



## VII CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE LINGÜÍSTICA DEL CORPUS

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### THE INFLUENCE OF COGNATES ON THE ACQUISITION OF LEGAL TERMINOLOGY: HELP OR HINDRANCE? A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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# PAPER STRUCTURE

## 1. Introduction

## 2. Literature review

## 3. Methodology

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Justification for the study

➤ Widespread concern about the influence of cognates on language acquisition in the literature (section 2).

➤ Common historical origin of legal English and Spanish terms.

*i.e.* **Convictio** (Lat.) > conviction (leg. Eng.)= the proving of guilt.

**Latin meaning=**

**companionship;**

**intimacy**

(gen.Eng.)= strong belief; certainty.

>convicción (gen. Spa.)= strong belief; certainty.

➤ A decision was made to explore this issue applying a corpus-based methodology. Two corpora were employed to obtain the data from: *BLaRC* (8.85m words) and *LACELL* (21m words).



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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. DDL studies on ESL and ESAP

➤ The advantages and disadvantages of using corpora in language instruction have been profusely discussed (Johns, 1986; McEnery and Wilson, 1996, 2010; Sinclair, 2003; Hunston, 2007)

➤ Only two studies on DDL experiments focus on legal English acquisition (Boulton, 2010):

- Fan & Xun-feng (2002)

- Hafner & Candlin (2007)

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## 2.2. Cognates and ESL/ESAP acquisition

➤ Most of the studies on this topic concentrate on receptive skills

- Cohen et al., 1979; Laufer, 1989; Haynes, 1995; Roca Varela, 2014 ...)

- Only a few centre on production (Fernández Toledo, 2010)

➤ **Main findings:** general words used in specific contexts with specialised meanings cause problems in reading; false cognates lead to mistakes even when the context is favourable.

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### 3. METHODOLOGY

- 56 informants: 1<sup>st</sup> year Spanish Law students doing a legal English course.
- 12 legal terms (10 cognates) were presented in a specialised and a general context (taken from the *BLaRC* and the *LACELL* respectively).

4-TRACK:

Context 7	Context 8
<p>There is no automatic allocation to a <b>track</b>. Allocation is a matter of judicial decision; it will be to one of the tracks specified in Part 26, each track being dealt with in Part 27 (small claims <b>track</b>), Part 28 (Fast <b>Track</b>) or Part 29 (Multi-track).</p>	<p>The journey started easily enough, the way going up a <b>track</b> that in summer is an <u>unsurfaced road</u> used by tourists.</p>

Figure 1. Sample PPT slide



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➤ Terms automatically extracted from the *BLaRC*.

➤ Drouin's (2003) *TermoStat* ATR method implemented.

➤ Terms ranked according to specificity score, then classified and selected applying the criteria in table 1.

**Table 1. Term groups**

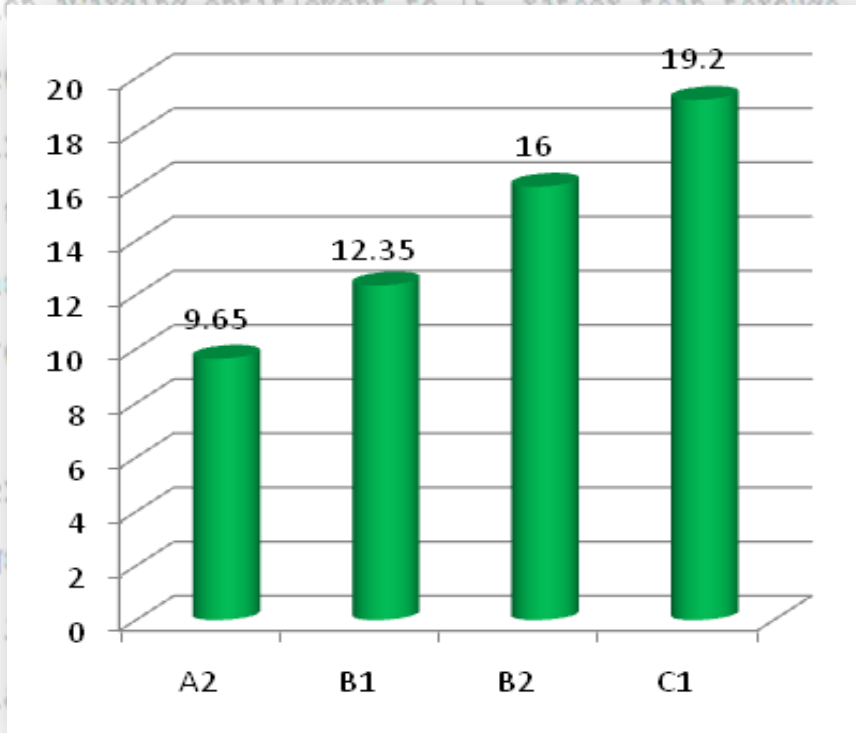
GROUP 1 (G1)	GROUP 2 (G2)	GROUP 3 (G3)	GROUP 4 (G4)
Legal terms with Latin origin (cognates) which are totally or almost totally equivalent in both the L1 and the L2. Included within the most frequent 3,000 words of the BNC	Legal terms with no Latin origin (non-cognates) which can be found among the most frequent 3,000 words of the BNC.	Legal cognates with partial semantic equivalence between the L1 and the L2 only in the legal field. Their general usage is almost identical in both languages. Included in the most frequent 3,000 words of the BNC.	Legal cognates with partial semantic equivalence between the L1 and the L2 only in the legal field. Their general usage is almost identical in both languages. Not present within the most frequent 3,000 words of the BNC

