

**CONCEPTUALIZATION OF 'SCHOOL'
IN THE ENGLISH AVAILABLE LEXICON
OF SPANISH ADOLESCENTS**

**LA CONCEPTUALIZACIÓN DE LA 'ESCUELA'
EN EL LÉXICO INGLÉS DISPONIBLE
DE ADOLESCENTES ESPAÑOLES**

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Abstract

This study explores the conceptualization of 'School' in the English lexicon of EFL learners, and compares this lexicon to the meanings attributed to the entry School in English dictionaries. Our first objective aimed at identifying the most frequent content words retrieved by Spanish EFL learners in response to the cue-word SCHOOL in a lexical availability/association task, and comparing them with the meanings attributed by dictionaries. Our second objective aimed at ascertaining whether there were gender similarities or differences in the lexical production and the actual words retrieved by males and females. The quantitative analyses applied to the data revealed a common structure in male and female EFL learners' available lexicon as well as a high correspondence to the meanings attributed to School in dictionaries. However, the qualitative analysis also uncovered typical patterns related to adolescent school life not present in dictionaries as well as vocabulary not shared by males and females but exclusively generated either by males or by females.

Keywords: conceptualization, archetype, available lexicon, lexical retrieval, adolescent EFL learners.

Resumen

Este estudio explora la conceptualización de la ‘Escuela’ en el léxico inglés de aprendientes de inglés como lengua extranjera, y compara este léxico con los significados atribuidos a la entrada de la palabra Escuela en diccionarios ingleses. Nuestro primer objetivo pretendió identificar las palabras de contenido más frecuentes vertidas como respuesta a la palabra estímulo ESCUELA por chicos y chicas españoles aprendientes de inglés en una prueba de disponibilidad léxica/asociación y compararlas con los significados que se atribuyen en los diccionarios a la ‘Escuela’ como concepto, a través de la entrada léxica de la palabra. Nuestro segundo objetivo tuvo como fin determinar si había similitudes y diferencias de género entre la producción léxica y las palabras que produjeron los chicos y las chicas en respuesta a dicho estímulo. Los análisis cuantitativos realizados demostraron una estructura común en el léxico disponible de los aprendientes de inglés como lengua extranjera, así como una elevada correspondencia con los significados que los diccionarios atribuyen a la ‘Escuela’. Sin embargo, el análisis cualitativo reveló patrones prototípicos relacionados con la vida estudiantil de los adolescentes que no estaban presentes en los diccionarios, al igual que vocabulario no compartido por chicos y chicas, es decir, generado exclusivamente o bien por los chicos o por las chicas.

Palabras clave: conceptualización, prototipo, léxico disponible, recuperación léxica, adolescentes aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera.

1. Introduction

The concept of ‘School’ is related to language education, since foreign languages form part of the instructional programs of schools and universities all over the world. Likewise, it relates to gender, identity, and emotions because male and female learners may develop positive or negative attitudes and views towards the foreign language. In this regard, several scholars (cf. Dewaele 2007; Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009) have reported that females have more positive attitudes towards languages than males in school contexts.

This paper explores ‘School’ as a conceptual archetype, defined by Evans (2007: 31) as “a concept that has a direct experiential basis, but which constitutes an abstraction representing commonalities over ubiquitous everyday experiences”. Our study applies this abstraction to the words retrieved by Spanish learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in response to the cue-word SCHOOL in a lexical availability task and compares the words to the senses attributed to the entry School in English dictionaries. By means of this double perspective, we hope to

contribute to Applied Linguistics (AL) within the subfields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Education (FLE), as the present study will provide an account of the vocabulary that Spanish adolescent EFL learners know and associate to specific concepts closely related to their lives such as 'School', as this forms part of their everyday experience.

According to Evans (2007: 36), "the conceptual content system or meaning" of archetypes consists of content words. Consequently, the first objective was to identify the most frequent content words retrieved by EFL learners and classify them in terms of their word class. This allowed us to explore how the conceptual content system of 'School' is structured in the lexicon of EFL learners. Following Aitchison (1987), we understand structure as the distribution or organization of content words in the mental lexicon in terms of word classes, senses and their connections to concepts. Thus, we used current English dictionaries as a reference for the identification of word classes and senses in learners' word responses which we interpreted in terms of conceptual archetypes. Our second objective was to determine whether there were similarities or differences in the words retrieved by males and females associated with SCHOOL. By means of this objective we hope to contribute to gender and EFL research as male and female's available English words associated with SCHOOL may point to different views of a shared reality, which in turn, as noted by Eriksson et al. (2012), might result in inequalities in language achievement and vocabulary performance. For the sake of clarity, we mark the concept in single quotation marks ('School'), the lexical entry in dictionaries without quotation marks (School), and the cue-word in capital letters (SCHOOL).

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The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 includes a review of studies on lexical availability in EFL and poses the research questions. Section 3 provides a description of the sample, data collection instruments and analyses conducted. Section 4 presents the results and their interpretation in terms of lexical availability and includes a brief interpretation of the findings from the perspective of 'School' as an archetype. We end the paper by presenting the main conclusions and the implications of the study for foreign language education.

2. Lexical Availability Studies in EFL

Lexical availability is a dimension of lexical competence, and as such forms part of the available lexicon in any language (cf. Faerch et al. 1984). It is defined as the words that come to mind when required to talk about a topic in a communicative situation. Lexical availability research is based on time-controlled association tasks consisting of cue-words related to topics such as FOOD AND DRINK, TRANSPORT, or SCHOOL (Richards and Schmidt 2002 [1985]). Theoretically,

cognitive lexical availability research is close to the Spreading Activation Theory of Semantic Processing (Collins and Loftus 1975), where it is postulated that “concepts correspond to particular senses of words or phrases” (408). Words are connected in the mind by means of semantic networks, where concepts are represented as nodes and are organised on the grounds of semantic similarity. Thus, under this theoretical framework, lexical availability retrieval would involve the activation of words related to the node or concept but would expand to other nodes that present semantic similarity or to unrelated concepts with which they are linked in our memory; for instance, the association of positive or negative emotions towards ‘School’.

