



The representation of culture in EFL learners' available lexicon

Andrés Canga Alonso

Universidad de La Rioja
España

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Andrés Canga Alonso: Departamento de Filologías Modernas, Universidad de La Rioja, España.
| E-mail: andres.canga@unirioja.es

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Abstract

This study explores the words that 265 pre-university (12th grade) English as a foreign language learners produce in response to the prompt 'Food and drink'. Specifically, it aims to (i) ascertain the number of cultural words this sample of learners retrieved overall and in their first responses to the abovementioned word stimulus; (ii) classify the culture these terms represent, i.e., source, target and international, and (iii) account for sex-based differences in cultural word elicitation.

Our findings evince that the number of cultural tokens corresponded to one fourth of the total number of the words students retrieved in response to the aforementioned prompt. These tokens mostly belonged to international culture. As for sex-based differences, our data revealed that males obtained higher mean values and retrieved a higher rate of cultural types in their first responses than females did. However, differences between male and female learners in regard with cultural word elicitation were not statistically significant.

Keywords: pre-university students; cultural available lexicon; food and drink; sex-based differences; source, target, international culture.

1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) teaching and learning programmes worldwide aim to develop learners' proficiency in communicating successfully with speakers of the target language. Thus, vocabulary knowledge becomes a crucial aspect in second language learning. Implicit to this notion is the ability to understand and negotiate both linguistic and cultural differences (Byram, 1997), and to communicate and negotiate cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian, 2003: 2013). However, a frequent weakness of teaching programmes is that language and culture are separated in the FL classroom, and culture becomes little more than an addendum which focuses on learning facts about the target country. Studies on lexical availability (LA) have progressively gained importance in L1 and foreign language (FL) to explore the lexicon students have stored in their minds and are able to elicit in response to a word stimulus (also framed as centre of interest or cue word) either in their L1 (López Morales, 1973, 1999; Serrano Zapata, 2004; Hernández Muñoz, 2010; Rodríguez Muñoz and Muñoz Hernández, 2011) or in a foreign language (Carcedo González, 2000; Germany and Cartes, 2000; Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba, 2009a, 2009b; Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha, 2014; Gallardo del Puerto and Martínez Adrián, 2014; Jiménez Catalán, Agustín Llach, Fernández Fontecha and Canga Alonso, 2014; Jiménez Catalán and Fitzpatrick, 2014; Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán, 2015; Jiménez Catalán and Dewaele, 2017). However, there is a lack of research in regard with the cultural available lexicon of a sample of 2nd baccalaureate (pre-university) students in response to a prompt which is closely related to cultural values, namely 'Food and drink'. Hence, this paper aims to (i) ascertain the number of cultural words this sample of learners retrieved overall and in their first responses to the abovementioned word stimulus; (ii) classify the culture these terms represent, i.e., source, target or international, and (iii) account for sex-based differences in cultural word elicitation. The first section reviews the existing literature on LA and EFL learning, paying close attention to gender differences. The relationship between culture and vocabulary is, then, stated. A report of the study conducted with main results found and interpretation of the same follows. This paper concludes by pointing out some lines for further research trying to overcome its main limitations.

2. Gender differences in EFL studies on lexical availability

Lexical availability (LA) studies aim to bring to the surface the words available for immediate use by a given speaker, or a specific group of speakers (Gougenheim, Michéa, Rivenc and Sauvageot, 1964), so that they could be understood as the vocabulary flow usable in a given communicative situation (Jiménez Catalán and Fitzpatrick, 2014).

Research on EFL learners' available lexicon has recently spread with different age groups: primary education (Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba, 2009a, 2009b; Jiménez Catalán and Dewaele, 2017) primary and secondary education (Agustin Llach and Fernández Fontecha, 2014; Jiménez Catalán and Fitzpatrick, 2014), secondary education (Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán,

2015; Jiménez Catalán and Agustín Llach, 2017), pre-university level (12th grade) (Agustín Llach, 2017; Canga Alonso, 2017; Jiménez Catalán and Fernández Fontecha, 2018), and adult speakers (Gallardo del Puerto and Martínez Adrián, 2014; Martínez Adrián and Gallardo del Puerto, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to gender differences in lexical retrieval since, to our knowledge, only three studies have addressed this variable. Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba (2009a) implemented the LA task with 6th graders to account for the most and least productive prompts as well as gender differences among the boys and girls surveyed. Their findings revealed that 'Food and drink' was the prompt with the highest mean values and statistically significant differences were found in favour of females.

