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**The Acquisition of False Friends in English  
as a Foreign Language:  
Comparison between Oral and Written Output**

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the acquisition of false friends by Catalan learners of English comparing their acquisition in written and oral production. The research analyses how register –oral and written- may influence the production of false friends. An experiment was conducted to ten Catalan students of English as a foreign language with B1/B2 level of English, and between 17/18 years old. They were asked to translate Catalan-English false friends in an oral and a written task with similar contexts. On the one hand, the results of the experiment conclude that oral register leads to a higher percentage of lexical transfer, concluding that written production allows a better lexical acquisition. On the other hand, taking into account that the difference between oral and written output was not of great significance, it is assumed that when tasks are timed, there is no meaningful difference between registers.

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to examine how register –oral vs. written- influences the acquisition of false friends in English as a foreign language. The present paper focuses on the lexical transfer from Catalan to English by Catalan learners of English by means of creating and conducting an experiment.

The first part of the paper will be centred on clarifying the conception of false friends and its divergence with cognate words, followed by a brief overview of the diachronic perspective of false friends. The second part of the research will present the theoretical factors that are assumed to interfere in the acquisition of false friends and how they are dealt with in both registers.

By means of the conducted experiment, the influence of time in the acquisition of false friends is going to be explored as it is assumed to be determinant in the production of oral and written discourse, in addition to the analysis of the weight of context regarding second language acquisition.

Therefore, considering the little evidence on the influence of register in the acquisition of false friends, the purpose of this study is to compare the impact of oral and written output in second language acquisition of false friends.

## 2. False Friends

### 2.2. Definition

This section introduces the central concepts that the present paper is focused on: false friends and cognates. Although the study centres its attention in the analysis of false friends, it is highly important to differentiate them from cognate words, which at the same time can be subclassified into partial cognates and genetic cognates.

Literature agrees in considering false friends as “pairs of words in two different languages that are perceived similar but have different meanings” (Frunza, 2006:4). For example, the English word *lecture* and the Catalan word *lectura* (reading) are two words, which despite being only differentiated by the final vowel, have different meanings in the two languages.

The lexical similarity between false friends may lead to misunderstandings as the following: if we examine the pair of false friends *library* – *llibreria*, despite their similarity, there is a clear divergence in meaning. Whereas ‘library’ refers to a “place, as a building or set of rooms, containing books, recordings, or other reading, viewing, or listening materials arranged and catalogued in a fixed way” (wordreference), ‘*llibreria*’ is defined as “shop where books are sold” (wordreference). Considering the negative lexical transfer<sup>1</sup>, the sentence ‘He comprat una llibreta a la llibreria’ (I

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<sup>1</sup> Negative lexical transfer accounts for the negative linguistic interference of L1 in the process of learning a foreign language (Calvo, 2005)

bought a notebook in the bookshop) could be expected to be translated as ‘I bought a notebook in the library’ a grammatically correct sentence despite pragmatically odd.

Here follow more examples:

1. Carpet:

-‘The floor was covered with carpet’

vs.

-‘I keep all my documents in a \*carpet’

So the example shows that the word ‘carpet’ may be confused with ‘folder’ in Catalan.

2. Embarrassed:

-‘I felt embarrassed to be praised aloud in front of so many people’

vs.

-‘She felt quite pregnant\* about her height’

The example shows that the word ‘embarrassed’ is confused with ‘pregnant’ in Catalan

These are some of the most common Catalan-English false friends:

English	Catalan	English	Catalan
Actually	Actualment	Realize	Realitzar
Assist	Assistir	Sane	Sa
Carpet	Carpeta	Career	Carrera
Constipated	Constipat	Library	Llibreria
Contest	Contestar	Sympathetic	Simpàtic
Embarrassed	Embarassada	Sensible	Sensible
Fabric	Fàbrica	Preservative	Preservatiu
Lecture	Lectura	Idiom	Idioma

False friends should not be confused with cognates, which are “pairs of words that are perceived as similar and are mutual translations. The spelling can be identical or not” (Frunza, 2006: 4). This classification is meant for pairs of words as the English *responsible* and the Catalan *responsable*, which are words of different languages that not only look or sound similar, but also share their meaning. Regarding such definition, many authors (Chacón, 2006; Duran, 2004) refer to false friends as false cognates concerning the misleading similarities between them.

Nevertheless, not only false friends are misleading pairs since there are two other classifications that should be pointed out. On the one hand, partial cognates, which are “pairs of words that have the same meaning in both languages in some but not all contexts. They behave as cognates or false friends depending on the sense that is used in each context. For example, in French, *facteur* means not only *factor*, but also *mailman*”. (Frunza, 2006: 4) And, on the other hand, the last definition refers to genetic cognates, which are “word pairs in related languages that derive directly from the same word in the ancestor (proto)-language. Because of gradual phonetic and semantic changes over long periods of time, genetic cognates often differ in form and/or meaning, e.g. *père-father*. This category excludes lexical borrowings” (Frunza, 2006: 4).

## 2.2. False Friends vs. Cognates

As it has been previously mentioned, cognates are those pairs of words of two different languages that share similar spelling and meaning; consequently this vocabulary can help in the acquisition of L2. However, pairs of words that positively interfere in the acquisition of a second language can hinder the process if we are not aware of the presence of other types of words that can lead to inconvenient misunderstandings.



