

L2 Vocabulary Learning and Linguistic Mediation: Working with Phrasal Verbs through Mediation Activities

Aprendizaje de vocabulario en L2 y mediación lingüística: trabajar con verbos frasales a través de actividades de mediación

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The latest version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2018) remarks linguistic mediation as one of the communicative skills to be developed by foreign language learners. In this paper, two groups of secondary education students of English as a Second Language work on several phrasal verbs through different activities. One of the groups uses mediation activities, while the other group works with other more traditional classroom activities. After the intervention, students were evaluated on both receptive and productive acquisition of these verbs. The results show that, although no significant differences in productive knowledge were found, the group that had worked with mediation activities did obtain better results in their receptive knowledge of those terms. This suggests that mediation, in addition to its value in itself as a skill within the communicative competence, may have a relevant role in the development of other aspects within L2 learning.

Keywords: *linguistic mediation; English as a Foreign Language; vocabulary learning; secondary education*

La última versión del Marco Común Europeo para las Lenguas (2018) menciona la mediación lingüística como una de las destrezas comunicativas que tienen que desarrollar los aprendices de segunda lengua. En este artículo dos grupos de estudiantes de inglés en educación secundaria trabajan una serie de verbos frasales a través de diferentes actividades. Uno de los grupos lo hace a través de actividades de mediación, mientras el otro lo hace a través de actividades más tradicionales. Tras la intervención, los estudiantes fueron evaluados tanto en el conocimiento receptivo como en el productivo de estos verbos. Los resultados muestran que, si bien no se encontraron diferencias significativas en el conocimiento productivo, sí se encontraron en el receptivo a favor del grupo que trabajó con actividades de mediación. Esto sugiere que la mediación, además de su valor en sí misma para la competencia comunicativa, puede jugar un papel relevante en el desarrollo de otros aspectos dentro del aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

Palabras clave: *mediación lingüística; inglés como lengua extranjera; aprendizaje de vocabulario; educación secundaria*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contact between different cultures and languages is not a recent phenomenon. Developing our personal and professional activity in multilingual contexts has become the norm. *Mediation* arises as part of the solution to this challenge in today's society, for now more than ever the world needs dialogue (Campos, 2004).

Foreign language (FL) learning is to be considered a requirement in a globalized world, where different communities are constantly in contact. Traditionally, the study of languages has been based on different pedagogical models, from the mere repetitive and mechanical learning of grammatical structures and lexical elements, to the present time in which learning is based more on the interaction with other members of the linguistic community, which is essential for the co-construction of shared knowledge. In this sense, *linguistic mediation* has arisen as a methodological novelty at the same time it is seen as an essential activity for human relations within multilingual contexts.

Linguistic mediation appears as an aspect to be developed in the recent Spanish Education Royal Decree 1/2019, which establishes the common basic principles of teaching and evaluation applicable to the official certification tests of Intermediate and Advanced FL levels for official language schools. In this way, both the classroom activities and those contained in the assessment tests must contemplate *mediation*, together with *comprehension*, *production* and *interaction*. In fact, the current decrees of the different Spanish regions for FL teaching at primary and secondary school periods establish the need to develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills, in addition to purely linguistic skills. As it is contemplated in these decrees, not only does this imply producing but also processing oral and written texts which are adequate for a specific social context. Moreover, there is already a claim for the need to explicitly introduce linguistic mediation as an element to be developed within the classroom in schools and high schools. This is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018), hereafter CEFR, which introduces linguistic mediation as one of the components of the communicative competence, and which has been specified with new descriptors by the complementary Companion Volume.

The recent importance that linguistic mediation is acquiring and its potential from the point of view of research and teaching lead us to suggest studies such as the one presented here. We propose to go beyond linguistic mediation as an element within communicative competence and explore its possibilities as a tool for progression when learning L2 vocabulary.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Linguistic mediation in the L2 classroom

The origins of the concept of *mediation* have traditionally been associated to *culture*. In this regard, Blini (2008) highlights the difficulties that still exist in defining this term. The author points out the arbitrariness and inappropriate uses of the concept of mediation. Sánchez (2009) warns that it is difficult to separate the term mediation

from the cultural scope. Hence, he suggests talking about linguistic and cultural mediation as an indissoluble binomial concept. However, Blini (2009) and Carreras i Goicoechea and Pérez Vázquez (2010) insist on the need to fine-grain the concept of mediation and to distinguish the cultural from the linguistic, although both aspects are unavoidably related. In fact, Blini understands *cultural mediation* as something that goes beyond linguistics. The former shows a more solid and agreed basis than linguistic mediation itself, which is of a more recent nature and therefore more ambiguous in its definition.

