

'Right under our noses' cognates in context and in translation

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1. Introduction

What are cognates?

e.g., **English nose and German Nase**

Cognates – words which share one meaning, a similar orthography, and sometimes even phonological features – were found to elicit facilitation in language processing, e.g., in:

- Picture-naming (e.g., Costa et al. 2000)
- Lexical decision (e.g., Sánchez-Casas & García-Albea 2005)
- Translation (e.g., De Groot 1992)

→ assumption: cognates take on a 'special' place in the bilingual mental lexicon.

2. Research question

One or two lexical entries?

Do cognates facilitate processing, because they are listed under one entry in the mental lexicon? Can the use of **cognates in written language** give us any clues?

4. Corpus Study (II): Translating cognates

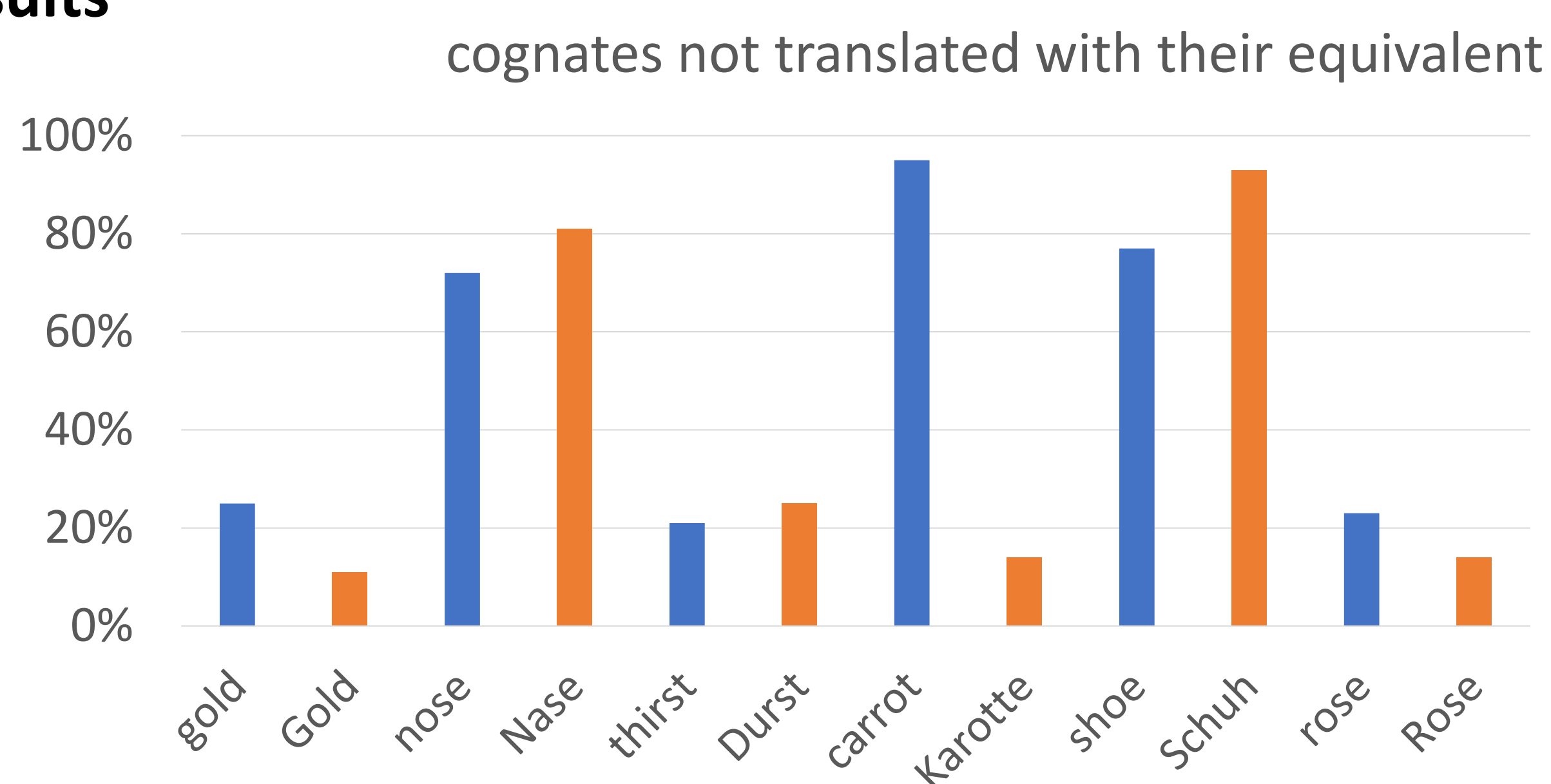
Hypothesis

H1: Cognates are not always translated with their equivalent from the other language.

