

CAPÍTULO 94

IMPACT OF OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE ON LEXICAL AVAILABILITY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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INTRODUCTION

Having visited a target-language speaking country and lexical availability in English and Spanish as foreign languages: Mapping the ground

More than six decades ago Gardner introduced the novel concept of integrativeness, which is related to “the individual’s orientation to language learning that focuses on communication with members of the other language group, a general interest in foreign groups, especially through their language, and favourable attitudes toward the target language group” (Gardner, 2005, p.10). This openness to other cultures in general and to the target language culture in particular might explain the results obtained in several studies carried out in Spanish L2 (Sandu, 2013) and English L2 (Sandu & Oxbrow, 2021; Sánchez, 2021), which show that students who have visited a country where the target language is spoken, or who give importance to the target language culture and who show interest in travelling to these countries have better results, more vocabulary and that lexis is more advanced and more closely related to the culture of the target language. Moreover, these learners are more motivated in general and make more effort to acquire the language.

Traditionally, travelling has been regarded as a way to explore self-identity (Cristofolini, Chirico, & Gaggioli, 2018). Studies bring to light findings related to study abroad which have to do with “changes in self-identity, personality, and adaptability, tolerance, flexibility, self-esteem, autonomy, confidence, attitude toward diverse cultures and concern for others” (Kauffmann, 1983, as cited in Cristofolini et al., 2018).

The present study attempts to enquire into the impact of travelling to a target language country (Spanish and English) on the vocabulary available to two groups of students. Travelling is understood as any type of contact with a target language country, even when done with families and the main purpose is to visit the place, not to improve the language.

The principal objective is to observe the difference in quantity but also in the type of words learners retrieve, bringing to light the relevance of virtual travelling students nowadays explore as a way to improve their English or just as a way of entertainment.

Furthermore, students of English today identify with an international community rather than a specific second language group (Geoghegan & Pérez-Vidal, 2019), which is also possible due to unlimited access to information and to informal learning thanks to the Internet.

With regard to lexical availability (LA) studies, these were undertaken in France as a means to be able to advance more effectively in the field of teaching French as a foreign language (Gougenheim, René, Rivenc, y Sauvageot, 1967). This initial research focus on teaching French as a foreign language to the citizens of former French colonies in order to maintain Gallic language and culture outside France has been further expanded, not only to explore lexical acquisition in other languages, but also to other factors affecting learning, which have enhanced our understanding of the process of vocabulary building and the way in which a wide range of variables, such as gender, age, language level, first language (L1), foreign language (L2) 2, learning context (immersion versus non-immersion), teaching/learning materials or language exposure, among others, might affect language acquisition and, hence, what teachers and other professionals in the field can do to ensure that foreign language learners develop appropriate lexical knowledge as a way to enhance their communicative competence corresponding to their proficiency levels. As López Morales has indicated (López, 2014, p.7), “[t]ogether with basic vocabulary, the available lexicon allows vocabulary learning planners and vocabulary tasks designers to conduct a rigorous work both in mother tongue and in foreign languages”.

While there is a well-established body of research literature in Spanish as a foreign language (Carcedo, 2000; Samper, 2002; etc.), the exploration of LA in English (L2) has received relatively scant attention since the first related publication by Dimitrijévic (1969). As Martínez-Adrián and Gallardo-del-Puerto (2017, p.64) highlighted, “[...] the studies on lexical availability in L2 English are more limited than in L2 Spanish, and a call for more research has been made in recent investigations”. This study explores LA in both Spanish and English as foreign languages revealing both the similarities and differences of these two lines of research. While it is true that the methodology is the same, as explained in Jiménez (2014), the findings show the interesting role played by English as a *Lingua Franca* nowadays.

Research questions

The research questions we address are as follows:

- 1) What is the impact of the variable ‘having visited a target-language speaking country’ in the number of words English L2 and Spanish L2 learners produce?
- 2) What is the relation between the variable ‘having visited a target-language speaking country’ and the type of vocabulary students retrieve when asked to think

of 'food and drink' and 'entertainment'? Does their overseas experience exert any cultural influence?

Objectives

The main objectives are the following:

- 1) Carry out a quantitative analysis of lexical availability in English L2 and Spanish L2.
- 2) Explore the variable 'having visited a target-language country' in the vocabulary produced by students of English L2 and Spanish L2 both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- 3) Discuss the results bearing in mind the new international posture of English L2 learners (Yashima, 2009, p.145).

METHOD

Participants

Lexical availability questionnaires were distributed to 76 upper-secondary school students of Spanish L2 in Romania and to 79 English Major students in Spain.

The 76 eighteen-year-old students with a B2 level of Spanish, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), who carried out the survey in 2009 in their last year of upper-secondary school, were studying Spanish as a foreign language in the bilingual upper-secondary schools Miguel de Cervantes, Iulia Hasdeu and Mihail Sadoveanu, where they had up to six hours per week. They were all native speakers of Romanian.