Scholars have also tried to ascertain whether the use of English as a vehicular language to learn curricular subjects correlated with a higher production of words in a lexical availability task. Fernández Fontecha (2010) analysed a sample of 250 13-14 year-old Spanish EFL learners' to explore the connections among gender, motivation and attainment in an EFL lexical availability test. Her results revealed that females obtained higher mean values than their male classmates. Inferential statistics also stated statistically significant differences ($p=0.016$) in favour of the female participants. In the same vein, a later research conducted by Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha (2014) with a group of EFL learners at two different stages of their formal instruction (6th grade and 9th grade) confirmed differences regarding centre of interest productivity in males and females and across educational levels in favour of females, but no statistically significant differences were established between both sexes.

The former review of the existent literature uncovers a need of research to explore whether the quantitative differences in favour of girls reported at primary or early secondary education will be also observed in older learners at pre-university level. Likewise, previous studies based their analysis on the total and average number of words produced by males and females, but the number of cultural words was not provided. Thus, the present study attempts to go a step further in L2 gender lexical availability corpus by means of the identification and qualitative analysis of the specific cultural words retrieved by boys and girls before entering university. For this reason, it seems necessary to review the relationship between culture and vocabulary and its influence on pre-university school students' attainment in a lexical availability task, as the following section of the present paper tries to set out.

3. Culture, cultural vocabulary and lexical availability studies

Vocabulary knowledge is acknowledged to be of paramount importance to facilitate students' interaction and performance in the foreign language (Verhoeven, 1990; Jiménez, García and Pearson, 1996; Hu and Nation, 2000). This interaction is based on the sociocultural aspects which are implicit to every language. This implicitness of sociocultural aspects lets us establish a close relationship between vocabulary and culture as they carry a great load of meaning and connotations; their incorrect use or the lack of understanding or familiarity with the

culture that surrounds them can lead to misunderstandings in conversation and even cause breakdowns in communication (Dimitrijevic, 1977; Carcedo, 1999; Baker, 2013).

Learning a foreign language also requires a process of enculturation in which the learner acquires knowledge about the new culture/s and even gains awareness of their own culture (Alptekin, 2002). Concurrently, vocabulary is strongly linked to culture since words are different in each language not only in their form but in their meaning and are affected significantly by the feelings, ideas and experiences shared by the community in which they occur (Williams, 1976; Wierzbicka, 1997; Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, 2005). In the same vein, the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR, 2001) emphasizes that the cognitive organization of vocabulary and expressions is given by cultural features of those communities the speaker has been in contact with. Moreover, the lexicon is a linguistic form where the influence of culture could be more noticeable and words can encode “culturally context conceptual systems” (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013: 28). This conceptual systems are also affected by language communities in which they interact, so we can conclude that the lexicon is also affected by cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian, 2003). Cultural conceptualisations, then, reflect the way people represent their cultural values regardless if they refer to the source culture, the culture of the language they are learning (target culture) or values which are considered globally (international culture). Cultural conceptualisations are usually rendered by means of cultural words which can be defined as those terms used “for special kinds of ‘things’, ‘events’ or ‘customs’ [...] that cannot be translated literally, because translation will distort its meaning” (Hapsari and Setyaningsih, 2013: 76).

Hence, it seems relevant to be aware of the number of cultural words pre-university school students are able to retrieve in response to a lexical availability task as the one implemented in the present study, to gain knowledge on the terms they have stored in their mental lexicons and can activate in response to a given word stimulus.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, the notion of culture in FL teaching also implies source, target and international culture (Risager, 1990; Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997). Source culture words refer to students' native culture (e.g., ‘paella’, ‘wine’, ‘(Spanish) omelette’), whereas target culture is that culture or cultures involved in the study of a language. Words such as ‘tea’, ‘Yorkshire pudding’ or ‘roast beef’ refer to this type of culture. In more recent times, a third subtype has been added to this classification: international culture (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; Alptekin, 2002). This later type of culture includes a great variety of cultures set in English-speaking countries or in other countries around the world. It exemplifies the manner in which English is used to communicate with others for international purposes. International culture is represented by words which were borrowed from other cultures different from our students' source culture and have gained international recognition (e.g., ‘pizza’, ‘spaghetti’ or ‘kebab’).

