



Revista EntreLinguas

ISSN: 2447-4045

ISSN: 2447-3529

Araraquara SP: Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho Faculdade de Ciências e Letras Campus de Araraquara

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Revista EntreLinguas, vol. 9, e023031, 2023, January-December
Araraquara SP: Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita
Filho Faculdade de Ciências e Letras Campus de Araraquara

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v9i00.15903>

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LEXICOGRAPHY AND SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE/SECOND LANGUAGE: DEFINITIONS THROUGH WORD PUZZLES IN THE SPANISH CLASSROOM

LEXICOGRAFIA E ESPANHOL COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA/SEGUNDA LÍNGUA: PROPOSTAS DE DEFINIÇÕES ATRAVÉS DE PASSATEMPOS NA AULA DE ESPANHOL

LEXICOGRAFÍA Y ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA/SEGUNDA LENGUA: PROPUESTAS DE DEFINICIONES A TRAVÉS DE PASATIEMPOS EN EL AULA DE ESPAÑOL



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How to reference this paper:

AGUILAR RUIZ, M. J. Lexicography and Spanish as a foreign language/second language: definitions through word puzzles in the Spanish classroom. **Rev. EntreLinguas**, Araraquara, v. 9, n. 00, e023031, 2023. e-ISSN: 2447-3529. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v9i00.15903>



| Submitted: 07/08/2023
| Revisions required: 11/09/2023
| Approved: 16/10/2023
| Published: 30/12/2023

Editor: Prof. Dr. Rosangela Sanches da Silveira Gileno
Deputy Executive Editor: Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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ABSTRACT: The present paper focuses on an issue that different types of word puzzles (crosswords, word searches, cryptograms, etc.) usually cause, such as the usual difficulty and strangeness of the definitions offered as linguistic “clues” in these types of games. To fix this issue, we briefly offer three different kinds of definitions experienced in our teaching practice when we have used these word-based word puzzles, such as illustrations, retouched definitions, and idioms. The study offered here is intended to facilitate this discursive microtype so recurrent in the class of Spanish as a Foreign Language when Spanish is taught playfully.

KEYWORDS: Spanish. Spanish as a Foreign Language. Word puzzles. Lexicographic definition. Dictionaries.

RESUMO: *Este artigo enfoca um problema que costumam ter diferentes tipos de passatempos ou jogos linguísticos (palavras-cruzadas, caça-palavras, criptogramas ou mensagens criptografadas etc.), como a dificuldade usual e estranheza das definições oferecidas como “pistas” linguísticas neste tipo de jogos. Para resolver esse problema, oferecemos resumidamente três tipos diferentes de definição experimentados em nossa prática de ensino quando usamos esses passatempos baseados em palavras, como ilustrações, definições retocadas e a mediação de unidades fraseológicas. O objetivo da reflexão aqui oferecida é facilitar esse microtipo discursivo tão recorrente na aula de espanhol quando é ministrado de forma lúdica.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Espanhol. Espanhol como língua estrangeira. Passatempos. Definição lexicográfica. Dicionários.*

RESUMEN: *El presente trabajo se centra en un problema que suelen acarrear los distintos tipos de pasatiempos de carácter lingüístico (crucigramas, sopas de letras, criptogramas o mensajes cifrados, etc.), como es el de la dificultad y extrañamiento habituales de las definiciones que se ofrecen como “pistas” lingüísticas en este tipo de juegos. Para solventar este problema, ofrecemos brevemente tres tipos distintos definicionales experimentados en nuestra práctica docente cuando hemos empleado estos pasatiempos basados en palabras, como son las ilustraciones, las definiciones retocadas y la mediación de unidades fraseológicas. La reflexión ofrecida aquí tiene como finalidad facilitar este microtipo discursivo tan recurrente en la clase de E/LE cuando se imparte de manera lúdica.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Español. E/LE / Segunda lengua. Pasatiempos. Definición lexicográfica. Dicionarios.*

Introduction

The interest that games currently arouse as a didactic resource in teaching Spanish as L2-LE has been recognized both by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (MCERL, 2002) as well as by several very recent studies (BARROS GONZÁLEZ, 2016; GUO, 2020; MONTAÑEZ MESAS, 2017, 2022; etc.). Linguistic hobbies such as crosswords, word searches, encrypted messages, the game known as “The Hanged Man” etc., are recreational activities frequently used in the Spanish classroom, due to their high didactic potential (MCERL, 2002, p. 59; COHEN; FRATES, 2010; MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 487-491; DEMYDA PEYRÁS *et al.*, 2018; MATEU MARTÍNEZ, 2022). They are used as motivational activities or as reinforcement and extension, aimed at developing competence lexico-semantics (see MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 455-509).