Cassany (1996) was one of the first scholars who tried to offer a definition of linguistic mediation. His idea was to professionalize the term, establishing a field of work where linguistic mediation requires documentation and new technology. Notwithstanding, his attempt is far from the conception of linguistic mediation found in the CEFR (2002). The CEFR conceives *mediation* as an integral part of the communicative competence alongside *reception*, *production* and *interaction*. It highlights the fundamental role of mediation as a cornerstone in the development of society:

The language learner/user's communicative language competence is activated in the performance of the various language activities, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation. Each of these types of activity is possible in relation to texts in oral or written form, or both [...] activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Mediating language activities have an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies (Council of Europe, 2002: 14-15).

However, it is not until 2018 with the revised version of the CEFR that linguistic mediation is extended, consolidated as a concept and developed through specific constructs and aspects. The so-called Companion Volume of the CEFR (2018) introduces new descriptors for all skills, especially as regards mediation. Linguistic mediation is presented as one of the underpinnings of communication together with reception, interaction and production. In fact, according to the Companion Volume, mediation comprehends a combination of the other three aspects, and it is to be considered wider than a cross-linguistic phenomenon, that is, it is an important part of learning in

general and language learning in particular. It is stated that “in mediation, the learner [...] creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another” (Council of Europe, 2018: 103). Descriptive aspects of mediation are divided into three blocks: 1) mediating a text; 2) mediating concepts; and, 3) mediating communication. These are complemented by two groups of strategies: 1) those to explain a new concept and; 2) those to simplify a text.

Although one of the aspects of linguistic mediation in the Companion Volume (2018) is translation, we should not identify both terms as synonyms. De Arriba (2003) recognizes the relationship that may exist between both concepts. Yet, she is adamant about establishing differences between them. She considers that translation should be understood as a specialized profession involving two or more languages, while mediation should be seen as something inherent to language use and may involve two languages or a single language, even several registers within the same language. In fact, Cantero and De Arriba (2004) go further by defining linguistic mediation as opposed to *translation*. According to their view, translation consists of an accurate transmission of meaning, without taking into account the interlocutor or what is important to him/her. By contrast, mediation presents the interlocutor and his or her needs as a central part of the communicative act, selecting the content and adapting it to specific communicative goals.

Passos (2010) highlights the value of mediation itself as a communicative aspect that students must develop so that they become efficient and autonomous when using a FL. Nonetheless, not only does mediation have a value as a communicative underpinning itself. It may also contribute to the development of linguistic competence in general. Indeed, Trovato (2015) advocates that having advanced language skills requires a new language learning model which includes mediation for the development of communicative skills and the increase of in-class participation.

2.2 L2 vocabulary acquisition in formal education

Already in the 21st century, the importance of L2 vocabulary in FL learning remains far from debate. Vocabulary knowledge serves as an indicator of language proficiency in general (Nation, 2001; Milton, 2013). Additionally, we can find plenty of literature supporting the link between high vocabulary levels and better development of communicative skills. Milton, Wander and Hopkins (2010) and Golkar and Yamini (2007) found statistically significant relations between writing performance and L2 vocabulary size. In both studies, scholars observed that students with higher vocabulary levels wrote longer and more accurate essays than those with lower levels. In the case of Laufer and Aviad-Levitzky (2017) and Tozcu and Coady (2004), outcomes indicated correlation between number of words and the learner's ability to read and understand a text in a particular period of time.

As for oral skills, Staerh (2008) and Noreillie, Kestemont, Heylen, Desmet and Peters (2018) observed the relation between L2 vocabulary and listening skills. Gorman (2012) showed that better access to vocabulary in a second language leads to improvement in phonological awareness lexical availability. Not only does oral accuracy benefit from L2 lexicon, but also fluency. Studies by Uchihara and Saito (2016) and Uchihara and Clenton (2018) explore the implications of vocabulary learning for L2 oral production and the strong link between vocabulary and speaking, particularly the effects of the former on the degree of oral fluency in L2 learners. They found that English as a Foreign language (EFL) learners' productive vocabulary knowledge was significantly bound to fluency. Koizumi and In'nami (2013) identified the predictive role of productive vocabulary in the development of different aspects of L2 oral ability such as fluency, accuracy or syntactic complexity with students in their first learning stages of EFL.

