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Demonstrating a Free Listing Data Collection Approach to Cultural Instruction

Gregory De La Piedra
St. Petersburg College

Abstract

Free listing tasks are a common data collection method used by cultural anthropologists, language historians and linguists (Nolan, 2002; Ryan et al., 2000; Weller & Romney, 1988; Wolfram & Schillings-Estes, 1998). These tasks are interviews in which a researcher asks groups of respondents to list words or expressions that come to mind for a given cultural topic. This study focused on a free listing task collected from working class Mexicans about fiestas y celebraciones [parties and celebrations]. Although this topic is routinely included in second language (L2) teaching materials, common terms or slang used by Spanish speaking populations that U.S. students are most likely to interact with may not be included in instruction, creating a communication gap. Accordingly, for this study a total of 32 working class Mexican people, who were born and raised in Mexico, were interviewed using a free listing data collection method. The interviews transpired in Palmetto and St. Petersburg, Florida and in the Costa Maya region of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Through a thematic analysis, (Quinlan, 2017; Robbins & Nolan, 2019) salient terms are identified and a comparison according to gender is presented. The principal objective of this endeavor was to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity among Spanish language students by learning about fiestas y celebraciones through the words of the native speakers themselves. Pedagogical implications and example practices are provided.

Keywords: Mexico, Culture, Parties, Celebrations, Free Listing, Cultural Perspectives, Spanish, Foreign Language Education, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

Language and culture scholars have devoted considerable attention to identifying patterns of variation that characterize the speech habits of social groups. Studies of various languages have shown that people frequently employ different speech styles, dialects and vocabularies when speaking in different social contexts and locations (Bonvillain, 1993; Moshood, 2020; Penny, 2000; Trudgill, 1983; Zhang

2023; Zhou & Fan, 2013). Work in sociolinguistics such as Budiarsa (2015) has revealed that people who belong to the same economic strata or occupational groups use colloquial expression as a way to identify with and accommodate other members of their respective stratum. The Cultures Standards, as provided by *The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, emphasize the need for second language (L2) students to learn about and better understand the cultural perspectives of native speakers (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, pp. 69-80). However, scholarly articles that target and investigate slang terms as a resource for subject matter that can be used to teach cultural perspectives in the (L2) classroom are not abundant. For these reasons, this paper aims to examine the patterns of slang usage among members of a common socio-economic group, working class Mexicans, through interviews that were conducted in two cities in Florida and Quintana Roo, Mexico. Regardless of the interview location, every interviewee was originally from and raised in Mexico.

The findings of this manuscript and an example of its application via a condensed reading will help introduce to L2 learners certain cultural perspectives held by the selected socio-economic group about a topic within their own culture. This paper targets high schoolers taking upper-level Spanish classes or college students who are enrolled in the elementary sequence of courses. Given most associate and bachelor's degree programs have a language requirement, these courses reach the greatest number of students, and they also frequently serve among the first introductions that students have to Spanish and the culture of its native speakers. Finally, Spanish instructors who use Open Educational Resources (OER) or popular introductory textbooks such as *Portales 2.0 Introductory Spanish* (Blanco, 2023) or *Dicho y Hecho 11th ed.* (Sobral & Potowski, 2023) will have little difficulty when incorporating a free listing-based condensed reading within their lesson plans.

Review of Literature

The concept of slang can be understood as the use of vernacular language, stigmatized words or technical jargon (Daniels, 1994). Although slang terms have been part of human languages for over 2000 years (Trudgill, 1983), linguists often struggle with a universal or standardized definition. The controversy over what constitutes slang is probably due to the lack of clear-cut criteria for what designates a given word as slang. Linguists Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes assert that slang words are those which carry a connotation of informality, serve as synonyms for more conventional words, have a relatively short life span, and have the special capacity to mark social solidarity among its users (1998). As an example of slang's prevalence in a given language, according to the findings of Wentworth and Flexner (1967), the average American knows approximately 10,000 to 20,000 words of which 2000 are slang terms, representing approximately ten percent of the total figure. Regarding slang use according to gender, scholarly work in sociolinguistics over time has torn down stereotypes like the slang of boys or men is more vulgar, while girl's or women's slang is less so (Bayard & Krishnayya, 2001; de Klerk, 1992; Forsskåhl, 2001; Hughes, 1992). In the case of vulgarity, rather than understanding it as a speech pattern that manifests according to gender norms, Risch (1987) contends the distinction is more accurately understood as a matter of public versus private

discourse rather than gender specific speech patterns.

Latin American Spanish displays tremendous dialectal diversity that has inspired an immense amount of scholarly work in linguistics to better understand and catalogue the language's various manifestations throughout its expansive geographic footprint. Examples of book length publications in this field include Cotton & Sharp (1988), de Rosario (1970), Fontanella de Weinberg (1976), and Zamora & Guitart (1988). In his book, John Lipski (1994) dedicates one chapter for each Latin American country to describe the uniqueness of its Spanish. His commentary outlines variation within each country, and among the countries, on a range of topics like etymology, lexicon, syntax, and pronunciation. When describing Latin American Spanish, Lipski remarks, "Latin American Spanish, when compared with the dialects of Spain, embodies the same sense of the exotic and the magical as the flora, fauna and civilizations which dazzled and amazed the first European observers" (p. 1). In a recent study, Tellez et al. (2023) analyze vocabulary and slang variation among Spanish speakers according to the country of origin of social media postings like Twitter tweets. Their study notes overlapping vocabulary patterns are common among neighboring countries, like Argentina and Uruguay or Mexico and neighboring Central American countries or Andean South American countries like Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. However, interesting exceptions to these patterns are noted as well such as postings originating from Paraguay exhibit more similarities with those coming from Colombia and Mexico than neighboring Bolivia and Argentina.