However, a major problem that this type of playful activity usually presents is precisely of a linguistic nature, which is the definitions offered of hidden words to solve the activity. The big disadvantage that is generally observed in them is that they are usually taken from one of the editions of the academic dictionary (*DRAE22* or *DLE*, for example), from some other dictionary whose plan is essentially based on it, or which presents a definition that normally It is very complex for E/LE students. However, our teaching practice in the E/LE classroom has shown that the use of these definitions taken literally from dictionaries presents a considerable level of linguistic complexity for intelligibility by non-native (and even native) students, due to the stagnant language, interdependent definitions, “vicious circles”, “missed clues” and other irregularities and defects that are generally attributed to definitions in academic dictionaries (see BAJO PÉREZ, 2000, p. 44-45; MEDINA GUERRA, 2003, p. 144-146; PORTO DAPENA, 2014, p. 265-295) and, in short, lexicographic compilations in general, although we are aware of the relevance of lexicographic resources in the Spanish classroom (see PÉREZ CAÑIZARES; SCHNITZER, 2019). Furthermore, the lexicographic discourse of this microstructural apparatus is generally not adequately contextualized, nor does it provide sufficient motivation to students, basic characteristics for the elaboration or selection of activities in teaching Spanish (MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 81-106).

To solve this problem regarding the definitions that are part of hobbies in the E/LE classroom, we can choose, as teachers, the way to offer them, depending on the level of our students. In our teaching practice, we present them in three different ways, through illustrations, definitions (especially communicative ones), or phraseological units, as we will explain in

Section 2. We consciously avoid academic dictionary definitions (unless we are working with students in grades higher or with high proficiency, i.e. at proficient user levels). However, good preparation can consist of keeping in mind the difficulties that students will encounter a priori due to the shock of Spanish and their respective native languages, as analyzed in Moreno Cabrera (2010, p. 93-112).

Images, Dictionaries and Phraseological Units: Definition Methods for Linguistic Hobbies

It has been advanced that, when it comes to offering linguistic games such as crosswords, word searches, or the "hangman game", we could have three methods to present the definition of the lexical pieces in question: 1) through illustrations, 2) through retouched definitions taken from dictionaries or our elaboration, and 3) through phraseological units (basically, phrases). Below, each of these definition proposals is analyzed, based on our experience in teaching Spanish as L2-LE.

Definition by illustrations

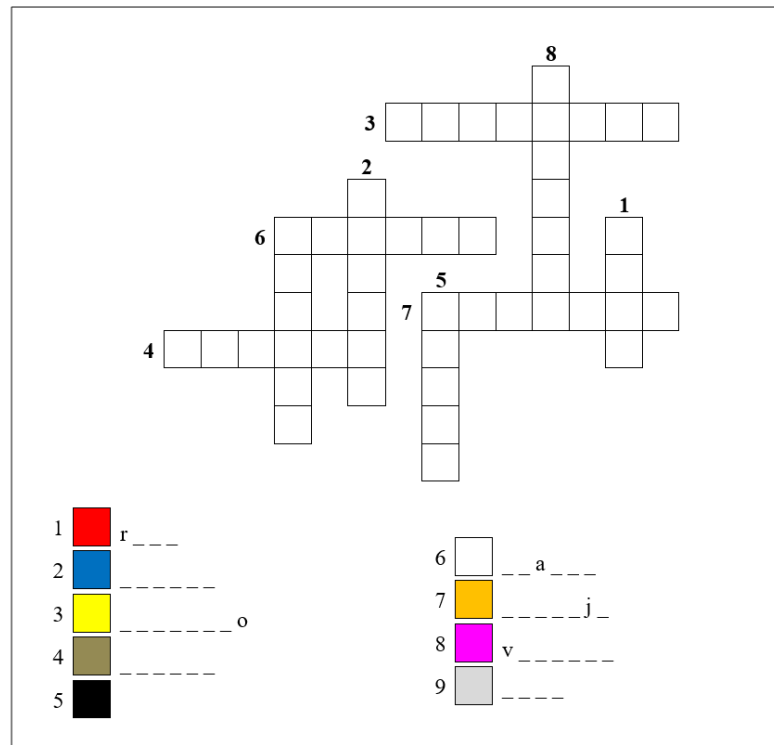
The first of the formulas to offer the searched word would be the most basic, limiting itself to the non-verbal presentation of it through illustration or photography. This iconic representation of the desired lexical unit is truly profitable at beginning levels, such as an absolute beginner A1, and proves highly beneficial in students whose previous contact with Spanish may have been sparse or non-existent. We have pictorial dictionaries that can be consulted in the classroom and are very appropriate for this type of student, such as the *Spanish-English-Chinese Visual Dictionary (SECVD)*, aimed mainly at Chinese language learners) or multilingual lexical repertoires *Visual Dictionary Spanish-English-Portuguese-Chinese-Arabic (VDSEPCA)* or the *New Visual Dictionary (NVD)*, in Spanish, English, French, German and Italian), for example.

