



Word associations in Spanish Paul Meara *University of Wales Swansea*

This paper describes a set of word associations that we collected from a group of native speakers of Spanish. The data were originally collected as part of a larger project dealing with vocabulary tests for non-native speakers of Spanish. However, the data are much more interesting than this rather bald statement of purpose implies, and we thought they would be of interest to teachers more generally.

Word associations are collected very simply: you provide a list of words to the testee, and for each word the testee replies with the first word that comes to mind. The test words can be read aloud, or they can be presented in written form. Likewise, the testee can produce his/her words in writing or aloud, though usually you don't mix the two methods. Thanks largely to popularisations of the work of Freud, and popular depictions of psychiatrists in films, many people believe that word associations have an uncanny ability to reveal our innermost secrets and desires. In fact, most word associations are much more mundane than this, and it is even possible to predict the kinds of associations that people will produce in most ordinary situations.

For the major European languages there even exist sets of word association norms, which list the most common responses made by large groups of native speakers. Most of these norms are based on a list of words first used by Kent and Rosanoff in 1910. Kent and Rosanoff were chiefly interested in the associations of people they referred to as 'insane', but their list was taken up by other people interested in associations as well, and by the 1960s, it had become the de facto standard list for work of this sort.

Table 1 shows a small sample of the Kent-Rosanoff list. Each entry consists of a stimulus word together with the three associations that it most commonly elicits from native speakers. These data are taken from Postman and Keppel (1970).

Table 1: Some common words and their associations

TABLE	CHAIR	CLOTH	DESK
HAND	FOOT	FINGER	GLOVE
MAN	WOMAN	DOG	BOY
SOFT	HARD	CUSHION	LIGHT
BLACK	WHITE	NIGHT	CAT
SHORT	LONG	TALL	FAT
SLOW	FAST	QUICK	TRAIN
NEEDLE	THREAD	COTTON	PIN
BREAD	BUTTER	JAM	CHEESE
BITTER	SWEET	LEMON	BEER

A number of things will be immediately obvious from even this very small sample of words and their associations. The most important thing is that words tend to elicit associations which most native speakers agree on - a core of common associations, which are largely shared by other members of the speech community. These response patterns are so reliable, in fact, that psychologists have been able to classify the main types, and to describe the way these standard types of association develop in young

children. They have also been able to show how people with mental disorders sometimes deviate systematically from what we would expect of normal adult native speakers of a language.

There are three main types of associations. PARADIGMATIC associations are associations which are semantically linked to the stimulus word, and share most of its semantic features. Classic examples of this are MAN => WOMAN, or BOY => GIRL. In these cases, the stimulus word and the response word share much of their meaning, but they differ in terms of one or more crucial semantic features. In these examples, you could argue that the response words share all the formal semantic features of the stimulus words, except for the feature male/female. The two stimulus words are +male, while the response words are both +female. Paradigmatic associations of this type account for about 40% of the responses produced by normal adult native speakers. SYNTAGMATIC responses are associations which make up a phrase. Examples of this type of association are RIDE => HORSE or TOOTH => BRUSH. In these examples, the stimulus word and the response word match each other in the sense that one of them fulfils the selectional requirements of the other. Again, in normal native speaking adults, syntagmatic responses of this sort account for about 30% of the total. The remaining 30% is usually made up of several different types of responses. SCENARIO responses are responses which refer to things that often co-occur in real life with the stimulus word. Response patterns like SKY => CLOUD, or WINTER => SNOW are of this type. CLANG associates are words which share a close formal relationship with the stimulus word, but generally do not have any relationship on the level of meaning. These associations usually share with the stimulus a rhyme or assonance pattern, or a prominent syllable, as in DARK => PARK or WATER => DAUGHTER or CONDIMENT => CONDOM. Finally, in any collection of associations you always find a substantial number of idiosyncratic associations which only make sense to the person who produced them.

There are some systematic differences between adults and children in the types of associations that they produce. Adults typically - though not always - tend to prefer paradigmatic associations, while children tend to prefer clang associates and syntagmatic responses. Around the age of seven there is a sudden shift in the way children respond, and their responses become much more adult-like. No-one really knows why this is, although it might have something to do with the fact that children are usually learning to read about this time, and acquiring a very large number of new words.