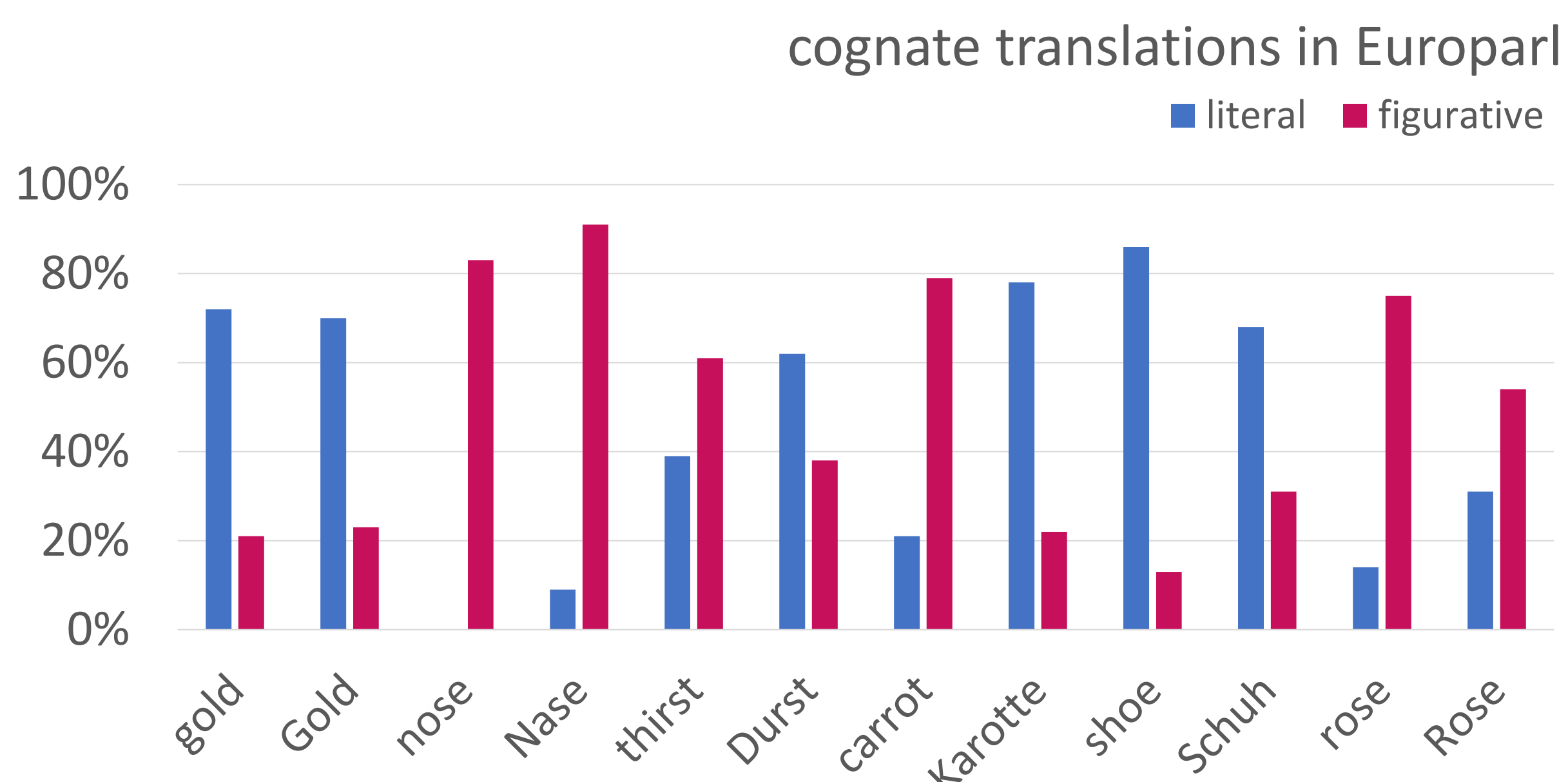
Design

- Parallel corpus Europarl (via SketchEngine)
- **IV**: cognate form (language: Eng. vs Ger.) **DV**: translation

Results



→ cognates are often used figuratively (e.g., as part of an idiom), and then translators opt for various translations which do not include the cognate's equivalent.



