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Word Analysis: Contemplating the Word La Madre to Develop an Approach for the Instruction of Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract

Word Analysis is an approach to teach second language (L2) students about cultural perspectives which are understood collectively as the ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences many native speakers have regarding cultural domains within their own cultures. Word Analysis is anchored on the relationships between language and communication, and language and culture. The present study researches the history behind the dual value of the term "la madre" [mother] in Mexican Spanish to deliver a practical method that language instructors easily could easily incorporate within their materials to teach L2 culture, or that publishers could integrate within their textbooks. The primary purpose and goal of Word Analysis is to improve cultural awareness, sensitivity, and overall competence among learners. Therefore, the benefits of L2 learning as described by the "Comparisons" and "Communities" standards are supported via the content students learn by studying cultural perspectives (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

Keywords: *Word Analysis, Mexico, La Madre, Cultural Perspectives, Spanish, Colloquial Expression, Cultural Competence, Second Language Instruction*

Introduction

It is undeniable that Open Educational Resources (OER) instructional materials are steadily more commonly used in the effort to teach second languages (Thoms et al., 2018; Thoms & Thoms, 2014; Toetenel, 2014). While the general trend over the coming decades may likely be further expanded use of OERs, today the textbook continues to serve widely in many language classrooms. Cubillos (2014) confirms that in the United States, Spanish textbooks account for 69% of the total language textbook market at the high school level and 52% at the college level (p. 205). Huhn (2018) states "despite what we have come to understand about effective language teaching, the textbook continues to serve as the cornerstone of World Language instruction in many post-secondary classrooms" (p. 3). While the present study does not intend to debate the proper role or usage ratio of OERs versus textbooks within the language classroom, the above references confirm that the latter remain in use significantly.

Over the last two decades, Spanish language textbooks for elementary level college courses have increasingly emphasized cultural subject matter. This paper highlights these beginning textbooks because they frequently serve among the first introductions that second language (L2) students have to Spanish, and the culture of the people who speak the language natively. Additionally, given most associate's and bachelor's degree programs have a language requirement, beginning textbooks also reach the greatest number of students. Within these volumes, meaningful input is delivered about the often studied culture domains of Latin America and Spain such as history, art, literature, music, geography, famous people, and major holidays. Students also receive a detailed presentation on the everyday lives of the people in the Spanish speaking world. Examples of such textbooks include: *Portales* (Blanco, 2017), *Portales 2.0* (Blanco, 2023), *¡Exploremos!* (Blitt & Casas, 2018), *Mosaicos* (De Castells et al., 2015), *¿Qué Tal?* (Dorwick et al., 2007), *Puntos de Partida* (Dorwick et al., 2017), *Poco a Poco* (Hendrickson & Borrás, 1998), *¡Tú Dirás!* (Martínez-Lage et al., 2003), *Avenidas* (Marinell & Oramas, 2002), *Dicho y Hecho* (Potowski et al., 2012) and *¡Dímelo Tú!* (Rodríguez et al., 2010). These textbooks illustrate the incredible effort and ingenuity afforded by foreign language education professionals to present material on several themes like social customs, family life, regional foods and drinks, professional life, common idioms, popular pastimes and sports, indigenous people and influences, and university life. They also include side notes on various culture points that students and instructors alike will likely find intriguing. However, an area of culture instruction that could be further enhanced in these textbooks is material regarding the ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences native speakers have about certain topics within their own culture. Simply stated, their cultural perspectives.

The "Cultures" standards, as provided by *The World-readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, emphasize perspectives from a viewpoint that highlights values and ideas displayed by people who share a common culture (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, pp. 69-80). As an example, the *Standards* comment on the importance of cuisine in France and the idea that meals are events of value, and during meals, French people follow a certain cultural protocol like the avoidance of distracting conversation topics such as money or work (p. 74). The present study further enriches the understanding of cultural perspectives by emphasizing the ideas, values, beliefs and experiences of people as they are expressed through colloquial expression and the words of everyday speech.

Additionally, the findings of this paper seek to complement the expansive body of culture subject matter described in the above textbooks by introducing Word Analysis as a method through which content regarding cultural perspectives can be obtained and delivered to (L2) students. Within the current academic literature, there are multiple publications regarding the analysis of words. These scholarly works tackle the analysis of words through a wide range of investigative endeavor in disciplines such as semantics, mnemonics, grammar, regional lexical variation, etymology and morphology (Barcroft et al., 2011; Bowers & Kirby, 2010; Levin et al., 1988; Malkiel, 1993; Penny, 2000; Penny, 2002; Swan, 2011). This manuscript, by contrast, advances Word Analysis which is defined as an approach through which content on cultural perspectives is gleaned by analyzing certain words and the colloquial expressions native speakers routinely say containing these words. Word Analysis employs a novel

sociohistorical perspective in the field of L2 instruction because it uses the words of everyday speech to help unlock valuable insights regarding the ideas, values, beliefs and experiences native speakers have about certain domains within their own culture. Therefore, L2 students can obtain a glimpse into the cultural perspectives of these people.

Review of Literature

Because culture is complex and expansive with multiple manifestations in any community, it is prudent to define the term culture and then categorize this manuscript's broadened notion of cultural perspectives within the parameters of these definitions.