Foreign language learners also tend to behave differently from native speakers in the association patterns that they produce. A number of people (e.g. Politzer, 1978) have claimed that non-native speakers, like children, seem to prefer syntagmatic responses, and some people (e.g. Söderman, 1993) have suggested that learners go through the same sort of shift that children do. There is also a lot of evidence to suggest that non-native speakers produce much more varied responses than native speakers do. In native speakers, for instance, a group of 100 testees will typically produce about 10 idiosyncratic responses that are not produced by anybody else in the group. For learners, this figure is very much higher. In many cases this appears to be because non-native speakers misunderstand the stimulus words, and confuse words that have a vague resemblance to each other, but whatever the reason, the effect is often bewildering to native speakers.

This paper reports a set of word associations produced by 50 native speakers of Spanish to 200 Spanish words. As far as we know there are no previously published norms of

association in Spanish. The source for the stimulus words was a list of the 2000 most frequent words taken from the Rodríguez Bou frequency count (Rodríguez Bou 1952). 200 words were extracted from this list. Of these words, 120 were nouns, 50 verbs, 20 adjectives, 10 adverbs and prepositions. These proportions reflect the proportions found in basic vocabulary counts for each category. The resulting list is rather different from the words that appear in the Kent-Rosanoff list, but is rather more useful for work with second language learners.

The data was collected in the autumn of 1993 in Barcelona. The respondents were adults, both male and female, with a wide spread of formal education, age and social status. The number of subjects was limited to 50 for practical reasons of data handling. Deese (1965) reports that 50 subjects is usually sufficient for stable response patterns to emerge. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire, which consisted of a set of questions concerning basic personal details, and 200 stimulus words. Each stimulus was followed by a blank space allowing for a single response. The task required the testees to write next to each stimulus word, the first association that came to their mind. It was emphasised that answers should be as spontaneous as possible. A few examples were provided on the written form. For the sake of clarity, oral explanations and a few further examples were provided before the start of the test. There were no time restrictions on completions. Testees took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete the test.

The data is presented in Table 2 below. The table lists the 200 words that we used as stimuli (col 1), together with the three most common associations that they elicited (cols 2-4). The numbers in the final four columns indicate the number of respondents who produced the common associations (cols 5-7) and the total number of different responses the group produced (col 8). We do not intend to make any serious theoretical claims with this data, but some brief observations will be found in the discussion section that follows.

Table 2: The three most common associations made to 200 Spanish words. n = 50.

	Stimulus	resp 1	resp 2	resp 3	Frequencies			
1	abuelo	viejo	anciano	abuela	15	7	6	21
2	alcantarilla	rata	cloaca	agua	8	8	4	21
3	feo	guapo	horrible	monstruo	13	8	5	18
4	cubo	agua	basura	fregona	16	10	6	14
5	cerrar	abrir	puerta	llave	21	15	2	12
6	pata	palo	polio	pierna	10	5	5	23
7	hacer	deshacer	cosas	construir	13	8	3	24
8	tapón	botella	corcho	rosca	18	7	3	20
9	reír	llorar	chiste	alegría	12	8	4	19
10	juego	niños	divertido	parchis	7	7	4	23
11	mediodía	sol	comida	comer	17	8	5	17
12	madera	arbol	mueble	armario	8	6	3	29
13	comer	beber	comida	hambre	6	5	4	29
14	bailar	música	tango	discoteca	6	4	4	28
15	tomate	rojo	frito	verdura	17	9	3	18
16	oler	nariz	colonia	perfume	10	7	7	16
17	grupo	gente	amigos	clase	14	10	2	28
18	grifo	agua	abierto	gota	36	4	2	12
19	gritar	chillar	enfado	miedo	8	5	5	26
20	lengua	boca	gusto	hablar	8	4	4	29
21	piel	suave	morena	abrigo	13	8	3	25