This latter classification would provide students with a basis to gain fuller understanding of how English as an international language (EIL) serves a great variety of international purposes in a broad range of contexts (e.g., economy, education, travel or broadcasting) (Crystal, 2000; McKay, 2003; Han and Bae, 2005). The influence of context in EFL dates back to Kachru's (1985) three circles (inner, outer and expanding) through which English has spread over the centuries. The inner circle refers to the countries in which English is used as the first language. The outer circle involves those countries in which English is a powerful second language and the expanding circle refers to those countries in which English is a foreign language. Owing to the growing numbers of English speakers around the world in recent decades, Crystal (2000) and Lund (2006) concluded that textbooks should include references to an international context-free culture, so that learners could gain knowledge of the world. This knowledge should help them reflect on their own culture and develop intercultural communication skills. Sharifian (2013, 2018) goes a step further and introduces the concept of 'metacultural competence', "which enables individuals to participate with flexibility in intercultural communication and effectively articulate and negotiate their cultural conceptualisations" (Sharifian, 2018: 6). From our view, knowledge of cultural vocabulary will be of paramount importance to develop this competence as it will be shown with our informants' outcomes to the LA task.

Once the relationship between culture and vocabulary has been posed, we move to review previous literature on culture word elicitation in response to the aforementioned task. To our knowledge, only three studies have tackled this issue. Carcedo González (1999, 2000) studied the cultural words elicited by a group of pre-university Finnish students of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) and a group of Spanish L1 speakers of their same age to test if they produced similar or different words in response to the LA task. He purported differences in the type of words they produced in regard with alcoholic drinks (e.g., *vino*, *cerveza*, *whisky*, *ginebra* and *vodka*) or words related to legumes (e.g., *lentejas* or *garbanzos*) in the Spanish group and more specific words associated with the countryside in the Finnish group Finland (e.g., *bosque* or *lago*). However, Carcedo González (1999, 2000) did not attempt either to classify the words according to a given culture (i.e., source, target or international) or explore gender-based differences as the present study aims to analyse.

Cultural studies in EFL learners' LA are also scarce. As far as we know, only Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte (2016) addressed this issue. They compared the cultural types elicited by twenty-nine EFL undergraduate students in response to two prompts from a lexical availability task (i.e., food and drink and countryside) and the cultural input provided by four pre-university ELT textbooks used in La Rioja. Their findings revealed that the number of words related to culture either elicited by students or included in the ELT textbooks was low. Most of the words students and textbooks provided belonged to everyday living and international was the most representative culture in the study. Similarly to Carcedo González (1999, 2000), Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte (2016) did not account for gender-based differences and did not explore the cultural words included in students' first responses to the LA task, their sample

was smaller than the one studied in the present research, and the age and instructional level of the informants also varies in both studies.

Therefore, we can state that there is a need for research in regard with pre-university (12th grade) EFL learners' cultural word elicitation in response to the LA task. Hence, this study seeks to contribute to narrowing this gap by exploring these students' lexical availability in response to the centre of interest 'Food and drink'. We set out to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the cultural available lexicon of our sample of informants?

RQ2: Do male and female 1st responses differ according to our informants' gender?

RQ3: Are there statistically significant differences in cultural word elicitation between male and female participants?

RQ4: Do the cultural words retrieved refer to source, target or international culture?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The sample comprised 265 (171 females and 94 males) pre-university school EFL learners from five high schools located in La Rioja. The research was conducted in March-April 2015. Students answered a background questionnaire to provide the researcher with information about their mother tongue, other languages they spoke at home or in their social interactions, their gender and their previous exposure to EFL. As a result of their responses to this questionnaire, we noticed that 95.47% of the informants were Spanish L1 speakers and did not speak any other language at home. The remaining 4.53% used other languages at home since their parents were not born in Spain. Nevertheless, they spoke Spanish at school, with their friends and in their daily social encounters. Table 1 shows the languages they knew and the rate of informants who could speak each language.