Cross-linguistic influence is usually present in the acquisition of a foreign language process, and it is even more accentuated when the L1 and L2 are typologically related. Chacón (2006) highlights the relevance of the semantic affinity between two languages in terms of foreign language acquisition by claiming that cognate words “can facilitate the foreign language learning process; they have similar meanings and, therefore, they can support the acquisition and/or learning of a non-native language” (Chacón, 2006: 30).

The acquisition of cognates is said to be easier during the process of learning a second language and help to develop linguistic abilities in order to improve their vocabulary acquisition and interpretation (Arce, 2005).

However, Chacón (2006) also points out that lexical similarities between different languages cannot only result in positive transfer, but also in hindering the acquisition of a second language due to the cross-language negative interference; e.g., the English word ‘sane’, which means having a healthy mind, may be confused with the Catalan word ‘sa’, which implies having a good health and not likely to be ill.

Consequently the presence of negative transfer through phonetically or graphically similar words between L1 and L2 cannot be ignored. The foreign language learner has to be aware of the misleading interference of false friends, also named deceptive cognates, in order to be able to communicate as well as to acquire a proficient level of the L2 considering that “users such as translators, language teachers, journalists, etc. is not to be underestimated because they (false friends) are often difficult to identify”(Chacón, 2006: 30).

### 2.3. Diachronic Perspective of False Friends

The English language, as every other language, has been nourished partly by copying and compiling words from other languages due to historical circumstances such as the introduction of different tools and concepts and the will of enrich the language, evidence that is demonstrated by analysing the borrowed words, which mirror “the type of relations between the two communities and their shared interests” (O’Neil & Casanovas, 1997:104).

“The English language borrowed copiously from over fifty languages over the centuries but its chief source of borrowing was Latin” (O’Neil, Casanovas, 1997: 104) due to geographically, historical and cultural contact between different countries over many years, consequently, due to historical evidence we can determine the reason why the English language shares words that have similar meaning and spelling with other languages such as Catalan. However, such similarities can turn into positive or into negative interference for foreign language students, in other words, language resemblances can aid the learners or, contrarily, deceive them. As Oldin enlightens, “transfer is the natural starting point for considering what contributions SLA may make to the study of linguistic relativity” (Oldin, 2005: 16).

Although more than fifty languages have influenced English, Latin constitutes its principal source and its borrowings are the reason why there are so many similarities between Germanic and Romance languages. However, over the years words “may undergo radical changes in meaning, reversion to their original sense, specialization, generalization, and the acquisition of new connotations. These processes can create linguistic traps for the student reading Chaucer, Shakespeare or Jane Austen” (O’Neil & Casanovas, 1997: 107).

### 3. The Acquisition of False Friends

#### 3.1. State of Art

Studies on the acquisition of false friends have focused on exploring the correlation between the level of the foreign language and the recognition of false friends (Arce, 2005; Durán, 2004) maintaining that the level of the L2 is a key factor in lexical acquisition. Whereas the identification of false friends within different languages seems to be an easy task, it is a “complex phenomenon where linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive processes constantly interact” (Arce, 2005: iii).

Arce’s study (2005) explores such correlation by testing Spanish students of English in the recognition of Spanish-English cognates, which they had to edit. She carried out a study in order to examine the possible relationship between low and high reading proficiency levels and identification of Spanish-English false friends. The subjects were assessed in a timed reading passage and were asked to answer multiple-choice questions with cognates, whereas in another task the students were required to circle the cognates in an English text. The results of the experiment revealed that “as reading proficiency decreases or increases, so does the editing of Spanish-English cognates in second language” (Arce 2005: iv).

Another influential factor that has been examined is the influence of acknowledging the common origin of the L1 and L2, which helps predicting the possible mistakes. In other words, the level of lexical transfer will depend on the contact between the two languages (Frunza, 2006; O’Neil & Casanovas, 1997). As Calvo (2005) defends, the proximity between the languages is a key factor in the level of interlanguage influence becoming a powerful tool for teachers to predict possible mistakes and be able to approach different teaching techniques. Alonso (1997) brings

up the principal errors of Spanish students of English due to interference, and pays special attention to the *overextension of analogy*, which “occurs when the student misuses a vocabulary item because it is similar, either phonetically, orthographically, semantically or syntactically to another form in the L1” (Alonso, 1997: 8). Hence, we can consider false friends as misleading vocabulary that can appear as result of an overextension of analogy. Consequently, it is of high relevance to be aware of the influence of the background and environment of the foreign language student in relation with the target language.

On the other hand another influential aspect in the second language acquisition is the weight of context, considering that the background of knowledge becomes an essential factor that influences “in the construction of a meaning, since new information is considered relevant in as much as information is being processed matches with our previous information” (Duran, 2004: 103). The subject’s communication experience is a major factor that influences the results of the tasks. Pilar Duran (2004) explores the processes of cognition in second language acquisition of cognates and false friends through Spanish speaking engineering students, which focuses on “how background knowledge helps students to interpret and process new technical terms in context” (Duran, 2004: 96). The conducted experiment was applied to subjects divided into two groups, one formed by first year mining engineering students and the other one by third year mining engineering students. As pointed out by Duran:

*If the words in a given text are misinterpreted due to false clues, the readers will match up the linguistic elements of both codes (English-Spanish) with wrong contexts. If to this we add the fact that the reader may not be familiar with certain terms proper of a specialist academic community, a new difficulty for their correct interpretation of a text arises (Duran, 2004:102).*

The relation between age and language transfer is another factor that interferes in second language lexical acquisition. Adults are more prone to transfer than children considering that they have their first language structures internalised, whereas children are more likely to acquire false friends as new words, ignoring there is a similar one in their mother tongue (Calvo, 2005).

