



Jiménez Catalán, Rosa María (Ed.). 2014. *Lexical Availability in English and Spanish as a Second Language*. New York: Springer. xiv + 205 pages. ISBN: 978-94-007-7157-4.

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Once a neglected area (Meara, 1980), vocabulary has increasingly emerged as an important area of research with a vast number of insights for language instruction. A quick inspection of the important scholarly journals provides evidence of the significance of vocabulary studies with various avenues of fresh research. Any journal in the field publishes one or more articles on vocabulary per year. Vocabulary has increasingly called the attention of scholars to such an extent that a specific journal, *Vocabulary Learning and Instruction*, was quite recently launched to publish the findings in the area.

The volume under review here is still a further piece of evidence for the flourishing of the field of vocabulary studies. It focuses on lexical availability, a common concern of English and Spanish applied linguists nowadays. However, in the past decades, research on vocabulary “has followed a different path in English applied linguistics and Spanish applied linguistics” (p. v). Lexical availability is concerned with the words that people have in their minds, given in response to cue words on domains closely pertaining to daily life, such as town, countryside, parts of the body, clothes, and so on. It is considered as an important aspect of the lexical competence of language learners.

THE CONTENTS

The book is organized into a Preface, an opening chapter, two parts with empirical studies on English and Spanish as L1 and L2, respectively, and a closing chapter. The Preface by the editor, Jiménez Catalán, introduces the focus of the volume and sums up the contents. Next, López Morales in the opening chapter on “Lexical Availability Studies” sets the framework for the book; he defines a number of terms and notions associated with lexical availability such as ‘frequent’ and ‘available’ words, and traces the origin of studies of lexical availability back to French applied linguistics in the late 50s and then goes on to provide an outline of their development in Spanish applied linguistics. López Morales further states that, due to its

potential, the focus of lexical availability has expanded to different disciplines. Providing objective instruments for applied linguistics through studying available lexicons as well as studying vocabulary knowledge in foreign or second language education in Spanish or English are areas under inquiry, dealt with in connection with many factors such as age and gender.

Part I: Lexical Availability in English as L1 and L2

Part I includes five chapters. Chapter 2, “Lexical Availability of Basic and Advanced Semantic Categories in English L1 and English L2” by Ferreira Campos and the late Echeverría Weasson assesses the lexicon that advanced L2 learners, compared to native speakers, are able to elicit on a lexical availability task with different semantic categories or prompts. They show that natives outperform non-natives on the number of words produced in each semantic category, and that a number of words are unavailable for the latter group. However, both groups show specific similarities concerning the integration and organization of the words in their mental lexicons, as reflected in their comparable lexical availability values for the 100 most available words.

In Chapter 3, Jiménez Catalán, Agustín Llach, Fernández Fontecha, and Canga Alonso investigate how young and adult EFL learners, with a similar language level but a different age, responded to the prompts ‘Town’ and ‘Countryside’ on a lexical availability task. They consider the number as well as the type of the words retrieved. The two groups produced a similar number of words, mostly nouns, with only some of these being actually shared. The two groups, however, had a high degree of variation in their responses to each prompt above. The variation is shown to be characteristic of each prompt and age-group. Thus, it suggests that the two groups had a different conceptualization of realities in their minds.

In Chapter 4, “The Incidence of Previous Foreign Language Contact in a Lexical Availability Task: A Study of Senior Learners,” Gallardo del Puerto and Martínez Adrián report that false beginners (people recommencing language instruction) outperformed true beginners (people without any previous language knowledge) significantly in the number of words activated in the lexical availability task, with both groups showing similarities regarding productivity in each semantic field and shared words in the top five responses. The authors suggest similar stages in lexical development for beginners and the ability of language learning for older adults.

In Chapter 5, “Lexical Variation in Learners’ Responses to Cue Words: The Effect of Gender”, Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha study the same participants at 6th and 9th grades. Besides noticing gender-related differences in the number of responses, the authors observe that the correspondence of male and female learners in the semantic fields surveyed with the most and least frequent responses remained quite uniform across grades and that lexical availability increased over time and exposure to a foreign language.

To further the discussion, Chapter 6 offers a pioneering study. Jiménez Catalán and Fitzpatrick analyzes “Frequency Profiles of EFL Learners’ Lexical Availability” with 6th and 8th graders. Profile analysis results with VocabProfile show the growth as the course grade increases, but *not* the growth (as displayed by frequency bands) foreseen in other lexical frequency studies. The profile reveals the growth in the most frequent 1,000 words and in Off-list band. These findings confirm the results reported by Horst and Collins (2006), from Quebec, with French-speaking learners of English.

Part II: Lexical Availability in Spanish as L1 and L2

In Part I, the focus is on the English language whereas the next part is devoted to Spanish. More particularly, in Part II, there are four chapters. In Chapter 7, “The Relationship of Language Proficiency to the Lexical Availability of Learners of Spanish,” Samper Hernández shows the superiority of advanced learners over beginners and intermediate learners in producing word tokens and types, while observing a similarity between the two groups in the cohesion index, that is, a coincidence among the words given by the informants.

In Chapter 8, Šifrar Kalan compares Slovene students’ lexical availability in English and Spanish across eight semantic categories, finding similarities on the most and least productive words and numerous shared words in most semantic categories and word classes. The author suggests that “mental lexicons are very alike in different foreign languages” (p. 134).