TABLE 1

Students' language profiles

LANGUAGE	PERCENTAGE
Romanian	1.89
Arabic	1.13
Portuguese	0.68
Armenian	0.38
Georgian	0.38

High school headmasters signed consent forms, so that the tasks could have been administered. They also informed students' parents and tutors. The students whose families did not consent their children to take part in the investigation moved to another room while the tasks were implemented.

4.2. Procedures and instruments

Students were asked to respond to fifteen prompts from the LA task (i.e., 'Parts of the body', 'Clothes', 'House', 'Make', 'Food and drink', 'Black and white', 'Sad', 'School', 'Town', 'Countryside', 'Love', 'Animals', 'Hobbies', 'Professions' and 'Hate'). Two members of our research team moved to each school to administer the tasks to students in their own classrooms, in the presence of their teachers. Students answered the questionnaire in the first place. Then, they were asked to write down as many words as came to their minds in response to each prompt in the lexical availability task. The time allowed for each prompt was two minutes (30 minutes in total). Clear instructions were given both orally and in written form in students' L1 to clarify what they were required to do during the implementation of the task.

This paper focuses on students' responses to the cue word 'Food and drink', since food has been associated to cultural values in former literature (Almerico, 2014; Van Drie, 2014; Chung, Yang, Shing and Chung, 2016), has been a very productive prompt in former studies on EFL learners' available lexicon with young learners (Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba, 2009b; Jiménez Catalán and Fitzpatrick, 2014; Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha, 2014), secondary school students (Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán, 2015) and pre-university informants (Agustín Llach, 2017; Canga Alonso, 2017).

4.3. Data analysis

Answers were codified and students' identity preserved. The edition of word responses was based on previous studies in the field (Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba, 2009a, 2009b; Samper Hernández and Jiménez Catalán, 2014; Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán, 2015; Jiménez Catalán and Agustín Llach, 2017; Canga Alonso, 2017). Thus, we applied the following criteria: (i) correction of spelling errors, (ii) count of repeated words in the same prompt only once, (iii) discarding Spanish words and deleting proper nouns except for those which refer to cities or countries in their English version (e.g., London, Sweden), (iv) change of plural words into singular unless they were plural in English (e.g., trousers), (v) change of verb forms to bare infinitive unless they appeared as lexical entries in dictionaries, (vi) keeping irregular verb forms and counting them as different tokens, (vii) count of abbreviations (e.g., mum) if they were included as lexical entries in dictionaries, (viii) hyphenating lexical units with a lexicalised meaning (e.g., fish-and-chips) and (ix) deletion of titles of films or books.

The edited responses per prompt and per student were, then, introduced in a Microsoft Excel© file in order to run quantitative analysis (mean values). Wordsmith Tools version 5.0 was used in order to identify the number of tokens (i.e., examples of occurrences of a type), types (i.e., a class of linguistic items) (Nation, 2001), as well as the alphabetic and frequency ranks of the cultural words elicited by our informants. The statistics package SPSS 24 was used to account for inferential statistics in regard with gender-based differences. Finally, cultural words were classified according to source, target and international culture based on the definitions of each culture as illustrated in section 3.

5. Results

This section sets out to pose the findings of the present study. In order to answer RQ1 (What is the cultural available lexicon of our sample of informants?) the total number of tokens and types this sample of informants produced in response to 'Food and drink' will be presented. Then, these data will be compared with the corresponding figures in regard with cultural tokens and types. As shown in tables 2a and 2b, the cultural tokens (1139) elicited by the participants represent 23.6% of the total number of tokens (4825) whereas the number of cultural types (97) represent 8.5% of the total number of different words (122) elicited by our respondents. This data seem to show that the variety of cultural types (97) is much higher (8.5%) than that of general types (2.5%).