Little has been said about the influence of register in the acquisition of false friends; however, it has been proved that written and oral discourse differ in their production, including also the production of false friends; as Biber (1988:5) claims, “the general view is that written language is structurally elaborated, complex, formal, and abstract, while spoken language is concrete, context-dependent, and structurally simple”.

### **3.2. Oral vs. Written Register**

The present study explores how register may affect the generation of false friends errors. Many researchers have analyzed the field of written and oral language differences (Biber, 1986, 1988; Chafe and Tannen, 1987; Rickheit *et al.*, 1987; Larssen-Freeman, 2006; Bourdin & fayol, 1994; Macaulay, 1993; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005), and although each register compiles many supporters, there is more evidence defending the statement that written output allow a more accurate language acquisition than speech.

It is standardly assumed that there are important differences between oral and written register (Biber, 1986, 1988; Chafe & Tanner, 1987) considering that writing has a more “detached and elaborated style”, a “more explicit level of expression and marking of informal relations”; whereas as for speech it is said to be “more inexplicit,

informal style of expression”, as well as containing “more interactional features and more situated in a physical/temporal context” (Biber, 1986: 383-384).

Written register allows the reader to do a deeper analysis of the text enabling a better understanding and acquisition, “so that ideas can be critically examined in the abstract and the logical relations among ideas can be discussed” (Biber, 1991:3). At the same time, written register provides tangible data, which can be analyzed using different techniques as being “collected, stored, examined, manipulated, and analyzed in ways that were until very recently impossible for spoken language” (Chafe & Tannen, 1987:383). Chafe & Tanner also expose DeVito’s significant research in the 1960’s defending the advantages of written discourse over oral, when he analyzed writings of ten professors of speech and after that they were interviewed to discover that “written language has greater lexical diversity, more difficult words, more simple sentences, and greater idea density” (Chafe & Tanner, 1987:385).

Moreover, Biber also maintains his position referring to Chafe & Danielewicz:

*Chafe & Danielewicz explicitly distinguish these two factors (writing/speech), claiming that features like degree of lexical precision are determined by processing considerations (the restrictions of real-time production in speech vs. opportunity for extensive editing in writing), while features like first person pronouns (indicating degree of ‘involvement’ between speaker/writer and the audience) are conditioned by situational considerations. (Biber, 1986:384)*

Time is another essential factor that is said to be determinant in the production of oral and written discourse. As Rickheit *et al.* (1987) argue, “textual information offers the reader a greater degree of freedom than it offers the listener” (1987:438). Written editing implicitly brings up the conception that “the reader is able to control and manipulate time and space, principal aspects which the listener lacks” (1987:438) and consequently it represents a clear advantage in producing a better discourse and concluding that “the parameters of space and time should be limited to controlling the degree of freedom that exists in the normal reading” (1987:438). Time becomes a

playing role in the acquisition of false friends on the basis that the listener “has little control over the speed of oral presentation” and is “unable to focus repeatedly on a particular point in the message” (Rickheit *et al.*, 1987:438). According to Chafe & Danielewicz (1985, cited in Biber, 1986), time is also defended as a crucial element in differentiating oral and written discourses considering that written production allows its edition and greater control as opposed to the speaker.

By contrast, Kroll (1990) and Polio *et al.* (1998) claim the opposite by stating that extra time does not affect the writing production of second language learners. Kroll (1990) examined the effect of providing extra time upon subjects who had to write an essay in an hour under examination conditions; and the same subjects were also asked to complete another essay in 10-14 days. The results concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between the two essays. Kenworthy (2006) also defends Kroll (1990) and Polio *et al.* (1998)’s studies after conducting an experiment which explored timed versus at-home assessment tests and claiming that despite providing extra time for editing lexical errors, the general results were not statistically significant confirming that time is not a determinant factor in lexical acquisition.

Some studies hold that there are no differences between oral and written register as far as recalling series of words claiming that serial recall for adults presented no difference between registers, unlike for the children who obtained weaker results in written skills (Bourdin & Fayol, 1994).

In order to explore whether written or oral tasks affect the production of false friends, a selection of false friends will be introduced to ten subjects in an oral and a written task. Considering the previous research of written and oral register in terms of acquisition, a greater number of correct answers is expected in written discourse than

in oral according to the general basis that writing allows a more elaborated and explicit style. Moreover it is also expected that the results reveal that written and oral registers do not differ in their production according to Kenworthy's (2006) study.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Subjects

The present research takes data from ten Catalan subjects learning English as a foreign language with a B1/B2 level according to the Common European Framework level. Placement tests were given to the subjects in order to evaluate their level of English (Allen, 2004). In addition, a pilot study (see appendix 9.4.), formed by two native English speakers, was also conducted before giving the experiment to the subjects in order not to avoid ambiguous cases. It allowed the evaluation of the experiment practicability, predict an appropriate sample size and improve upon the study design prior to performance of a full-scale. On the basis of the pilot study, some false friends were omitted and some others redefined in context since they resulted too ambiguous and complex to be part of the experiment where only one-to-one translations were expected.

