

# PLURILINGUALISM AND POLISH TEENAGE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** Using several languages has become a norm for those who want to learn and work in the European Union. However, teaching for plurilingualism is also a challenge. The present paper first clarifies the notions of plurilingualism and multilingualism, then discusses the role of crosslinguistic similarity in language learning in the case of European languages. It also shows how lexical crosslinguistic similarity can be used in teaching typologically related and unrelated languages, and discusses the key factors in noticing such similarity. The research presented reports on examining and raising language awareness of Polish-English cognate vocabulary in the case of a group of Polish teenage learners of English. It presents the results of a small-scale study in quasi-experimental design, as well as qualitative research on the learners' opinions and attitudes. Finally, the paper presents implications for language pedagogy and focuses on the fact that awareness raising may affect the learners' plurilingual competence.

**Keywords:** crosslinguistic lexical similarity, language learning, awareness-raising, teenagers

## 1 - Multilingualism and Plurilingualism

Living in a multilingual society implies mobility, which in turn, involves having a bulk of linguistic and cultural experience which adds up to overall communicative competence. As stated by the European Commission (2008:10) the aim of teaching should be 'to allow understanding and basic communication across different languages.' Such communicative competence is strongly connected with the notion of plurilingualism, widely recognized in European documents concerning language policy.

Although Kemp (2009:15) states that plurilingualism is often used with reference to individual multilinguality by researchers following the Francophone tradition, the use of the term seems more complex. The very word *plurilingualism* is relatively new to the English language. While in English the same term can be used for societal and individual multilingualism, French and German use different words for referring to an individual's ability to use several languages (*plurilinguisme/Mehrsprachigkeit*, respectively) and to the multilingual nature of a given society

(*multilinguisme/ Vielsprachigkeit*, respectively). According to Mackiewicz (2002), The Council of Europe has translated the French terms literally into English, using *plurilingualism* in the individual and *multilingualism* in the societal sense. The European Union, on the other hand, uses the term *multilingualism* when referring to the individual and *linguistic diversity* when referring to societies. Interestingly, the European policy of using both terms of *plurilingualism* and *multilingualism* has forced some local policy makers to coin new words. For example, in Polish, the word *wielojęzyczność* used to function well with reference to both individual and societal multilingualism. However, the new term *różnojęzyczność* has been introduced to cope with the term of *plurilingualism* reoccurring in European documents. It is also possible to find the new coinage of *kilkujęzyczność*, which is supposed to be more neutral (Wilczyńska 2007).

Jessner (2008) sees the concept of plurilingualism included under the umbrella term of multilingualism, but the CEFR, which is one of the best known documents by the Council of Europe, differentiates between multilingualism and plurilingualism identifying the former with the 'knowledge of a number of languages or the coexistence of different languages in a given society' (Council of Europe 2001: 4). The CEFR also defines plurilingualism as:

Task [t]he ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

Council of Europe (2001: 168)

This definition captures the core characteristics of multilingual language knowledge and use, stressing the importance of communicativeness rather than the mastery of language. In fact, the definition implies that a plurilingual individual naturally presents different levels of knowledge of each of their languages and explains the pluri-/multilingual system in terms of mutual influence among a person's languages. A definition of a plurilingual person proposed by Christ (2001:3 emphasis original) states that '[a] person is plurilingual if, with respect to a number of languages, he/she has learned to cross the *threshold* into these different language houses'. By this he implies that there exists some minimal competence necessary to achieve in order to be counted among plurilinguals. However, plurilingualism seems to mean more than multilinguality, when one takes into consideration the socio-cultural factors interwoven into the definition. It is often specifically underlined that plurilingualism cannot be considered separately from pluriculturalism, which promotes interlingual tolerance, respect and cooperation.

Although the simple categorization introduced by the Council of Europe has been generally accepted, some researchers prefer to use both terms as covering roughly the same range of meanings, especially with respect to the issue of proficiency of individuals (e.g. Hufeisen & Neuner 2004). In the present paper both multilingualism and plurilingualism will be used when referring to individuals rather than to

societies. In the light of the definitions discussed above, it is understood that an individual's multi- or plurilingualism does not imply knowing several languages perfectly, but being able and trying to use this knowledge and competence in communicating with other people in various situations. As pointed out by the CEFR, plurilingualism emphasises partial competences, i.e. limited abilities of some kind within a given language, e.g. written comprehension or non-linguistic knowledge about culture of a particular language community (Council of Europe 2001: 135); and transversal competences, i.e. transferable knowledge or skills across languages which, may be used for varied purposes (Council of Europe 2001: 169). In practice, plurilingualism manifests itself in the ability to function in a multinational and multicultural society, and thus implies an increased linguistic, metalinguistic and cultural awareness, as well as sensitivity to similarities and differences between languages.