Spanish in the United States is spoken by more than 40 million people, and these speakers also manifest regional vocabulary and slang variation (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Among the reasons for this linguistic phenomenon, is the origin of the Spanish spoken by the inhabitants of the various regions across the country. Escobar & Potowski (2015) identify and describe seven sociolinguistic regions of Spanish speakers. The following summary of four of the regions highlights some of the more dominant population groups. In the Southwest region, Spanish speakers of Mexican descent lead. In Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix and Las Vegas, Mexican Spanish speakers account for over 75% of the overall Spanish speaking population. In the Northeast region, people of Puerto Rican ancestry and also from the Dominican Republic prevail. In Boston Puerto Ricans account for 28% of Spanish speakers while Dominicans represent 23%. The Southeast region also has a prominent Puerto Rican population and a significant Cuban population which accounts for 51% of Spanish speakers in the Miami-Hialeah metropolitan area. People of Mexican descent represent 79% of Chicago's Spanish speakers, the largest city of the Midwest region, while Spanish speaking people comprise 29% of the city's overall population. Escobar & Potowski also document that several other Latin American countries like Guatemala and El Salvador are represented across all these sociolinguistic regions, causing vocabulary and slang variation to manifest differently from place to place. As a result of such diversity, and in an effort to bridge communication gaps, Moreno & Garrett-Rucks (2021) observe the use of "general Spanish" among Spanish speakers calling it

> A natural effort by speakers to abide by mutually intelligible, shared linguistic norms as they interact with other speakers of the language.

> The effort is certainly linguistically unconscious and for the purpose of communicating. As speakers engage in this sort of negotiation for communication by necessity, they avoid local or regional norms and focus on norms that they seem to acknowledge as shared. (p. 76)

As an interesting aside, such a large and diverse Spanish speaking population in the U.S. has also created challenges pertaining to teaching Spanish to heritage speakers, such as sociolinguistic and cultural heterogeneity, and the implementation of suitable pedagogical approaches (Potowski & Lynch, 2014).

Among the many values a language has for its speakers, one that resonates with this study is its ability to serve as a window that provides a peek into the perspectives and even emotions of its users. Scholars like Teresa L. McCarty and others have advocated for and are authorities on the topic of Indigenous culture preservation and language rights (Coronel-Molina & McCarty, 2016; McCarty, 2008; McCarty et al., 2022; McCarty & Tiffany, 2014). In their study, McCarty et al. (2011) commented that Native American youth considered their ancestral languages "my cultural language" or "my blood language" (as cited in McCarty et al., 2014, p. 83). Such a description clearly denotes an emotional bond between people and language. Among Spanish speakers, a special bond has also developed with the language. As an example, Escobar & Potowski (2015) mention that Hispanic girls felt a unique affinity with Spanish when celebrating their fifteenth birthday (*la quinceañera*), specifically when mass in church is conducted in Spanish. These girls commented that when mass is conducted in English "*le quitaba un toque especial* [it took away a special touch]" (p. 264).

This study posits that because words can carry cultural information, and language is the conduit through which cultural perspectives are transmitted among people over time, the undertaking of analyzing slang terms to obtain cultural content for the L2 classroom is a valid one. De La Piedra (2023) concurs when he describes the everyday language of native speakers as "a vast resource for culture understanding" and determines language has communicative value that "plays a central role in the transmission of culture from person to person, and generation to generation" (pp. 59-60). Furthermore, the potential of slang to act as a signal of interpersonal familiarity and group membership also provides the intellectual basis for investigating its manifestation and variation among working class Mexicans.

Scope and Goals of Study

Students prioritize cultural understanding as a motivation for taking a language course (Price & Gascoigne, 2006; Roberts, 1992). Magna et al. (2012) document that students ranked the Communities, Communication and Culture standards from among the five C's, which today are defined by the *Standards* (2015), as their top three motivations for taking a language class. This hierarchy suggests that what L2 students most want out of taking a language course is to learn about the lives and customs of native speakers through the study of their language and culture, with the ultimate goal of obtaining the necessary skills that enable them to bridge cultural and communication gaps. The *Standards* (2015) state, "Now more than ever, Americans want and need to access directly knowledge and information generated by other countries and cultures in order to be active participants and partners in the global

community" (p.101). Accordingly, the present study draws attention to slang use and routine vocabulary that are collected directly from working class Mexicans, who are all originally from and raised in Mexico, as a window into their perspectives on a selected emic topic.

As an overview, working class people often receive an hourly wage only and they typically have the same basic common denominators such as limited exposure to higher education, employment in rural or urban labor jobs, or entry level employment in stores and small businesses (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). Examples of working class jobs include farm and construction laborers, landscapers, store cashiers, grocery baggers, market vendors, restaurant servers, or hotel and janitorial workers. Although the percentage of Mexico's population with tertiary educational attainment has increased from 16% of the population in 2008 to 23% in 2018, the majority continue to not hold certificates or diplomas from tertiary or higher education institutions. Therefore, most of Mexico's population belongs to this socio-economic group, and thus their perspectives concerning cultural topics reflect those held by the majority of the people (OECD, 2019).

Within the expansive list of job types where these hard-working people are employed, this manuscript's participating respondents include restaurant workers and servers, store clerks, hotel workers, flea market vendors of multiple types, and lastly landscaping, maintenance, janitorial and roofing laborers. These workers were selected because they are widely visible in the urban scene, where the author was more easily able to conduct interviews. With regards to restaurant servers, a significant aspect of their employment entails conversation with customers. Consequently, when compared with other workers, restaurant servers have conversational skills that make them unique which has interestingly resulted in previous scholarly investigation for this reason among others (Adams, 1998; Juddin, 2017; Mirabelli, 2004).

The cultural topic selected for investigation is *fiestas y celebraciones* [parties and celebrations]. Apart from being a fun research topic, *fiestas y celebraciones* was selected because a widely known, appreciated and researched aspect concerning Mexico's festive culture is that people enjoy multiple holidays and celebrations throughout the year (Brautigam, 2016; Doering, 2006; Hoyt-Goldsmith, 2008; Porter, 1990). The following chronological list highlights various examples of Mexican holidays: January 6th (Three Kings Day), September 15th & 16th (The Shout of Padre Hidalgo & Independence Day), November 1st & 2nd (Day of the Dead), December 12th (Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe) and December 16th to 24th (The Posadas).

