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The present book analyses the role of gender in the acquisition of a second (L2) or a foreign language (FL)¹. In particular, it focuses on lexical acquisition and thus, gender is studied in relation to aspects such as vocabulary learning, assessment and use, as well as to vocabulary teaching and learning materials.

An introductory chapter by Jane Sunderland familiarises the reader with three different areas into which the field of gender and L2 education can be divided. The first is the issue of gender itself in the L2 (e.g. the distinction between 'natural gender' and 'grammatical gender' or the study of gender-related language change). The second area involves learning and teaching processes, which may actually be gendered, such as attitude, beliefs, learning strategies and cognitive or psycholinguistic processes. The third domain has to do with the ways in which gender is presented in teaching materials. This initial subdivision into these three areas also provides the lines along which the chapters of the book can be classified. Additionally, this chapter describes the different perspectives from which gender has been studied, both at the individual and at the social level, highlighting the lack of research on gender and SLA at both levels. This scarcity of studies, together with the many different teaching and learning contexts in which they have been conducted, may likely explain the mixed results that have been obtained so far (i.e. either favouring boys, girls, or not showing any significant difference between them).

After this lead-in chapter, the rest of the book falls into two distinct parts. The first one, entitled '*Gender tendencies in lexical acquisition, development and use*' consists of six chapters that aim at analysing how males and females perform in tasks with a vocabulary component or in different types of lexical tests. In this part, gender is understood as 'biological sex' and in the analyses conducted it is taken as an independent variable that may explain lexical performance.

Chapter 1 by Cindy Brantmeier explores a possible connection between gender and the quality of units recalled from L2 texts. The participants in her study are native English speakers learning Spanish at university at an intermediate level. They are asked to read a passage on a boxing match (which male students prove to be significantly more familiar with) and one on a frustrated woman visiting her college roommate (towards which female learners exhibit greater topic familiarity than males). Immediately after reading each text, they recall and write down as much as they can about what they have read. These inferences are then classified into correct literal idea units (correct facts based on the usual meanings), inferred units (when students go beyond the text) and incorrect idea units. Both male and female readers recall more literal ideas from the text with a more familiar topic and females tend to draw more inferences from the familiar text than males do. However, no difference is found between the numbers of incorrect ideas written by each group. The author suggests that further research could examine whether assessment tasks may be affected by gender in gender-neutral texts, so as to avoid any bias when testing reading comprehension.

In Chapter 2, Mercedes Díez Prados analyses the texts produced by several groups of university students, who differ in terms of gender (male/female) and nativeness (native-NS-/non-native speakers of English -NNS-). Among the NNS, she also distinguishes between those whose mother tongue is a Romance language or a Germanic one. In her analysis she chooses different types of vocabulary measures, e.g. lexical richness and lexico-pragmatic resources, such as grammatical metaphors (nominalizations) and epistemic adverbials (certainty and doubt adverbs). Results show that significant differences are obtained with the variable 'gender' in relation to most of the measures. For instance, the NNS males outperform the NNS females in lexical variation, whereas females outperform males in the use of nominalizations, thus giving the idea that females' language tends to be more formal. However, males use more certainty adverbs, which usually convey degree of self-reliance or assertiveness. It can also be seen that language typology does not interact with gender (i.e. no differences are found when participants from the same gender but with different first language families are compared). Nevertheless, the family to which a language belongs can determine the amount of nominalizations encountered or the degree to which lexical variation can fluctuate.

The next four chapters present studies that have been conducted in the framework of the same research project at the University of La Rioja, which investigates the development of lexical competence in English as a FL in primary and secondary education. Therefore, the chapters focus on different tests that are part of a large battery used in the project. In all cases, lexical performance is studied in relation to the variable 'gender'.

In Chapter 3, M. Pilar Agustín Llach looks at lexical inventions in the compositions written by learners in the second year of secondary education. The study reports no significant differences in the amount of lexical creations used by boys and

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girls and students from both genders also behave alike in the use of the lexical inventions subtypes. For example, both groups use foreignizing and literal translations more often than word coinages, which may be explained by their low proficiency level and their frequent recurrence to the first language as a source for these inventions. The young age of the students and the homogeneous learning context in which the FL is learned are other suggested reasons for this lack of significant differences. However, it is also pointed out that both groups may probably use similar cognitive processes when learning and using vocabulary, therefore it is perfectly plausible that gender differences do not exist in this particular area of expertise.

In the next chapter, Almudena Fernández Fontecha considers the possible relationship between gender, motivation and attainment. She operationalises attainment as the scores obtained in a lexical availability test, where 13-14 years old English learners have to generate as many words as possible for 6 cue words in 12 minutes (2 per word). She finds out that girls outperform boys in this task and that most of the learners are motivated irrespective of gender. Extrinsic motivation is higher than intrinsic motivation for both groups, although females are more intrinsically motivated than males. Explanations suggested for this female superiority range from potential biological/cognitive advantages for declarative memory to more socially-oriented reasons, such as stereotypes about girls 'being good at languages', which might affect motivation towards learning English. All in all, the author points out that correlations between motivation and achievement are not high, which means that many other factors should be at play in determining linguistic attainment.