## 2 - Cross-linguistic similarity in language learning

Thanks to various historical processes, including borrowing, i.e. adopting elements of another language to the language of a given speech community, it is possible to find numerous similarities between European languages. It is obvious that such similarities can be traced between languages which are typologically close. In the European context, crosslinguistic similarities can be easily found between languages within the Romance, Germanic and Slavonic groups. Thomason (2010:39) claims that '[t]ypological distance is a (very informal) measure of structural differences between two linguistic systems'. And so, lexical similarities can also be found between languages which are genealogically quite distant such as Finnish and English (e.g. Ringbom 2007), or English and Polish (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2009a and 2011a). However, as frequently pointed out nowadays,

L1 and other languages known to the learner clearly provide an essential aid, not a troublesome obstacle in learning a new language. (...) The use of cross-linguistic similarities, i.e. transfer, is an integral part of how people learn languages.

Ringbom (2007:2)

Historically, the preoccupation with similarities and differences between languages for pedagogical purposes began with the structuralist movement. Contrastive Analysis aimed at analysing learner errors and pointing to the areas of interference from the native language. Research on positive transfer and crosslinguistic influence began in the late 1970s and in the 1980s (e.g. Kellerman 1977; Odlin 1989). In the 1990s, practical use of positive transfer studies helped forge the idea of intercomprehension (e.g. the EuroCom project, Zybatow & Zybatow 2002, Meiβner *et.al* 2004). The interest in internationalisms and cognates, fostered by the united Europe's policy, gave rise to studies on teaching receptive competence and research into how the relations between languages in the same group can be utilized in language teaching practice (e.g. Hufeisen & Marx 2007, more recently <http://redinter.eu/web>). In the EuroCom project, teaching receptive

competence started by studying international vocabulary in texts. As the method proponents suggested

[a]dults normally have about 5000 of these easily recognisable words in their vocabulary. [...] [T]hese words provide that part of a newspaper article on, say, international politics that can be immediately understood: this vocabulary usually forms the larger part of such articles.'

([www.eurocomcenter.de](http://www.eurocomcenter.de))

For a linguist, it is not difficult to notice that Latin- and Greek-based words are also quite common in formal styles and registers used by educated European speakers in their L1. Thus, cognate vocabulary in SLA studies is defined more broadly than, for example, in historical linguistics (Odlin 1989:78). Ringbom (2007:73) proposes such a broad definition stating that: '[c]ognates in two languages can be defined as historically related, formally similar words, whose meanings may be identical, similar, partly different, or occasionally, even wholly different.' He does not specify exactly what is meant by 'historical relation', but states that cognates may be found in '[r]elated languages, and to a minor extent also in unrelated languages because of possible loanwords'. Thus, cognates should be understood as words which have descended from a common parent word, have been borrowed from Lx to Ly or have been borrowed independently by two languages (Rusiecki 2002). For Polish and English, the number of cognates exceeds two and a half thousand items, as noted by Otwinowska-Kasztelanica (2009a).

A language that is very interesting with respect to cognates is English, the international *lingua franca*. It comprises numerous words of Latin and Greek origin, which brings its vocabulary close to Romance languages. For instance, Meara (1993) talks about some 3000 English-Spanish cognates and estimates the number of English-French homographic cognates (identical in their form) as 6,500, whereas non-homographic number 17,000. According to Nation & Meara (2002:49) '[a]llmost all the basic Anglo-Saxon words have parallel forms based on Latin and Greek, which are used in particular, specialist discourse'. It is worth remembering that English is a language most commonly taught in the European Union (EURYDICE 2008). If not treated as a threat to the lesser-used languages, it can help bridge the gap between the native language and other languages (Hufeisen & Neuner 2004; Nation & Meara 2002). The use of English and the awareness of its role can help to develop learners' plurilingual communicative competence.