### 4.2. Task

The experiment consists of two tasks, an oral task (see appendix 9.2.) and a written task (see appendix 9.3.). The two tasks consisted in 44 sentences containing false friends and distractors and subjects were requested to translate the highlighted word from Catalan into English. For each false friend there were two different contexts, one with the incorrect English word and another one with the expected word; e.g. carpet/carpeta: 'La meva tieta estava netejant la **moqueta** amb l'aspirador' – 'La



**carpeta** groga conté tots els documents'. In addition, there were mixed 10 distractors, and each of them were also provided within a context. The false friends under study were the same in both tasks but with the context slightly changed so that they could be comparable avoiding any hint of ambiguity.

During the oral task, subjects were read the sentences so that they only had to translate the specific word without any written input, whereas in the written task, which took place a week after, they were presented a printed version. Both tasks were timed making the experiment reliable.

## 5. Results:

The results of the experiment were classified on the one hand into false friends and on the other hand into predictable negative answers (misleading words). Each of them were divided time into oral task, written task and the comparison of the results between both registers -oral and written. There are a total of 340 answers for each task –oral and written-, which were divided into *Correct*, *Incorrect* and *Synonyms*.

### 5.1. False Friends Results

#### 5.1.1. Oral Task

ORAL	Correct/170	Incorrect/170	Synonyms/170
<b>Carpeta</b>	6	4	0
<b>llibreria</b>	10	0	0
<b>Comprensiva</b>	4	6	0
<b>Constipar</b>	8	2	0
<b>idioma</b>	8	2	0
<b>Actualment</b>	8	2	0
<b>Nota</b>	9	1	0
<b>Carrera</b>	6	4	0
<b>Fàbrica</b>	9	1	0

<b>Casualitat</b>	4	6	0
<b>Realitzar</b>	7	3	0
<b>Col·lapsat</b>	3	4	3
<b>Lectura</b>	10	0	0
<b>Preservatiu</b>	3	7	0
<b>Pares</b>	8	2	0
<b>Sensible</b>	6	4	0
<b>Advertir</b>	2	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>111/170</b>	<b>56/170</b>	<b>3/170</b>
Percentage	65%	32%	2%

Table 1. False friends results: Oral Task

Results show that 111/170 answers were correct over 56/170 incorrect ones, which reveals fewer instances of errors in written register considering that the number of correct answers account for a 33% higher than incorrect ones. In addition, 3/170 of the answers were synonyms of the expected English word.

### 5.1.2. Written Task

<b>WRITTEN</b>	<b>Correct/170</b>	<b>Incorrect/170</b>	<b>Synonyms/170</b>
<b>Carpeta</b>	8	2	0
<b>llibreria</b>	10	0	0
<b>Comprensiu</b>	5	5	0
<b>Constipat</b>	9	1	0
<b>idioma</b>	8	2	0
<b>Actualment</b>	8	2	0
<b>Nota</b>	9	1	0
<b>Carrera</b>	8	2	0
<b>Fàbrica</b>	9	1	0
<b>Casualitat</b>	4	6	0
<b>Realitzar</b>	8	2	0
<b>Col·lapsat</b>	4	4	2
<b>Lectura</b>	10	0	0
<b>Preservatiu</b>	5	5	0
<b>Pares</b>	9	1	0
<b>Sensible</b>	8	2	0

<b>Advertis</b>	3	5	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>125/170</b>	<b>41/170</b>	<b>4/170</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Table 2. False friends results: Written Task

Results reveal that 125/170 of the answers were correct over 41/170 incorrect ones; and 4/170 of the answers were synonyms. The table above shows that there have been made fewer instances of errors in written output than in oral.

### 5.1.3. Comparison of False Friends between Oral and Written Register

COMPARISON	ORAL	WRITTEN	DIFFERENCE
<b>Correct</b>	65%	73%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Incorrect</b>	32%	24%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Synonyms</b>	2%	2%	<b>0%</b>

Table 3. Comparison of False friends between oral and written register

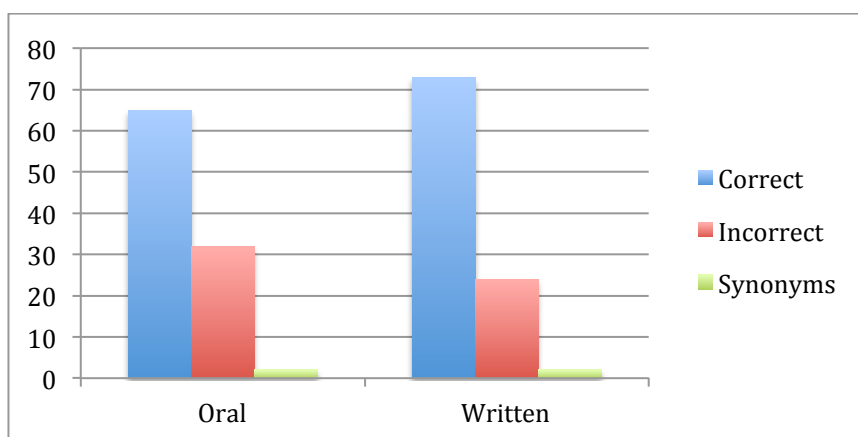


Table 4. Comparison of False Friends between oral and written register

The results revealed that written register has a slightly better impact (173/170 correct answers in the written task) on the correct production of false friends than in oral register (111/170 correct answers in the oral).