TABLE 2a

Total number of tokens and types

TOKENS	TYPES	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
4825	122	4	39	18.21	6.05

TABLE 2b

Total number of cultural tokens and types

TOKENS	TYPES	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
1139	97	0	13	3.67	1.70

RQ2 aimed to shed some light on the variability of male and female 1st responses in terms of cultural words. Table 3 illustrates that females produced a higher number of 1st responses including a cultural word (44). However, the sample is unbalanced as we have more females than males. Mean values were compared. This comparison purported that males (29.79%) outperformed females (25.73%) in their first answers to 'Food and drink'.

TABLE 3

1st responses to 'Food and drink'

GENDER	NUMBER OF 1ST RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Males (n=94)	28	29.79%
Females (n=171)	44	25.73%

Boys also included a higher number of types (16) whereas females elicited 14 different words (see table 4). From a qualitative point of view, the data shown in table 4 indicates that both sexes have stored similar cultural terms in their minds since the first two words in the list were the same, though in different order, as females produced 'spaghetti' and 'hamburger' and males 'hamburger' and 'spaghetti'. However, we can account for slight differences in regard with some of the words they have written in the LA task. Thus, 'beer', 'sandwich', 'cookie', 'cupcake', 'hot-dog', 'ham', 'mushroom', 'popcorn' or 'Thai food' were produced by boys, whereas girls included terms such as 'coke', 'sausage', 'bacon', 'crisps', 'meatball', 'omelette' or 'tea' in their answers. Nevertheless, all these terms have a very low frequency of occurrence (1); therefore, it can be concluded that the types reflected in students' 1st responses were quite homogenous.

TABLE 4

Cultural types in students' 1st responses

MALES	FREQUENCY	FEMALES	FREQUENCY
Hamburger	4	Spaghetti	13
Spaghetti	4	Hamburger	8
Chips	3	Chips	7
Pizza	3	Coke	3
Fish And Chips	2	Sausage	3
Sandwich	2	Wine	2
Beer	1	Bacon	1
Coffee	1	Coffee	1
Cookie	1	Crisps	1
Cupcake	1	Fish and Chips	1
Ham	1	Meatball	1
Hotdog	1	Pizza	1
Mushroom	1	Omelette	1
Popcorn	1	Tea	1
Thai Food	1		
Wine	1		

These results have been compared with the 20 most frequent cultural words in both sexes to test whether they were common to most of the informants or, on the contrary, they had just been elicited in students' first responses to the prompt. Table 5 reveals that most of these terms were popular among the participants regardless of their sex as they were included in the 20 most retrieved answers to the prompt. The fact that only two types in males' replies to the LA task ['pop-corn' (1) and 'Thai food' (1)] were not among the 20 most common terms supports this assertion. On the contrary, we found instances of three types purported by females ['sandwich' (20), 'macaroni' (12) and 'fast food' (10)] and only one word type ['kebab' (6)] elicited by males that were not included in their first responses to the cue word.

TABLE 5

20 most frequent cultural types

MALES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FEMALES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Hamburger	44	46.81%	Chip	70	40.93%
Chips	34	36,17%	Spaghetti	67	39,18%
Spaghetti	32	34.04%	Hamburger	63	36.84%
Pizza	27	28.72%	Wine	46	26.9%
Beer	24	25.53%	Coke	38	22.22%
Coke	19	20.21%	Pizza	37	21.64%
Wine	17	18.08%	Sausage	36	21.05%
Coffee	15	15.96%	Beer	25	14.62%
Sausage	15	15.96%	Cookie	24	14.03%
Grape	11	11.7%	Coffee	20	11.69%
Cookie	9	9.57%	Sandwich	20	11.69%
Hot dog	9	9.57%	Pasta	19	11.11%
Tea	9	9.57%	Tea	17	9.94%
Beans	8	8.51%	Bean	16	9.36%
Pasta	8	8.51%	Grape	15	8.77%
Sandwich	8	8.51%	Crisps	13	7.6%
Kebab	6	6.38%	Macaroni	12	7.02%
Crisps	6	6.38%	Fast food	10	5.85%
Mushroom	6	6.38%	Ham	10	5.85%
Omelette	6	6.38%	Omelette	10	5.85%

RQ3 aimed to account for statistically significant differences in cultural word elicitation between male and female participants. As for descriptive statistics, table 6 shows that males' mean values were higher than those of females' despite the fact that girls had elicited a higher number of types. This apparent contradiction in the data could be justified on the grounds of the size of the samples since there were more females than males. As for maximum and minimum scores, both sexes attained the same scores (max=13; min=0). Finally, the standard deviation (2.87 vs. 2.42) indicates the degree both samples of informants differ from the mean is quite alike. The boxplot in figure 1 illustrates these findings.

