

# AILA 2021

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Virtual

# Vocabulary production/word association of children and adolescent EFL learners: similarities or differences? Preliminary data from the semantic field of ANIMALS

**Submission Status :** Accepted

**Submission Type :** Focused

## **Abstract :**

This presentation will focus on the English productive vocabulary of Spanish children and adolescents, learners of English as a foreign language, in the semantic field of ANIMALS. This field has attracted attention in clinical research as well as in lexical availability studies. Likewise, ANIMALS is one of the semantic fields language learners are exposed to in ELT textbooks. However, to our knowledge, there are no comparative studies on the lexical production of EFL learners at different educational stages, different age range, and amount of language instruction. This study contributes to fill this gap by looking at the words generated in semantic fluency task by 45 primary school children and 45 adolescents at sixth grade (12- year-olds) and second year of Spanish post-obligatory education (12th grade ) (17-year-olds) respectively. The specific objectives were (i) to compare their vocabulary production in terms of the number of words produced in response to the cue-word ANIMALS, and (ii) to ascertain whether there were similarities or differences in the actual words retrieved by each group. The data collection process was identical for the two groups: they performed the task in school time and received identical instructions in English and Spanish: they were asked to write as many words as came to their mind in response to the cue-word in two minutes. The results show that the productive vocabulary in the semantic field of ANIMALS increases significantly at 12th form as compared to 6th grade. As to the actual words retrieved by the two groups, the qualitative analysis of the top 20 words reveals a high degree of similarity: 15 out of the 20 words are found among the top 20 of each group. However, differences are observed in the number of learners who retrieved each word in each group. The findings point to significant age differences concerning productive vocabulary knowledge related to the semantic domain of Animals, but a high degree of similarity as far as the words most frequently associated to this semantic category by 6th and 12th graders. This seems to point to a similar structure and organization of the lexicon of EFL learners, as regardless of age/grade the words most frequently recalled are identical in the two age-groups.

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**Submission Summary :** This study compares the vocabulary production/word association of 6th and 12th EFL learners in response to the prompt ANIMALS. The results provide evidence of a significant higher word production in 12th grade as compared to 6th grade EFL learners. As to the actual words retrieved by the two groups, the qualitative analysis of the top 20 words revealed a high similarity in the words retrieved by children and adolescents.