The practice of feasting at all levels of society during the Aztec era illustrates that *fiestas y celebraciones* were also central to the culture of Mexico's Pre-Columbian people (Smith et al., 2003). One example are the guild-based *pochteca* merchants who were known to organize rich feasts. Because they were categorized as commoners in Aztec society, successful *pochteca* were not permitted to show their abundant wealth publicly as it could offend the nobles. As a result, they would organize their famously extravagant feasts as a means to shed excessive riches (Maestri, 2021; Smith & Hicks, 2016). The *pochteca's* objective of maintaining financial balance also had a religious overtone as offerings were made during feasts to the merchant god Yacatecuhtil (Berdan & Smith, 2021). Finally, feasting could possibly be related to

the Mesoamerican philosophy of hot and cold equilibrium which permeated other aspects of science and life such as medicine, diet, plants, animals, and cosmology (Messer, 1987).

The prevalence of *fiestas y celebraciones* in Mexico's remote past and the many holidays on today's calendar explain why L2 teaching materials often incorporate segments on the various celebrations in Mexico. One example comes from the textbook *Portales 1.0 Introductory Spanish* which targets Mexican history and culture in every chapter via its *Fotonovela* series (Blanco, 2017). Although "the textbook continues to serve as the cornerstone of World Language instruction in many post-secondary classrooms" (Huhn, 2018, p. 3), Hardwood (2014) and Ur (2009) point out, "no textbook can ever completely meet the needs of a class" (as cited in Le Gal, 2018, p. 13). This is especially the case with language and culture instruction offered by globally used textbooks and the resulting conflicts that occur within the local cultural contexts of learners and instructors alike (Gray, 2000; Le Gal, 2018). To help bridge this gap, O'Keefe et al. (2007) advocate for teaching materials that include examples of *real* spoken language of native speakers so that students better grasp language nuance and variation. In a similar vein, Hardwood (2005) contends, "A range of expert and student corpora which feature various spoken and written genres and various disciplines should be used for awareness raising" (p. 154). To that end, because the culture instruction found in teaching materials can benefit by including the language of everyday conversation, and given language is a peek into the perspectives of users, and given the interests that students have in learning about culture and communicating with native speakers, this study uses free listing data collection to investigate common terms and slang that working class Mexican people routinely use on the topic of *fiestas y celebraciones*. By analyzing their everyday language, this paper focuses on similarities and differences between the male and female perspectives on the selected cultural topic, and it highlights the manner in which various terms convey a perspective on *fiestas y celebraciones* that overlaps with the Mexican *feria* [festival or fair]. The free listing data are then synthesized into a condensed reading that instructors can use in the L2 classroom for the purpose of sharing these perspectives with students, with the ultimate goal of increasing their awareness and sensitivity regarding Mexico and the culture of its people.

Free Listing

Free listing tasks are a common data collection method used by social scientists such as cultural anthropologists and linguists (Quinlan, 2017; Robbins & Nolan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2000; Weller & Romney, 1988; Wolfram & Schillings-Estes, 1998). Free listing tasks are interviews in which a researcher will ask groups of respondents to list as many words or expressions that come to mind for a given cultural topic. Tables are then produced to organize the responses and these serve as the centerpiece of data for analysis, interpretation and discussion. For example, Nolan (2002) employs free listing research to classify indigenous flora according to the knowledge that two groups of local residents demonstrate about these plants in Little Dixie, a seven-county vernacular region of central Missouri.

Methods and Procedures

A total of 32 interviews were conducted to collect data during March-June, 2024. The data were collected in Florida (Palmetto and St. Petersburg) and the Costa Maya region of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Quintana Roo, a state located on Mexico's Caribbean coast, is one of the most important tourist destinations in the country and it offers a variety of working class employment to people from around the country in venues like resorts, theme parks, cruise ship ports, and a multitude of shops and restaurants. Every respondent was randomly selected, and an equal number of female and male respondents participated. In addition, as previously mentioned, a central characteristic shared by all the respondents is every person is originally from and was raised in Mexico, and they hold working-class jobs. Nearly half of Mexico's 31 states, from across eight regions of the country, plus the federal district are represented by the respondent group, and thus the findings of this study broadly reflect Mexican perspectives on the selected cultural topic.

To conduct interviews, the author walked the streets and entered various places of business already profiled. He would then randomly approach a person who was at work but not overly busy at the time. The respondents were often on break. The author carried his faculty identification badge and a hard copy of a previously published article on Mexican culture so the respondents could validate his credentials. During initial introductions, the author displayed his institution's identification badge and publication, and shared that he was gathering data via brief interviews for an upcoming article about Mexican culture that focuses on *fiestas y celebraciones*. The author then asked the two questions mentioned below. Conversations were not recorded, instead, the author wrote every response that each respondent said in a research notebook. More specifically, the responses were numerically recorded according to their order of mention as each respondent answered the questions. Finally, at the end of the interview, the respondents were asked their age, state or city of origin and if necessary, their employment. This information was recorded in the research notebook as well.

For the sake of creating a more amicable exchange, after the initial introductions were finished, the author and respondents agreed to speak informal Spanish, which uses *tú* [you, informal] verb conjugations. Informal Spanish was proposed because the author estimated that he was older than most of the respondents and it was a gesture they seemed to appreciate, resulting in lively and entertaining interview sessions. The interviews were divided into two main questions: 1) *¿Me puedes decir todas las expresiones, palabras o sinónimos que te vienen a la mente cuando yo digo las palabras: fiestas y celebracions?* [Can you tell me all the expressions, words or synonyms that come to your mind when I say the words: parties and celebrations?]. 2) *¿Me puedes decir todas las cosas que son requisitos para que una fiesta o celebración sea buena y divertida?* [Can you tell me all the things that are requirements so that a party or celebration is good and fun?].