Throughout the history of FL teaching, several vocabulary approaches have been proposed. From the traditional method of Grammar and Translation, through the Direct Method, to the Audiolingual Method, efforts have focused on repetition and use of key terms in a more or less naturalized environment (Sánchez, 2009). With the advent of the communicative approach, vocabulary is integrated

into the activities, not as an aim, but as a tool. This does not mean that vocabulary has lost a relevant role, but it must be integrated together with the grammatical aspects. In contrast to the idea of vocabulary learning through grammatical and structural methods by means of thematic lists, communicative and naturalized use is the one which predominates in the present-day teaching approaches.

Several factors are considered as potentially influential in lexical acquisition. Among them we highlight, for example, what Laufer (2005) calls *intra-lexical* aspects. These are those that concern the word itself, such as length, grammatical category, frequency of appearance, or its distribution in time and space. On the other hand, the way vocabulary is presented to students may also have an effect in acquisition. A recent study by Yeung, Ng, Qiao and Tsang (2019) state that explicit L2 vocabulary teaching exerts a positive influence on the learning process, even in young learners. What is more, this explicit exposure to new L2 words also had an effect in phonemic awareness, showing greater gains in those children under this type of instruction. In this sense, several studies on L2 vocabulary acquisition have highlighted the role of *cognitive processing* (Schmidt, 2001; Rott, 2007; Pulido, 2007, 2009).

There are currently two theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain and measure how information is processed in the L2 vocabulary learning process. One of them corresponds to the so-called Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH) (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001), while the second is the Technique Feature Analysis, hereafter TFA (Nation & Webb, 2011). These models basically differ in two aspects: 1) on the one hand, the way of conceptualizing information processing; and, on the other, the parameters they propose for measuring the degree of acquisition. The differences are materialized in the different components that each model offers. Both models have proved positive effects on L2 vocabulary learning, although it is the ILH which has been more widely tested. Despite their dissimilarities, both theories share the idea that the more cognitively elaborated an item, the better this item is acquired and retained.

3. AIM

As shown above, L2 vocabulary teaching has been approached in many different ways and adopting different didactic frameworks. At the same time, leaving aside some exceptions, research about linguistic mediation has mainly hinged on didactic proposals. The present study, however, goes a step further. It aims to check whether linguistic mediation has a positive effect on L2 vocabulary learning.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 *Participants*

Forty-two students in their first year of *Bachillerato* took part in the study. Students were in their first year of *Bachillerato* at a state secondary school in Madrid. They were between 16 and 17 years old, and it was the first time they coursed that academic year. Given the number of hours they had been exposed to the English language, their level was considered to be Intermediate. Group A was composed of 21 teenagers (12 girls and 9 boys) who studied the branch of Social Science. In Group B there were 21 Bioscience students (10 girls and 11 boys).

All participants had a similar profile. They spoke Spanish as their native language and could not speak any other FL except for English. All of them belonged to a middle-class socioeconomic framework. They received four hours of English a week, of which one was entirely devoted to vocabulary. Group A was the experimental group who work on vocabulary through mediation activities. Group B followed the traditional communicative teaching approach as a control group and work on vocabulary through more traditional in-class activities. Both groups had the same English teacher who had followed the same EFL methodology except for vocabulary teaching during the intervention.

4.2 *The key words: phrasal verbs*

Six phrasal verbs were selected for the study (see Table 1). There are several reasons why this word category was the one chosen for our proposal. In the first place, phrasal verbs are among the type of

vocabulary that L2 students find hard to learn and retain. In the second place, there were more possibilities students did not previously know these terms, although participants were pretested (see below). We considered phrasal verbs might encourage discussion and debate – which would provide a basis for some of the linguistic mediation activities and strategies to be suggested in the study.

Table 1: Phrasal verbs

Hang out	See off
Keep down	Set about
Put off	Work out

4.3 Vocabulary activities

4.3.1 Mediation activities

The scales for mediation in the Companion Volume of the CEFR (2018) organize the mediating actions into three groups: 1) mediating a text; 2) mediating communication; and 3) mediating concepts. The first one consists of transmitting the content of a text to someone who has difficulties for understanding. The second group pursues to make understanding not only possible but fully successful, where participants frequently have common communicative aims. The nature of the activities presented are based on the third group of mediating actions, that is, mediating concepts. This category is defined as “the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others” (Council of Europe, 2018: 106). Despite this division, the Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018: 106) states that “one cannot in practice completely separate types of mediation from each other” and it is easy to combine several aspects from different groups. In fact, all mediation descriptors are considered highly relevant for the FL classroom, as they promote collaboration and teamwork among students, where they are encouraged to share different input, explain information to others and work together in search for a common goal (Council of Europe, 2018).