Most lexical availability research has focused on the available lexicons of learners of Spanish. In comparison, studies on English language learners are scarce and mainly targeted at the identification of the most and least productive cue-words and the correlation of lexical output to learning and instructional factors. For instance, regarding learning factors, research has addressed the effect of age, gender, mother tongue, and language level (cf. Jiménez Catalán 2014, 2017). Research has shown an increase in EFL learners’ lexical availability output as age and course level increase (Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha 2014), as well as an advantage for adult learners in comparison with child learners of the same mother tongue and vocabulary level (Jiménez Catalán et al. 2014). Regarding gender, research has revealed a higher lexical availability production in girls than in boys across primary and secondary school education (Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba 2009a; Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha 2014). As for instructional factors, researchers have explored the effect of the type of school and language program on EFL learners’ lexical output. For example, there is research on the effect of private versus state Schools, CLIL versus non-CLIL instruction, and special language programs versus ordinary programs in secondary education in Chile, Spain and Poland (cf. Germany and Cartes 2000; Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba 2009b; López González 2014; Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán 2015). In this respect, the findings were strikingly similar concerning the most productive and least productive cues no matter the different focus, the educational level, and the places where the studies were conducted. For instance, SCHOOL was the most productive cue-word in a study carried out by Jiménez Catalán and Agustín Llach (2017) with EFL learners at 8th and 10th grade in CLIL and non-CLIL instruction. Their outcomes were alike to those obtained with other samples of EFL learners at sixth grade (cf. Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba 2009a, 2009b; Jiménez Catalán and Dewaele 2017).

The similarity of results points to the existence of gaps of knowledge in some semantic domains as well as gender differences in favour of female EFL learners that may result in educational inequalities. The similar findings also have

implications for research on the conceptualization of EFL learners' lexicon as they suggest the existence of common patterns at different ages and levels. However, although some of these studies have explored prototypical patterns in foreign language learners' first word responses (e.g. Hernández et al. 2014; Jiménez Catalan and Dewaele 2017; Mora and Jiménez Catalán 2019), they did not go further to explore conceptual archetypes in learners' available words, neither did they compare the words retrieved by learners to the senses provided in current English dictionaries. This study is a first step in the identification and conceptual analysis of the words retrieved by adolescent EFL learners in response to SCHOOL in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What type of English words do 12th grade Spanish EFL learners most frequently associate with the cue-word SCHOOL?

RQ2: Do the English words retrieved by 12th grade Spanish EFL learners correspond to the senses provided for the entry SCHOOL in current English dictionaries?

RQ3: Are there differences or similarities in the words retrieved by 12th grade male and female Spanish EFL learners in response to SCHOOL?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample comprises 265 Spanish learners of EFL (mean age 17.37) distributed into 171 females and 94 males. At the time of data collection (spring 2015), they were enrolled in 12th grade (2nd year of baccalaureate, the last year of Spanish post-secondary education) in five secondary state schools in La Rioja, a Spanish autonomous community with full competences in education. Upon consultation with the education board, the selection was done on a stratification basis so as to obtain a representative sample of the state schools in La Rioja. Regarding instruction, English is a compulsory subject taught throughout three periods of 50-60 minutes per week under a communicative teaching approach. According to the school reports, the informants were at B1 level or close to it. B1 was assigned to 12th grade by the education board, and the ELT textbooks, the teaching and assessments were all adapted to this level.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Students were asked to accomplish a lexical availability task consisting of fifteen cue-words. Nevertheless, due to space limitations and in accordance with our

objectives, this paper only focuses on students' responses to SCHOOL. This cue-word is included in a good number of lexical availability studies both in Spanish (cf. Carcedo González 2001; Bartol Hernández 2004; Serrano Zapata 2004; Ávila Muñoz 2006) and in EFL (cf. Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba 2009a, 2009b; Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha 2014; Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán 2015).

Data was collected in one session during school time. At the beginning of the task, instructions were given both orally and in written form in Spanish. Students were encouraged to write down as many words as came to mind in two minutes per cue-word (see Appendix). Time was controlled by means of a stopwatch. Written consents for the administration of the availability task to students were signed by the headmasters of each participating school. Students were informed of the research purpose of the task, and its voluntary nature.

Once the data was collected, informants' responses were coded and entered into Excel files according to the following edition criteria: (i) spelling mistakes were corrected, (ii) repeated words in the same prompt were eliminated, (iii) Spanish words and proper nouns were deleted with the exception of those which refer to cities and countries in English (e.g. London, Sweden), (iv) plural words were changed into singular unless they were plural in English (e.g. trousers), (v) irregular verb forms and irregular plural nouns were counted as different word types, (vi) lexical units with lexicalised meaning were hyphenated (e.g. fish-and-chips), (vii) titles of films or books were deleted, (viii) brand names were deleted (e.g. PS4), (ix) verbs were changed to bare infinitive unless they appeared as a lexical entry, (x) possessive adjectives and articles were deleted, (xi) prepositions which were not part of a phrasal verb were deleted, (xii) the negative particle NOT was kept, (xiii) contracted forms (e.g. don't) were counted as two different words (e.g. do not) unless they constituted a fixed expression (e.g. can't stand), (xiv) the conjunction AND was deleted and the pair of words joined by it were counted separately (e.g. hot and cold became hot, cold), (xv) expressions and phrases which did not appear in the Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English were counted as separate words (e.g. make somebody do something: 4 words).

We combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. The Excel spreadsheet was employed to calculate the mean values of age, gender, and the average of words retrieved by both females and males. The Kruskal-Wallis test was implemented to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between males and females regarding the number of words retrieved in response to SCHOOL. Afterwards, WordSmith Tools version 5 was used to create alphabetical and frequency lists for the identification of the words retrieved by males and females.

For the identification of the word class retrieved by EFL learners and their senses we took as reference four English dictionaries: Cambridge, Collins, Merriam-Webster, and Oxford. The reasons for their selection were twofold. Firstly, the four dictionaries are considered as references by experts on applied linguistics (Lew 2011; Alexander 2015). Three of them are published by long-standing British publishing houses (Cambridge, Collins and Oxford), and one is considered America's foremost dictionary (Merriam-Webster). The distribution of British and American dictionaries reflects the situation in the community where the study was conducted, where most schools and teachers adopt the British variety as reference. Secondly, they provide free access to their content and can be consulted online anywhere and at any time from most currently used electronic devices.

After the extraction of all the senses for School from each dictionary, we identified those in common and created the classification shown in Table 1. These categories were used in the identification and classification of senses underlying the words retrieved by EFL learners in response to the cue-word SCHOOL. The categories also served as a reference for establishing tentative links among common word responses and archetypes.

Senses	Definitions	Examples
Place for education	'A place where children go to be educated' (Cambridge dictionary)	"My brother and I went to the same school" (Oxford dictionary)
	'A place or institution for teaching and learning; establishment for education' (Collins dictionary)	
People/entity	'All the students, or pupils, and teachers at any such establishment' (Oxford dictionary)	"The head addressed the whole school" (Oxford dictionary)
	'All the children and teachers at a school' (Cambridge dictionary)	"The whole school is delighted about Joel's success in the championships" (Cambridge dictionary)
	'A school is the pupils or staff at a school' (Collins dictionary)	
Educational level/stage	'UK a primary/secondary School' (Cambridge dictionary)	

Senses	Definitions	Examples
Training/instruction in some field or skill	'A part of a college or university specializing in a particular subject or group of subjects' (Cambridge dictionary; Collins dictionary; Oxford dictionary)	"Dancing School" (Collins dictionary; Oxford dictionary) "The School of Oriental and African studies" (Cambridge dictionary)
Building	'The building or buildings, classrooms, laboratories, etc. of any such establishment' (Collins dictionary)	"They're building a new school in the town" (Cambridge dictionary) "The cost of building a new school" (Oxford dictionary) "School building" (Cambridge dictionary)
College, Faculty, University Department	'A college or university or the time that a student spends there' (Cambridge dictionary)	"The School of Medicine" (Oxford dictionary) "We first met in graduate school" (Cambridge dictionary)
40 Activities/processes	'The process of formal training and instruction at a School; formal education; Schooling' (Collins dictionary)	"Ryder's children did not go to school at all" (Oxford dictionary)
	'The process of teaching or learning especially at a school' (Merriam-Webster dictionary)	"a children's writing competition open to schools or individuals" (Collins dictionary)
	'The period of your life during which you go to school, or the teaching and learning activities which happen at School' (Cambridge dictionary)	"Schoolwork" (Oxford dictionary)
Period of life (Time)	'The period of your life during which you go to school, or the teaching and learning activities which happen at School' (Cambridge dictionary)	"Most children start/begin School at the age of five" (Cambridge dictionary)
Period of day (Time)	'The period of instruction at any such establishment; regular session of teaching; the date when school begins' (Collins dictionary)	"School started at 7 a.m." (Oxford dictionary)

Senses	Definitions	Examples
Individual school objects	'The time during the day when children are studying in school' (Cambridge dictionary)	"School starts at 9 a.m. and finishes at 3.30 p.m." (Cambridge dictionary)
		"School books" (Oxford dictionary)
A group	'A group of people held together by the same teachings, beliefs, opinions, methods, etc.; followers or disciples of a particular teacher, leader, or creed' (Collins dictionary)	"School lunches/uniform/buildings" (Cambridge dictionary)
		"School bus" (Oxford dictionary)
Affect/emotion	'A large number of fish or other sea creatures swimming in a group' (Cambridge dictionary).	"The Frankfurt School of critical theory" (Oxford dictionary)
		"The impressionist School of painting" (Cambridge dictionary)
Related places/activities		"A school of dolphins/whales" (Cambridge dictionary)
Way of life, manners		"I love/hate School" (Cambridge dictionary)
		"Deirdre, the whole School's going to hate you" (Collins dictionary)
		"The Kingsley School of English" (Collins dictionary)
		"a gentleman of the old School" (American dictionary)

Table 1. Main semantic traits for School given by dictionaries' definitions and examples

4. Results and Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, this study aimed to explore 'School' as a conceptual archetype grounded on commonalities and shared experiences. By looking at word responses in a lexical availability task and contrasting them to the senses in dictionaries, we intended to uncover the actual words that adolescent EFL learners associate with SCHOOL, the senses of these words, and the common experiences that constitute their conceptualization of 'school'. In this section, we will first present the results and the discussion for each research question. We will then attempt to establish links between EFL learners' word responses and archetypes.