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22	ataque	nervios	defensa	guerra	7	4	3	33
23	motivo	causa	razon	importante	15	5	2	29
24	oscuro	negro	claro	noche	21	10	5	14
25	fraile	cura	monje	convento	15	7	4	18
26	crystal	transparente	ventana	roto	9	7	5	23
27	debajo	encima	arriba	cama	16	14	2	19
28	vaso	agua	vino	crystal	21	8	6	12
29	peca	lunar	cara	mancha	18	10	5	19
30	aceituna	verde	aceite	oliva	10	8	7	21
31	tienda	ropa	comercio	comestibles	14	5	4	24
32	dedo	mano	una	menique	21	6	4	14
33	pensar	idea	cabeza	estudiar	6	3	3	33
34	hui	correr	escapar	miedo	17	9	7	19
35	aja	dinero	fuerte	sorpresa	6	6	4	17
36	encontrar	buscar	hallar	tesoro	10	4	3	30
37	risa	alegría	llanto	alegre	13	5	4	25
38	reja	cárcel	hierro	jaula	18	7	4	22
39	jaula	pájaro	animal	cárcel	21	5	3	23
40	pared	blanca	muro	casa	11	10	7	20
41	sueño	dormir	cansancio	noche	16	4	4	25
42	comedor	comida	mesa	comer	10	4	3	26
43	pequeño	grande	niño	enano	17	6	5	21
44	recibir	dar	regalo	carta	7	5	4	28
45	agujero	negro	oscuro	hoyo	11	6	3	29
46	aceite	oliva	olivo	aceituna	19	3	3	29
47	carnicero	carne	cuchillo	sangriento	23	7	2	21
48	huelga	hambre	trabajo	paro	9	6	5	25
49	cereza	roja	fruta	verano	18	15	3	17
50	espejo	crystal	imagen	mirar	8	6	6	26
51	sangre	roja	herida	vida	23	4	4	20
52	miedo	terror	temor	oscuridad	10	7	6	28
53	cajón	madera	cosas	guardar	8	5	4	29
54	listo	inteligente	tonto	preparado	15	10	4	20
55	sorbo	beber	agua	trago	8	8	5	22
56	engordar	comer	adelgazar	comida	15	6	6	22
57	aprovechar	tiempo	ocasión	utilizar	8	4	4	29
58	desnudarse	ropa	vestirse	baño	13	5	3	29
59	lucha	pelea	libre	guerra	9	7	5	28
60	ojo	vista	gafas	azul	13	5	5	23
61	ver	mirar	ojos	oir	12	8	4	23
62	hijo	madre	amor	padre	9	7	6	29
63	bolsa	plástico	dinero	basura	10	5	4	28
64	hambre	comida	comer	guerra	16	6	4	25
65	pez	agua	mar	espada	18	8	6	19
66	hermano	hermana	amigo	familia	9	4	4	28
67	leche	blanca	vaca	café	13	11	2	24
68	albañil	paleta	trabajador	constructor	13	6	6	21
69	jarra	agua	cerveza	vino	22	8	5	13
70	limpio	sucio	aseo	aseado	13	3	3	26
71	hoja	árbol	papel	blanca	17	12	4	18
72	pelea	lucha	riña	discusión	6	5	2	33
73	llorar	lágrima	tristeza	reir	16	9	8	17
74	alinar	ensalada	aceite	lechuga	24	4	2	22
75	yeso	blanco	pared	cal	16	5	3	15
76	dulce	pastel	azúcar	caramelo	9	6	6	19
77	almendra	turrón	fruto	flor	10	9	4	21
78	levantar	subir	peso	izar	7	6	6	29
79	onda	radio	ola	pelo	11	10	3	25
80	compañero	amigo	clase	compañero	27	4	2	17
81	pronto	ya	tarde	rapido	9	8	5	21
82	bostezar	sueño	aburrimiento	boca	26	8	6	10