In Poland, two modalities with the same curriculum and the same number of teaching hours coexist in Spanish bilingual sections in the first bilingual stage: extensive (3 years) in the Middle school and intensive as the Year Zero. With this observation in mind, Chapter 9, entitled “The Effect of Instruction on Polish Spanish Learners’ Lexical Availability,” explores which modality brings about better lexical competence to approach a B1 lexical proficiency level as a prerequisite for the next stage. In other words, the author investigates the effect of an educational method on lexical availability. Specifically, López González produces evidence and overall results supporting the benefit of the intensive program “in terms of the words average, word types, and the quantity and quality of highly available vocabulary” (p. 162). However, the author notes that some semantic categories show advantages for the extensive program. Significant results are shown for the field ‘School’ in terms of the average of words and for the ‘School’ and ‘Means of transportation’ fields in terms of word types. The overall conclusion is that a longer schooling time and contact may well contribute to the fixation of these categories in the participants’ mental lexicon.

The last empirical chapter in Part II, “Cognitive Factors of Lexical Availability in a Second Language” by Hernández Muñoz, Izura, and Tomé is an interdisciplinary investigation of lexical availability, applied linguistics, and cognitive research. With a pool of 43 English-speaking learners of Spanish as an L2, the authors explore the lexical availability of the words produced with regard to the following variables: (i) the age of acquisition in L2,

(ii) concept familiarity, (iii) typicality, (iv) imageability, (v) cognateness, and (vi) rated frequency. They demonstrate that, as in L1, the words available in L2 were the ones acquired early in language learning, bearing a similarity to L1 words, mostly cognates. This finding lends support to language development models such as the one outlined in Kroll and Stewart (1994), which propose “strong lexical links between L1 and L2 translation equivalents and weaker links between the concept and L2 words,” especially at the beginning stages (p. 184).

Part III: Researching Lexical Availability in L2: Some Methodological Issues

Part III presents the concluding chapter. In Chapter 11, Samper Hernández and Jiménez Catalán analyze the investigations included in the volume in relation to the following parameters: (i) the type of study, (ii) the population, (iii) the sample, (iv) the lexical availability task, and (v) data processing and analysis. In addition, the authors pinpoint some exclusive differences between these investigations. Furthermore, the authors clarify the basic terminology as well as the key concepts in the literature on lexical availability, while highlighting some possible future lines of research. Thus, in addition to summing up the discussion, the main purpose of the chapter is to help students and researchers familiarize with this line of research. More importantly, by pointing out some common tendencies in the studies under scrutiny, the authors seek “to confirm the validity of the lexical task as a research instrument” (p. 201).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The book has noteworthy positive points. Firstly, it presents a novel area of investigation. This book only tackles lexical availability in English and Spanish as an FL. However, studies on other languages, such as German, Arabic, Russian, and so on, are rare. Therefore, the volume provides a seminal and comparative model which enables young teachers and researchers to consider the findings emerging from this book in the light of their own respective languages under study. Secondly, the book approaches lexical competence from a different perspective, not dealt with extensively by the scholars in the field of vocabulary studies. A considerable number of researches have been published on lexical frequency, but *not* on lexical availability. Despite the fact that a number of articles exist on lexical availability, a single volume or a collection of articles on lexical availability was not available in the market prior to the appearance of this volume. Therefore, this single volume would serve a newcomer to the field. Thirdly, knowledge on lexical profiling and word frequency has shaped thus far our understanding of vocabulary knowledge to a considerable extent (Schmitt, 2010). From now on, the knowledge gained from studies on lexical availability may well advance our understanding and thus have some useful implications for vocabulary teaching and the design of suitable pedagogical materials. Fourthly, for those students, teachers, and researchers who do not know any other language except English,

Jiménez Catalán demonstrates that other languages, such as Spanish, also have an important share in building our understanding of language learning issues. As the editor mentions in the preface, there were different prominent research concerns in English and Spanish in the past decades. The interest in lexical availability is particularly noticeable first among Spanish applied linguists and later among English applied linguists. This volume somehow highlights the important contribution of Spanish applied linguists to our understanding of delicate language learning issues. As such, the book is not only recommended to Spanish and English FL teachers and researchers, but also to those researchers who know other under-investigated languages. These teachers and researchers may thus choose to explore whether these findings can be duplicated in their respective language(s) or may take a fresh look at the language they deal with as an FL.

Numerous typos and grammatical errors that could be easily removed in a cursory proof-reading, call into question the care as well as the accuracy of the edition. Unfortunately, a considerable number of instances in need of correction can be found in this book. These include, among others, different words (e.g. ‘programme’ and ‘program’) being used interchangeably (p. 15), unfelicitous combinations (e.g. ‘different language level proficiency’ on p. 105; ‘Finnish students SFL learners’ on p. 130), missing words (e.g. ‘Students in the bilingual educational proved to have a ...’, on p. 144, where “institution” should have been inserted between “educational” and “proved”), and typos (e.g. ‘sample under studied’ on p. 146).

As a final remark, it should be noted that the advancement of technology in lexical data processing has contributed significantly to important achievements in the field of vocabulary studies. The current volume, together with other recent books (e.g. Arnó Macià et al., 2006; Gardner, 2013), can be regarded as a testimony of this phenomenon. The feasibility of the studies, reviewed in the preceding pages, has been largely due to technological developments. In the absence of any data processing software, the above studies would not have been conducted. Most probably, further technological advancements will in turn lead to unprecedented novel research in the future. With the aid of technological improvement, researchers at large will witness and conduct further delicate and complex studies on vocabulary in the future, hopefully from a relatively wide spectrum of languages.

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