The analysis of the results of the false friends that were examined in the study (see appendix A) reveals that there is a difference of 8% between oral and written

register: 173/170 (73%) in the written task, over 111/170 (65%) in the oral task, (see table 5.1.3). As for the incorrect answers the same difference between both registers: 41/170 (24%) of incorrect answers in the written task against 56/170 (32%) in the written (see tables 5.1.1; 5.1.2).

## 5.2. Misleading Words

### 5.2.1. Oral Task

ORAL	Correct/170	Incorrect/170	Synonyms/170
Moqueta	4	4	2
Carrera Professional	6	4	0
Ampli coneixement	2	4	4
Restret	2	6	2
Victimes	4	6	0
Adonar-se	7	3	0
Tela	1	9	0
Classes magistrals	7	3	0
enfondrar	2	3	7
Sensat	4	6	0
Conservants	2	7	1
Nota escrita	10	0	0
Biblioteca	10	0	0
Parents	7	3	0
De fet	5	4	1
Anunciar	7	3	0
Expressió	2	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>82/170</b>	<b>73/170</b>	<b>15/170</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>9%</b>

Table 5. Results misleading words: Oral Task

Results show that 82/170 of the answers were correct over 73/170 incorrect ones; 15/170 were synonyms of the expected answers. Considering this, results reveal that there is no meaningful difference between correct and incorrect answers (5%).

### 5.2.2. Written Task

WRITTEN	Correct/170	Incorrect/170	Synonyms/170
Moqueta	5	4	1
Carrera Professional	7	3	0
Ampli coneixement	3	3	4
Restret	3	5	0
Victimes	6	4	0
Parents	8	2	0
Adonar-se	7	3	0
Tela	3	7	0
Classes magistrals	8	2	0
enfondrar	3	4	5
Sensat	7	3	0
Conservants	3	6	1
Nota escrita	10	0	0
Biblioteca	10	0	0
De fet	6	3	1
Anunciar	7	3	0
Expressió	4	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100/170</b>	<b>58/170</b>	<b>12/170</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>7%</b>

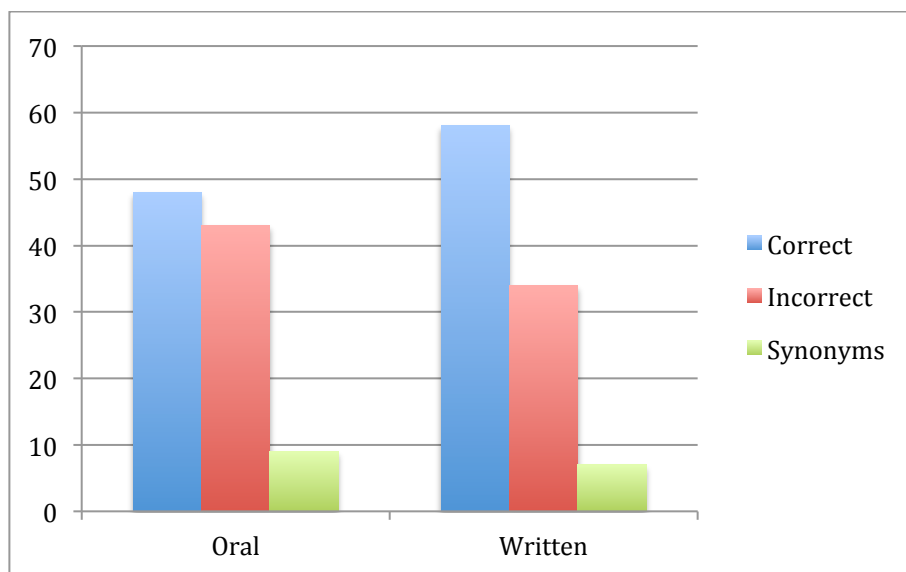
Table 6. Results misleading words: Written Task

The table above reveals that in the written task there is a higher number of correct answers than incorrect ones, 100/170 over 58/170, which accounts for a difference of the 24%. The results also show that 12 of the 170 responses were answered by synonyms of the expected English word.

### 5.2.3. Comparison of Misleading Words between Oral and Written Register

COMPARISON	ORAL	WRITTEN	DIFFERENCE
Correct	48%	58%	<b>10%</b>
Incorrect	43%	34%	<b>9%</b>
Synonyms	9%	7%	<b>2%</b>

Table 7. Comparison between oral and written register of the misleading words



**Table 8. Comparison between oral and written register of the misleading words**

Regarding the analysis of misleading words, there is as well no significant difference between oral and written tasks (see table 5.2.3). In the oral task the 48% of the answers were correct and the 58% in the written task, which means there is a 10% difference between both tasks. The difference in incorrect answers is of 9%, 43% in the oral and 34% in the written task (see tables 5.2.1; 5.2.2.).