### 3 - Key factors in recognizing and making use of cross-linguistic similarity

As mentioned above, linguists trace a fair amount of crosslinguistic lexical similarity even in unrelated European languages. However, for language learners such similarity is not obvious. Although it has been demonstrated that awareness of lexical similarity enhances vocabulary acquisition by triggering positive transfer from the native language (Jessner 1999; Otwinowska-Kasztelanica 2009a, 2009b and 2011b; Ringbom 1987 and 2007; Swan 1997), often enough, learners may not be aware

of the potential their other languages offer. Schmitt (1997: 209) notes that cognates can be ‘an excellent resource for both guessing the meaning and remembering new words. Of course, learners do not automatically accept cognates as equivalent.’

Apart from such obvious individual differences as noticing abilities, or qualities of the working memory (Dörnyei & Skehan 2003), the main factors in taking advantage of crosslinguistic similarity involve language typology (Odlin 2003; Ringbom 2007) and psychotypology (Kellermann 1983 and 1995; Ringbom 1987 and 2006). The closer typologically the languages are, the easier to notice the differences. On the other hand, if the learner does not perceive the languages as close, he/ she may not notice the similarity. As suggested by Odlin (2002: 260, original emphasis), ‘[t]he actual similarity or dissimilarity of forms and meanings is only one factor at work in transfer; the *judgement* of each individual learner matters as much’.

Whether learner judgements can help in overcoming psychotypological factors strongly depends on the level and the number of languages at their disposal. Multilinguals are better than bilinguals at recognising crosslinguistic lexical similarities and using them as a learning strategy (Jessner 2006 and 2008; Dewaele 2010). These factors are related to the role of ‘cumulative language experience and knowledge’ (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2007: 197). Research shows that in the case of languages typologically distant but sharing numerous lexical similarities, such as Polish and English, the level of L2 is also at play: the lower the L2 level, the lower is the awareness of crosslinguistic lexical similarity (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011a). On the other hand, noticing cognate vocabulary by language learners may depend on their knowledge of languages beyond L2. While even advanced bilingual Polish students of English are not fully aware of the existence of cognate vocabulary, multilinguals (L1 Polish, advanced in L2 English and L3 French/ Spanish/ German/ Italian) matched with the bilingual group for language level and learning experience, show significantly higher awareness of crosslinguistic similarity. Moreover, in qualitative studies they are consistent in reporting on how they make use of crosslinguistic similarity as a language learning strategy (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011a and 2011b).

#### **4 - Researching awareness of cross-linguistic similarity in the lower-secondary context**

##### **4.1 - Aims and Participants**

Learners’ awareness of crosslinguistic similarity can be raised through the use of various activities and texts, as well as strategy training. According to Swan (1997: 178), ‘the more aware learners are of the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and the target language, the easier they will find it to adopt effective learning and production strategies.’ Jessner (1999:207) states that ‘metalinguistic awareness can be increased through teaching similarities between languages.’ It has already been shown that it is possible to raise Polish bilingual learners’ awareness through the use of various activities and texts and through strategy training. The method works for Polish beginning adult learners of English (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2009a) and for advanced learners (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2009b,

2011b, and 2011c). Those studies have shown that after the awareness raising tasks the learners were able to recognise cognates (as defined in section 3 of this paper) in written texts better than the control groups, as well as use cognates in oral and written production more often than the control groups. The aim of the present study was to assess if awareness-raising tasks could be used for learners younger than adults, since age may be an important factor in transferability (c.f. Jarvis & Pavelnko 2007). The study was also meant to examine teenagers' attitude towards using cross-linguistic similarity in the English language classroom.

For the purpose of the study the following research questions were asked:

1. Does exposure to and activation of English-Polish cognate vocabulary help teenage learners recognize cognates more effectively while reading an English text, as compared to the control group?

2. Do the students display any change in the awareness of cognates and their role at the end of the course?

3. What are the learners' attitudes towards the awareness-raising tasks and Polish-English crosslinguistic similarity at the end of the course?

The participants of the small-scale study were 14 teenagers of mean age 14.6 years (second grade of Polish lower-secondary), learning English in a private lower-secondary school near Warsaw, the capital of Poland. Their level of English (B1+) had been measured by a written and oral placement test administered by the school at the beginning of the school year. The students learned English in two parallel groups, but their assignment to the groups had been random (with respect to the alphabetical order). Both groups used the same course book (*Activate B1+*, Pearson), but were taught by two different teachers. For the purpose of the study, the groups were randomly appointed as Experimental and Control, so there were 8 students in the Experimental group and 6 in the Control group.