Brooks (1968) provides a five-part outline which comprises his definition of the term culture. Of particular interest for the present study is Culture4 "patterns for living" which Brooks further divides into two parts "formal culture" and "deep culture" (pp. 210-211). These can be summarized as culture absorption achieved by the individual via his place in society, his personal experiences and achievements, the experiences and achievements of his community, and the history of his community which is shared from generation to generation. The *Standards* define culture as "generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products –both tangible and intangible – of a society" (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, p. 69). The *Standards* also identify language as "the primary vehicle for expressing cultural perspectives and participating in social practices" (p. 70). Everett (2012) defines culture as "the set of values shared by a group and the relationship between these values, along with all the knowledge shared by a community of people, transmitted according to their traditions" (p. 6).

Brooks' concept of "patterns for living" highlights personal experiences, community experiences, and community history. The *Standards* mention perspectives of a society, while Everett draws attention to values that groups of people share. This paper's concept of cultural perspectives fits well within this three-source overview, because as previously referenced, the term is understood and comprised by topics such as the ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences people have regarding cultural domains within their own culture. These perspectives can be found in the words and expressions of everyday speech, and they are transmitted via language which serves as a conduit for communication, while it also transmits culture.

Whorf's theory of linguistic determinism states, "our linguistically determined thought world not only collaborates with our cultural idols and ideals, but engages even our unconscious personal reactions in its patterns and gives them certain typical characters" (1952, p. 41). This theory directly ties language to thought, and therefore even grammar can influence the perceptions and world views people have. Shaul and Furbee (1998) further define Whorf's theory as, "the doctrine that a language, because of its idiosyncratic lexicon (and possibly grammatical categories), determines how a native speaker of the language perceives reality and thinks" (pp. 42-43). However, the extent to which language and thought are interwoven, and the extent to which thought occurs independently from language, is debated among scholars (Clark, 1973; Jackendoff, 1987; Nuyts, 1990). Everett (2012) posits "it is immediately obvious that the most important thinking tool at our disposal, besides our brain,

is not a calculator, a book, or a computer, but language…and without language it would be impossible to sequence our thoughts well, to review them in our minds, to engage in contemplation" (pp. 49-50). However, later in the same publication, Everett also opines "even though language contributes to human thought, thinking nonetheless goes on in non-human heads also, just as it went on in pre-human hominid heads. In fact, if thought were not possible in some ways without language, we could never have achieved language in the first place" (p. 158). As an example of non-linguistic thought, Nuyts (2012) contends convincingly that when people think about three-dimensional space and movement through three-dimensional space the most efficient and therefore effective way to do so is non-linguistically (pp. 329-330). Please see Nuyts and Pederson (1997) for a comprehensive overview on the topic of non-linguistic thought.

Work in sociolinguistics has shown that people frequently employ different speech styles, dialects and vocabularies when speaking in different social contexts and locations. Sociolinguistic research has also affirmed that people within common economic strata or occupational groups actively use jargon, colloquialisms or slang terms as a means to identify with and accommodate other members of their respective stratum (Bonvillain, 1993; Penny, 2000; Trudgill, 1983). In describing the "the heart of a language," MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) states "it is found in the ways that people interact with one another in their own communities to joke, to barter, to praise, to educate and connect with one another to express love, joy, sympathy, remorse, and a host of other sentiment" (p. 30).

This paper maintains that the everyday language of native speakers, the words and expressions themselves, represent a vast resource for culture understanding. This assertion is supported by the standing that there exists a connection between language and culture (Damen, 1987; Peck, 1998; Perkins, 1992; Seelye, 1993; Shaul & Furbee, 1998; Stroinska, 2001; Thanasoulas, 2001). Fawcett et al. (1984) contend that "a culture as a whole may be characterizable as a vast integrated semiotic in which can be recognized a number of subsemiotics, one of which is language" (p. 96). Whorf (1956) articulates "every language contains terms that have come to attain a cosmic scope of reference, crystallize in themselves the basic postulates of an unformulated philosophy, in which is couched the thought of a people, a culture, a civilization, even an era" (p. 61). Even though McWhorter (2014) takes to task those elements regarding Whorfianism that he compellingly concludes are overreaching, he nevertheless comments, "readers may justifiably sense an implication at this point in my argumentation that language has nothing to do with culture, or at least nothing important or interesting. Nothing could be further from the truth…I must make clear that I am referring solely to a *particular* argument about language and culture" (p. 59). Lastly, Agar (1994) succinctly adds, "culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture" (as cited in Garrett-Rucks, 2016, p.8). For a concise but thorough overview regarding the history of scholarly work on the topic of language and culture, please see Kramsch (2011).

The present study does not wish to enter the debate regarding the extent to which language and thought, or language and culture are interconnected. Instead, based on this body of scholarly discourse, this manuscript draws the conclusion that the analysis of words and expressions to glean teachable cultural content for

L2 students has merit because language contains cultural knowledge, and its communicative value plays a central role in the transmission of culture from person to person, and generation to generation.

Goals of the Study

The *Standards* (2015) identify many benefits students realize by studying a second language. One benefit described in the "Comparisons" goal area is gaining insight into the "multifaceted nature of interaction between language and culture" (p. 91). The "Communities" goal area claims, "competence in more than one language and knowledge of other cultures empowers learners to communicate more effectively in the various environments that they will experience during their lifetime" (p. 103). The cultural subject matter derived via Word Analysis research on colloquialisms supports these benefits and would help L2 students achieve them. As McWhorter (2014) affirms, "especially intuitive to all of us is that words and expressions in our language can be cultural" (p. 59).