Data collection interviews that occurred in St. Petersburg, Florida were conducted at three Mexican stores *El Maguey, Mexico Lindo and Chile Verde and two Mexican restaurants Carmelitas and Taquitos*. Also in St. Petersburg, a roofing laborer was interviewed who was part of a crew working on several of the campus buildings

at the author's place of employment. In Palmetto, Florida, interviews were conducted at the popular Mexican flea market *La Pulga* [the flea]. In the Costa Maya region of Quintana Roo, data collection efforts took place at locations such as shopping plazas, restaurants and a hotel.

In total, 16 female respondents and 16 male respondents were interviewed. The mean age of the women is 40.4 years, and the men 38.5 years. The following tables describe the number of respondents interviewed per location and their native region from within Mexico (Please see Appendix A for an overview of each respondent's state or city of origin).

Table 1

Location of Interviews

Name of Location	Males	Females
Carmelitas, St. Petersburg FL	1	0
Chile Verde, St. Petersburg FL	1	0
El Maguey, St. Petersburg FL	0	2
Mexico Lindo, St. Petersburg FL	1	0
St. Petersburg College, St. Petersburg FL	1	0
Taquitos, St. Petersburg FL	0	1

Table 2

Number of Respondents from Each Mexican Region

Mexican Region	Males	Females
Baja California	0	0
Bajío	0	1
Central Mexico	3	2
Chiapas & Tabasco	1	2
Northern Mexico	2	2
Oaxaca	0	1
Pacific Coast	1	2
Veracruz	2	1
Yucatan Peninsula	7	5

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, a total of four free list spreadsheets were produced in order to organize and analyze the results. Two free lists were produced for each interview question. The responses listed by the male respondents are organized in free lists 1a and 2a, and those mentioned by the female respondents are organized in free lists 1b and 2b. Free lists 1a and 1b reflect the responses to the first interview question regarding the expressions, words and synonyms respondents could recall upon hearing the terms *fiestas y celebraciones*. Free lists 2a and 2b reflect the responses to the second interview question regarding the requirements of a good

party. As seen in the free lists, the column labeled *Frequency* shows the total number of times a term was mentioned across all the interviews. The column labeled *Order of Mention* shows the number of times a respondent mentioned the term among his or her top three terms, while answering each interview question (Please see Appendix B to review the complete free list spreadsheets and Appendix C for a glossary of all the terms shown in free lists 1a and 1b).

Tables 3 and 4 were produced to highlight the top six most commonly mentioned terms from free lists 1a and 1b, in response to the first interview question.

Table 3

Male Respondents - Words and Expressions for Parties and Celebration

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *La pachanga* [party]	12	9	1	2
2. *La pari* [party]	5	2	1	2
3. *El reventón* [explosion or bash]	5	1	3	1
4. *El desmadre* [big mess]	4	0	3	1
5. *El convivio* [get together]	4	0	2	1
6. *La celebración* [celebration]	3	1	1	1

Table 4

Female Respondents - Words and Expressions for Parties and Celebration

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *La pachanga* [party]	9	4	4	0
2. *El convivio* [get together]	7	1	2	1
3. *La pari* [party]	5	4	1	0
4. *La celebración* [celebration]	4	3	1	0
5. *El reventón* [explosion or bash]	4	1	0	2
6. *El aniversario* [anniversary]	2	1	0	1

Tables 3 and 4 show the word *pachanga* has the highest frequency of mention, twelve times by male respondents and nine times by female respondents. The term's order of mention is routinely first, second or third on both tables; it is clearly a salient colloquialism for Mexicans. While in Mexican Spanish the term *pachanga* is a commonly used synonym for the word *fiesta*, Moore (2001) makes a compelling case that the word is of Cuban origin. In Cuba, *pachanga* is synonymous with the dance music party culture of working-class Cubans, and it specifically refers to, "the ambience of a party" (p.152). It appears the Cuban musical legacy woven within the meaning of the term *pachanga* manifests in Mexican slang because the word itself

is used as a synonym for *fiesta*, and a good *fiesta* is a lively occasion with music and dancing. As seen below in Tables 5 and 6, the terms *música* [music], *bailar* [to dance] and *buen ambiente* [good ambience] support this assertion as all three are frequently mentioned requirements of a good party.

The top six terms as shown in Table 3 are: *la pachanga, la pari, el reventón, el desmadre, el convivio* and *la celebración*. The term *la pari* is borrowed from the English word party. The term *el reventón* comes from the verb *reventarse* which means 'to explode'. For example, the sentence: *El globo se revienta* means 'the ballon explodes'. In a colloquial sense, *el reventón* is similar to the English word 'bash'. The term *el desmadr*e is a vulgarity that can mean a mess or something disorderly. The term *el convivio* comes from the verb *convivir* which means 'to live together or interact', and finally *celebración* is a cognate of the English word celebration.

The top six terms as shown in Table 4 are: *la pachanga, el convivio, la pari, la celebración, el reventón,* and *el aniversario*. Interestingly, both tables display a nearly identical top six with the exception of #4 *el desmadre* mentioned by the men and #6 *el aniversario* by the women. The presence of the term *el desmadre* as the fourth most mentioned term among the male respondents, and its complete absence among the female respondents, hints at the perspective that men view parties and celebrations as occasions to let loose more so than women. As shown in Appendix B, this assertion is supported by other terms from free list 1a such as #11 *echar unas chelas* [to drink/ throw back some beers], #16 *echar desmadre* [to cause a big mess], #18 *la gorra* [a term that refers to crashing a party or going to a party uninvited], #19 *tomar cerveza* [to drink beer], #21 *el chupe* [a colloquialism that comes from the verb *chupar*, which means 'to suck', and it means to drink in excess], #22 *el relajo* [although not a vulgarity, this term is a synonym of *el desmadre*], and #25 *la comelona* [a colloquialism that comes from the verb *comer*, which means 'to eat', and it means to eat in excess]. Free list 1b shows that female respondents also listed terms that convey the idea of letting loose while at a party, but they are fewer in number than those mentioned by male respondents. Examples of these terms include #12 *el bodorrio* [a colloquialism that means a rowdy party], #15 *la peda* [a vulgarity that means drunkenness], and #19 *el conbeber* [this term combines the verbs *convivir* and *beber*, which means 'to drink', and it conveys the idea of a get together where people enjoy drinks].