On the other hand, the 79 English Major students were in the second academic year of the degree in 'Modern Languages' at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. They were all native speakers of Spanish, with English as their second language. The obligatory integrated skills course they were doing required an entry level of B1+, according to the CEFR, with a B2 exit level, if successful.

A procedure aimed at testing their LA in different semantic areas was designed to be used as the main research instruments as a means to assess and measure these learners' lexicons, and hence their level in terms of vocabulary acquisition only.

Instruments

LA was assessed using paper-based test containing several lexical domains. For each one, participants were allowed a total time interval of two minutes to write down as many words that came to their minds when thinking of each of these topics. This research study focuses on only two, namely 1) 'food and drink' (F&D) and 2) 'entertainment', due to the possible influence of culture on such topics.

Procedure

The available vocabulary items noted down in the LA test by our informants were digitally transferred and edited. Some common criteria used in this research were the following: 1) words repeated by the same participant were deleted; 2) spelling was corrected; 3) nouns were typed in singular form, but irregular (e.g. feet, teeth) and plural nouns (e.g. jeans, shorts, etc.) were not; also, words that could be confused with adjectives were also kept in their plural form (e.g. sweets (n) and sweet (adj.); or 4) words written in their short and full form were unified (e.g. (ham)burger, (Coca-)Cola, etc.) (Samper & Jiménez, 2014)).

Data analysis

The *IBM SPSS* programme (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) version 25.0 and the formula developed by Gallego (2014) were used in order to carry out more sophisticated analyses, such as correlations or linear regressions.

RESULTS

Quantitative analysis

A first analysis of the number of words showed in table 1 indicates that English L2 students wrote considerably more tokens and types than their Spanish L2 counterparts. The mean of tokens is almost three times higher in the English L2 group in the 'entertainment' topic, although the cohesion index is quite similar in both cue words.

Table 1. Number of tokens and types in cue words 'food and drinks' and 'entertainment'

		Tokens	Types	Mean number of words	Cohesion Index
Food and drinks	SpL2	1177	175	15,49	0,88496
	EnL2	1750	302	22,15	0,73351
Entertainment	SpL2	518	134	6,82	0,050864
	EnL2	1381	397	17,48	0,044033

Furthermore, Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2 show that both students of English L2 and Spanish L2 who travelled to a target-language speaking country retrieved more vocabulary than those who did not.

Table 2. 'Overseas experience' and 'mean number of words'

	Food & drinks				Entertainment			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	SpL2 (23)	EnL2 (39)	SpL2 (53)	EnL2 (40)	SpL2 (23)	EnL2 (39)	SpL2 (53)	EnL2 (40)
Mean number of words	19,57	23,49	13,72	20,85	7,96	18,54	6,32	16,45
Tokens	450	916	727	834	183	723	335	658
Types	137	232	138	210	64	259	114	265

Figura 1. 'Overseas experience' and 'mean number of words' in 'food and drinks'

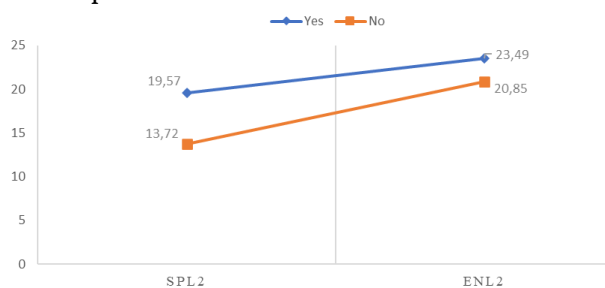
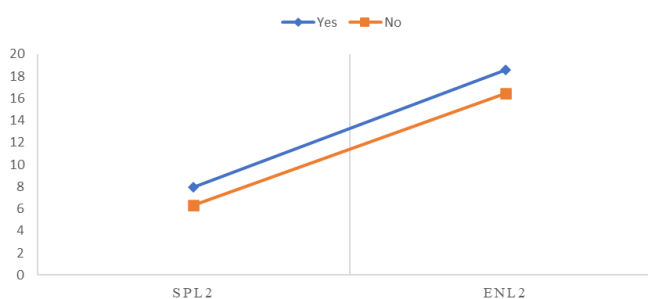


Figura 2. 'Overseas experience' and 'mean number of words' in 'entertainment'



And yet, as shown in previous research (Sandu & Oxbrow, 2021), logistic regression between the variables LA and OE in the English L2 sample showed that most students who did not travel to an English-speaking country were well predicted, meaning their vocabulary was rich despite not having spent time in the target language context. In the current study, as shown in Table 3, the percentages of students who did not travel to a target-speaking country, but retrieved a large amount of vocabulary are also considerably large, especially in the Spanish L2 group.