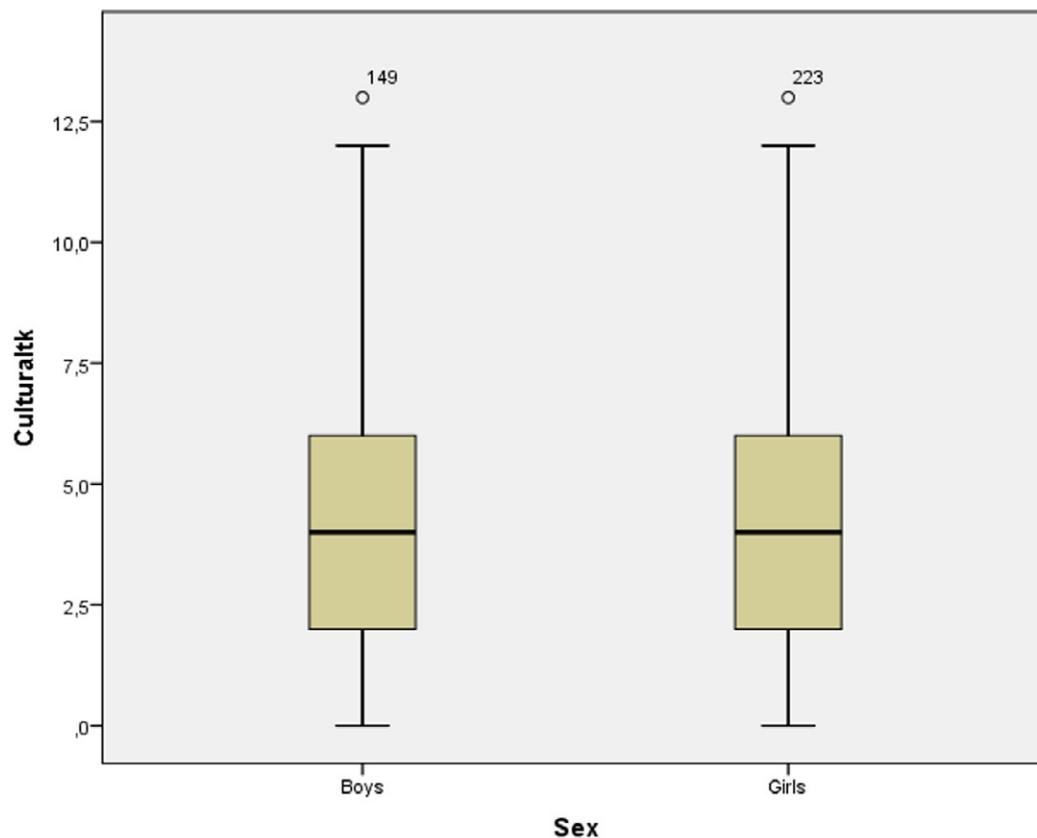
TABLE 6

Male's and female's cultural word elicitation

SEX	TOKENS	TYPES	MEAN	MAX	MIN	SD
Males	414	70	4.40	13	0	2.87
Females	725	76	4.26	13	0	2.42

FIGURE 1

Boxplot cultural words 'Food and drink'



SPSS 24 was employed to explore if we could account for statistically significant differences among the groups as for cultural word elicitation. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk's tests were implemented to test the normality of the sample. As the sample did not meet the normality assumption, the non-parametric test Mann-Whitney U was applied. The p-value ($p=0.993$) proved that we cannot account for statistically significant differences between our male and female informants. Table 7 displays the aforementioned figures.