Tables 5 and 6 were produced to highlight the top six most commonly mentioned terms in response to the second interview question, and they show significant overlap between the respondent groups. Both tables show the terms *música, comida, bailar* and *buen ambiente* and these party requirements often appear within the first three terms the respondents listed. Further, female respondents mentioned *bebidas* six times, while the men specifically named #3 *cerveza* eleven times and #4 *tequila* six times. The order of mention column shows these drinking related terms were routinely listed among their top three requirements of a good party. A clear perspective that both men and women share is that good parties are those that have an engaging environment and feature music, dancing, food and drinks.

Table 5

Male Respondents – Requirements for a Good Party

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *Música* [music]	16	7	0	6
2. *Comida* [food]	15	1	5	4
3. *Cerveza* [beer]	11	5	1	4
4. *Tequila*	6	0	3	1
5. *Bailar* [to dance]	6	0	2	1
6. *Buen ambiente* [good ambience]	6	0	1	1

Table 6

Female Respondents – Requirements for a Good Party

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *Comida* [food]	14	7	4	1
2. *Buena música* [good music]	14	6	2	5
3. *Buen ambiente* [good ambience]	9	0	1	3
4. *Bailar* [to dance]	7	0	2	0
5. *Bebidas* [drinks]	6	0	2	2
6. *Cerveza* [beer]	4	1	0	1

Nevertheless, by analyzing every party requirement the male and female respondents shared, as seen in free lists 2a and 2b via Appendix B, a bifurcation along gender lines can be deduced regarding the perspectives and expectations working class Mexican men and women have for parties. Simply stated, the free lists support the notion that male respondents view parties and celebrations as occasions to let loose more so than their female counterparts. Free list 2a shows male respondents included the terms #10 *mujeres* [women] and #11 *chicas* [girls] as requirements of a good party. Along with the presence of the opposite sex, the men also mentioned more terms related to being rowdy, drinking and even drug use, for example: #7 *alcohol*, #8 *bebidas*, #17 *cocaína* [cocaine], #18 *licor* [liquor], #22 *ambulancia* [ambulance], #27 *gente desmadrosa* [rowdy people], #28 *marijuana* and #29 *mezcal* [a type of hard liquor]. The terms *alcohol* and *bebidas* were mentioned four times each, and the terms *mujeres* and *chicas* were mentioned five times combined. Although the other terms were only listed once apiece, they jointly denote a common outlook about *fiestas y celebraciones* that the male respondents maintained.

Free list 2b shows the female perspective regarding parties is centered on spending time and sharing a meal with friends and family. The following terms support this assertion: #7 *tacos*, #8 *amigos* [friends], #9 *muchas personas* [many people], #13 *familiares* [relatives], #14 *alitas* [chicken wings], #17 BBQ, #18 *botanas* [snacks], #20 *buena salsa* [good hot sauce], #22 *pastel* [cake], #23 *agua* [water], #25

café [coffee], and #29 *pizza*. While some of these terms were only mentioned one time, it is the thematic consistency of food related words throughout free list 2b that collectively portrays this female perspective. In addition, the women mentioned *amigos*, *muchas personas* and *familiares* eight times combined. Table 4 reinforces the friends and family viewpoint as well with #6 *el aniversario*, a term that only the women used as a synonym for *fiestas y celebraciones*. Furthermore, free list 2b shows that female respondents did not mention the opposite sex, *hombres* [men], even one time, nor did they mention any terms besides those related to drinking that could convey a perspective of parties as being a wild time.

Male respondents also listed some terms that convey a perspective of parties as family-oriented events. For example, free list 1a shows that one man mentioned #14 *el cumpleaños* [birthday], and it was the first term in his order of mention. Free list 2a offers several family focused party requirements shared by the men, such as: #12 *refresocos* [sodas], #13 *piñata*, #14 *dulces* [candies], #15 *familiares*, #16 *pastel*, #21 *aguas frescas* [flavored waters], #26 *decoraciones* [decorations] and #31 *payasos* [clowns]. However, because these terms are mixed with various others that have a more unruly implication, the men display a two-pronged perspective about parties and celebrations to a greater extent than the women. On the one hand, men see parties as family time and on the other they view parties as occasions to carouse while meeting and interacting with the opposite sex. As a reminder to the reader, the difference between the mean age of the male and female respondent groups is only two years. Therefore, the terms mentioned by the men do not reflect a significantly younger group that is potentially more boisterous than their female counterparts.

Another interesting perspective the free list data show is an overtone regarding Mexican *ferias* [festival or fair]. In Mexico, *ferias* are held throughout the country and they are typically outdoor community festivals that often occur in rural areas. They include carnival rides, live music, dancing, drinking, games, abundant food, fireworks and public events like parades. Free list 1b shows that two female respondents mentioned the term #11 *la feria* as a synonym for *fiestas y celebraciones*, and both women are from the Chiapas & Tabasco region of Mexico as seen in Table 2. Free list 2b shows a variety of terms that convey elements of a Mexican *feria* such as #15 *rueda* [at a *feria*, a *rueda* means a Ferris wheel], #19 *fuegos* [fireworks], #21 *grupo de música* [music group or band] and #24 *castillos* [castle-like structures that are used at *ferias* to display spectacular fireworks]. These terms were mentioned by the same two respondents as well as another who is from the neighboring Oaxaca region. Similarly, free list 2a shows male respondents mentioned two party requirements that pertain to live music, #19 *mariachis* and #20 *banda* [music band].