References: Costa, A., Caramazza, A., & Sebastian-Galles, N. (2000). The cognate facilitation effect: Implications for models of lexical access. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 26.5, pp. 1283-96. • Sánchez-Casas, R. & García-Albea, J. E. (2005). The representation of cognate and noncognate words in bilingual memory. In: J. F. Kroll & A. M. B. De Groot (Eds.) *Handbook of Bilingualism* (pp. 226-250). Oxford UP. • De Groot, A. M. B. (1992). Determinants of word translation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 18, pp. 1001-18. • IDS. (2020). *Deutsches Referenzkorpus / Archiv der Korpora geschriebener Gegenwartssprache 2020-I*. (Release of 21.01.2020). • Koehn, P. (2005). *Europarl: A Parallel Corpus for Statistical Machine Translation*. MT Summit.

3. Corpus Study (I): English cognates in German

Some considerations

In written German, English words usually require licensing (e.g., **quotation marks**, translations, etc.). **Do cognates require such licensing, too?**

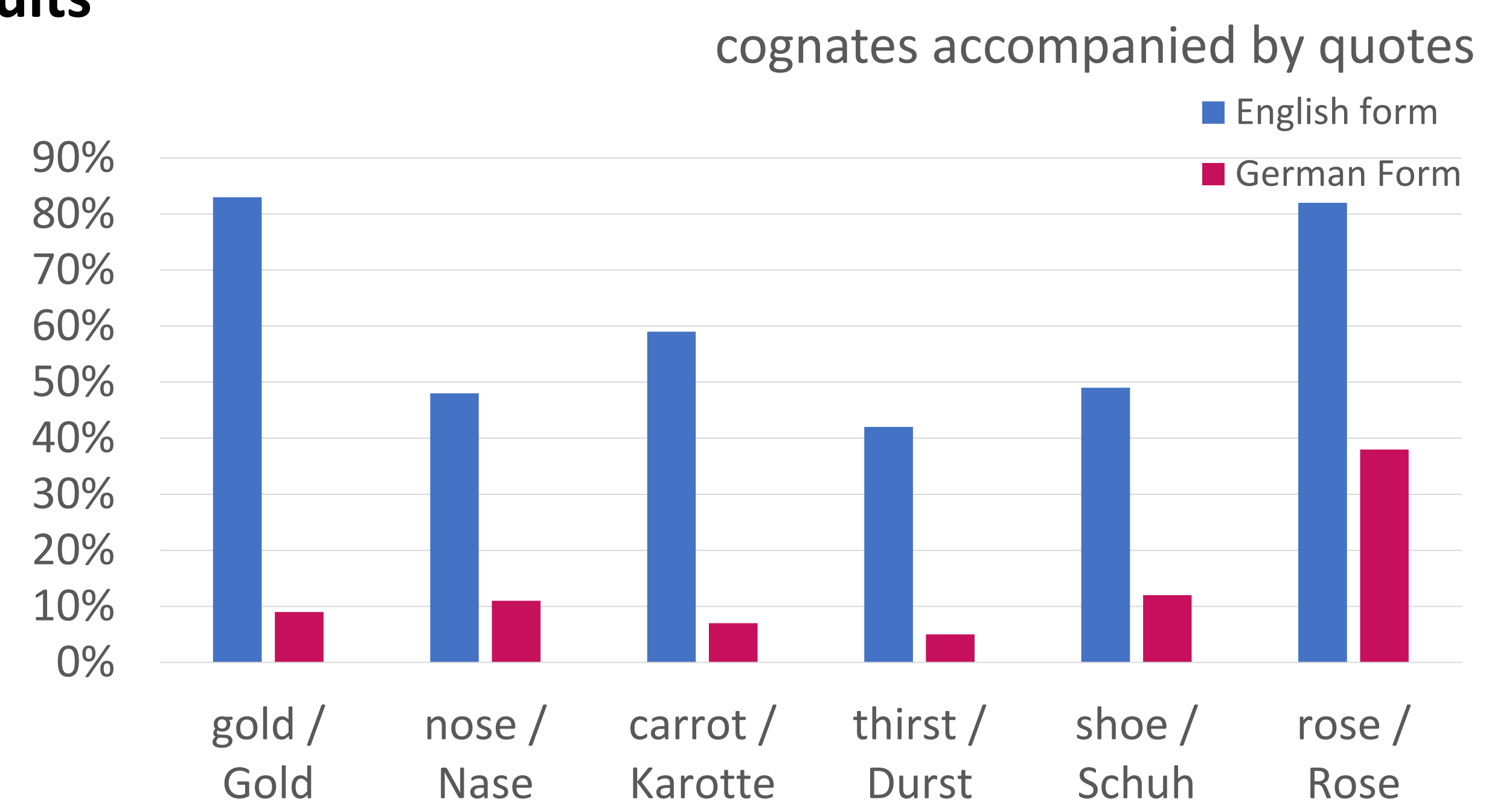
Hypothesis

H1: English cognate forms do not appear more often in quotes than their German equivalents. Both forms are treated similarly in the corpus.