Table 3. Binary logistic regression. Classification table

Logistic regression	Food & drinks		Entertainment	
	SpL2	EnL2	SpL2	EnL2
Percentage correct %	88,7%	55%	98,1%	62,5%

This might mean that in both groups, Spanish L2 and English L2, learners acquired most of the language in the classroom and that in terms of vocabulary related to 'food and drinks' and 'entertainment' there is very little difference between the two subgroups. Pearson correlations also show either no relation, in the case of 'entertainment', or negative correlations, in the case of 'food and drinks' (-.260* in the English L2 sample and -.388** in the Spanish L2 one). The qualitative analysis below might give us some insight into these findings.

Qualitative analysis

In this section the vocabulary analysed is below 75% of accumulated frequency as this is common practice in lexical availability studies and because it is a relative selective criterion, which takes into account both the productivity in terms of types and the frequency index together with the availability one; this way the most relevant words in each cue word and group of participants will be studied.

Cue word 'food and drinks'

The qualitative analysis brings to light a large percentage of common words between subgroups of each L2 language, that is, 74% of the words written by Spanish-speaking students in English L2 and 76% of the words retrieved by Romanian-speaking students in Spanish L2 are common to students who claimed they underwent or not 'overseas experience'. It should also be noted that 48% of all Spanish L2 and English L2 learners activated the same vocabulary, which seems to be a significant amount.

Students who have visited a Spanish-speaking country include vocabulary related to its culture, such as *plátano, sangría, chorizo, salchichón, bocadillo, marisco, pastel, pescado*, although both groups include three of the most common words related to the culture of the target language (*paella, tortilla, tequila*).

This difference is not observed in the English L2 group, where probably the English lessons on food and drink which students took in the academic year previous to the current research compensated for any cultural difference which might have existed between the two groups.

Cue word 'entertainment'

The number of common words to the two subgroups in this topic is also quite high, that is, 68% in the Spanish L2 sample and 65% in the English L2 one, and the percentage of words shared by all the students is 54%.

Romanian and Spanish students seem to have made a different interpretation of this topic, which might be due to their age (18 vs. 20 years old) or their education level (upper secondary-school vs. university). For instance, Spanish L2 learners write more

sports vocabulary, whereas English L2 students write more words related to leisure time, relaxation, rest (*sleep, cinema, television, reading, film, playing, video-games, writing, do yoga, walk, etc.*).

With regard to the lexis related to technology, Spanish L2 learners who have not been to a Spanish speaking country include *Internet, watch television and television*, while students who have been to such a country do not; these are the only words related to the media, which could indicate that the use of the Internet and the new technologies was still in its infancy in 2009 in Romania.

Similarly, while it is true that all English L2 students include words related to the internet, such as *internet, Netflix, YouTube, series, social network or media*, students who have never been to an English-speaking country include many more words of this kind, such as *mobile phone, TV programme, Twitter, k-pop, talk-show, Instagram, YG entertainment, SM entertainment, K-dramas, Cube entertainment or HBO*. This might indicate a greater exposure to English in an informal context of students who have never travelled abroad to an English-speaking country. These students seem to give paramount importance to their virtual exposure to the language they are learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative analysis of the impact of the variable 'having visited a target-language speaking country' shows, on the one hand, that English L2 students activate much more vocabulary than their Spanish L2 counterparts and, on the other hand, that students who underwent international experience wrote more words than their peers in both groups (Spanish L2 and English L2). Nevertheless, binary logistic regression indicates that a great percentage of the students who have never been to a Spanish or English speaking country write a considerable amount of words, which might be due to a positive L2 learning experience in the classroom.

The qualitative analysis brings to light several interesting findings: (1) the influence of culture in the Spanish L2 group when activating vocabulary about food and drinks as the group who has been to a Spanish-speaking country write words such as *sangría, chorizo, salchichón, marisco*, etc. (1) a different interpretation of the topic 'entertainment' in the two samples, as Spanish L2 learners related it to sports, while English L2 students related it to leisure time and rest; (3) the importance of the Internet in the English L2 group, especially to learners who never visited an Englishspeaking country, as they activated many more words related to this kind (*mobile phone, Twitter, k-pop, talk-show, Instagram, YG entertainment, etc.*); interestingly, these words were not retrieved by their peers who did undergo overseas experience in a target-language speaking country; this might reveal the impact the Internet has on informal learning on both groups and especially on the one who never went to an English-speaking country; the lack of difference in the two

subgroups in terms of the amount of the vocabulary could be due to their international exposure and to the ability of identifying and being in contact with an international community in which English is the new Lingua Franca. This seems to motivate and allow them to travel virtually to any English-speaking place, and hence to expand their vocabulary.

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