In both tasks there was a little percentage of subjects who answered with a synonym instead of the expected answer, in false friends results: 9% oral, 7% written; and in misleading words results: 5% oral, 4% written (see tables 5.1.3; 5.2.3.).

### **5.3. Results of the detailed analysis of the translated false friends:**

This section focuses on a detailed analysis of the examined false friends in order to determine which were the most confused words and which ones were the least.

	Oral		Written	
	Correct/170	Incorrect/170	Correct/170	Incorrect/170
<b>Carpeta</b>	6	4	8	2
<b>Llibreria</b>	10	0	10	0
<b>Comprensiva</b>	4	6	5	5
<b>Constipar</b>	8	2	9	1
<b>Idioma</b>	8	2	8	2
<b>Actualment</b>	8	2	8	2
<b>Nota</b>	9	1	9	1
<b>Carrera</b>	6	4	8	2
<b>Fàbrica</b>	9	1	9	1
<b>Casualitat</b>	4	6	4	6
<b>Realitzar</b>	7	3	8	2
<b>Col·lapsat</b>	3	4	4	4
<b>Lectura</b>	10	0	10	0
<b>Preservatiu</b>	3	7	5	5
<b>Pares</b>	8	2	9	1
<b>Sensible</b>	6	4	8	2
<b>Advertir</b>	2	8	3	5
<b>Total of tokens</b>	111	56	125	41

Table 9. Results of the detailed analysis of the translated false friends

The results show that the most confused tokens were *comprensivu*, *casualitat* and *preservatiu* in both oral and written tasks, and the ones with most correct answers were *llibreria* and *lectura* with 10 out of 10 correct answers, and *nota* and *fàbrica* with 9 out of 10 correct answers.

## 6. Discussion

The results of the present study provide evidence for the relevance of the acquisition of false friends by Catalan learners of English previously mentioned. The essential influential factors that are going to be thoroughly discussed consist in the interference of time, the magnitude of having a common origin between the two

languages as well as their proximity, the weight of context and background knowledge, in addition to the concepts of overextension of analogy and underproduction. Age and the level of the second language are also influential factors in second language acquisition, but they have not been relevant features for the development of the present study.

The analysis of the results of the false friends that were examined in the study (see appendix A) shows that written register displays less errors of false friends than oral register considering that the results show that 125 out of 170 of the answers were correct in the written task over 111 out of 170 in the oral, which accounts for a difference of the 8%. Consequently, it can be claimed that written register has a more positive influence in the acquisition of false friends in Catalan students of English. The most frequent errors were '*comprensiiu*', which was translated as 'comprehensive'; '*casualitat*' as 'casualty'; and '*preservatiu*' was also wrongly translated as 'preservative' (see table 3.3.).

Accordingly, as Oldin (1993) claims, having tangible data allowed participants to freely manipulate the time given as well as to have the chance of revising their output, resulting in a much-controlled production. Therefore, according to the results, the degree of lexical precision is influenced by register, in which false friends that were provided in a written context were better translated than those in the oral task (Oldin, 1993) despite not being of great importance.

However, a point must be made about the fact that both tasks of the experiment were timed, which is a factor that interferes in the hypothesis that the difference in oral and written register lies behind the addition of extra time given in the written register (Rickheit, Strohner, Müsseler, Nattkemper, 1987). Consequently,



the minimal difference between the registers (8%) shows that oral and written discourses, when they are timed, do not differ in their production.

Nevertheless, keeping in mind Kenworthy's (2006) analysis, in which he argued that time does not interfere in the production of written and oral discourse, it can be discussed that timing the tasks did not influence in the production of false friends in neither of the registers. Consequently, the present study sustains Kenworthy's (2006) study coinciding that there is no clear difference between oral and written discourse production.

By analyzing the results, it can be argued that the context in which the foreign language students learn also influences their lexical acquisition as Duran (2004) discussed. Results show that those Catalan words translated into English as expected by the majority of participants were those words that are closer to their daily life: *Mark - Nota; Actually – Actualment; Parents – Pares; Library – Llibreria*. Contrarily, *idiom*, which its Catalan false friend, *idioma*, means language, *fabric* or *preservatives* are words that do not integrate their daily English context. Therefore, results corroborate Duran's (2004) study in which she argued that the learner's background of knowledge and usage is an essential factor that influences in the acquisition of a second language.

The pairs of false friends analyzed (see appendix 9.1.) share the same common origin, which is Latin, given that English and Catalan, despite being part of different branches of the Indo-European language, both share several lexical similarities due to their common origin, as they share many words of Latin and Greek origin (Frunza, 2006). Currently, we are part of an interconnected world in which the impact of globalization arises the exchange of world perspectives, advances, and culture and so

it also affects languages such as Catalan and English. According to the fact that proximity plays a relevant role in the amount of lexical transfer between L1 and L2 and bearing in mind that Catalan and English are two languages that become closer over time, their level of crosslinguistic interference arises as Frunza (2006) defends. Moreover, acquiring a foreign language can also “influence the use of their native language and perhaps restructure somewhat their cognitive capacities, as seen” Oldin (2005:17).