As an example of Word Analysis, this paper's focus is concentrated on the dual value of the word *la madre* [mother] as expressed in Mexican colloquial speech. The word *la madre* in Mexican society can be used in expression that symbolizes love and sanctity, and it is also frequently used in coarse speech and the most hurtful of insults. So severe are the possible misunderstandings that can stem from this word that foreign visitors are sometimes encouraged to avoid using the term entirely. De Mente (1996) states:

> *Madre* is used in good as well as bad references to motherhood, in prayers and in the most serious kinds of insults. In fact, Mexicans are so sensitive to the word that some 'cultural experts' recommend that foreigners simply do not use it at all because it is so easy to misuse. (p. 176)

This dual value of the term la madre can be explained by analyzing four focal points found in Mexican history, literature and society: (1) *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, (2) The matriarch of the family, (3) *La Chingada* and (4) *La Malinche*. The soft and loving quality can be traced to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and the matriarchal role of mothers within the Mexican home. The hurtful and insulting quality can be traced to the tragic history of indigenous women during the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire, from which comes *La Chingada* who is a figure that represents indigenous women raped by Spaniards resulting in the beginning of the mestizo ethnicity. Finally, the hurtful quality also stems from the story of *La Malinche*, an Indigenous Mexican woman who was given to conquistador Hernán Cortés as an enslaved person.

By conducting a historical and literary overview of these four areas, the origin of the contrasting meanings of the word *la madre* unlocks. Consequently, cultural content for the L2 classroom can be produced and taught so that students not only learn about Mexico's history and culture, but more specifically, gain awareness with respect to a unique phenomenon within the country's cultural perspectives. This outcome will help students develop their own cultural competence of Mexican per-spectives, which will meaningfully improve their experiences while interacting with Mexican people. This is the principal goal of Word Analysis.

La Madre - Background

The first source of the soft and loving qualities of the word *la madre* in Mexican Spanish is tied to the history of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. In 1531, an indigenous man named Juan Diego saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary while walking in the countryside. The Virgin of Guadalupe, as she later became known, appeared with dark skin and is affectionately regarded today as the mother of Mexico. Th is is especially true for Mexico's Catholic population which continues to be the majority in the country (Cultural Atlas, 2021). Brasch (1967) offers the following commentary about the *Virgen de Guadalupe*:

> The First Lady of most nations is usually the ruling monarch's or president's wife. There is no doubt that in Mexico she is the Virgin of Guadalupe. People have asked why she chose an ignorant peasant to carry her message. It has been explained that the choice was meant to emphasize the Virgin's love for the poorest of the poor. (p. 119)

Representations of *La Virgen* are commonly found within Mexican households and in places of business. *La Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* [The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe] located in northern Mexico City is a religious shrine that hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit each year. Among many interesting details regarding *La Virgen* during Mexico's colonial era, Taylor (1987) provides an overview of baptismal records that show the frequency of people, female and male, who were named Guadalupe, and he also describes the key religious role of *La Virgen* as an intercessor and mediator between the spiritual and physical worlds (pp. 16-21). For millions of Mexicans today, *La Virgen* de Guadalupe continues to be a sacred mother, and from her prominent place in Mexican history the word *la madre* in Mexican Spanish takes on and conveys softness and love.

The second source for the positive connotation of the word *madre* is the matriarchal figure within the Mexican home. Although Mexican society continually changes and gender roles are reforming (Cerrutti & Zenteno, 1999; Chant & Craske, 2003), historically it lends itself to the practice of *machismo* in which domestic responsibilities and the overall household are domains of mothers. Mothers in Mexico are known for placing a high priority on their families. De Mente (1996) comments:

> When used in positive references to motherhood, the word *madre* instantly conjures up an image of mothers who are a cross between angels and saints—mothers who are still virginal, who are kind, tender, loving, loyal, and self-sacrificing. In other words, the mother of Jesus Christ incarnate. They [Mexican mothers] sacrificed themselves to their children and husbands, but life within the household revolved around them, not the fathers. (p. 177)

Nobles (2013) describes the impact that the migration of Mexican men to the United States has had on the increasing number of children being raised in fatherless homes. In 1992, 1 in 100 Mexican children had a father in the United States; by 2005, 1 in 22 children had a father in the United States. In rural areas the percentage of children being raised in fatherless homes is even more pronounced (pp. 1307-1311). Nobles et al. (2015) document the adverse emotional toll that this migration

pattern has on nonmigrant mothers. While the primary motivation of this migration pattern is financial need, not machismo, a social outcome that occurs is that the central place within Mexican homes remains occupied by mothers. In summary, the history and spiritual salience of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* along with the revered status of Mexican mothers as household pillars explain why the word *madre* often has a tender, unconditionally loving value in Mexican speech and culture.