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83	camino	sendero	andar	vereda	6	5	4	26
84	rojo	tomate	color	sangre	5	4	3	21
85	fuego	sangre	fuego	quema	7	4	2	29
86	trabajo	dinero	esfuerzo	pesado	12	5	3	30
87	tijeras	cortar	ropa	abiertas	28	2	2	18
88	garbanzo	cocido	potaje	legumbre	16	8	6	20
89	huerto	verdura	lechuga	tomate	8	5	5	28
90	parecerse	igual	similar	gemelos	6	7	6	22
91	vecino	amigo	amable	piso	8	4	3	33
92	sandía	fruta	melon	verano	11	10	6	19
93	cojín	sofa	cómo	blando	10	9	7	27
94	galleta	dulce	maría	comida	9	6	4	22
95	basura	suciedad	desperdicio	sucio	7	6	6	26
96	conocer	saber	gente	descubrir	17	5	3	25
97	azul	cielo	mar	color	25	11	6	10
98	detrás	delante	espalda	tras	20	4	4	21
99	rato	tiempo	momenta	largo	19	8	4	20
100	lluvia	agua	paraguas	tormenta	17	8	4	20
101	cuchara	sopa	tenedor	comer	19	5	3	21
102	calle	acera	coche	larga	4	4	3	33
103	recoger	ordenar	coger	tirar	8	5	4	29
104	cerca	lejos	aquí	proximo	20	7	4	20
105	grande	pequeño	mar	inmenso	17	5	4	25
106	mesa	silla	madera	comedor	20	6	3	20
107	gafas	ojos	sol	oscuras	8	7	5	22
108	pimienta	picante	sal	negra	17	9	7	15
109	mujer	hombre	belleza	señora	15	4	2	29
110	limón	ácido	agrio	naranja	18	11	4	15
111	recortar	tijeras	papel	cortar	18	7	4	19
112	freír	patatas	aceite	sarten	15	9	3	20
113	lleno	vacío	repleto	deposito	19	3	3	22
114	comida	alimento	hambre	buena	6	5	3	34
115	ahora	ya	nunca	momenta	22	5	4	20
116	rubio	moreno	pelo	tabaco	16	8	3	20
117	ligero	pluma	pesado	rápido	10	5	5	25
118	sello	carta	correos	sobre	27	5	4	10
119	billete	dinero	tren	avión	19	7	3	21
120	bebida	agua	refrescante	líquido	7	4	4	29
121	toser	resfriado	constipado	catarro	7	6	4	27
122	sucio	limpio	guarro	feo	15	4	3	27
123	tenedor	cuchara	comida	carne	15	7	5	18
124	querer	amar	persona	desear	30	2	2	16
125	cuerda	soga	atar	floja	7	7	7	21
126	tirar	recoger	basura	arrojar	7	7	3	31
127	pedir	limosna	pobre	dinero	12	7	7	20
128	mañana	tarde	día	hoy	9	9	5	23
129	juicio	delito	juez	final	6	5	4	33
130	vaciar	llenar	tirar	sacar	11	5	3	27
131	madre	padre	amor	cariño	15	6	4	20
132	bolsillo	pantalón	dinero	roto	7	7	6	20
133	botella	vino	agua	llena	21	4	4	18
134	barco	mar	agua	velero	13	7	5	24
135	cortar	tijeras	cuchillo	came	9	3	3	26
136	llegar	tarde	pronto	venir	6	4	3	26
137	ensuciar	manchar	limpiar	barro	5	5	5	32
138	molestar	incordiar	mosca	alguien	16	5	3	26
139	almacen	guardar	cajas	deposito	9	8	3	30
140	colgar	percha	cuadro	ropa	12	3	3	27
141	esparcir	tirar	extender	derramar	8	7	4	28
142	naranja	fruta	limón	zum	12	10	6	23
143	trapo	sucio	tela	limpiar	11	7	6	22
144	fila	india	orden	colegio	6	3	3	27