Although all the examined false friends share the same common origin, Latin, there is no clear difference between the results obtained by analyzing the false friends and the results of the misleading words. It also has to be pointed out that the provided misleading words share as well the same source, Latin; e.g. *parents*, *biblioteca*, *conservants*. The examined false friends have more instances of correct answers than in the misleading words: 100/170 against 125/170 correct answers in the written task and 58/170 over 111/170 in the oral task. Regardless of the standardly assumed conception that L2 lexical items which do not share any similarity with L1 allow a better acquisition than those that do as Oldin (2005) supports, therefore, the results reveal that there is no relevant difference in their acquisition process.

It is also relevant to analyze the presence of the synonyms in the results instead of the expected answer, 2% in both the oral and task. Although the students were introduced to the false friends in the past as well as in previous classes, in some cases they preferred to avoid using them during the experiment. One plausible argument which answers their appearance, as Oldin (1993) points out, is that they showed lack of confidence in using misleading words that could interfere in their results. According to Oldin (1993), when the learner is aware of the fact that there is a

clear divergence in L1 and L2, there appears the concept of ‘underproduction’ resulting in avoiding using such structures or words, e.g. instead of ‘collapsed’ 5 translations out of 20 were ‘busy’ or ‘jammed’.

Among the different factors that may influence the acquisition of false friends, the present study did not focus on the subject’s level of English taking into account that all participants had the same level of English, B1/B2 according to the Common European Framework level according to the placement test. In the same way, age was neither determinant considering that all subjects were between the ages of 17 and 18 years old.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study validates the influence of register in the acquisition of false friends in English by Catalan speakers learners of English as a second language. Through the results provided by the conducted experiment, it can be concluded that higher percentage of lexical transfer accounts for the oral register production. Therefore, written production allows a better lexical acquisition than through oral register.

The advantages of written output over oral register resulted as expected given that written output is proved to have a more precise level of expression than speech. Moreover, the fact that the experiment was timed led the results follow a straightforward explanation on Kenworthy’s study (2006), confirming that written and oral output do not differ taking into account the slight difference reported between both registers.

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## 9. Appendices

### 9.1. False Friends

English	Catalan
<b>Actually</b>	Actualment
<b>Note</b>	Nota
<b>Idiom</b>	Idioma
<b>Parents</b>	Pares
<b>Library</b>	Llibreria
<b>Lecture</b>	Lectura
<b>Constipated</b>	Constipat
<b>Preservative</b>	Preservatiu
<b>Sensible</b>	Sensible
<b>Collapse</b>	Col·lapsat
<b>Career</b>	Carrera
<b>Comprehensive</b>	Compensiu
<b>Casualty</b>	Casualitat
<b>Realize</b>	Realitzar
<b>Fabric</b>	Fabrica
<b>Carpet</b>	Carpeta
<b>Advertise</b>	Advertir

## 9.2. Oral Task

1. La **moqueta** de la seva habitació estava molt bruta
2. M'encantaria **navegar** per totes les illes Gregues
3. Posa els documents del metge a la **carpeta** blava
4. Jo no vull treballar durant tota la meva **carrera professional** en una oficina
5. **Malgrat** el seu estat, mai es va queixar
6. És un home molt interessant, té un **ampli coneixement** sobre les emocions
7. He comprat tres llibretes noves a la **llibreria**
8. La professora de geografia és més **comprensiva** que la de mates
9. Si vas **restret** has de menjar més fibra
10. La policia va **enxampar** els lladres a França
11. Avui es faran 5 minuts de silenci en record a les **víctimes** de l'accident
12. Els meus **pares** viatgen molt
13. Ell es **va adonar** ràpidament que la doctora era Italiana
14. Si et **constipes** no podràs anar d'excursió
15. Nosaltres **encara** estem esperant
16. Les **teles** naturals com la seda, són molt cares
17. Les **classes magistrals** del professor Smith són molt aviat
18. Degut al esllavissament, la casa es va **esfondrar**
19. La nova cadira de l'estudi és molt **còmode**
20. El rus és un **idioma** molt diferent a l'anglès
21. **Actualment** estan treballant des de Namíbia
22. Els meus cosins van a Menorca **cada** estiu
23. No, ara no hi és. Vols que li escrigui una **nota**?



24. Ella no vol estudiar la **carrera** Londres
25. La **fabrica** on treballava la seva tieta, ha tancat
26. És molt **sensat** amb els diners, mai es compraria un iphone
27. Vaig conèixer a la seva mare per **causalitat**
28. Ell **sempre** pensa en veu alta
29. Tot l'equip va **realitzar** una feina immillorable
30. La Mònica mai compra productes amb **conservants**
31. L'AP-7 està **col·lapsada** cada matí
32. La **lectura** és el que li costa més
33. Ella es sentia **culpable** sense motiu
34. El **preservatiu** és un mètode anticonceptiu molt eficaç
35. La Júlia va treure la **nota** més alta de tota la classe
36. Quan és època d'exàmens, jo sempre estudio a la **biblioteca**
37. Els nostres **parents** d'Itàlia ens van trocar ahir
38. La nostra professora ens **ensenya** les taules de multiplicar
39. **De fet**, el meu color preferit és el blau, no el verd
40. Per cada feina que **anunciem**, rebem més de cent sol·licituds
41. "All that glitters is not gold" és una **expressió** anglesa molt certa
42. **Per causa** del temps no vam poder dinar al jardí
43. Tinc la pell molt **sensible**, l'he de cuidar molt
44. Sempre és millor **advertir** als clients, pel que pugui passar