Both explanations for the hurtful and insulting property of the word *madre* stem from the violent end of the Aztec civilization in Mexico at the hands of Spanish conquistadors. The first source comes from the widespread assault and rape of indigenous women, the *madres* of the mestizo ethnicity, by Spanish soldiers. This horrible fact regarding the Conquest of Mexico has left a wound in the Mexican psyche that may never fully heal. In his book *El Laberinto de la Soledad* [*The Labyrinth of Solitude*], the famous Mexican writer and Mexico's only laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Octavio Paz (1997) says the following about this tragic truth, "*Para el español la deshonra consiste en ser hijo de una mujer que voluntariamente se entrega, una prostituta; para el mexicano, en ser fruto de una violación*" [For the Spaniard, dishonor consists in being the son of a woman who voluntarily submits herself, a prostitute; for the Mexican, in being the result of a rape] (p. 55). MacLachlan and Rodriguez (1980) assert, "The Spaniards [conquistadors] tended to view native women as part of the booty" (p. 198).

From this historical tragedy comes the figure *La Chingada* whose name is used in many of the most hurtful insults in Mexican Spanish. Paz (1997) defines *La Chingada* as "*La Madre abierta, violada o burlada por la fuerza*" [The mother who is exposed, violated or scorned by force] (p. 87). Paz continues his commentary on *La Chingada* with the following, "*Si la Chingada es una representación de la Madre violada, no me parece forzado asociarla a la Conquista, que también fue una violación, no solamente en el sentido histórico, sino en la carne misma de las indias*" [If *La Chingada* is a representation of the violated mother, it does not seem forced to me, to associate her with the Conquest which was not only a violation historically but also of the flesh of indigenous women] (p. 94).

Additionally, the word *madre* has obtained a hurtful and insulting quality from the story of *La Malinche*. Although for decades numerous scholars have justly called for a reconsideration of *La Malinche's* legacy (Candelaria, 1980; Cypress, 1991; Godayol, 2012; Romero & Harris, 2005; Tate, 2017), for many Mexicans *La Malinche* is considered a traitor to Mexico's indigenous people and history. She is remembered for directly aiding Hernán Cortés in his destruction of the Aztec Empire. At first, she was his slave and used as a translator. Later she became a vital asset in Cortés' conquest. She is credited for notifying Cortés about Motecuhzoma II's plan to ambush him. When Cortés learned of this plot, he ordered a preemptive attack on the Aztecs which resulted in most of the best Aztec warriors being killed (León-Portilla, 1987, pp. 105-110). *La Malinche* went on to become Cortés' lover and eventually she gave birth to Cortés' son which, in myth, started the mestizo ethnicity (Ashby & Ohrn, 1995, pp. 42-43). A lingering feeling of resentment or betrayal is associated with *La Malinche*, the mythical mother of all mestizos, who today represent the overwhelming majority of Mexico's population. Concerning *La Malinche*, Paz (1997) writes "*el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a La*

Malinche" [the Mexican people do not forgive their betrayal from the Malinche] (p. 94). From her name comes the term *Malinchism* which Pereira (2020) defines as, "A social phenomenon, distinctive of Latin America, which generates an internalisation of valuation patterns characterised by denying and underestimating local cultural expressions and considering foreign cultures as models of emulation" (p. 1176). In summary, the dire history of indigenous women during the Spanish Conquest, coupled with the memory of *La Malinche* and the myth surrounding the origin of the mestizo people, lead to the deeply wounding capacity of the word *madre* when used in certain expressions.

La Madre - Contemporary Colloquial Uses

The manifestation of this duality regarding the term *madre* is broadly visible in Mexican Spanish and culture. The famous genre of Mexican cinema, the Melodrama, offers titles of films with very positive usages of the word *madre*. Such titles include *Mi Madrecita* and *Madre Adorada* which translate as "My Sweet Mom" and "Adored Mother" (Standish, 1996, p. 185). There are also many common sayings that denote a very positive connotation to the word and concept of *la madre*. The following two expressions are examples: *Que Dios bendiga a quien le parió* [May God bless the one who gave birth to you] and *Madrecita Santa* [Sweet Holy Mother], which is often said during prayers. Furthermore, if a Mexican swears on his mother, *Lo juro por mi madre* [I swear it on my mother], it is generally taken and understood with utmost seriousness.

Contrary to these positive values, there is an abundance of expressions that use the term *madre* in a way that many would consider the most insulting and hurtful forms of Mexican vulgarity. The following examples are a small sample among a multitude: *Huele a madres, Me vale madres, El tráfico está de madres, ¡Ni madres!, Hijo de tu pinche madre,* and *Chinga tu madre*. In the first expression, which translates as "It smells horribly," the term *madre* is used as a synonym for the word *mierda*, which is the Spanish word for "shit." The second expression is an impolite form of saying "I don't care." The third negatively describes traffic congestion by curiously using the term *madre*. The fourth expression is used to coarsely say "No way!" when a proposition is rejected. The fifth means "Son of your deplorable mother." The final vulgarity has woven within its meaning the legacy of *La Chingada*, causing it to be amongst the most offensive Mexican profanities. It literally means, "Go fuck/ violate your mother." However, in the context of appropriate language for classroom instruction, the translation "Go rape your mother" is advised.