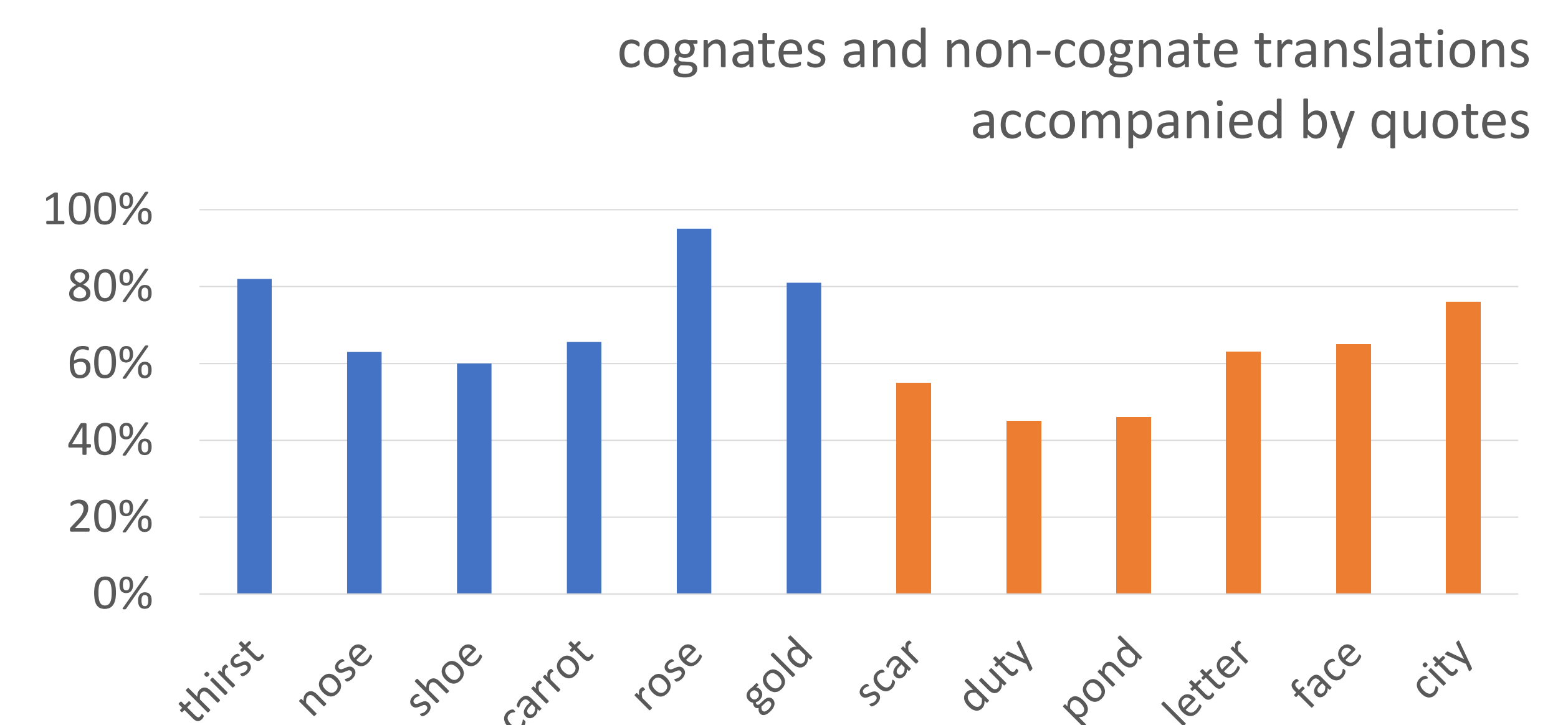
Design

- German monolingual corpus COSMAS II (IDS Mannheim)
- **IV**: cognate form (language) **DV**: presence of quotes

Results



→ compare to non-cognates:



5. Discussion

In the monolingual corpus, English cognate forms are treated much like non-cognate translations (= L2 words). This suggests that speakers separate the two cognate forms from one another, even though they might be aware of their special connection.

In the parallel corpus, cognates - when used figuratively - tend to be not translated with their equivalent, but with (idiomatic) expressions that possibly convey the intended meaning better. A separation of cognate entries once again seems likely.

The findings thus lean towards the assumption that cognates in fact are listed in separate entries in the bilingual mental lexicon, rather than under one.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrated that cognate translations are mostly treated like L2 words, similarly to non-cognates. Moreover, translating cognates regularly does not involve the cognate's equivalent. This indicates a separation of cognate forms in the mental lexicon of bilingual speakers.