#### 4.2 - Methods and procedures

The study took place in spring 2010 and lasted for three months (March-June). Due to the small size of the groups, a mixed methods approach was used in the research. It involved a quasi-experiment with a pre-test and a post-test in the Experimental and the Control group, as well as qualitative methods, such as an opinion questionnaire and a guided discussion in the Experimental group after the post-test. The post-test and the qualitative study were carried out in June 2010. For the analysis of cognate recognition, means and independent sample t-tests were calculated, and qualitative methods were used for the second part of the study.

In the pre-test all the participants in both groups were asked to fill in a Polish-language version of Questionnaire 1 (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011a) in order to assess their awareness of Polish-English cognates. Next, both groups were given Reading 1, an unfamiliar English text of 414 running words, which included 76 cognates. Their task was to read it and underline as many cognates as possible within a time limit of 6 minutes. For the purpose of the clarification, cognates had been defined to teenagers as words whose form and meaning was similar to Polish.



The experimental treatment for the Experimental group involved activities for raising awareness of cognate vocabulary, which were added to the course topics. These were activities for listing, word mapping, grouping, contextualization, matching and recombination, as well as communicative activities (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2009a). In the course of the experiment the Experimental group were often sensitised to the existence of cognates, while the Control group were given other vocabulary tasks that did not involve cognates. In the post-test, the students' recognition of cognates was again assessed on the basis of Reading 2, which consisted of an English text of 830 words with 92 cognates. Their task again consisted in scanning the text to underline cognates within a time limit of 8 minutes. It was hypothesised that there would be no initial difference in cognate recognition between the Experimental and the Control group. Secondly, it was hypothesised that the Experimental group would be better than the Control group at recognizing cognates in the post-test.

Due to the small scale of the study, which made it more qualitative than quantitative in nature, emphasis was placed on investigating the learners' subjective points of view on the method. Thus, the Experimental group were given Questionnaire 2 in order to gather their opinions and assess their attitudes concerning the use of cognates in English language teaching. From Questionnaire 2 statements (below, originally in Polish) the teenagers had to choose the ones that best described their attitudes towards the exercises:

1. The exercises helped me learn vocabulary faster.
2. The exercises helped me notice that there are similar words in both languages.
3. Earlier, I did not notice such words.
4. The exercises did not change my way of learning vocabulary.
5. I have not noticed any specific exercises dealing with cognates.
6. Now, I try to use cognates more often when writing in English.
7. Now, I try to use cognates more often when speaking English.
8. Now, I notice cognates more often when reading in English.
9. I stopped checking the meaning of the words which look similar to Polish.
10. I do not see a point in introducing such exercises.

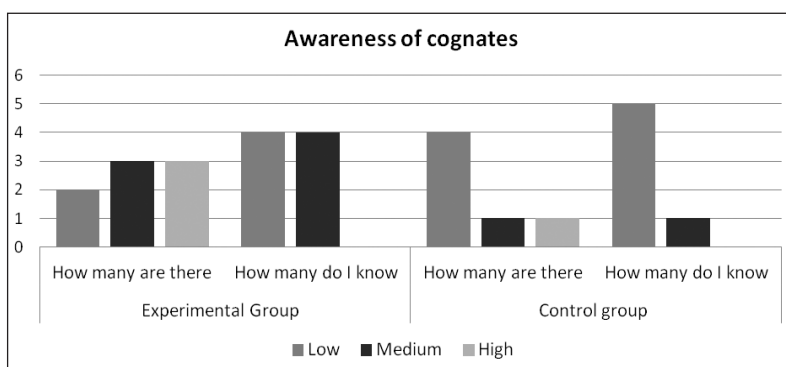
The Experimental group learners were also asked to write comments concerning the tasks and to assess their own knowledge of cognates. After that, the Experimental group were engaged in a discussion on the role of cognate vocabulary.