The four activities suggested here are mainly in the line of mediating concepts. In an extended definition of this category, it is stated that the students learn to facilitate access to knowledge and

concepts through language by collaborating and interacting with other students.

- Activity 1. What do these phrasal verbs mean? Discuss in pairs and try to guess.

Each phrasal verb is highlighted in bold as part of a brief text. In groups of three, students have to discuss and agree on the message of the text focusing on the meaning of the phrasal verb. In each group, one of the students knows the key term and adopts the role of moderator, providing clues and encouraging discussion. This activity is developed so that all members of the group can experience the role of moderator.

The activity can be classified within the category of mediating concepts, which refer to facilitating the access to concepts or knowledge for others. In this group of activities two actions are promoted: 1) collaborative interaction with peers; and, 2) meaning construction. Students are encouraged to make use of questions and to contribute to move the discussion forward, respecting turn taking. They are also expected to develop brainstorming and problem-solving skills, which are “particularly relevant to construct meaning” (Council of Europe, 2018: 118).

- Activity 2. Guess the verb. Explain to your classmate the meaning of these phrasal verbs. Your classmate will try to guess.

Student 1 has in front of him/her an English text where one of the key phrasal verbs appears. S/He must convey its content orally in English to Student 2. However, s/he cannot use that phrasal verb. Based on the information received by Student 1, Student 2 must say which of the phrasal verbs can be related to that text. Then, students would swap positions so that the pairs of students can experience both roles.

In this case, the activity promotes mediating text, where a written text is processed into speech. This is one of the

modalities that mediation activities adopt. Processing a text requires reformulating, condensing and adapting the information contained in this text.

- Activity 3. Carousel

This activity requires groups of three people. In the Carousel, Student 1 makes up a story where two key terms are used. This story is orally transmitted to Student 2, who has to tell that story to Student 3. Then, Student 3 explains in the L1 – in this case Spanish - to the large group what Student 1 is supposed to have said. The activity is carried out so that all members of the group can adopt the three roles.

The Carousel can be framed within the category of mediating text, that is, information is transmitted from one subject to another. In this process of transmission, information is processed and therefore shaped by the different students it goes through. In the Carousel specific information is relayed from the original source - in this case Student 1 - to the rest of the students.

- Activity 4. Look at the pictures and write the story

Students are asked to write a brief story in English. The story is to be based on the pictures provided. Those pictures contain actions which reflect the key phrasal verbs they are working on. This last activity is individual, and it also belongs to the category of mediating text, particularly in explaining data. Explaining data consists of transforming visual information found in graphics, diagrams, or other types of images (Council of Europe, 2018). In this case, students use their L2 in order to write a story, by resorting to the visual input of the pictures.

4.3.2 *No mediation activities*

The control group also did four different activities. These activities are designed to be carried out individually. They represent the type of activities students are used to finding when working on vocabulary in class. First, they look up the phrasal verbs in a dictionary; then, they have to match the phrasal verbs with their correct definition. In the third activity gaps are filled in with the phrasal verbs, and finally, students are asked to use those phrasal verbs in a sentence.

- Activity 1. Look up these terms in the dictionary

In this activity students have to look up the different phrasal verbs in a bilingual dictionary.

- Activity 2. Match these phrasal verbs with the correct definitions

The second activity consists of finding the correct definition for each phrasal verb among the ones provided.

- Activity 3. Fill in the gaps with the correct phrasal verb

The student is provided different sentences with a gap each. Gaps are to be filled in with one of the phrasal verbs students find as options in a textual box.

- Activity 4. Try to use each phrasal verb in a sentence
In the last activity, students are asked to use the phrasal verbs in a sentence.

Both the experimental and control group carried out the activities in one session of 65 minutes. The first five minutes were devoted to explaining the activities to the students. Then, each activity was developed during four slots of 15 minutes.

Four weeks before starting with the experiment, students took a vocabulary yes/no test. In this type of format, the key terms are

presented in a list and testees are asked to indicate whether they know the meaning of the words presented or not. Pellicer and Schmidt (2012: 490) remark the advantages of this test format: “limited task demands, easy development of items, straightforward and automatic scoring, and no apparent negative washback effects. Overall, the yes/no test format is time and resource efficient”. The yes/no test has been validated in many occasions, revealing high correlation with other formats such as multiple-choice and fill in the gaps (Mochida & Harrington, 2006; Harrington & Carey, 2009). The phrasal verbs were presented in a list. The participants had to write yes or no just after each item. We insisted on the importance of being honest in carrying out this pre-test. Participants were explained that the exercise was not an exam and that no mark would be given or taken into account for the course mark.