The first research question aimed at the identification of the words most frequently retrieved by 12th grade Spanish EFL learners in response to the cue-word SCHOOL. Table 2 shows the top 50-word responses ranked according to the number of learners who retrieved each word and its word class following its classification in dictionaries. A close inspection of the data reveals common patterns. Firstly, the positions 1 to 8 in the ranking correspond to the words retrieved by over 50% of the informants, the retrieval of *teacher* by 85.28% of the learners being remarkable. Secondly, the data shows the prevalence of nouns over other word classes since 31 out of 34 word responses were nouns (91.18%), one was a verb (*learn*), and one an adjective (*boring*). The double (or even triple) classification in dictionaries of 16 words within the 50 most frequent words should be taken into account, since they are nouns but also belong to other word classes. Specifically, 8 words are both nouns and verbs (e.g. *pen, chair, pass*), and one can be a noun and an adjective (*rubber*). In addition, we find 8 words (e.g. *pencil, class, table, book*) that can be nouns, verbs and adjectives, and one word (*subject*) that is labelled as a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb in the four dictionaries.

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Rank	Word	n Students	Word Class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word Class
1	<i>teacher</i>	226	N	26	<i>Science</i>	53	N
2	<i>pencil</i>	184	Adj, N, V	27	<i>notebook</i>	49	N
3	<i>pen</i>	158	N, V	28	<i>paper</i>	48	Adj, N, V
4	<i>table</i>	154	Adj, N, V	29	<i>student</i>	48	N
5	<i>chair</i>	152	N, V	30	<i>French</i>	43	Adj, N
6	<i>book</i>	150	Adj, N, V	31	<i>mark</i>	42	N, V
7	<i>exam</i>	145	N	32	<i>Biology</i>	39	N
8	<i>Maths</i>	135	N	33	<i>classroom</i>	38	N
9	<i>friend</i>	95	N, V	34	<i>Geography</i>	38	N
10	<i>pencil case</i>	95	N	35	<i>playground</i>	37	N
11	<i>rubber</i>	95	Adj, N	36	<i>window</i>	37	N
12	<i>blackboard</i>	94	N	37	<i>learn</i>	35	V
13	<i>study</i>	88	N, V	38	<i>door</i>	34	N
14	<i>English</i>	87	Adj, N, V	39	<i>ruler</i>	33	N
15	<i>computer</i>	84	N	40	<i>children</i>	32	N
16	<i>schoolbag</i>	74	N	41	<i>fail</i>	32	N, V

Rank	Word	n Students	Word Class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word Class
17	<i>homework</i>	70	N	42	<i>Physical Education</i>	32	N
18	<i>bag</i>	67	N, V	43	<i>Philosophy</i>	31	N
19	<i>language</i>	67	N	44	<i>pass</i>	30	N, V
20	<i>class</i>	65	Adj, N, V	45	<i>Music</i>	29	N
21	<i>History</i>	64	N	46	<i>professor</i>	29	N
22	<i>pupil</i>	60	N	47	<i>Art</i>	27	Adj, N
23	<i>subject</i>	60	Adj, N, V	48	<i>university</i>	27	N
24	<i>desk</i>	59	N	49	<i>boring</i>	26	Adj
25	<i>classmate</i>	54	N	50	<i>Chemistry</i>	26	N

Table 2. The 50 most frequent word responses to SCHOOL classified by word class

The words retrieved by 12th grade EFL learners in response to SCHOOL bear a striking resemblance to the words retrieved by 6th grade EFL learners in response to the same cue-word. For instance, *pencil*, *Maths*, *book*, *computer*, *teacher*, *notebook*, *PE* (*Physical Education*), *pen*, *pencil case*, and *table* were the top 10 words retrieved by sixth grade EFL learners in the study conducted by Jiménez Catalán and Dewaele (2017), while *pen*, *book*, *table*, *pencil*, *chair*, and *paper* were among the first word responses to SCHOOL provided by senior EFL learners (Gallardo del Puerto and Martínez Adrián 2014). The concurrence of results may be interpreted on the grounds of exposure to the words either in their English textbooks or in class. Our interpretation is only tentative as we did not control this factor and, to the best of our knowledge, the relation between input and lexical availability output has not been investigated to date.

The predominance of nouns in this study also corroborates the results obtained in previous research with EFL learners at different grades. This may be because the cue-words included in lexical availability tasks are usually nouns rather than verbs or adjectives. Research has shown that cue-words activate more frequent word responses of the same category. For example, in a lexical availability study comprising six cue-words of different word classes, Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán (2015) found that 10th grade EFL learners' word responses depended on the type of cue-word. Although nouns predominated in their word responses to all the cue-words, FRIENDSHIP (abstract noun), HAPPY (adjective), and GIVE UP (phrasal verb) tended to activate words from other word classes: they “elicited words from other parts of speech apart from nouns, as for instance adjectives,

verbs, adverbs and prepositions” (Fernández Orío and Jiménez Catalán 2015: 112). Another explanation for this finding might be the higher accessibility of nouns in comparison to other word classes in the learners’ English lexicon. This coincides with what occurs in the mental lexicon of English native speakers, where nouns predominate, as Aitchison (1987) notes. Furthermore, according to this scholar, words of the same class are connected in the mind, as proved by speakers’ involuntary mistakes and errors. More studies are needed in which cue-words of different word classes are included so as to obtain more evidence concerning the structure of the English lexicon of EFL learners. Likewise, as one of the reviewers of this paper observed, this research could be expanded by extending lexical availability analyses to the learners’ mother tongue to ascertain whether there are similarities or differences in their L1 and L2 available lexicons related to ‘School’.