Pedagogical Implications

When studied through the lens of Mexican history, the origin and rationale behind these positive and negative expressions using the term *madre* are more easily understood and explained. These cultural messages are not difficult to teach. One method to convey the history, culture and overall Mexican experience behind these expressions is the use of condensed readings followed by class discussion. Throughout the textbook *Abriendo paso Temas y Lecturas* (Díaz & Nadel, 2014) readings on a variety of topics are the center of instruction, which are then followed

by *después de leer* [after reading] questions and discussion. In this same vein of teaching methodology, please see the Appendix which offers four examples of Spanish readings with English translations that encompass *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the Mexican mother, the origin of *La Chingada* and finally the story of *La Malinche*.

If during the *después de leer* follow up, students were given a list of positive and negative Mexican colloquialisms using the term la *madre*, and then were asked to evaluate those expressions against the historical summaries provided via these four readings, this paper advances the raison d'être of these dichotomous and extreme expressions in everyday Mexican Spanish would unlock. If used for a unit on Mexican culture, or a unit on *la familia* [family], these paragraphs could prompt lively ensuing class discussions and would therefore be ideal for a conversation class. The advanced vocabulary, grammar and writing would challenge composition students or those taking the third level of an elementary sequence. Heritage speakers, particularly those of Mexican descent, could learn about the history and culture of their ancestry in a way that captures the uniqueness of Mexico. By becoming acquainted with Octavio Paz, these students would perhaps take pride in learning about Mexico from one of its most famous 20th century writers. Regardless of the course or student profile, this topic and the corresponding readings would help learners grasp, understand and appreciate the dual values the term *la madre* carries in everyday Mexican Spanish. They would attain a glimpse of what the term can mean to Mexicans and how their expressions reflect its cultural and historic value. This lesson would likely endure in the memories of the students long after the conclusion of the course. As the *Standards* (2015) contend:

> Whether or not learners continue the study of a particular language throughout their formal education, the understandings gained about the nature of language and its interaction with culture carry over into future circumstances where they, as learners and workers in the 21st century, will have the confidence and competence to interact in other cultural settings. (p. 92)

Also worthy of note, Garrett-Rucks (2016) draws attention to challenges foreign language educators continue facing in the context of teaching culture. In chapter 5 of her book, successful culture learning projects are described which serve as templates for instructors to follow in their classrooms. As an additional value, this manuscript's simple lesson plan to teach Word Analysis mateiral provides educators with an easy method to deliver meaningful presentations on the cultures they target in their courses. This lesson plan could also be integrated within current OERs and textbooks as a source of new subject matter that would complement their scope of culture instruction.

In summary, efforts to teach culture that incorporate Word Analysis content will help L2 students learn about the cognitive cultural perspectives associated with the vocabulary usage of native speakers. As a result, they will continue developing their cultural competence and awareness of target cultures which will improve the experiences they have while interacting with native speakers. To reiterate, this outcome is the principal goal of Word Analysis. Otherwise, as Hendon (1980) points out, the students will learn only utterances and not the cultural appropriateness connected to these utterances (as cited in Fleet, 2006, p. 7).

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study stem from the vastness of languages and cultures. If scholars decide to conduct future Word Analysis research, how do they choose which cultural category to prioritize? Why would one category warrant attention above another? In the case of Spanish, given the number of Spanish speaking countries, how do scholars objectively target one country for research over another? Perhaps a simple solution for scholars is to give priority to a particular category or country by following the existing outline of lesson topics found in textbooks. Nevertheless, these questions illustrate the challenging exploratory endeavor scholars will face if cultural subject matter derived through the Word Analysis approach is broadly embraced for inclusion in language instruction materials.

An avenue for future research that broadens further the Word Analysis approach in an exciting way, and also employs a different method, is the use of free-listing tasks. Free-listing tasks are a common data collection technique used by linguistic scholars, cultural anthropologists and language historians (Nolan, 2002; Ryan et al., 2000; Weller & Romney, 1988; Wolfram & Schillings-Estes, 1998). This method is effective for evaluating patterns of salience, or relative order of mention of terms in a list compiled by sampling targeted groups. Salient terms are the most typical, representative and commonly used terms mentioned early in the list and by multiple respondents; for example, the top five most commonly mentioned terms. Free-listing tasks are interviews in which a researcher will ask groups of respondents to list things in a domain (example: listing the types of plants or animals in the local environment). Quinlan (2005) describes free-listing tasks as a research method that rests on three principles. "First, when people freelist, they tend to list terms in order of familiarity. Second, individuals who know a lot about a subject list more terms than do people who know less. Third, terms that most respondents mention indicate locally prominent items" (p. 2).

If applied from the perspective of Word Analysis, free-listing based research could be used to examine the cultural insights found in everyday words and expressions among the targeted groups. For example, if targeted groups of respondents within a community were asked to list the first ten words or expressions that come to mind when the interviewer says the terms *las fiestas y celebraciones* [parties and celebrations] or *tu pareja ideal* [your ideal partner], the author of this manuscript posits there will be identifiable overlapping patterns within the respondent groups for each emic category that could yield insightful content to share with L2 students. The data would likely reveal a coup d'oeil regarding the ideas, values, and beliefs that the respondents have about the selected domains. Regarding free-listing as a research tool, H. Russell Bernard (2018) comments, "Free listing is a deceptively simple, but powerful technique…you'd be surprised how much you can learn from a humble set of free lists" (p. 235). Current efforts to teach culture to language students could be well complemented by incorporating Word Analysis subject matter derived from free-listing based research.