TABLE 7

Inferential statistics

Mann-Whitney U	8042.500
Wilcoxon W	22748.500
Z	0.009
P (two tailed)	0.993

Our last research question (RQ4) targeted at exploring the cultural words retrieved by males and females to categorise the terms elicited into source, target or international culture. As shown in table 8, each of the sexes produced the same number of words representing each of three cultures, namely five types about their source culture, two terms which belonged to the target culture and thirteen items representing international culture. Thus, international culture was the most representative in their responses to 'Food and drink'. This finding concurs with previous research in lexical availability and cultural words (Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte, 2016) as the international culture was the most common both in the textbooks these scholars analysed and their informants' responses. Similarly, words referring to the target culture (e.g., 'tea' and 'crisps') were the least prevalent in their sample.

TABLE 8

20 most frequent source, target and international cultural words

INFORMANTS	SOURCE CULTURE	TARGET CULTURE	INTERNATIONAL CULTURE
Males	Wine, Grape, Beans, Mushroom, Omelette	Tea, Crisps	Hamburger, Chips, Spaghetti, Pizza, Beer, Coke, Coffee, Sausage, Cookie, Hot dog, Pasta, Sandwich, Kebab
Females	Wine, Grape, Beans, Ham, Omelette	Tea, Crisps	Chips, Spaghetti, Hamburger, Coke, Pizza, Sausage, Beer, Cookie, Coffee, Sandwich, Pasta, Macaroni, Fast food

As for the international cultural words our informants included in their answers, it can be stated that their 20 most frequent words were practically identical as they only reported two different types. Thus, females produced 'macaroni' and 'fast food' whereas males recorded

'hot dog' and 'kebab'. The same applies for source cultural words as males' and females' responses only differed in one type: 'mushroom' (males) and 'ham' (females).

6. Discussion

RQ₁ tried to offer some insights on the cultural available lexicon of a sample of 265 pre-university EFL learners. Our findings indicate that the total number of cultural tokens and types was approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ (23.6%) of the total number of responses to the prompt. Previous studies on textbook cultural input on the same context as this research has been developed have purported that the number of cultural tokens and types included in ELT materials was scarce (Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte, 2015). Therefore, it seems reasonable that the cultural vocabulary input EFL learners have been exposed to in their formal instruction could answer for this decrease in cultural word elicitation since they might not even been exposed to cultural terms in their formal instruction. However, this assertion should be taken with caution since the aforementioned study analysed two textbooks from two different educational levels (last secondary and pre-university) and results could vary if the sample of textbooks were extended. Therefore, further research is called in this field at all educational levels to explore the cultural input included in ELT textbooks to test (i) whether students are familiarised with it and (ii) whether they are able to elicit it in response to a given cue word from an LA task.

Our second research question aimed at exploring male and female 1st responses to 'Food and drink'. As illustrated in the previous section (see table 4), they mostly agreed in their responses, which shows that they share the same cultural conceptualisations in this case about food and drink habits (e.g., hamburger, chips or coke). They all belonged to the same age group and most of the informants shared Spanish as their L₁. Hence, it seems quite likely that they follow similar food patterns (type of food and lunch times) with their families. If we had focused on the learners with different language profiles coming from other parts of the world, their answers might have been more diverse. However, this was not the scope of the present research as all our students followed the same curriculum and similar textbooks at high school, though from different publishing houses. This teaching context might have had an influence on their cultural word knowledge and their similar responses to the LA task.

As for differences in cultural word elicitation between male and female participants (RQ₃), the data reported that males obtained higher mean values and retrieved more cultural types in their first responses than females. These findings do not concur with previous studies on lexical availability with younger EFL learners in the same context (Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba, 2009a; Fernández Fontecha, 2010; Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha, 2014), and SFL learners of their same educational level in Turkey (González Fernández, 2013) and Romania (Sandu, 2012). All these studies stated differences in favour of females although only Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba (2009a) and Fernández Fontecha (2010) reported statistically signif-

icant differences in favour of girls. Males' higher cultural word production could, then, be explained on a threefold basis: (i) former EFL or SFL studies did not focus on cultural word retrieval but on general lexical availability; hence, their results might have been different; (ii) the number of hours of instruction received and the SFL educational programs were not alike, which might have altered their outcomes, and (iii) Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba (2009a) and Fernández Fontecha (2010) conducted research with younger learners, so the age factor might have an influence on males' and females' results. As aforementioned, our sample of boys outperformed the female group, but the differences between both sexes were not statistically significant. Further studies are needed to explore whether this pattern of boys' better performance is repeated with other samples and age-groups or, on the contrary, it was only distinctive of the present group of informants.