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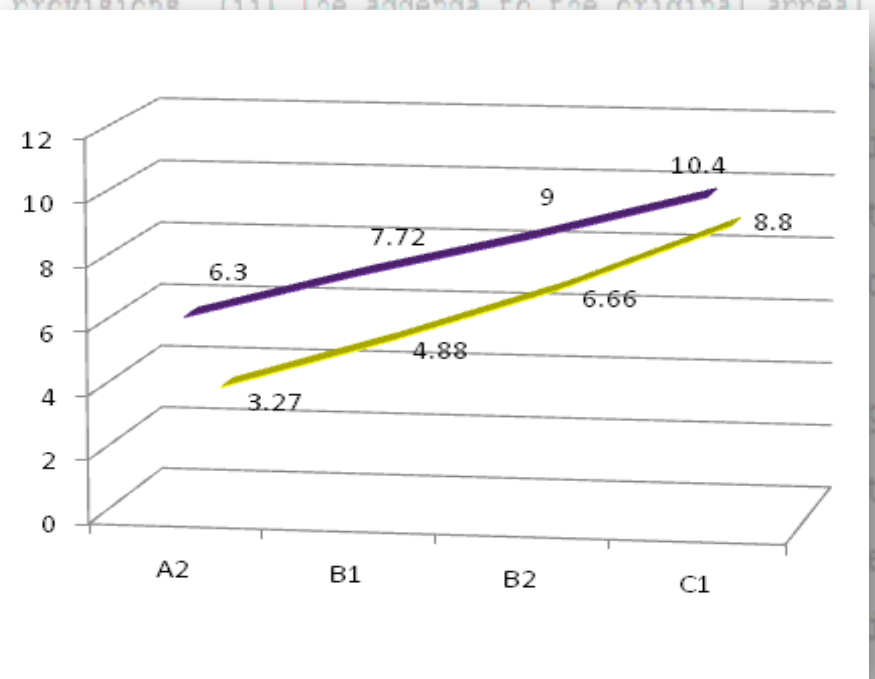
# 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Level tests were administered to students  
for the sake of comparison**

**Figure 2. Average correct answers per CEFR group (max. 24)**



**Figure 3. Average correct answers per CEFR group according to context (Max. 12)**





**Table 2 Total correct answers per term**

	CONCLUSION (G1)	TRACK (G2)	BATTERY (G3)	CONVICTION (G4)
% ANSWERS GENERAL	81.25%	71.75%	87.5%	94.75%
CONTEXT				
% ANSWERS SPECIFIC:	19.81%	22.25%	37.75%	35.5%
CONTEXT				

**Table 3. Correct answers per term and CEFR group. General context**

	CONCLUSION (G1)	TRACK (G2)	BATTERY (G3)	CONVICTION (G4)
A2 GROUP	86%	31%	83%	79%
B1 GROUP	72%	56%	67%	100%
B2 GROUP	67%	100%	100%	100%
C1 GROUP	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Table 4. Correct answers per term and CEFR group. Specific context**

	CONCLUSION (G1)	TRACK (G2)	BATTERY (G3)	CONVICTION (G4)
A2 GROUP	72%	14%	10%	10%
B1 GROUP	72%	22%	28%	39%
B2 GROUP	100%	33%	33%	33%
C1 GROUP	80%	20%	80%	60%

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## 4. FINAL REMARKS

### ➤ Limitations of the study:

- Number of informants (similar number in each group).
- Amount of terms involved in the study.
- Better selection of contexts (difficulty in handling so much data).
- Reliability of placement tests (not infallible).

### ➤ The **greatest problems** were found when the terms was highly specialised (track or conviction) and also when there were non-cognates or false ones.

### ➤ Cognates: help or hindrance?—Probably the former, however, other parameters must be also taken into consideration for the design and sequencing of activities that may derive from this study.



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