The purpose of our second question was to ascertain whether the words retrieved by EFL learners corresponded to the senses provided for the entry School in English dictionaries. To answer this question, each of the 50 most frequent words retrieved by the EFL learners in response to SCHOOL (see Table 2) were checked against the categories of the senses previously identified in English dictionaries for the entry School (Table 1 above). The comparison allowed us to establish links between senses given in the dictionaries and senses in the EFL learners’ available lexicon on the grounds of the following: (i) six senses seem to be available in the learners’ mental lexicon. These are related with Individual school objects (e.g. *pencil, pen*), the most common sense, followed by Activities/processes (e.g. *exam, study*), and People (e.g. *teacher, pupil*). Likewise, although in a reduced number, informants retrieved words that related to the senses Place (*class, classroom, playground*), Affect/emotion (*friend, boring*), and College, Faculty, or University Department (*university*) (Table 3); (ii) eight senses present in dictionaries, such as Way of life/manners or Educational level/stage, did not appear in the learners’ 50 most frequent word responses; while, (iii) nouns for school subjects, such as *Maths* or *History*, activated by learners do not appear in English dictionaries.

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	Senses in dictionaries	EFL Learners’ words
1	Individual school objects	<i>pencil</i> (69.43%), <i>pen</i> (59.62%), <i>table</i> (58.11%), <i>chair</i> (57.36%), <i>book</i> (56.60%), <i>pencil case</i> (35.85%), <i>rubber</i> (35.85%), <i>blackboard</i> (35.47%), <i>computer</i> (31.70%), <i>schoolbag</i> (27.92%), <i>bag</i> (25.28%), <i>desk</i> (22.26%), <i>notebook</i> (18.49%), <i>paper</i> (18.11%), <i>window</i> (13.96%), <i>door</i> (12.83%), <i>ruler</i> (12.45%)
2	Activities/processes	<i>exam</i> (54.72%), <i>study</i> (33.21%), <i>homework</i> (26.41%), <i>mark</i> (15.85%), <i>learn</i> (13.21%), <i>fail</i> (12.07%), <i>pass</i> (11.32%)

	Senses in dictionaries	EFL Learners' words
3	People	<i>teacher</i> (85.28%), <i>pupil</i> (22.64%), <i>classmate</i> (20.38%), <i>student</i> (18.11%), <i>children</i> (12.07%), <i>professor</i> (10.94%)
4	Place (building)	<i>class</i> (24.53%), <i>classroom</i> (14.34%), <i>playground</i> (13.96%)
5	Affect/emotion	<i>friend</i> (35.85%), <i>boring</i> (9.81%)
6	College, Faculty or University Department	<i>university</i> (10.19%)

Table 3. Senses in EFL learners' word responses to SCHOOL

The lack of comparative research on dictionaries and lexical availability does not allow the tendencies observed to be confirmed or disconfirmed. However, we could hypothesise that learners might have produced more words related to the sense Individual school objects because these are items used at school on a daily basis (e.g. *pencil*, *notebook*, *ruler*) and many teachers use them as realia to foster the learning of English vocabulary in a contextualised manner (cf. Bala 2015). Similarly, words referring to the school curricula such as *Maths*, *English*, *Language*, or *History* are part of school life. Therefore, it seems plausible that the vocabulary of individual objects and school subjects might have been learnt at an early age through the vocabulary input in EFL textbooks, thus giving rise to their high availability in the EFL learners' lexicon. Some evidence on the vocabulary input in primary and secondary textbooks was reported in Jiménez Catalán and Mancebo Francisco (2008) where words such as *class*, *teacher*, *children*, *friend*, *book*, *English* or *History* were ranked within the top 50 words in textbooks for those levels. In consequence, it is not unrealistic to assume that 12th grade EFL learners' association of those words with SCHOOL might be due to a high degree of familiarization with the words and their meanings. In lexical availability tasks, the higher the number of informants who retrieve a given word, the higher the association in the mental lexicon. Strong association involves high word familiarity (Hernández et al. 2014).

We now move on to present the results for the third research question in which we asked whether there were differences or similarities in the number and type of words retrieved by males and females. Regarding number, Table 4 summarises the average mean obtained by each group together with the comparison of maximum and minimum and the standard deviations for both sexes. These figures were calculated on the average number of different words retrieved by each individual learner. As can be observed, male students obtained a slightly higher mean than females although this difference did not prove to be significant, as revealed by the Kruskal-Wallis test applied to the means (Table 5).

Males				Females				
Cue-word								
Min	Max	Mean	SD		Min	Max	Mean	SD
9	33	19.88	6.33	SCHOOL	1	37	19.77	6.18

Table 4. 'School' Means for males and females

Kruskal-Wallis Test		
Chi-squared	df	p-value
0.0027035	1	0.9585

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis test

As to the actual words retrieved by males and females, we observe that 88% were shared by both groups. However, as a close inspection of Tables 6 and 7 reveals, six words were retrieved only by females (*Music, Art, note, Spanish, colour, people*) and six words were retrieved only by males (*professor, Physics, boring, fail, pass, and test*). A similar pattern is observed when we look at word class in the two top 50 lists, as nouns predominate in both groups. However, we also note that males produced the only adjective found in both groups, *boring*, and three verbs more than females (*pass, fail, test*).

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Rank	Word	n Students	Word class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word class
1	<i>teacher</i>	148	N	26	<i>notebook</i>	35	N
2	<i>pencil</i>	120	Adj, N, V	27	<i>paper</i>	33	Adj, N, V
3	<i>book</i>	109	Adj, N, V	28	<i>subject</i>	33	Adj, N, V
4	<i>chair</i>	101	N, V	29	<i>French</i>	32	Adj, N, V
5	<i>pen</i>	100	N, V	30	<i>student</i>	29	N
6	<i>table</i>	98	Adj, N, V	31	<i>window</i>	26	N
7	<i>exam</i>	90	N	32	<i>Biology</i>	25	N
8	<i>Maths</i>	86	N	33	<i>Music</i>	24	N
9	<i>friend</i>	68	N, V	34	<i>classroom</i>	23	N
10	<i>pencil case</i>	66	N	35	<i>Geography</i>	23	N
11	<i>blackboard</i>	63	N	36	<i>children</i>	22	N
12	<i>computer</i>	58	N	37	<i>ruler</i>	22	N
13	<i>English</i>	57	Adj, N, V	38	<i>door</i>	21	N
14	<i>rubber</i>	57	Adj, N	39	<i>mark</i>	21	N, V

Conceptualization of 'School' in the English Available Lexicon...