Conclusion

The foundation of the Word Analysis approach is rooted in the belief that

cultural messages can be found in everyday colloquialisms, and they represent a treasure trove of largely untapped content on cultural perspectives. This paper understands cultural perspectives as the ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences native speakers have regarding cultural domains within their own culture. Historical and literary references are examined to glean understanding regarding the origin of the wide ranging connotation that the term *la madre* has in Mexican Spanish. The follow up discussion offers a simple lesson plan for educators to follow that examines several examples of illustrative words and expressions using the term *la madre* against a backdrop of concise readings on *La Virgin de Guadalupe*, *La madre mexicana*, *El origen de La Chingada* and *La Malinche*. The origin of the extreme dual value the term *la madre* carries in Mexican Spanish unlocks by studying these illustrative words and expressions in tandem with the concise readings. Through the Word Analysis approach, this paper demonstrates that L2 students will better understand what the term *la madre* can mean to Mexicans and the historical reasons behind its double meaning and usage in Mexican Spanish. In short, this outcome will enable learners to attain a glimpse into Mexican cultural perspectives. This glimpse will allow learners to develop an empathy which serves as the cornerstone for developing their cultural competence and sensitivity toward target cultures.

In summary, the pedagogical contribution of this study has the potential to significantly enhance the culture instruction L2 programs offer in their beginning level courses. This study's findings could also further broaden the already robust culture presentation found in elementary level language textbooks and their ancillary materials. Whether researchers continue to analyze colloquial expressions by conducting historical and literary overviews, or if they choose to use free-listing tasks to gather cultural data, the blueprint is established for an approach and method that allows cultural perspectives to unlock for the benefit of students. Lastly, while this manuscript focuses on Mexico and Mexican Spanish, the Word Analysis approach is certainly not limited to one country or language.

As language instruction professionals, our collective goal remains to continually advance the field. We must continue to embrace the challenge of teaching the culture woven within the words our students learn because "understanding the words is not the same as understanding the message" (Seelye, 1993, p. 2). By studying the dual value of the term *la madre* in Mexican Spanish, this paper's findings are a small step into the vast arena of cognitive cultural perspectives and their corresponding delivery to L2 students. The central goal of this undertaking remains to increase the cultural sensitivity and competence among L2 students which is a fundamental priority of second language instruction. The *Standards* contend, "culture cannot be understood as being static in terms of its products, practices and underlying perspectives but rather we must remain open to new hypotheses and questions as we seek to interact with cultural competence and understanding in the world of today and of the future" (p. 70). It is the sincere hope of this manuscript's author that the contribution of this paper will foster conversation around a new hypothesis that has potential to meaningfully impact our collective endeavor to teach culture, and therefore improve the understanding of our students.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

La Virgen de Guadalupe: Una historia breve

Poco después de la conquista Española, la Virgen María apareció a un campesino indígena llamado Juan Diego. La Virgen era una mujer morena y se parecía mucho a una mestiza. Le habló a Juan Diego como si fuera su hijo y le pidió que construyera una iglesia en aquel lugar que antes era el sitio de un templo Azteca en honor de la diosa del maíz y la tierra. La Virgen le dijo, "Yo soy la Madre de todos ustedes que viven en esta tierra". Juan Diego fue a decirle al arzobispo la demanda de la Virgen pero él estaba demasiado ocupado para recibirle. Cuando eventualmente llegó a hablar con el arzobispo, solamente recibió rechazo. La Iglesia no creía que la Virgen escogiera a un hombre indígena para llevar su mensaje. Decepcionado, Juan Diego volvió a ver la Virgen. Él aceptó la culpa de su fracaso porque pensó que otro hubiera podido entregar de mejor manera el mensaje de la Virgen al arzobispo. Sin embargo, la Virgen insistió en que él fuera su mensajero. Entonces Juan Diego volvió a ver al arzobispo, y con lágrimas en los ojos, le dijo por segunda vez el mensaje de la Virgen. El arzobispo decidió mandar miembros del Clero para seguirle a Juan Diego al lugar en dónde la Virgen le había visitado. No obstante, cuando el grupo llegó al destino, ellos no vieron nada y aún peor, Juan Diego se les perdió de la vista. El grupo regresó con el arzobispo y le acusaron de mentiroso y fraudulento a Juan Diego. Después del fracaso, la Virgen habló con Juan Diego por tercera vez. Le dijo que volviera el siguiente día para recibir un símbolo para llevar al arzobispo, aunque no le dijo que iba a ser el símbolo. Tristemente, Juan Diego no regresó para ver a la Virgen. Tal vez porque ya había perdido la fe. Sin embargo, la Virgen lo buscó y le ordenó que fuera al lugar en dónde apareció ante él la primera vez. Cuando Juan Diego llegó al sitio, encontró rosas castellanas, una variedad extranjera a esta región que nada más tenía cáctuses. Él recogió las rosas en una tela para llevarlas a la iglesia. Cuando abrió su tela ante unos miembros del Clero, uno de ellos se sorprendió de que las rosas se habían formado parte de la tela. Inmediatamente llamaron al arzobispo y cuando llegó, Juan Diego, con las manos temblando, dejó caer la tela al piso. En este instante una imagen en color de la Virgen apareció en la tela. Después de eso, el arzobispo no dudaba más que la Virgen había aparecido ante Juan Diego. Hoy en día hay una basílica en la loma donde se cree que la Virgen apareció y allí se encuentra el manto original (adapted and translated from Brasch, 1967, pp. 115-117; Bright, 1958, pp. 36-37).