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145	manga	camisa	corta	larga	9	8	6	22
146	polio	asado	frito	gallina	11	9	7	25
147	perro	gato	animal	ladrar	9	6	5	25
148	lección	libro	saber	estudio	7	4	4	26
149	herramienta	trabajo	martillo	llave	17	7	4	21
150	hombro	ancho	espalda	codo	6	4	3	32
151	comprender	entender	saber	asimilar	18	5	4	21
152	veneno	muerte	malo	cianuro	20	5	4	18
153	feria	noria	fiesta	alegría	5	4	4	26
154	nada	todo	vacío	cero	16	11	7	17
155	lápiz	papel	escribir	goma	8	8	4	23
156	sudor	olor	calor	frio	9	9	6	20
157	muñeca	niña	trapo	mano	11	5	3	20
158	ancho	estrecho	largo	no	12	8	3	20
159	pierna	larga	rota	cuerpo	6	4	4	21
160	olla	presión	cornida	cazo	12	5	2	21
161	azúcar	dulce	moreno	café	23	8	6	12
162	ahorrar	dinero	banco	hucha	21	6	6	17
163	pino	árbol	piña	verde	12	7	7	19
164	escoger	elegir	amigos	seleccionar	18	3	3	21
165	limpiar	casa	asear	cristales	4	4	3	30
166	pozo	agua	profundo	hondo	16	7	5	14
167	niebla	espesa	frío	invierno	5	4	4	27
168	amarillo	sol	limón	color	13	8	7	18
169	martillo	clavo	herramienta	golpe	14	6	5	20
170	viejo	anciano	abuelo	nuevo	16	5	4	21
171	lechuga	verde	ensalada	tomate	16	15	3	16
172	lucir	vestido	ropa	presumir	10	3	3	28
173	mojar	agua	pan	secar	9	6	5	21
174	olvidar	recordar	pasado	penas	8	5	5	31
175	serpiente	reptil	veneno	venenosa	8	6	5	25
176	bastante	mucho	suficiente	poco	13	8	6	21
177	redondo	cuadrado	círculo	ternera	6	6	5	25
178	vivir	vida	morir	bien	6	6	5	30
179	cepillo	dientes	peinar	peine	29	5	4	12
180	tender	ropa	mano	colgar	31	4	4	12
181	tomar	coger	beber	recibir	9	5	4	28
182	nido	pájaro	vacío	alto	28	3	2	16
183	ganar	perder	victoria	vencer	8	6	4	28
184	bonito	feo	agradable	atún	9	5	4	24
185	pisar	fuerte	pie	suelo	11	5	4	23
186	pájaro	volar	nido	libertad	7	6	4	25
187	esto	aquello	eso	otro	26	9	3	12
188	cara	cruz	bonita	rostro	6	5	3	31
189	luz	claridad	bombilla	sol	8	7	6	24
190	leer	libro	escribir	ojos	27	5	2	18
191	hervir	agua	cocer	huevo	14	11	4	19
192	arriba	abajo	alto	encima	29	7	3	14
193	queso	leche	mancheo	raton	9	6	5	21
194	beso	amor	cariño	labios	17	7	5	21
195	caer	mal	daño	tírar	7	4	4	30
196	frio	caliente	hielo	calor	9	8	8	20
197	dar	recibir	tomar	regalar	'8	7	4	28
198	pastel	dulce	cumpleaños	chocolate	16	10	7	18
199	grieta	raja	agujero	pared	8	4	4	23
200	calcetín	pie	roto	sucio	10	4	3	25

Discussion

For readers who are unfamiliar with data of this type, it is perhaps worth drawing

attention to the main points of interest.

The first point to note is that there are two basic patterns in the associations elicited. Some words produce a very large number of different associations (col 8), while others are much more focused in the type of response they elicit. Among the second set, some words elicit one very clear primary response, while other words elicit a couple of strong responses, with only a small difference between the two main contenders. In this data, COMIDA produced a total of 37 different responses, followed closely by ATAQUE, PENSAR, PELEA, VECINO, CALLE and JUICIO with 36 different responses each. At the other end of the scale, three words produced a total of only 13 different responses, and very strong primary responses: SELLO (27 respondents produced CARTA), BOSTEZAR (26 respondents produced SUENO), and AZUL (25 respondents produced CIELO).

The second point to note is that while a large number of the responses are roughly equivalent to what you would expect with English words, this is not always the case. Responses like PEQUENO => GRANDE, MUJER => HOMBRE and LLENO => VACIO tend to be the same in any language. Other responses are much more culture bound, however, and often are not obvious to people from outside the culture. Some examples of this in the present data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows a set of strongly associated words in Spanish, and their translation into English. The translated words are only weakly associated in English. This is usually because the translated words just do not collocate in English, or because the Spanish words highlight things which are uncommon in English culture.

Table 3: Examples of associations that do not transfer into English

PISAR	FUERTE	step - strong
FUEGO	SANGRE	fire - blood
GARBANZO	COCIDO	chick pea – casserole
GALLETA	MARIA	biscuit - Mary
BONITO	ATUN	bonito, the fish - tuna
FERIA	NORIA	fair - big wheel
ALMACEN	GUARDAR	store - to store away
RUBIO	TABACO	blonde - tobacco
BAILAR	TANGO	to dance - tango
REDONDO	TERNERA	round - veal

PISAR FUERTE is a phrase which means to act determinedly, making a real impression.

FUEGO and SANGRE appear in the Spanish expression *a sangre y fuego*. The English equivalent of this would be *by fire and sword*. Spaniards also refer to *fire in the blood* as a way of talking about fierce passions.