After the two groups finished the activities, two post-tests were distributed in order to measure their acquisition of the phrasal verbs. Students were tested on their productive and receptive knowledge of the key items. We opted for the translation format. Nation (2001: 351) states that the attitude of rejecting translation for vocabulary assessment “is quite wrong [because] translation is one of a number of means of conveying meaning and in general is no better or worse than the use of pictures, real objects, definitions, L2 synonyms and so on”. In the productive format, students had to provide the L2 form of L1 equivalents of the phrasal verbs. The receptive form consisted on providing an L1 equivalent for the phrasal verbs. Several scholars remark the validity of these type of tests. Takala (1984: 146) affirmed that “the best pay-off between validity, reliability and practicality is shown by test types which ask students to write L2 or L1 equivalents to written decontextualized stimulus words”. More recent studies such as Read (2000), Harsh and Hartig (2016) and Haug and Ebling (2019) show that providing equivalents to words in another language is considered to be a reliable way for measuring L2 vocabulary acquisition. In both receptive and productive tests, the items were alphabetically listed and accompanied by a dotted line to provide a Spanish equivalent (in the former) or the L2 term (in the latter).

4.4 Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical operations are applied. Descriptive statistics offer percentages and means in the groups. On the other hand, in order to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of the experimental group and the control group, inferential statistics is needed. In this sense, two T-Tests were carried out, that is, one for the receptive knowledge and another one for the productive knowledge.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Experimental vs control group for receptive knowledge

Table 2 shows that the group who carried out mediation activities (N=21) was associated with a receptive knowledge result M=5.00 (SD=0.71). By comparison, the control group, which worked on vocabulary with no mediation activities (N=21) was associated with a numerically smaller result in the receptive vocabulary post-test M=3.52 (SD=0.75).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for receptive knowledge

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mediation	21	5.00	0.71	0.15
No mediation	21	3.52	0.75	0.16

To test the hypothesis that the experimental group and the control group were associated with statistically different means, an independent samples t-test was performed. As can be observed in Table 3 the experimental and control group distributions were sufficiently normal for the purposes of a t-test. The independent sample t-test was associated with a statistically significant effect, $t=6.564$, $p=.000$. Thus, the experimental group, which worked on vocabulary through mediation activities, revealed a statistically significant larger mean of

receptive vocabulary knowledge of the key phrasal verbs than the control group.

Table 3: T-test for receptive knowledge

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	95% confidence interval	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	6.564	40	.000	0.91	0.225	1.02	1.93
Equal variances not assumed	6.339	40	.000	0.91	0.225	1.93	1.93

5.2 Experimental vs control group for productive knowledge

Table 4 shows that the group who carried out mediation activities (N=21) was associated with a productive knowledge result M=3.00 (SD= 0.45). In the case of the control group the mean was M=2.76 (SD=0.44). The result for the experimental group was slightly larger than the one for the control group.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for productive knowledge

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mediation	21	3.00	0.45	0.10
No mediation	21	2.76	0.44	0.10

However, in this case the samples t-test could confirmed the null hypothesis that the experimental and the control group were associated to means which were not significantly different. As can be observed in Table 5, the experimental and control group distributions were sufficiently normal for the purposes of a t-test. The independent sample t-test was not associated with a statistically significant effect, $t=.000$, $p=.088$, as the value of p is higher than the standardized $p \geq .05$. Thus, no significant difference was found between the two groups.

Table 5: *T-Test for productive knowledge*

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	95% confidence interval	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.746	40	.088	0.24	0.136	-0.04	0.51
Equal variances not assumed	1.746	40	.088	0.24	0.136	-0.04	0.51

6. DISCUSSION

The analysis of results suggests that working on vocabulary through mediation activities seems to provide better results in receptive learning than working with more traditional activities. Recent studies insist on the idea that linguistic mediation might help to develop communicative skills in a FL. Scholars such as Trovato (2014, 2015), Payant and Kim (2015), Marshall and Bokhorst-Heng (2018), Nagy (2018) and Hutanu and Jieanu (2019) make interesting proposals for working mediation in class. They put the emphasis on the didactic value of mediation through different tasks which include translanguaging, negotiation, or text processing. Beyond proposals, recent research by Stathopoulou (2019) or Alcaraz-Mármol (2019) delves into the positive value of linguistic mediation in written and oral production. Both studies reveal how students improved their L2 writing and speaking skills through linguistic mediation activities, highlighting the relevance of this meditation beyond its value itself.