#### **4.3 - Research results: Pre-test**

The results of Questionnaire 1 were meant to estimate the teenagers' awareness of the number of Polish-English cognates. Similarly to the procedure described in Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011a), the participants' answers to questions 6 and 7 of the questionnaire were categorised and labelled: the votes for below 150 cognates – Low Awareness, between 150 and 500 – Medium Awareness, and above 500 – High Awareness of the existing Polish-English cognates. When asked about the number of words whose form and meaning are similar in English and Polish

(question 6), in most cases the teenagers in both groups chose the answers between 50 and 100, rarely between 100 and 500 cognates. Such answers indicate Low or Medium awareness of cognates. Of interest is the fact that that in the Experimental group there were three students whose knowledge of L3-Ln languages (other than English) was higher than the rest. It is these students who actually displayed higher awareness when answering about the number of cognates available. However, none of the teenage learners from both groups displayed High awareness of cognates in their own vocabulary (question 7), as neither of them believed to know more than 500 such words. The results of the questionnaire for the two questions are presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1** – The number of students’ answers to questions 6 and 7 of Questionnaire 1.



In order to estimate the awareness of cognates more precisely, the pre-test included Reading1, a task in recognising cognates in a written text. Reading 1 involved scanning an English text of 414 words to recognise and underline 76 cognates within a time limit of 6 minutes. Surprisingly, the mean for recognizing cognates was higher in the Control group than in the Experimental group ( $M=48.00$  and  $M=38.75$ , respectively). However, the independent samples t-test did not show any significant differences between the groups  $t(12) = -1.29, p < 0.22$ , as presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** – The results of the pre-test (Reading 1) for the Experimental and the Control group.

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Experimental	8	38.75	12.81	-1.29	12	0.22
Control	6	48.00	13.89			

As the results of the pre-test indicated no initial difference in cognate recognition between the Experimental and the Control group, which corroborated the first hypothesis, it allowed us to proceed with the experimental treatment, as described in the previous section on methods and procedures.



#### 4.4 Research results: Post-test and qualitative study on learners' attitudes

The post-test took place roughly after three months of the experimental treatment. The first part of the post-test consisted in scanning an English text of 830 words, to underline 92 cognates. The time limit was set to 8 minutes, since the text was twice longer and more difficult than the first one. In the Experimental Group, 7 out of 8 students managed to recognize over half the cognates in the text. Also, the mean for the Experimental group ( $M=45.75$ ,  $SD=12.88$ ) was much higher than for the Control group ( $M=28.33$ ,  $SD=11.62$ ), as presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2** – The results of the post-test (Reading 2) for the Experimental and the Control group.

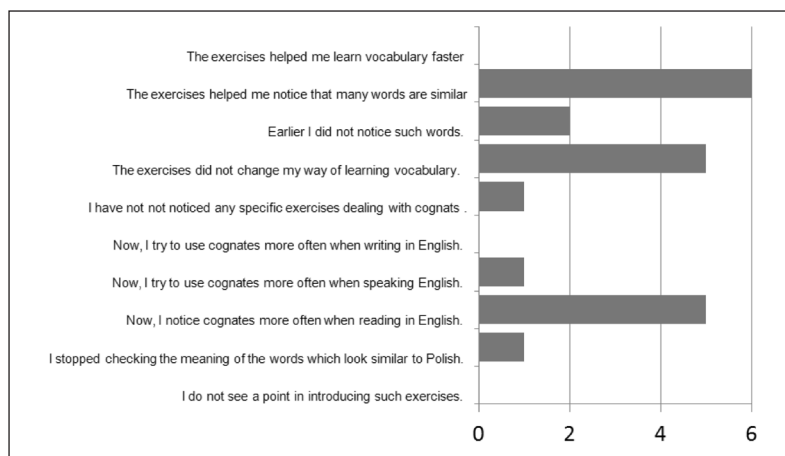
Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Experimental	8	45.75	12.88	2.61*	12	0.02
Control	6	28.33	11.62			

\* $p < 0.05$

The independent samples t-test has indicated a significant difference between the results for both groups ( $t(12)=6.61$ ,  $p < 0.02$ ), which corroborates that the Experimental Group students were significantly better than the Control Group at recognizing cognates in the post-test.

Due to the small scale of the study, the post-test procedure additionally involved a qualitative part which was meant to survey the learners' attitudes towards the method. As the first task, the learners had to choose statements in Questionnaire 2 (originally in Polish) to indicate what they thought of awareness raising exercises and of using cognate vocabulary in learning English. Their answers are summarised in Figure 2 below. Although none of the teenagers indicated that the exercises helped them learn vocabulary faster, they did not negate the sense of introducing such exercises, either. On the whole, the learners considered raising awareness of cognates as a positive and useful experience. Most of them decided that the exercises helped them notice crosslinguistic lexical similarities in general, and in particular, notice them in reading texts. Two students claimed they had never noticed cognate vocabulary before. What is interesting, 5 out of 8 students claimed that their ways of learning vocabulary did not change under the influence of the exercises, which is somewhat contrary to what they expressed more explicitly in their free comments, as discussed below.