In regard with the type of culture (source, target or international) which was mostly represented in students' answers to 'Food and drink' (RQ4), our data purported that students' words mostly refer to international culture. The growing influence of English as an international language (EIL) which serves a great variety of international purposes in a broad range of contexts (Crystal, 2000; McKay, 2003; Han and Bae, 2005) may support these findings. The huge number of EIL speakers around the world in recent decades also plays a role in the prevalence of this type of cultural terms. Similarly, the role of textbooks (Crystal, 2000; Lund, 2006; Canga Alonso and Cifone Ponte, 2015, 2016) seems to have an influence on the spread of international culture as they should include references to an international context-free culture, so that learners could gain knowledge of the world (Lund, 2006). The use of words related to the international culture could be, finally, affected by the phenomenon of globalization, because international cultural words about food and drink (e.g., hamburger, pizza, chips or coke) are displayed in all media, which favours their easy activation by FL informants as the ones surveyed in the present study.

Furthermore, international cultural knowledge should help language learners reflect on their own culture and develop their metacultural competence (Sharifian, 2013, 2018). Our data seem to show that students' are struggling to acquire their metacultural competence as far as vocabulary knowledge is concerned, since they were able to refer to their source culture. They reported words such as 'wine', 'grape' or 'mushroom', which are part of their closest reality (La Rioja) and their home country, 'ham' and 'omelette', but their frequency of occurrence was lower than the rate of words about the international culture. In this vein, we concur with Sharifian (2018) in that the cultural backgrounds of learners should become assets and resources enabling them to reflect on their cultural conceptualisations and allowing the development of the necessary skills to account for these conceptualisations and to negotiate them with speakers from other cultural backgrounds. However, the few instances our informants purported about the target culture seem emphasize that EFL lessons should provide learners with more opportunities to develop metacultural competence, so that they can develop an awareness of the conceptual variation that currently characterizes the global use of English

by many speech communities. Therefore, concurrently with Sharifian (2018), we believe that ELT materials should include lessons about cultural conceptualisations associated with different varieties of English, so that learners could also be provided with chances to learn conceptual strategies during naturally occurring communicative interactions.

The present findings seem to indicate that our informants might have been influenced by the phenomenon of globalization and they mostly retrieved international cultural words about food and drink. At the same time, they were aware of their closest reality; consequently, they elicited words related to local vegetables (e.g., mushroom) and regional drinks (e.g., wine).

7. Conclusion

This study has tried to cover the gap in research addressing pre-university EFL learners' cultural available lexicon, in regard with sex-based differences in cultural word elicitation and the culture represented by the words produced in response to the prompt 'Food and drink'. Three main findings stand out in this research. First, the total number of cultural tokens and types is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of total number of responses to the prompt. Similar cultural conceptualisations about 'Food and drink' are used by both sexes since, regardless of their sex, informants retrieved practically the same cultural words. Finally, students' responses mostly refer to the international culture, so the influence of EIL and globalization seems to be present in this research. In this same vein, the amount of terms related to the source culture is quite limited and references to the target culture are practically non-existent.

Nevertheless, we recognize the limitations of the present study. We should have controlled for the input contained in the EFL textbooks used by our sample of informants. Further research is thus called to analyse the vocabulary included in pre-university EFL textbooks to see the number of tokens, which refer to culture and correspond with the centres of interest of the LA task. This textbook analysis will show the words learners have been exposed to during their EFL instruction and display the cultural lexical items they might have stored in their minds and are able to elicit in response to the aforementioned task. The present study has focused on 2nd baccalaureate students' cultural word elicitation frequency taking the lexical availability task as the data collection instrument. However, former studies on lexical availability have also analysed the order in which word responses have been produced by their informants. Further studies should also explore this variable to determine the most and least available words in the sample.

Finally, we have not surveyed EFL teachers on the importance they give to culture in their classrooms. This data could be very important for research on intercultural learning and cultural vocabulary since, if teachers do not consider cultural aspects relevant for their teaching, it seems quite unlikely that their students could allot cultural values the importance they should deserved.

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