Two examples of major festivals that occur annually in Mexico are *La Fiesta Grande de Enero* [The big party of January] from January 8-23 in the city of Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas and the famous *La Guelaguetza* festival which is held every July in Oaxaca. While both of these events are major celebrations that have their own unique history and characteristics, they entail multiple outdoor festivities that are consistent with Mexican *ferias*. Instructors who may want to share content with students about these festivals can explore *¡La Fiesta Grande de Chiapas!* (Visit Chiapas, 2024) and the popular children's book *We're Going to the Guelaguetza* (Butron & Guzman,

2023). Because they mentioned multiple party requirements related to *ferias* and they use the term *la feria* as a synonym for the word *fiesta or celebración*, it appears the respondents, in particular those from southeastern regions of Mexico, maintain a perspective on parties and celebrations as events that are interwoven with the concept of a Mexican *feria*.

Pedagogical Implications

The incorporation of this study's free list data within L2 teaching materials is perhaps best accomplished as a complement to current subject matter on *fiestas y celebraciones* because the data convey unique insights that people have about this cultural topic. The author suggests the use of condensed readings that summarize the findings derived from collecting and analyzing the data. For instance, towards the end of a unit on Mexican holidays, the reading offered below could be used to facilitate an in-class discussion that takes learners beyond a routine overview on given celebration and into the mindset of the people who actually observe these events. With this glimpse, L2 students could compare and contrast these points of view with their own, which is an instructional goal that provides an opportunity for them reflect, thereby increasing their cultural awareness. The English version is more appropriate for introductory Spanish 1 and 2 classes. However, should an instructor choose to challenge upper-level high school students or those taking the third course of the college-level elementary sequence, a Spanish translation has been provided in Appendix D.

Free listing data collection is a common research tool among cultural anthropologists (Nolan, 2002; Ryan et al., 2000). This method employs random interviews among people who share similar backgrounds. During each interview, the same key questions are repeated about a selected cultural topic and the researcher writes down the terms each person states, in the order in which they were mentioned. These terms are then analyzed to glean patterns of overlap and difference regarding the respondents' perspectives about the cultural topic. Free list research has shown that working class Mexicans use over 40 different synonymic terms in reference to *fiestas y celebraciones* [parties and celebrations], and they understand "good parties" as those that have music, dancing, drinks, a festive ambience and abundant food. Men and women routinely call parties a pachanga which is a colloquialism that possibly stems from Cuba's dance music party culture, referring to "the ambience of a party" (Moore, 2001, p.152). Mexicans also refer to parties as un *reventón* [an explosion or bash], which comes from the verb *reventarse* [to explode], and un *convivio* [a get together], which comes from the verb *convivir* [to live or interact with others].

Free listing data show there is some divergence between the male and female perspectives regarding parties and celebrations. For many women, the focus of a party is spending time with friends and

family, and the goal is to celebrate events like anniversaries. When they mentioned the requirements of good parties, female respondents stated the term *comida* [food] most often. They also listed multiple terms related to food like *tacos, alitas* [chicken wings], *botanas* [snacks], *buena salsa* [good salsa], *pastel* [cake] and *café* [coffee] along with other friends and family-oriented terms like *amigos* [friends] and *familiares* [relatives]. As synonyms for the word *fiesta or celebración*, women mentioned terms like *convivio* [get together], *aniversario* [anniversary], and *reunión* [reunion].

Male respondents understood parties and celebrations as family-oriented occasions as well, and mentioned some of the same synonyms such as *convivio* and *reunión*. Like the women, the men mentioned party requirements such as *familiares* and *pastel*, and they listed others like *refrescos* [sodas], *dulces* [sweets], and *payasos* [clowns] which convey a party where children are present. However, the male respondents also maintained a perspective that parties and celebrations are moments to let loose with friends while interacting with the opposite sex. Men sometimes use the term *desmadre* [a vulgarity that means a big mess] as a synonym for *fiesta or celebración* whereas none of the female respondents mentioned this colloquialism. Male respondents also mentioned *mujeres* [women] or *chicas* [girls], and *gente desmadrosa* [rowdy people] as requirements of a good party along with numerous alcohol related terms such as *cerveza* [beer], *tequila*, *licor* [liquor] and *mezcal* [a type of hard liquor]. Not one woman mentioned *hombres* [men] as a requirement of a good party, and while female respondents mentioned drinking related terms, they were fewer in number by comparison.

The data also identify an interesting overtone specific to the perception of a good party and elements of a Mexican *feria* [festival or fair]. *Ferias* are outdoor community festivals, often held in rural areas throughout the country, which include games, carnival-style rides like the Ferris wheel, live music, fireworks and parades in addition to the common attributes of a good party mentioned above. Three female respondents from southeastern Mexico mentioned terms like *juegos* [games], *rueda* [Ferris wheel], *fuegos* [fireworks], *grupo de música* [music group or band] and *castillos* [large castle-like structures that display elaborate fireworks] when they were asked to list the requirements of a good party. Two male respondents listed *mariachis* and *banda* [music band] which pertain to live music. Finally, two respondents also used the term *la fiera* as a direct synonym for the terms *fiesta or celebración*. Collectively, the data suggest that for working class Mexicans, perhaps in particular for those who are from southeast Mexico, parties and celebrations are a cultural event that is interwoven with *las fieras*.

By giving numerous examples of *real* language collected directly from working class Mexican people, this reading offers L2 students a glimpse into their perspectives on *fiestas y celebraciones*. Considering the previously outlined prevalence of Spanish speakers who are of Mexican descent throughout the United States, and the integral role parties and celebrations play within their culture, students should learn these words and colloquialisms, and the cultural perspectives they convey. In a class discussion format, students can compare their own perspectives with those mentioned in the reading to find points of commonality and difference. Apart from being fun and engaging, this exercise can help to reduce barriers between common people from Mexico and L2 students because when overlapping perspectives regarding cultural topics are discovered, the divides between people are more easily bridged. This outcome is a central objective of L2 education, and the inclusion of subject matter derived via free listing research will certainly support educators in this undertaking. The *Standards* expressly point out, "all students need to understand diverse cultural perspectives that exist both within the United States and other countries in order to function appropriately in varied cultural and linguistic contexts that they may encounter in their future" (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015, p. 68). The combination of this simple, yet meaningful, condensed reading and a corresponding in-class discussion activity strives to directly address this critical mandate.