**Figure 2** – The Experimental group attitudes after the experiment (Questionnaire 2)



Apart from the questionnaire, it had been decided that with such a small group of learners it would be useful to ask them directly for their opinions. Thus, as an additional task the learners were asked to comment on their learning experiences and on their knowledge of cognate vocabulary in general. Like in the pre-test, they were asked to state how many cognate words they think there are between Polish and English and how many such they know. In their comments, originally written in Polish in the space provided in Questionnaire 2, most learners appreciated the fact of being aware of similarities between languages, e.g.

**Kamila** (L3 German, A2): *I think it's useful and it helps to learn the language. Such exercises help to notice that. (...) But I think there are more such words between English and German, because most German words were borrowed from English. (sic!)*

**Ania 2** (L3 German, A2; L4 Spanish, A2): *In my opinion noticing similarities between languages is useful especially when teaching young learners (sic!) or when learning specialized language, e.g. business, where there are lots of words borrowed from other languages. I myself notice more similarities between the second and the third language I'm learning. (sic!)*

**Olek** (L3 French, A2): *I think that such exercises make us aware that there are lots of such words. The more languages we learn, the more similarities we notice, that help us learn further languages. I think that there are lots of such words. I know lots of them.*

What is quite interesting, the higher the level of the learners' L3-Ln languages, the more they precise comments they expressed. Some comments by the learners with the highest levels of L/L4 knowledge involved deepened metalinguistic awareness of crosslinguistic similarity.

**Olaf** (L3 German, B2): *I don't know what those exercises have changed, but now I notice similarities between some English and Polish words. (...) I think*

*there are about 5000 such words, but I probably know, when I think about it, around 1000.*

**Zofia** (L3 Spanish B1, L4 French B1): *I don't think that such exercises are good for me as an individual because I have used this method for about 4 years, i.e. since I started learning Spanish. When you learn several languages, especially from the same group, it is easier to learn through similarities. I can recommend it to all having problems with remembering words. There are thousands of similar words because once Latin was the international language. But I cannot say how many I know. It all happens when I find them in the text. I can know fewer words from such a range as "introvert" etc.*

It can also be noticed that in the case of all the learners from the Experimental Group their awareness of cognates rose. The change of the learners' awareness levels, as indicated in Questionnaire 1 and as indicated by their comments Questionnaire 2, is presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3** – Students' awareness of Polish-English cognates before and after the training.

Student	Students' L3-Ln and their level	Level of awareness	
		before the training	after the training
Zofia	French B1 Spanish B1	Medium	High
Maria	Spanish A2 German B1	Medium	High
Anna 1	French A2	Low	Medium
Alek	German A2	Low	Medium
Kamila	German A2	Low	Medium
Anna 2	Spanish A1 German A2	Low	Medium
Olaf	German B2	Medium	High
Olek	French A2	Medium	High

The last step of the study was a guided discussion about the role of crosslinguistic similarity run after filling in Questionnaire 2. The learners were asked to say what comes to their minds in connection with cognate vocabulary, whether such vocabulary can be useful in learning English and other languages. The discussion was run in English towards the end of the lesson. It was recorded and the learners' ideas were noted on the board in the form of a mind-map. Below, there are some fragments of the teenagers' comments in the discussion.

**Interviewer: What comes to your mind when you think of those words, those cognates?**

Zofia: Useful for learning foreign languages.

**I: Do they help you in learning English, or other languages?**

Zofia: They help in noticing connections between languages.

Olaf: The most important thing is to notice them first.

Kamila: They are easier to understand.

Anna 1: They are harder words, from Latin, used in the past years. The people who travelled brought those words to our language.

Zofia: I can see connections with Spanish and French

Maria: And German. For example the word 'homonim' 'homonym' and 'Homonymus'. There are more connections between Polish and French, Polish and German than Polish and English. Also between English and French.

When looking at what the teenagers said, one can clearly see that they had already understood that crosslinguistic similarity can help in language learning. As their attention had been drawn to cognates, they could also notice similarity across the different languages they were learning and were even trying to comment on some historical processes governing its emergence. Further on, the learners argued about the process of learning vocabulary and the usefulness of awareness raising activities.