Rosa María Jiménez Catalán starts chapter 5 by reviewing different types of vocabulary tests and summarising what previous studies have revealed about their functioning, paying special attention to how boys and girls have each been shown to perform on them. As she is interested in seeing the effects of the type of test on gender performance, her study reports the results of a group of primary education students on the 1,000 *Word Test* (WT) (Nation, 1983); the 2,000 band from the *Vocabulary Levels Test* (VLT) (Schmitt et al., 2001); a cue word test and a written composition. The former two assess receptive vocabulary, while the latter assess productive vocabulary. Results of the four tests do show a positive correlation and it is also worth mentioning that the cue word test generates more types than the composition, at least at these particular low levels. In relation to gender, while girls and boys perform similarly in the receptive tests, girls are significantly better than boys in the productive ones. This outcome is attributed to girls' higher degrees of motivation and to an effective use of vocabulary consolidation strategies, which they may use more often than boys.

Chapter 6 by Soraya Moreno Espinosa presents data on a different test, Lex30 (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000), which consists of 30 stimulus words of different frequencies and to which students are asked to provide quick association responses. Results from the fourth, fifth and sixth year of primary education evidence that boys and girls keep gaining vocabulary throughout the three years, as the mean numbers of tokens and types recalled progressively increases. Also the words produced

become slightly more difficult throughout the years. Although some of the associations provided may reflect different social influences on the two genders, girls are only significantly better than boys in the sixth grade in the amount of tokens recalled. There are no striking differences between the two genders in the sort of word categories recalled or the type of associations provided, despite the fact that the oldest boys seem to change their preference for syntagmatic responses in favour of paradigmatic associations.

The second part of the book, entitled '*Gendered words: Representations and identities*', is formed by four chapters. In this section, gender is considered from a socio-cultural point of view, which is the perspective defended, for instance, by Cameron (2009). Gender is seen as a state continually being constructed and in this process other individuals are also inevitably taken into account. As Sunderland acknowledges in the first chapter, it is in this construction of oneself and others that vocabulary is precisely an important tool. This notion of gender leads to qualitative research quite naturally, which is why most of the chapters in this section adopt qualitative methodologies.

In chapter 7, Allyson Jule examines teacher talk in a grade two class with Punjabi Canadian students. She conducts classroom observations for about a year in one of the very few heritage schools run by Punjabi immigrants in Canada. She also interviews the teacher, Mrs. Smith, an Anglophone Canadian who does not speak Punjabi. The researcher notices an imbalance between the contributions to the class made by boys and girls, as the girls in the classroom only speak very rarely. After analysing the amount of tokens produced by boys and girls and the speech acts in these classes, she concludes that the teacher does certainly show her attitudes towards gender -and also ethnicity-. She finds out that Mrs. Smith either ignores the girls, interacts with them through corrections of their interventions or summarily dismisses their contributions, thus leaving no linguistic space for them to use in the classroom. The study offers the reader some points of reflection on this teaching situation that could also be relevant to other settings.

In the next chapter, Mercedes Bengoechea and José Simón concentrate on the ways that Spanish as a FL materials have dealt with gender in the last decade, as the issue of gender identity in language books has recently generated controversy. More specifically, they study how professional titles and jobs are presented in the sections devoted to occupations in textbooks and grammars. Drawing on a corpus of more than 60 books, these are two interesting conclusions they reach. First, the number of feminine titles is considerably lower than the number of masculine ones, and just those feminine terms accepted by the Language Academy are liable to appear in pedagogic materials. Second, they see no evidence in these books of the debate on language and gender, as textbooks do not follow the non-sexist policies promoted by governments. This is interpreted by the authors as a way of preserving (intentionally or not) an 'androcentric status quo' and they raise the alert about this current situation.

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In chapter 9, Julieta Ojeda Alba relates gender, humour and vocabulary in EFL learning. She analyses the instances of humour found in the compositions of English learners in primary school (grade 4) and secondary school (grade 7). The data comes from the project at the University of La Rioja mentioned above and complements findings presented in the previous chapters. In this quantitative and qualitative study, the author shows that boys do definitely attempt to be more humorous than girls, especially at grade 7, and that exaggeration and hyperbole are two widely used resources when trying to be amusing. The lack of humour in female writing is interpreted as an echo of old traditional constraints on women to make jokes. Hence, it is concluded that gendered roles can determine the presence of humour when writing.

Finally, the participants in the study by Antonio García Gómez in the last chapter are undergraduates training to be primary school English teachers. They are asked to create advertisements for toys devised for boys and toys devised specially for girls, as well as for unisex toys. The main aim of the study is making future teachers aware of any prejudiced attitudes they may show and helping them realise the importance of their role in the development of children's identity. When analysing their written scripts, patterns of lexical choice are identified. Those adverts on boys' and girls' toys reveal males' biased attitudes towards girls, as the lexical choices show that they consider them less capable. A close inspection of the unisex toys' adverts evinces that boys are usually seen as 'agents' and girls as 'emotional' beings, thus reinforcing old stereotypes. These results point to a need for education in gender sensitivity.

To conclude, this book offers a good selection of studies that will be attractive to both vocabulary and gender researchers, as well as to any applied linguists with an interest in these topics. Language teachers may also find it useful, as most chapters give valuable insights to improve teaching practices and some raise questions on assessment techniques. Even curriculum planners or textbook writers can benefit from the reading, as it offers some food for thought about course arrangements and educational planning. Nevertheless, findings presented in this book are neither conclusive nor unquestionable, as the gender variable is a complex one to study. Fortunately, books like the present one and a growing amount of research recently published in the area (see for instance Jule 2008) are helping to cast light on the potential implications of gender in SLA, as well as on the role of SLA in gender construction.

NOTE

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1. 'L2' will be used as a general term to refer to second and foreign languages. In cases where it is relevant to make reference to the foreign language, 'FL' will be used.

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