GARBANZO is one of the essential ingredients of the traditional COCIDO dish. GALLETA MARIA refers to a type of plain biscuit, originally a brand name, but now widely used to refer to any plain biscuits of this type.

BONITO generally means *pretty*, but it also refers to a kind of fish similar to tuna (ATUN).

NORIA is basically a water wheel, but the word is also used to describe the Ferris

Wheels found at fairgrounds.

ALMACEN is most commonly a *department store*, but is more generally used to mean any kind of store room, hence the association with GUARDAR, *to keep*.

RUBIO generally means *blond*, but in the context of TABACO, the word is used to describe Virginia, rather than dark tobacco.

BAILAR and TANGO is an association which English speakers would easily understand, but not one that they would readily make. Tangos play the same sort of role in Spain that waltzes have in British culture.

REDONDO de TERNERA is a veal dish, in which the meat is rolled into a spiral and tied with string.

There are a number of ways in which data of this kind can be exploited with advanced learners of Spanish. What links all these tasks together is that they provide a natural context for new words, and new meanings of old words, to be learned. There is a lot of evidence that contexts of this type are extremely effective learning environments. The fact that most of the tasks require the learners to puzzle over the meaning of the words, and to work out why they might be related is also a factor that affects learning: the more you are required to work with a word, the more likely you are to remember it in the long term.

Probably the easiest form of exploitation is simply to elicit a set of responses from your own students, and then to get them to compare their results with the words listed here. You will generally find that even advanced learners do not often produce exactly the same responses as our group of native speakers. Occasionally, even a large group of learners will fail to come up with any of the responses produced by a group of native speakers, and this can lead into a discussion of why they forgot or avoided the native speaker preferences. Sometimes, the responses learners produce will be completely inappropriate, and this can lead to interesting discussions about the way words are related to each other, and how associations between words define their meanings.

Another way of using data is to provide your learners with the three associates, and ask them to find the missing stimulus word. This is a task which native speakers find very easy, but one which turns out to be very difficult for non-native speakers. For instance, with

_____ cruz bonita rostro

the missing stimulus word is CARA, but most learners would be hard-put to find this word unless they know that CARA is a synonym for ROSTRO, and that CRUZ y CARA are the Spanish words for *Heads and Tails*, as in tossing a coin. This task is one where you cannot find the right answers by translating the words into English, and it encourages students to think in Spanish. You can get a very similar effect by giving your students a chain of associations, with every other link missing. The students have to find the missing links. This task is quite hard: having to find a word that links to two other words in a chain severely constrains the possible answers.

andar _____ zapato _____ alto
(pie) (tacon)

A slightly easier task is to provide your students with three words, two of which are associated with each other, while the third one is not. The task is to identify the odd one

out.

[] pastel [] camisa [] cumpleaños

We are currently carrying out research on the use of this task as a technique for evaluating depth of vocabulary knowledge in advanced students.

If you have a complete list of all the associations produced by a group of native speakers to some words, then other types of exercises also become possible. These associations provide a wealth of information about the different meanings and uses of words. Table 4 illustrates this. In this table, we have selected few words from our stimulus list, and reported all the associations produced by this group of native speakers. With data like this, an interesting task is to group the responses to show the different types of relations that the stimulus words make with their responses.

Table 4: Complete response lists for eight Spanish words.

BOLSA =>

as a container: BASURA, PAN, PIPAS, COMIDA, COMPRA, CARGA;

different types: BOLSO, MACUTO, SACO, de VIAJE;

words that describe a BOLSA: LLENA, VACIA, GRANDE;

parts or components: PLASTICO, ASA, TELA;

as exchange: TRABAJO, DINERO, MERCADO;

others: GUARDAR, UTENSILIO, LOCAL, ESPACIO, VIDA (as in the expression 'la bolsa o la vida' meaning 'your money or your life',

JUEGO =>

sports: CORRER, PELOTA, RAQUETA;

table games: OCA, PARCHIS, CARTAS, AJEDREZ, DOMINO;

phrases: JUEGO PELIGROSO, JUEGO LIMPID, JUEGO DIFICIL, JUEGO DIVERTIDO;

others: OCIO, AZAR, VICIO, VIDA, RISA, DISTRACCION, DIVERSION, DIVERTIR.