In activity 1 we exemplify a possible didactic application of this type of pictorial definition in two simple games (a crossword puzzle and a word search) generated on the web Words² that, in which we ignore the "linguistic clues" that the site itself generates for us: the first (1A, a crossword) would require a form of pair work and is proposed as a revision of the lexical field of colors in Spanish.

² Available at: www.palabrasque.com. Accessed on: 10 July 2021.

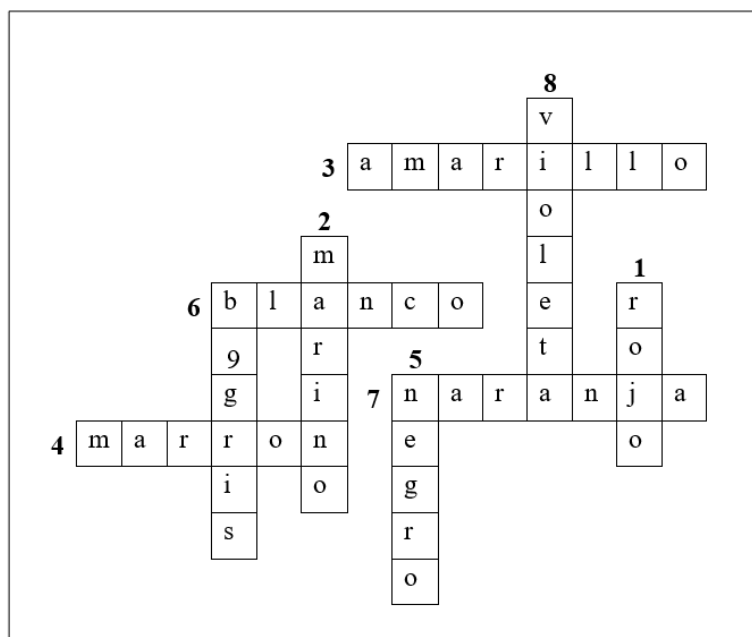
Thus, a simple crossword puzzle of nine lexical units is proposed above and we would offer the “clues” by creating a table in word processors such as Microsoft Office Word or in a text document in Open Office®®, for which we can hide the outer and inner edges to present a more attractive design. However, we would have other more advanced options to generate crosswords, such as the free program EclipseCrossword³ (MATEU MARTÍNEZ, 2022). To make solving the activity easier, you can indicate the number of missing letters using dashes and add, as an aid, some of the letters (r _ _ _ , for *rojo* (*red*); _ _ a _ _ _ , for *blanco* (*white*); etc.).

Activity 1A – Solve the following crossword puzzles with the clues provided (own elaboration using Microsoft Office Word® text processor)



³ Available for download at www.eclipsecrossword.com. Accessed on: 10 July 2021.

Solution



Legend: 1 – purple, 2 – navy, 3 – yellow, 4 – brown, 5 – black, 6 – white, 7 – orange, 8 – violet.

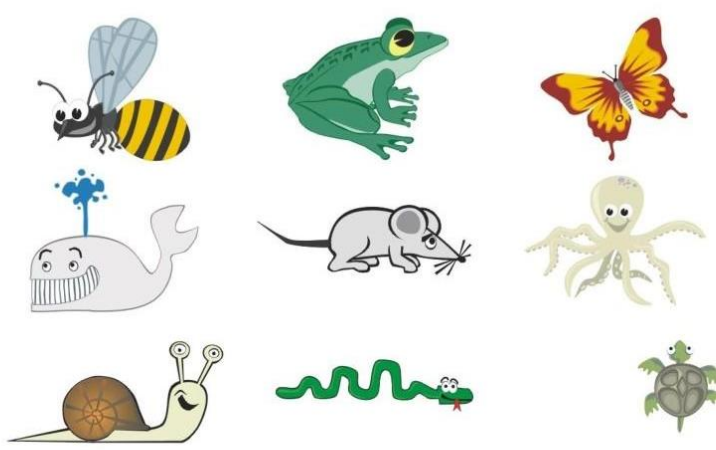
Source: Author data

The second activity (1B, an alphabet search) would seek the active acquisition, by the learner, of animal names in Spanish (nine in particular), so that only the illustration of the animal itself is offered as a clue, as an ostensible definition of an iconic type (PORTO DAPENA, 2002, p. 281; 2014, p. 61), and it would be the students who would have to discover their names through a group resolution (MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 473-474), or through sharing with colleagues (which encourages oral interaction among group members and agreement among them on the meanings and slogans sought; vid. MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 323 y ss.), or through the search for lexical unity specific in bilingual or visual dictionaries (which stimulates and favors heuristic skills and autonomy in handling sources by students; see. MALDONADO GONZÁLEZ, 1998; MORENO GARCÍA, 2017, p. 380 y ss.).