**I: So what do you think about such exercises, about showing learners that such words exist?**

Olek: I think it's a good idea, but we need longer sessions, (...) Like this they are hard to remember.

**I: Do we really have to remember them?**

Zofia: But... we don't have to remember them! They are at the back of our heads.

For example, I never remember the word for "wiosła" ['oars', in Polish], but I don't have to remember those cognate words.

Kamila: You can see them on the labels.

Maria: These words are also around us in shops, when we use the net, on portals like Facebook. We don't have to remember them.

Olaf: When we study, they will help us understand Biology, Chemistry. ... No, not really. Rather History.

Anna 1: We can use them when we are abroad and we are talking to other teenagers, our peers, and they help us understand them.

**I: So, how many such words are there? Fifty? (...)**

Zofia: More. There are thousands of those words.

**I: There are over 3000 of such words between English and Polish. Do you know them all?**

Olek: It's difficult to say.

**I: How can we know a word? If we can use it, we know it actively. If we only understand it we know it...**

Maria: Passive. Passively. We know lots of them passively.

## 5 - Discussion and Conclusions

The study indicates that awareness-raising tasks can be used with learners younger than adults. The exposure and activation of English-Polish cognate vocabulary helped teenagers recognize cognates more effectively while reading an English text, as compared to the Control group. What is more, the teenagers' attitude towards using crosslinguistic similarity in language learning was positive. Three quarters of the learners claimed the exercises helped them notice similarities between the two languages. Although five out of eight learners claimed the activities did not change their way of learning vocabulary, the teenagers' awareness of cognates was higher at the end of the experiment, which was clearly indicated by their comments. The students also displayed a lot of metalinguistic awareness of crosslinguistic lexical similarity and its role, both in their written comments and in the discussion. What is of special interest, the comments revealed that the higher the level of the learners' L3/Ln languages was, the more they likely they were to notice the usefulness of cognate vocabulary. Multilingual learners with at least intermediate knowledge of L3 tended to be more aware of the role of crosslinguistic similarity.

The main limitation of the study is its small size and the fact that the teenagers in the research came from quite specific backgrounds (their parents could afford a private school). Also their English language level was higher than the average for learners of their age (B1+, and not A2). However, the advantage of the study is that it shows the direction changes in education can follow. The main implications of the study are that it is quite possible to introduce the notion of crosslinguistic similarity to learners younger than adults and to introduce tasks on raising awareness of cognates even at the lower-secondary school level. An important conclusion of the study, stemming from the learners' comments, is that the teaching of L3 should start as early as possible, perhaps in the upper-primary. The teaching of L3 should also be carried out to a level higher than elementary. Multilingual learners with at least intermediate knowledge of L3 tended to be much more aware of the role of crosslinguistic similarity than their peers, which may enhance language learning.

This paper has discussed the issues of plurilingualism and multilingualism in connection with the role of crosslinguistic lexical similarity in enhancing language learning. It pointed to the fact that cognate vocabulary, which exists not only in typologically close languages but also across typological boundaries, may be important for the speed of language acquisition. However, in order to make use of cognates the student has to be aware of their existence.

Proficiency in English – the current European and international *lingua franca* – is still of major importance for participating in the international communication. According to Breidbach (2003) of the role of English within a framework of plurilingualism is not to be underappreciated, with reference to participation in various public forums. Whereas on the national level the national and minority languages suffice, on the European forum it is English that is the predominant means of communication and comprehension between the participants of communication. Breidbach (2003:20) states that 'English has already become the very linguistic

means to give speakers, especially of lesser-used languages, their voice within a European public discourse'. Contemporary multilingualism and plurilingualism are often presented in terms of constellations of languages rather than individual languages known to the speaker (Aronin 2006; Singleton & Aronin 2007). Thus, it seems reasonable to postulate that teachers at various levels should try to make their students aware of similarities between the cognate vocabularies found not only in languages typologically close, but also between various languages and English. In this way learners may obtain quick access to numerous lexical items, very similar to their L1 equivalents. Raising awareness of crosslinguistic similarity may help learners to be more confident when using English, which may, in turn, influence their motivation to learn this and other European languages. Since Latin- and Greek-based words are commonly used by educated European speakers in their L1, English may not only serve as a *lingua franca*, but also as a mediation tool between the native language and other European languages.

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Recebido em março de 2012; aceite em maio de 2012.

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