Rank	Word	n Students	Word class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word class
15	<i>study</i>	51	N, V	40	<i>Art</i>	20	Adj, N, V
16	<i>homework</i>	48	N	41	<i>learn</i>	19	V
17	<i>bag</i>	44	N, V	42	<i>Philosophy</i>	19	N
18	<i>schoolbag</i>	44	N	43	<i>playground</i>	19	N
19	<i>History</i>	43	N	44	<i>note</i>	18	N, V
20	<i>class</i>	42	Adj, N, V	45	<i>university</i>	18	N
21	<i>pupil</i>	40	N	46	colour	17	Adj, N, V
22	<i>language</i>	39	N	47	people	17	N, V
23	<i>Science</i>	39	N	48	<i>Chemistry</i>	16	N
24	<i>classmate</i>	37	N	49	<i>Physical education</i>	16	N
25	<i>desk</i>	35	N	50	Spanish	16	Adj, N

Table 6. Females' 50 most frequent word responses to School classified by word class

Rank	Word	n Students	Word class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word class
1	<i>teacher</i>	78	N	26	<i>student</i>	19	N
2	<i>pencil</i>	64	Adj, N, V	27	fail	18	N, V
3	<i>pen</i>	58	N, V	28	<i>playground</i>	18	N
4	<i>table</i>	56	Adj, N, V	29	<i>classmate</i>	17	N
5	<i>exam</i>	55	N	30	pass	17	N, V
6	<i>chair</i>	51	N, V	31	<i>learn</i>	16	V
7	<i>Maths</i>	49	N	32	<i>Physical education</i>	16	N
8	<i>book</i>	41	Adj, N, V	33	<i>classroom</i>	15	N
9	<i>rubber</i>	38	Adj, N	34	<i>Geography</i>	15	N
10	<i>study</i>	37	N, V	35	<i>paper</i>	15	Adj, N, V
11	<i>blackboard</i>	31	N	36	professor	15	N
12	<i>English</i>	30	Adj, N, V	37	<i>Biology</i>	14	N
13	<i>schoolbag</i>	30	N	38	<i>notebook</i>	14	N
14	<i>pencil case</i>	29	N	39	<i>Science</i>	14	N
15	<i>language</i>	28	N	40	boring	13	Adj
16	<i>friend</i>	27	N, V	41	<i>door</i>	13	N
17	<i>subject</i>	27	Adj, N, V	42	Physics	13	N
18	<i>computer</i>	26	N	43	<i>Philosophy</i>	12	N
19	<i>desk</i>	24	N	44	test	12	Adj, N, V

Rank	Word	n Students	Word class	Rank	Word	n Students	Word class
20	<i>bag</i>	23	N, V	45	<i>French</i>	11	Adj, N, V
21	<i>class</i>	23	Adj, N, V	46	<i>ruler</i>	11	N
22	<i>homework</i>	22	N	47	<i>window</i>	11	N
23	<i>history</i>	21	N	48	<i>Chemistry</i>	10	N
24	<i>mark</i>	21	N, V	49	<i>children</i>	10	N
25	<i>pupil</i>	20	N	50	<i>university</i>	9	N

Table 7. Males' 50 most frequent word responses to School classified by word class

The higher (but not significant) mean obtained by males in the present study does not corroborate the results reported by Jiménez Catalán and Ojeda Alba (2009a) and Agustín Llach and Fernández Fontecha (2014) for SCHOOL, where females generated a significantly higher number of words. This may be due to the different age and grade levels of the informants as the samples in the previous research were 6th and 8th grade EFL learners, compared to the 12th grade EFL learners of the present study. It may be the case that, as age/grade increases, males become more motivated towards English and this, in turn, might be related to a higher lexical availability output concerning SCHOOL. Some evidence in this regard is found in Fernández Fontecha and Terrazas Gallego's (2012) longitudinal research on the receptive vocabulary and motivation of EFL learners in secondary school education. They reported an increase in the motivation towards English of a great number of students (132 out of 185) at 9th grade in comparison with 8th and 7th grade. A strong correlation between motivation and receptive vocabulary knowledge at 9th grade was also reported. However, the evidence of these results should be treated with caution as their study focused on receptive vocabulary. Studies are required in which motivation and lexical availability production of EFL learners are observed across grades.

As to the similarities found in the actual words retrieved by both males and females, this finding fulfils expectations as in Spain male and female EFL learners attend mixed schools where identical subjects are taught to both sexes sharing instruction and classrooms from kindergarten to post-compulsory education. However, the small but relevant exclusive vocabulary for each group observed cannot be overlooked as, in our opinion, it may suggest different preferences, views and attitudes towards 'School' and its activities, which in turn may be affected by gender ideology. As van der Vleuten et al. quote, "traditionally, more science-related subjects, for example mathematics and information technology, are considered masculine subjects, whereas art, language and humanities are typical feminine subjects (Colley and Comber 2003; Whitehead 1996)" (2016: 184).