The Virgin of Guadalupe: A brief history

Shortly after the Spanish Conquest, the Virgin Mary appeared to a peasant named Juan Diego. The Virgin was dark-skinned and she looked like a mestizo woman. She spoke to Juan Diego as if he were her son and she asked him to build a church in the place of their meeting, which used to be an Aztec temple honoring the earth and corn goddess. The Virgin told him, "I am the mother of all you that live on this earth." Juan Diego went to tell the archbishop the Virgin's demand but he was too busy to receive him. When he eventually spoke with the archbishop, Juan Diego only received rejection. The Church did not think the Virgin would choose an indigenous man to take her message. Disappointed, Juan Diego returned to see the Virgin. He

blamed himself for his failure and thought another would have delivered better the Virgin's message to the archbishop. However, the Virgin insisted that he continued as her messenger. Juan Diego went again to see the archbishop, and with tears in his eyes, he told him the Virgin's message. This time the archbishop sent members of the clergy to follow Juan Diego to the place where the Virgin had visited him. When they arrived at the destination they did not see anything, and worse still, they lost sight of Juan Diego. They returned to the archbishop and accused Juan Diego as a fraud and liar. After this failure, the Virgin spoke with Juan Diego a third time. She told him to return the next day to receive a symbol to take to the archbishop, although she did not tell him what the symbol would be. Sadly, Juan Diego did not return to see the Virgin. Maybe because he had lost faith. However, the Virgin looked for him and ordered him to go to the place where she appeared the first time. When Juan Diego arrived, he found Castilian roses, a foreign variety to that region which only had cactuses. He picked up the roses in a cloth to take to the church. When he opened his cloth in front of some clergy members, one was surprised to see the roses had become part of the cloth. They immediately called the archbishop and when he arrived, Juan Diego with his hands trembling, dropped the cloth. In that moment an image of the Virgin appeared in color on the cloth. After that, the archbishop never doubted again that the Virgin had appeared to Juan Diego. Today, there is a basilica on the hill where it is believed the Virgin appeared and there you can find the original cloth (adapted from Brasch, 1967, pp. 115-117; Bright, 1958, pp. 36-37).

La madre mexicana

La relación entre la palabra madre y todo lo que es bueno y malo en México es un concepto tan fuerte en la cultura mexicana que la palabra ha llegado a ser de las más usadas, más honradas, más sensibles y más peligrosas en todo el idioma. Históricamente, hombres mexicanos de todos los niveles sociales han pensado que la crianza de los niños es trabajo femenino y por lo tanto han sido padres ausentes la mayoría del tiempo. Esta actitud se llama el machismo. Hoy en día, la migración de los hombres mexicanos a Los Estados Unidos es otro factor por el cual muchos niños son criados en hogares sin padres. En el año 2005, se calculó que de cada veintidos niños mexicanos, uno vive sin su padre debido a la migración. En las comunidades rurales la ausencia de los hombres por la migración es aún mas destacante. Por lo tanto, las madres mexicanas viven en una sociedad que todavía tiene ragos del machismo, y por necesidad económica, un porcentaje alto de los hombres viajan al extranjero para buscar empleo. Esta combinación causa que la responsabilidad de criar a los niños caiga sobre los hombros de las mujeres mucho más que sobre los hombros de los hombres. El resultado cultural y societal es que las madres mexicanas siguen ocupando un lugar sumamente especial y son adoradas por el pueblo mexicano (adapted and translated from De Mente, 1996, pp. 105-108, 176-177; Nobles, 2013, pp. 1307-1311).

The Mexican mother

The relation between the word mother and all that is good and bad in Mexico is a concept so strong in Mexican culture that the word has become one of the most used, most honored, most sensitive and most dangerous in the entire language. Historically,

Mexican men at all social levels have thought that child rearing is a feminine job and they have been absent fathers most of the time. This attitude is called *machismo*. Today, the migration of Mexican men to the United States is another factor that causes many children to be raised in fatherless homes. In the year 2005, it was calculated that of every twenty-two children in Mexico, one lives without a father because of migration. In rural communities, the absence of men due to migration is even more pronounced. Therefore, Mexican mothers live in a society that still has characteristics of *machismo*, and out of economic necessity, a high percentage of the men travel abroad to search for work. This combination causes the responsibility of childrearing to fall on the shoulders of women much more than on the shoulders of men. The cultural and societal result is that Mexican mothers continue occupying a very special place, and they are adored by the Mexican people (adapted from De Mente, 1996, pp. 105-108, 176-177; Nobles, 2013, pp. 1307-1311).