Future Research

Any language represents an extensive arena for the study of cultural perspectives. Spanish is robust due to its number of global speakers and the language's expansive geographical footprint. The author's choice of *fiestas y celebraciones* as the targeted culture topic for this small study is a first step into an array of topics worthy of analysis. Additionally, while this paper targets Spanish and the cultural perspectives of working-class Mexicans, free listing research is certainly not limited to one language, group of people or country. Instead, researchers have an immeasurable number of avenues they could explore in the effort to expand the use of this research tool in the field of Foreign Language Education (FLE). As an example, a study could be done on the topic of relationships, beauty and aesthetics. A researcher could ask respondents to list terms that come to mind when they are asked: What is your notion of an ideal partner? How does this person look? What are the qualities about this person that you value most? Subject matter derived from this data could be used to complement instruction about Valentine's Day or *El día del amor y la amistad* [The day of love and friendship] as it is called in Mexico. Another research topic would be to compare and contrast the manner in which a multi-national holiday is observed. For example, how do the Mexican and American Christmas seasons differ? Respondents could list terms when answering questions like: What do you most look forward to when the Christmas season arrives? What are the things or events that make this season special for you and your family? Furthermore, apart from comparisons on the basis of gender, studies could compare respondent groups on the basis of urban vs. rural communities, geographical factors like coastal vs. mountainous regions, or between different generations of people from the same community. In summary, by

using instructional content derived from free listing research as a complement that enriches current instruction in the L2 classroom, the author contends students will become more culturally informed and aware. This outcome provides the means for students to more easily interact with native speakers, which is the first domino to fall in an effect that can lead to new amicable relationships between groups of people who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important goal of L2 instruction is to help students become acquainted with, and knowledgeable about, the cultural perspectives of other societies. This knowledge is necessary to not only better understand the language itself, but also to successfully meet and interact with native speakers in an increasingly globalized environment. When this outcome is not achieved, García (1992) calls it "cross-cultural miscommunication" (p. 387), and Green and Smith (1983) articulate the same negative result as a "frame clash" (as cited in García, 1992, p. 389). Clearly, neither of these two results is desirable. To help foster this central learning objective, this study highlights free listing-based research. This method employs random interviews to obtain pertinent cultural data directly from targeted respondent groups regarding their perspectives about a selected topic, from within their own culture.

The targeted respondents for this paper are working class Mexicans, who are all originally from and were raised in Mexico. Free listing data collection helped to assemble an equally divided group of 32 male and female respondents who collectively represent eight regions of Mexico and the nation's capital city. This group of people listed over 40 synonymic terms and expressions for the cultural topic *fiestas y celebraciones*. In addition, the respondents mentioned more than three dozen items they consider to be requirements of a good party. Apart from the sheer number and variety, the lists of terms are very descriptive and they cast a unique light onto the perspectives and expectations that working class Mexican people have about parties and celebrations, which unquestionably play an integral role in their culture. Based on this data, a condensed reading was produced to demonstrate how cultural content derived from free listing research can be easily used by educators to enhance instruction by introducing L2 students to the perspectives of native speakers in a distinct way.

While free listing may presently be an under-utilized research approach in the field of FLE, this manuscript illustrates that it has the potential to produce subject matter that can play a meaningful role in today's language classrooms. This paper and its findings correlate well with the *Standards*' premise that "culture cannot be understood as being static in terms of its products, practices, and underlying perspectives" (p. 70). Moreover, the results of this paper further endorse the concept of targeting colloquial expression as a resource for teachable material regarding the perspectives people have on topics within their own culture. The free listing data have shown that cultural topics are dominated by a corpus of culturally salient terms that groups of people share, as well as a large number of novel terms unique

to individual speakers. An analysis of these terms yielded multiple insights into the values, beliefs and perceptions among the respondents with respect to the selected topic. It is hoped that this research will lend further validation to the importance and merit of analyzing the words of everyday conversation as a mirror that reflects a candid portrait of culture. The benefit of sharing that portrait with L2 students, and the increased cultural competence and sensitivity they will enjoy as a result, makes similar future research needed and certainly warranted. In short, researchers must continue to look for new ways to harvest cultural data, and in doing so, provide students with instruction that will help bring linguistically and culturally diverse communities together.

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Appendix A

Respondents' Origins

Male respondents from each state or city:

Coahuila:	1
Durango:	1
Hidalgo:	1
Michoacán:	1
Puebla:	1
The State of Mexico:	1
Quintana Roo:	4
Tabasco:	1
Veracruz:	2
Yucatán:	3

Female respondents from each state or city:

Chiapas:	1
Durango:	1
Guanajuato:	1
Guerrero:	1
Mexico City:	1
Michoacán:	1
Oaxaca:	1
Puebla:	1
*Quetzaltenango, Guatemala:	1
Quintana Roo:	4
Tamaulipas:	1
Veracruz:	1
Yucatán:	1

Appendix B

(1) Complete Free List for Words and Expressions Used for Parties and Celebrations