The present study confirms this observation regarding school subjects given that females retrieved *Music*, *Art*, and *Spanish* (language) and males *Physics*. Likewise, our study corroborates the results obtained for upper education in the Netherlands by van der Vleuten et al. as boys in their study showed a preference for science and technology whereas girls tended “to choose the more feminine tracks that focus on biology and physics (science & health) and languages and humanities (culture & society)” (2016: 191). Particularly relevant in our data is the presence of words related to exams such as *test* or *fail* in males but not in females. Girls seem to be more concerned with the recognition of the work accomplished and the assessment of the task rather than with a cause-effect relationship, as suggested by the retrieval of *note* (meaning marks) by females and not by males. Finally, another relevant finding is the presence of *boring* in the males' 50 most frequent words list, but not in the females' list. This seems to point to negative male attitudes towards their school as an institution.

We believe that the findings can be interpreted under the conceptual framework of archetypes. In the first place, the EFL learners' 50 most frequent word responses reflect *commonalities* that point to learners' *everyday experience* with individual school objects and activities. From the English learners' words, we note that the 'School' has classrooms, which contain typical objects (*blackboard*, *desk*, *chair*, *window*, *door*), and where typical activities (*study*, *learn*, *homework*, *exam*, *fail*, *pass*) are conducted. Furthermore, the learners' words point to the subjects that form part of their school curricula (*Maths*, *English*, or *History*) and with the people linked to the 'School': *teacher*, *student* or *pupil* with *teacher* being the most frequent word retrieved by the two groups. The learners' words range from general nouns (*teacher*, *student* or *pupil*) to more specific ones (*classmate* or *friend*), but *teacher* emerges as the more salient word response since it was retrieved by most of the learners. Furthermore, for 125 of them it was the word that first came to mind, appearing between the first to fifth position in learners' first responses. According to cognitive lexical availability research, the salient position of the word *teacher* in response to SCHOOL would point to a strong association of both words in EFL learners' lexicon, usually related to a high degree of word familiarity and typicality. The study conducted by Hernández et al. (2014) proved that the most available words were those which learners were more familiarised with because of having learnt them earlier in life. They also found that the most available words corresponded to the most typical exemplars of the semantic categories under investigation. According to the Spreading Activation Theory of Semantic Processing (Collins and Loftus 1975), 'Teacher' and 'School' would represent two nodes or concepts related by semantic links. From a pedagogical perspective, the prominent position of the word *teacher* in learners' responses may suggest a teacher-centred approach

rather than a learner-centred approach in EFL and possibly in other school subjects. This is in line with the research conducted on the conceptualization of teaching in terms of prototype theory (cf. Sternberg and Horvath 1995; Smith and Strahan 2004), as well as with the research conducted by Marchant (1992) on undergraduate and graduate education students' similes and metaphors of what a teacher is.

Secondly, the comparison of the learners' 50 most frequent word responses with the senses in English dictionaries uncovers common patterns that can be interpreted as archetypes. Although the learners' words come from their mental lexicon and the words from dictionaries come from texts, we believe that the comparison is possible as the dictionaries used as reference were created out of corpora of natural language. Thus, in both cases we note that 'School' is linked to students and teachers. Likewise, 'School' is a physical place divided into distinct parts which can be represented as whole-part or part-whole-part relationships. Furthermore, in dictionaries and in the learners' available lexicon, 'School' is related to emotions. Compare, for instance, the example in the Cambridge dictionary "love/hate School" to the word responses *friend* and *boring* retrieved respectively by 95 and 26 EFL learners. The learners' word responses suggest a conceptualisation of 'School' alike to the senses provided in the dictionaries: a place or container where there are people, and where relations, feelings and emotion emerge. However, the learners' English words in response to SCHOOL also reveal patterns typically associated with school life not included in dictionaries we used as reference, as for example, *homework*, *pass*, *fail*, *exam*, or school subjects such as *History*, *Maths*, or *Music*.

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Finally, the comparison of the males' and females' word responses reflects a shared conceptualization of 'School' through words that point to *commonalities* and *experiences* related to school, which can be considered as *ubiquitous* as they are part of the life of the adolescent EFL learner all over the world. Overall, the words retrieved by males and females present more similarities than differences. However, the data also reveals exclusive words in the two groups. For females the exclusive words were: *Music*, *Art*, *note*, *colour*, *people*, and *Spanish*. In comparison, the exclusive words for males were: *fail*, *pass*, *professor*, *boring*, *Physics*, and *test*. The comparison of the males' and females' exclusive words reveals a slightly different view of 'School': those retrieved by females have to do with school subjects (*Music*, *Art*, *Spanish*) and with qualifications (*colour* and *notes*), ("notas" in Spanish means scores or marks), whereas the males' exclusive word responses point to the results of exams and tests (*fail* and *pass*) as well as to a negative feeling towards 'School' (*boring*). It is also noteworthy that the two groups differ in the words retrieved regarding school subjects.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence on the available lexicon of EFL learners. The first finding was that 12th grade Spanish EFL learners retrieved a higher number of nouns than other word classes in their top 50 word responses in a lexical availability task. Among these, *teacher* was the most frequent response. We have interpreted this finding on the grounds of a common structure of EFL learners' lexicon but we have pointed out the need of conducting further research with EFL learners of different ages and grades to ascertain whether the structure of their available lexicon is similar or differs according to age, vocabulary knowledge and level. We have also considered the possible effect of the task on the elicitation process as this finding might have been somewhat affected by the word class of the prompt. This result suggests the need to select prompts of different word classes in lexical availability/association tasks. In particular, it is necessary to include verbs as cue-words since verbs have been found to be more difficult to acquire than nouns by English children (cf. Gentner 2006).

