Do L2 and L3 learners benefit from training their awareness of cross-linguistic similarity?

Words whose form is similar across languages: cognates (formally and semantically similar) and false cognates (formally similar) are claimed to be learned differently than non-cognates. Raising learners’ "cognate awareness" means consciously focusing their attention on cross-linguistic similarity between L1 and L2 words. However, it is unclear if L2 learners really need to be made aware of cognateness. Another question is whether focusing on L1-L2 similarity is enough, considering that many students are learning a foreign language not as their L2, but as their L3. In this talk I will discuss whether raising "cognate awareness" indeed modulates the effectiveness of learning words in a foreign language. First, I will briefly present two classroom quasi-experiments concerning the acquisition of L2-English cognates and non-cognates by language learners with L1-Polish. Then, I will move on to a naturalistic classroom experiment on learning words in Italian as L3 by L1-Polish learners with L2-English. The talk will present robust and ecologically-valid evidence on acquiring cognates in a foreign language.