

## **The cognate facilitation effect depends on stimulus list composition**

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Research conducted by Poort, Warren, and Rodd (2016) suggests a key finding in bilingualism research, the *cognate facilitation effect*, may not be as robust as thought. Numerous studies have shown that cognates, which share their form and meaning across languages (e.g. “fruit” in English and Dutch), are often processed more quickly than single-language control words (e.g. “witch”). Two English lexical decision experiments with Dutch–English bilinguals investigated whether this effect depends on stimulus list composition. In Experiment 1, the ‘classic’ version, which included only identical cognates, English controls and regular non-words (e.g. “vasui”), showed significant cognate facilitation (32.6ms). In contrast, the ‘alternative’ version, which also included identical interlingual homographs (e.g. “angel”, meaning “insect’s sting” in Dutch), pseudohomophones (e.g. “mistaik”, instead of regular non-words) and Dutch controls (e.g. “krijt”), showed non-significant inhibition (8.3ms). Experiment 2 further revealed that this reversal of the cognate effect was due to the presence of the Dutch controls. We suggest that when participants must respond ‘no’ to non-target language control words, competition arises between the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses associated with the two interpretations of a cognate, which can cancel out the facilitation that is a result of the cognate’s shared form and meaning.

### **References**

- Poort, E. D., Warren, J. E., & Rodd, J. M. (2016). Recent experience with cognates and interlingual homographs in one language affects subsequent processing in another language. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 19(1), 206–212.