PEDIR =>

synonyms: ROGAR, SUPPLICAR, SOLICITAR, MENDIGAR;

phrases: PEDIR MANO, PEDIR LIMOSNA, PEDIR FAVOR, PEDIR DINERO, PEDIR MUCHO, PEDIR CONSEJO, PEDIR COMIDA, PEDIR PRESTADO;

opposites: DAR, PRESTAR;

others: SUGERIR, NECESITAR, DERECHO, QUERER

RUBIO =>

hair colours: MORENO, PELIRROJO, ALBINO, CLARO, ORO; PELO, CABELLO;

unusual: EXTRANJERO, SUECO, ALEMAN;

beautiful: GUAPO, ALTO, CHICO;

others: TABACO.

CORTAR =>

synonyms: DIVIDIR, REDUCIR, TROCEAR, LAMINAR, RASGAR, PARTIR, RAJAR;

effect: HERIDA, TAJO;
tool: HACHA, CUCHILLO, TIJERAS;
objects: TRAJE, PAN, TELA, CESPED, POLLO, CARNE, PAPEL, MADERA, HILO.
related actions: COSER, PEGAR;
relations: ACABAR.

HERRAMIENTA =>

work: TRABAJO, BRICOLAJE, HACER;
tool: MARTILLO, LLAVE, SIERRA, HAZADA, LANZA, LLAVE INGLESA, DESTORNILLADOR;
synonyms: UTENSILIO, UTIL;
others: HIERBO, FACIL, ARREGLO, MECANICO.

COLGAR =>

synonyms: ATAR, TENDER, FENDER, ENGANCHAR;
objects: TOALLA, CUERDA, TELEFONO, CHAQUETON, ADORNOS, CHORIZO, GENTE, CONDENADO, CHAQUETA, ABRIGO, LAMPARA, ROPA, CUADRO, PERCHA;
others: ARBOL, CUELLO, CAER.

ATAQUE =>

medicine: NERVIOS, TOS, HISTERIA, MUERTE, ENFERMEDAD, DOLOR, EPILEPTICO, CORAZON, NERVIOSISMO.
game: GOL, GOLPEAR, SORPRESA, OFENSIVA, DEFENSA; war: ENEMIGO, FALLIDO, GUERRA, CONQUISTA, ESPADA, INOFENSIVO, FRONTAL, LUCHA, TANQUE, VIOLENTO, INDIO (from Western films), RESISTENCIA, AEREO.

Finally, once your students understand word associations, and how they are elicited, you can get them to elicit long chains of responses from a native speaker. This is quite a good way to use young, untrained assistants, since it exploits their knowledge of the language, but doesn't require a great deal of expertise on anybody's part. The chains elicited from native speakers will generally not be straightforward or transparent to non-native speakers, and a great deal of unusual, but important vocabulary can be learned very easily in the course of sorting out why words are obviously related for a native speaker. If you have access to two or three native speakers, then you can get your students to elicit multiple associations from them, instead of single associations. If you choose your stimulus words carefully, then the resulting associations can provide a rich source of insights into the real meanings of words for native speakers of Spanish. Table 5, for instance, shows a set of associations elicited for the stimulus word GUERRA.

Table 5: Multiple Associations for GUERRA

frente, soldado trincheras, armas, resitencia, clandestinidad, exilio,

propaganda, partidos, republica, patria, militares nation

muerte, genocidio civil, mundial, nuclear, hambre

racionamiento, heridos de guerra, mutilaciones, anarquistas, rojos, comunistas, nacionales

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have reported on a set of word association norms for Spanish. We hope that readers of this journal will be able to use this information in their own teaching, particularly with advanced learners of Spanish. It is obviously very useful to know how native speakers of Spanish associate words, and what association patterns they take for granted. Associations of this type are regularly exploited by writers, both in literature and in the media, and in everyday conversation as well. Non-native speakers are often seriously disadvantaged when they fail to pick up allusions of this sort, and can often misunderstand the subtleties of an interaction as a result. The more aware learners are of the unspoken links between words, the more likely they are to use the language, both receptively and productively, like a native speaker uses it.

The associations listed here are, of course, very far from a complete map of the semantic fields of Spanish. We hope, though, that the partial data we have presented will be enough to provide an idea of just how rich and fascinating a crop these much neglected fields can produce.

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Notes:

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