El origen de La Chingada

Por contraposición a Guadalupe, que es la Madre virgen, La Chingada es la Madre violada. ¿Quién es la Chingada? Ante todo, es la Madre. La Chingada es la madre que ha sufrido, metafórica o realmente, la acción coactiva e infame implícita en el verbo que le da nombre. Cuando [el verbo 'chingar'] se alude al acto sexual, la violación o el engaño le prestan un matiz particular. Él que chinga jamás lo hace con el consentimiento de la chingada. En suma, chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro. Es un verbo musculino, activo y cruel: pica, hiere, desgarra y mancha. Provoca una amarga y resentida satisfacción en él que lo ejecuta. El "hijo de la Chingada" es el engendro de la violación, del rapto o de la burla. Si la Chingada es una representación de la Madre violada, no me parece forzado asociarla a la Conquista, que también fue una violación, no solamente en el sentido histórico, sino en la carne misma de las indias. Toda la angustiosa tensión que nos habita se expresa en una frase que nos viene a la boca cuando la cólera, la alegría o el entusiasmo nos llevan a exaltar nuestra condición de mexicanos: ¡Viva México, hijos de la Chingada! (adapted from Paz, 1997, pp. 82-94).

The origin of *La Chingada*

As opposed to [The Virgin of] Guadalpue, who is the virgin Mother, *La Chingada* is the violated Mother. Who is *La Chingada*? Above all else, she is the Mother. *La Chingada* is the mother who suffered metaphorically or literally the infamous coercive action implied in the verb that gives her, her name. When the verb '*chingar*' alludes to the sexual act, rape or betrayal give it a particular tinge. He who '*chinga*' [third person singular conjugation of the verb chingar], never does it with the consent of *La Chingada*. To summarize, the verb '*chingar*' is to do violence to another person. It is a masculine verb, active and cruel; it bites, hurts, rips and stains. It provokes a bitter and resented satisfaction in the one who administers it. The 'son of the *chingada*' is the spawn of rape, shame or insult. If *La Chingada* is a representation of the violated mother, it does not seem forced to me, to associate her with the Conquest which was not only a violation historically but also of the flesh of indigenous women. All of the anguished tension that inhabits us is expressed in one phrase that comes to our mouths when anger, glee or enthusiasm makes us exalt

our condition as Mexicans: Long Live Mexico, sons of *La Chingada*! (adapted and translated from Paz, 1997, pp. 82-94).

La Malinche: Una introducción breve

La Malinche es una mujer envuelta en contradiciones históricas. La Malinche nació de una princesa de Viluta, un pueblo indígena en México al comienzo del siglo dieciséis. Su estatus social le permitió ser educada, un previliego no disponible para la mayoría de las niñas de su tiempo. Durante una época de guerra y turbulencia, ella fue o capturada o vendida, y después vendida de nuevo por los Mayas como una esclava a los Aztecas. En este momento, su vida privilegiada se acabó. Sin embargo, su belleza, inteligencia y capacidad de hablar varios idiomas la separó de las otras esclavas. Ella llegó con los españoles como parte de un tributo que los Aztecas mandaron a Cortés con el deseo, irónicamente, de parar su conquista. En poco tiempo, Cortés reconoció la capacidad verbal e intelectual de la Malinche y le prometió la libertad si ella le ayudaba a establecer buenas relaciones con la gente indígena de México. Como una esclava, no tenía muchas opciónes. Aunque al inicio Cortés dudaba de su fidelidad, su preocupación se terminó cuando la Malinche le reveló que los Aztecas planeaban un ataque contra él. Cortés respondió con un ataque preventivo y como resultado los Aztecas perdieron la mayoría de sus mejores guerreros. En el año 1521 Cortés y los españoles completaron la conquista del Imperio Azteca. Además de recibir de Cortés su libertad y abundante riqueza, la Malinche también se convirtió en su amante y tuvieron un hijo. Según la leyenda, la etnicidad del mestizo empezó con el hijo de la Malinche y Cortés. No hay duda de que el éxito de Cortés puede ser atribuido directamente a la ayuda que recibió de la Malinche. Para el pueblo mexicano de hoy, ella es una figura histórica controversial y muchos la consideran como una traidora de la cultura e historia Azteca de México (adapted and translated from Ashby & Ohrn, 1995, pp. 41-43; León-Portilla, 1987, pp. 105-110).

La Malinche: A brief introduction

La Malinche is a woman wrapped in historical contradictions. *La Malinche* was born to a princess of the village Viluta, Mexico at the beginning of the 16th century. Her social status allowed her to be educated, a privilege not made available to the majority of girls of her time. During a time of war and turbulence, she was either captured or sold, and later sold again by the Maya as a slave to the Aztec. In this moment, her privileged life ended. However, her beauty, intelligence and ability to speak many languages separated her from the other female slaves. She arrived with the Spanish as part of a tribute the Aztecs gave to Cortés with the hope, ironically, of halting his conquest. Cortés quickly recognized the verbal and intellectual ability of *La Malinche* and promised her freedom if she helped him to establish good relations with the indigenous people of Mexico. As a slave, she did not have many choices. Although initially Cortés doubted her trustworthiness, his concern was over when she told him of an attack the Aztecs were planning against him. Cortés responded with a preemptive attack which resulted in the Aztecs losing the majority of their best warriors. In the year 1521 Cortés and the Spaniards completed their conquest of the Aztec Empire. Not only did *La Malinche* receive her freedom and abundant wealth from Cortés but she also became his lover and they had a son. According to

legend, the mestizo ethnicity began with the child of *La Malinche* and Cortés. There is no doubt that Cortés' success can be directly attributed to the help he received from *La Malinche*. For Mexican people today, she is a controversial historical figure, and many consider her a traitor of the Aztec culture and history of Mexico (adapted from Ashby & Ohrn, 1995, pp. 41-43; León-Portilla, 1987, pp. 105-110).