Thus, actions such as *summarizing*, *pedagogical translation*, *terminological discussion*, *transmission of information from one particular format to another*, among others, are activities and strategies which arise as part of the mediation scales contained in the CEFR (2018). They imply complex aspects of the handling of a language that go beyond more simple processes such as *reproduction of information*, *recalling*, *listing*, or *classifying* (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000). In fact, some recent research is in the line of our results as it explores the

effect of some of these mediating actions on vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Hummel (2010) and Joyce (2018) observed how direct and inverse translation surpassed other type of activities such as glosses and rote-repetition when dealing with new L2 vocabulary. Hennebry, Rogers, Macaro & Murphy (2017) could check how reflection and discussion on the meaning of new key terms after listening was significantly better for the retention of those terms than mere exposition and listening exercises. In a similar vein, Dehkordi and Shafiee (2016) compared learning vocabulary through the summary technique to fill in gaps with significantly better results for the former than for the latter.

Those studies highlight the importance of deep cognitive processes when working with L2 vocabulary. Thus, at the beginning of this century, Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) presented what was called the Involvement Load Hypothesis. Behind this theory is the idea that the deeper the elaboration of input the better for its retention. These authors point out that “processing new lexical information more elaborately will lead to a better retention than if it had been processed less elaborately” (2001: 541). In fact, the depth of processing—that is the shallowness or depth with which information is managed—determines its retention. Hulstijn and Laufer combined the notions of *elaboration* and *processing* in the Involvement Load Hypothesis. Accordingly, the more elaborated and deeper L2 vocabulary learning is, the better its acquisition and retention.

Focusing on how vocabulary was managed by the experimental group in our study, the cognitive processes implied in this type of mediating activities and others within linguistic mediation promote a level of cognitive effort that contributes to the acquisition of new vocabulary. Several studies (Alcaraz-Mármol & Almela, 2013; Soleimani & Rahmanian, 2015; Zhou, 2017) have delved into this idea. They show that the more cognitive elaboration required in activities, the better for acquisition. Alcaraz-Mármol and Almela (2013) compared four types of EFL activities with different levels of involvement and therefore different levels of cognitive elaboration in Primary Education students. It was found that the higher the elaboration and complexity the better their results. Soleimani and Rahmanian (2015) observed that the students’ outperformance in L2 vocabulary tests was maintained not just in immediate retention but also in delayed

retention some weeks after intervention. In addition to obtaining results validating Hulstijn and Laufer's hypothesis, Zhou (2017) suggested the organization of information and the input order of introduction as another factor which can condition L2 vocabulary learning.

In the case of productive knowledge, although the mean of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group, the difference is not statistically significant. One of the possible reasons for this may be the short period of time students were exposed to the key terms. It is widely recognized that productive knowledge requires more effort than receptive knowledge. The *receptive-productive* dimension of vocabulary knowledge is the most relevant aspect for L2 learners, and it is based on the access to a word, particularly to its meaning (Henriksen, 1999). The relationship between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge is not dichotomous, put it another way, "vocabulary knowledge should be regarded as a continuum on which a word grows from receptive to productive status" (Zhou, 2010: 15). In fact, Zhou (2010) continues to explain that words are first known receptively and "only after that learning become available for productive use" (2010: 15). This productive use implies the ability to recover the structure and meaning of a L2 key term (Webb, 2008).

Consequently, it is considered more complex and it presumably requires more time to be developed. As observed in our results, productive knowledge is smaller than receptive knowledge in both the experimental and control group. Our study comprehends just one session. It would be interesting to check if with more sessions these mediation activities also affect the productive knowledge in the experimental group with a significant difference from the control group.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has given an account of the role of linguistic mediation in L2 vocabulary acquisition. Mediation is already considered one of the cornerstones of communicative competence together with comprehension, production and interaction, these last three possibly being an integrated part of the former. The evidence from this study

points towards the idea that not only are mediation activities and strategies valuable themselves, but they appear to be especially relevant in the learning process of a FL in general. Taken together, our outcomes seem to suggest that linguistic mediation can help L2 vocabulary acquisition. However, further work needs to be done to get to know the possible benefits of mediation in the development of a FL, particularly the potential positive effect of this element on the communicative competence in general and specific components and skills at all proficiency levels.

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