### 9.3. Written Task

1. La meva tieta estava netejant la **moqueta** amb l'aspirador.
2. Si jo fos tu, em comportaria **diferent**.
3. La **carpeta** groga conté tots els documents.
4. Durant tota la meva **carrera professional** he treballat en un hospital.
5. **Malgrat** la pluja, nosaltres vam anar al parc.
6. El meu pare té un **ampli coneixement** en l'economia.
7. Vaig comprar tres diccionaris a la **llibreria**.
8. La meva mare és més **comprensiva** que el meu pare.
9. No mengis picant si vas **restret**.
10. El seu germà va **robar** un banc al 1996.
11. Sortosament no hi va haver **víctimes** a l'accident.
12. Els meus **parets** van a classes de ball.
13. Ell es **va adonar** ràpidament que alguna cosa havia passat.
14. Tanca la finestra o et **constiparàs**.
15. Ella **encara** està a casa.
16. M'encanta el tacte de les **teles** naturals com la seda o el lli.
17. Tothom assistia a les **classes magistrals**, el professor era molt divertit.
18. Durant el terratrèmol la torre es va **esfondrar**.
19. La meva nova butaca és molt **còmode**.
20. Ella vol aprendre un nou **idioma** nou, potser l'Italià.
21. **Actualment** estem preparant un nou projecte.
22. A les meves cosines els hi agrada ballar **cada** cap de setmana.
23. Vaig deixar una **nota** a la nevera.
24. Ella està estudiant la **carrera** a Harvard.

25. El seu avi treballava en una **fàbrica** a Alemanya.
26. És molt **sensat** amb els diners, mai compra tonteries.
27. Ens vam trobar de **casualitat** al supermercat.
28. Ell **sempre** pensa en veu alta.
29. Els treballadors van **realitzar** una feina excel·lent.
30. Els **conservants** no són saludables.
31. La carretera sempre està **col·lapsada** a les 9.
32. El meu hobby preferit és la **lectura**.
33. No et sentis **culpable**, no és culpa teva.
34. El **preservatiu** es va trencar i ara ella està embarassada.
35. Els estudiants no saben la seva **nota**.
36. No hi havia lloc a la **biblioteca**, per tant vaig tornar a casa.
37. Els meus cosins van visitar els **parents** de França.
38. El meu veí **ensenya** mates a un institut.
39. **De fet**, el meu nom és Ann, no Anna.
40. Ell va **anunciar** la oferta de feina en un portal online.
41. “It’s raining cats and dogs” és una **expressió** anglesa molt divertida.
42. No vam poder anar a la platja **per causa** del temps.
43. La meva pell és molt **sensible**.
44. Ningú em va **advertir** dels perills del viatge.

#### 9.4. Pilot Study

1. El doctor va **atendre** a la meva àvia.
2. Si jo fos tu, em comportaria **diferent**.
3. Nosaltres no vam **assistir** a la conferència.
4. Durant tota la meva **carrera** he treballat en un hospital
5. **Malgrat** la pluja, nosaltres vam anar al parc
6. El meu pare té un coneixement **global** de l'economia.
7. Vaig comprar tres diccionaris a la **llibreria**.
8. La meva mare és més **comprensiva** que el meu pare.
9. No mengis menjar picant si vas **restret**.
10. El seu germà va **robar** un banc al 1996.
11. El xicot de la meva germana és molt **simpàtic**, sempre fa bromes.
12. Els meus **pare**s van a classes de ball.
13. Ell portava una **disfressa** divertida per carnaval.
14. Tanca la finestra o et **constiparàs**.
15. Ella **encara** està a casa.
16. Tothom assistia a les **classes magistrals**, el professor era molt divertit.
17. Durant el terratrèmol la torre es va esfondrar.
18. La meva nova butaca és molt còmode.
19. Ella vol aprendre un **idioma** nou, potser l'italià.
20. **Actualment** estem preparant un nou projecte.
21. A les meves cosines els hi agrada ballar **cada** cap de setmana.
22. Vaig deixar una **nota** a la nevera.
23. Ella està estudiant la **carrera** a Harvard.
24. És molt **sensat** amb els diners, mai compra tonteries.

25. Ell **sempre** pensa en veu alta.
26. Menjar cargols és una **costum** estranya.
27. Els **conservants** no són saludables.
28. La carretera sempre està **col·lapsada** a les 9h.
29. El meu hobby preferit és la **lectura**.
30. No et sentis **culpable**, no va ser culpa teva.
31. El **preservatiu** es va trencar i ara ella està embarassada.
32. Els estudiants no saben la seva **nota**.
33. No hi havia lloc a la **biblioteca**, per tant vaig tornar a casa.
34. Els meus cosins van visitar els **parents** de França.
35. El meu veí **ensenya** mates a un institut.
36. **De fet**, el meu nom és Ann, no Anna.
37. Ell és molt **empàtic**, sent molt el dolor dels altres.
38. 'It's raining cats and dogs' és una **expressió** anglesa molt divertida.
39. No vam poder anar a la platja **per causa** del temps.
40. La meva pell és molt **sensible**.