1a. Male Respondents

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *La pachanga* [party]	12	9	1	2
2. *La pari* [party]	5	2	1	2
3. *El reventón* [explosion/bash]	5	1	3	1
4. *El desmadre* [big mess]	4	0	3	1
5. *El convivio* [get together]	4	0	2	1
6. *La celebración* [celebration]	3	1	1	1
7. *El reve* [explosion/bash]	3	0	1	2
8. *El bailongo* [dance party]	3	0	2	0
9. *El guateque* [house party]	3	0	0	1
10. *El cotorreo* [a party where people mingle and talk]	2	0	0	1
11. *Echar unas chelas* [to drink/throw back some beers]	2	0	0	1
12. *La comemoración* [commemoration]	1	1	0	0
13. *La convivencia* [get together]	1	1	0	0
14. *El cumpleaños* [birthday]	1	1	0	0
15. *El dieciséis de septiembre* [sixteenth of September]	1	1	0	0
16. *Echar desmadre* [to cause ruckus or a big mess]	1	1	0	0
17. *La festividad* [festivity]	1	0	1	0
18. *La gorra* [a party that has been crashed]	1	0	1	0
19. *Tomar cerveza* [to drink beer]	1	0	1	0
20. *El baile* [the dance]	1	0	0	1
21. *El chupe* [a party with abundant drinks]	1	0	0	1
22. *El relajo* [rowdy party]	1	0	0	1
23. *Vámonos de pato de perro* [an expression that means to go on a bar crawl or from house to house]	1	0	0	1
24. *El borrlongo* [wild party]	1	0	0	0
25. *La comelona* [a party with abundant food]	1	0	0	0
26. *El toquín* [music party]	1	0	0	0

1b. Female Respondents

Term	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *La pachanga* [party]	9	4	4	0
2. *El convivio* [get together]	7	1	2	1
3. *La pari* [party]	5	4	1	0
4. *La celebración* [celebration]	4	3	1	0
5. *El reventón* [explosion/bash]	4	1	0	2
6. *El aniversario* [anniversary]	2	1	0	1
7. *La reunión* [reunion]	2	1	0	1
8. *El cumpleaños* [birthday]	2	0	1	1
9. *La diversión* [entertainment/fun time]	2	0	1	1
10. *Vamos a divertirnos* [let's go have fun]	2	0	1	1
11. *La feria* [festival/fair]	2	0	0	1
12. *El bodorrio* [rowdy party]	1	1	0	0
13. *La parranda* [binge]	1	0	1	0
14. *Ir a convivir* [to go get together]	1	0	1	0
15. *La peda* [a vulgarity that means a drunken party]	1	0	1	0
16. *El cotorreo* [a party where people mingle and talk]	1	0	0	1
17. *Irse de fiesta* [to go out partying]	1	0	0	1
18. *La carnita asada* [an event that serves roasted meat]	1	0	0	0
19. *El conbeber* [a get together with drinks]	1	0	0	0
20. *El concierto* [concert]	1	0	0	0
21. *El guateque* [house party]	1	0	0	0
22. *Ir a chismear* [to go gossip]	1	0	0	0
23. *La reunión familiar* [family reunion]	1	0	0	0
24. *El traje* [potluck]	1	0	0	0

(2) Complete Free List for Words and Expressions Used for Requirements for a Good Party

2a. Male Respondents

Item	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *Música* [music]	16	7	0	6
2. *Comida* [food]	15	1	5	4
3. *Cerveza* [beer]	11	5	1	4
4. *Tequila*	6	0	3	1
5. *Bailar* [to dance]	6	0	2	1
6. *Buen ambiente* [good ambience]	6	0	1	1
7. *Alcohol*	4	2	2	0
8. *Bebidas* [drinks]	4	0	1	1
9. *Amigos* [friends]	3	0	0	0
10. *Mujeres* [women]	3	0	0	0
11. *Chicas* [girls]	2	1	0	1
12. *Refrescos* [sodas]	2	0	1	0
13. *Piñata*	2	0	0	1
14. *Dulces* [sweets]	2	0	0	0
15. *Familiares* [relatives]	2	0	0	0
16. *Pastel* [cake]	2	0	0	0
17. *Cocaína* [cocaine]	1	1	0	0
18. *Licor* [liquor]	1	1	0	0
19. *Mariachis*	1	1	0	0
20. *Banda* [music band]	1	0	1	0
21. *Aguas frescas* [fresh/flavored waters]	1	0	0	0
22. *Ambulanica* [ambulance]	1	0	0	0
23. *Botanas* [snacks]	1	0	0	0
24. *Buen anfitrión* [good host]	1	0	0	0
25. *Carnitas* [good meats]	1	0	0	0
26. *Decoraciones* [decorations]	1	0	0	0
27. *Gente desmadrosa* [rowdy people]	1	0	0	0
28. *Marijuana*	1	0	0	0
29. *Mezcal* [a type of hard liquor]	1	0	0	0
30. *Mucha gente* [many people]	1	0	0	0
31. *Payasos* [clowns]	1	0	0	0
32. *Uno que otro gay* [one or two gay men]	1	0	0	0

2b. Female Respondents

Item	Frequency	Order of Mention		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1. *Comida* [food]	14	7	4	1
2. *Buena música* [good music]	14	6	2	5
3. *Buen ambiente* [good ambience]	9	0	1	3
4. *Bailar* [to dance]	7	0	2	0
5. *Bebidas* [drinks]	6	0	2	2
6. *Cerveza* [beer]	4	1	0	1
7. *Tacos*	4	0	2	0
8. *Amigos* [friends]	3	0	0	0
9. *Muchas personas* [many people]	3	0	0	0
10. *Alcohol*	2	1	0	1
11. *Juegos* [games]	2	0	2	0
12. *Cantar* [to sing]	2	0	0	0
13. *Familiares* [relatives]	2	0	0	0
14. *Alitas* [chicken wings]	1	1	0	0
15. *Rueda* [wheel/Ferris wheel]	1	1	0	0
16. *Tequila*	1	1	0	0
17. *BBQ*	1	0	1	0
18. *Botanas* [snacks]	1	0	1	0
19. *Fuegos* [fireworks]	1	0	1	0
20. *Buena salsa* [good hot sauce]	1	0	0	1
21. *Grupo de música* [music group]	1	0	0	1
22. *Pastel* [cake]	1	0	0	1
23. *Agua* [water]	1	0	0	0
24. *Castillos* [fireworks castles]	1	0	0	0
25. *Café* [coffee]	1	0	0	0
26. *Contar chistes* [to tell jokes]	1	0	0	0
27. *Evento de deportes* [sports event]	1	0	0	0
28. *Invitados* [guests]	1	0	0	0
29. *Pizza*	1	0	0	0