The second finding provided evidence of the similarity of the EFL learners' word responses to the senses provided in English dictionaries. This result has educational implications as on the one hand it proves that the available lexicon of EFL learners concerning the 'School' concept matches the senses attributed to the lexical entry School by English dictionaries. On the other hand, it provides evidence of the potential of English dictionaries to serve as a reference when conducting qualitative analyses of EFL learners' available lexicon. In the first place, we noted common patterns in both sources. Secondly, the examples provided in dictionaries for each sense facilitated the understanding of what the learners meant by the word responses and allowed us to interpret them under the conceptual framework of archetypes. However, although there was considerable coincidence in the two sources, the analysis of the learners' word responses uncovered realities closely linked to daily life at school such as Maths, History, Physical Education, blackboard, pencil, or book. Furthermore, the word *teacher* was the first response retrieved by numerous students, which suggests that the teacher represents an essential part in their conceptualization of 'School'. This finding is relevant for research on the L2 lexicon as it points to the existence of typical patterns in learners' available lexicons in relation to the 'School' concept.

Regarding the performance of female and male EFL learners, no significant differences were observed in the average means of words produced by both groups, and their word responses were similar. However, we also observed words retrieved by males but not by females and vice versa. This exclusive vocabulary needs further research as differential patterns might be related to gender ideologies, and these may involve

stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the school as an institution and therefore have consequences for the successful achievement of learning a foreign language.

The findings are relevant for teachers, dictionary compilers and researchers on L2 available lexicon as knowledge of the number and the actual words that EFL learners can generate in response to SCHOOL in a lexical availability task provides them with clues about 12th grade EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge related to a specific semantic domain. For example, it is possible to hypothesise from the learners' word responses that they would have the words to write about or discuss issues related to 'School'. Furthermore, given the sample stratification, the findings can be generalised to all the EFL learners in the community where the study took place. With caution, the findings could serve as a reference for comparison with EFL learners at the same level in other learning contexts. Notwithstanding this, we recognise limitations to the study. The first is that due to space constraints, our analysis and interpretation was based on only the 50 most frequent words retrieved by the learners rather than on the total number of words elicited by means of the lexical task. In a subsequent study it would be necessary to check whether the tendencies resulting from the analysis of the 50 most frequent words are also observed in the whole corpus. This analysis would need to be complemented by the identification of possible clusters and switches resulting from the EFL learners' word responses as these would allow in-depth insights into the conceptualization of 'School'. The second limitation of this study is that our analysis was based on EFL learners' responses in a lexical availability task. As shown in Table 3, some word responses may be classified under different word classes and some words convey more than one meaning. This calls for more innovative lexical availability research, in which a detailed examination of the words English language learners associate with SCHOOL should be complemented by interviews. These could allow us to determine the word class and the intended meaning of the words retrieved by learners, which in turn would provide a deep insight into their L2 mental lexicon. However, as it would be unrealistic to conduct interviews with large samples such as that used in the present study (265 students), the most problematic cases (e.g. *boring, note*) could be chosen for further exploration. Likewise, regarding conceptual archetypes, comparative research is necessary with other ages and educational levels in primary and secondary education to ascertain whether the patterns of the conceptualization of 'School' change or remain as age and course level increase. Moreover, for a more comprehensible picture of the variables that might affect EFL learners' lexical availability, it would be necessary to include standardised language tests to ascertain whether learners' language level determines or not their lexical availability output in terms of both number and word variation. Likewise, a study with informants of different mother tongues

and cultures would expand the present study as it would allow us to ascertain whether their conceptualisation of the 'School' is different or similar.

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APPENDIX

- EDAD:.....
- SEXO: MUJER
 HOMBRE
- NACIONALIDAD:
- CENTRO:
- LENGUA(S) MATERNA(S) (lengua(s) que usas con tu familia).
Marca con una X tu respuesta:
 - Español Rumano
 - Chino Portugués
 - Árabe Urdu
 - Ruso Ucraniano
 - Otra (escribe cuál):
- En caso de que recibas o hayas recibido clases de inglés fuera del centro, especifica:
Nº años:
Nº semanas por año:
Nº horas por semana:
- ¿Cuál ha sido el motivo?
 - Había suspendido y quería aprobar. Complacer a mi familia
 - En el colegio/instituto/centro saco buenas notas pero quería mejorar. Otros
 - Me gustan mucho los idiomas y me divierte aprenderlos.
- ¿Has estado en algún país de habla inglesa?
 - NO SÍ ¿Cuál?.....
 - ¿Cuándo?.....
 - ¿Cuánto tiempo aproximadamente?.....
 - ¿Fuiste a clases de inglés allí? NO SÍ
- ¿Has ido a cursos de inglés intensivos/de verano, etc. en España alguna vez?
 - NO SÍ ¿Cuándo?.....
 - ¿Cuántas semanas y horas de duración aproximadamente?.....

- Además de inglés, ¿estudias otra lengua extranjera bien en este Centro o fuera?
 NO Sí ¿Cuál?.....
- Tipo de Bachillerato:
 Artes Ciencias y Tecnologías Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales
- Programa(s) de lenguas en los que participas (por ejemplo, Programa de Escuela Oficial de Idiomas):

PRUEBA DE DISPONIBILIDAD LÉXICA

INSTRUCCIONES:

- En esta prueba hay 10 enunciados.
- Escribe **en 2 minutos** las palabras que te sugiera cada enunciado siguiendo el orden numérico.
- El profesor/a te irá marcando el tiempo para cada palabra.
- Una vez acabado el tiempo no puedes incluir más palabras.
- Por favor, escribe con letra legible.

THE SCHOOL

1.	31.
2.	32.
3.	33.
4.	34.
5.	35.
6.	36.
7.	37.
8.	38.
9.	39.
10.	40.
11.	41.
12.	42.
13.	43.
14.	44.
15.	45.
16.	46.
17.	47.
18.	48.
19.	49.
20.	50.
21.	51.
22.	52.
23.	53.
24.	54.
25.	55.
26.	56.
27.	57.
28.	58.
29.	59.
30.	60.