Activity 1B – Example of solving a crossword with images provided as clues (own elaboration via the web El mundo de Deckerix)

Ñ	Y	H	R	T	A	S	O	P	I	R	A	M	F
M	E	T	N	E	I	P	R	E	S	S	D	W	R
H	X	L	F	Y	A	G	V	E	L	I	Ñ	G	P
K	N	V	O	N	W	X	L	O	G	O	L	H	R
U	R	E	C	C	L	M	C	F	Z	P	S	B	O
M	I	V	F	I	A	A	V	V	K	L	V	K	D
X	A	X	Z	Y	R	R	D	T	K	U	M	A	N
C	O	S	W	A	E	C	A	C	I	P	J	O	E
W	R	L	C	E	R	Y	U	C	S	E	F	C	Z
J	Q	A	G	U	T	R	O	T	B	X	U	O	M
I	N	H	K	R	G	T	S	A	S	C	A	J	C
A	O	W	A	J	J	B	N	O	T	A	R	P	X
U	C	N	Z	T	O	H	V	S	N	K	M	H	T
S	A	D	B	A	L	L	E	N	A	E	V	U	C

Encuentra los siguientes animales en la sopa de letras. Puedes usar un diccionario, si es necesario:



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Caption: Find the following animals in the alphabet soup. You can use a dictionary if necessary.

Source: Author data

Concerning these two activities, we should note that, in the same way, that we play with units from the lexical field of colors and animals, we could use lexical units related to food,

professions, clothing, common lexicon related to the street/class/house, etc., and use royalty-free illustrations or photographs, such as "clues". Furthermore, for the activity in which a pictorial definition is used, kinesthetic skills and greater student participation and involvement would be promoted if, following the proposals of Olaeta Rubio (1997, p. 456) or Penadés Martínez (1999, p. 38), students were invited to later create a game for their colleagues and try to draw their own illustrations.

Definitions from monolingual Spanish dictionaries

As already mentioned, websites⁴ that offer the type of hobbies discussed here usually use academic dictionary definitions and other lexical repertoires as "clues" for solving activities. Since definitional discourse can sometimes be difficult for students, it would be feasible to discard the definitions provided by crosswords, cryptograms, and word searches, among others, used and change them to 1) the definitions of the monolingual Spanish learning dictionaries most used in the classroom, such as *Dicionário Chave*. Dictionary of Current Spanish Usage (key) or the Great Dictionary of Current Spanish Usage (*GDUEA*), 2) definitions from usage dictionaries, such as the *Current Spanish Dictionary (DEA)* or the *Dictionary of Spanish Usage (DUE)*, for example, or 3) more specific dictionary definitions for E/LE students, such as the *Dictionary for Teaching the Spanish Language (DIPELE)*, Salamanca (*Salamanca Dictionary of the Spanish Language*), *Spanish Dictionary for Foreigners (DEPE)* or *Dictionary of the Spanish Language for Spanish Students (DLEPEE)*, among others.

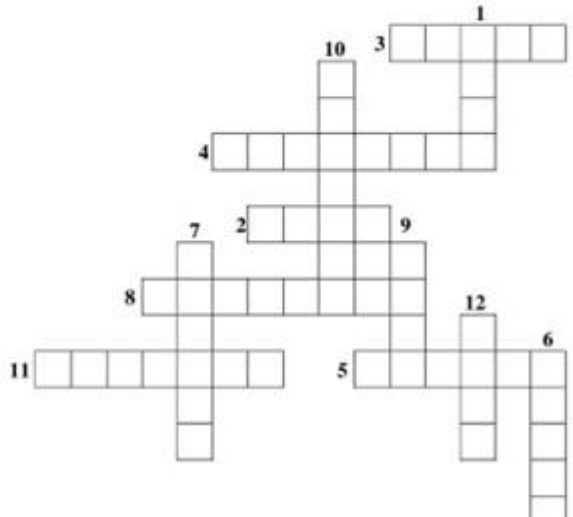
In our teaching experience, when it comes to putting these activities into practice, we always choose to develop our definition, starting from one of the previous dictionaries or mixing definitions from different lexical repertoires (even from an academic plant). On other occasions, we choose to offer a translation of communicative definitions from monolingual dictionaries of the English language with eminently communicative purposes, such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)* or the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*, or directly from the Spanish language, as is the case of the *Salamanca Studies Dictionary (DESAL)*.

⁴ For example, *Educima* (em www.educima.com/crosswordgenerator.php e www.educima.com/wordsearch.php), *O Mundo de Deckerix* (deckerix.com/modulos/juegos/sopadeletras e deckerix.com/modulos/juegos/ahorcado), *eHobbies* (www.epasatiempos.es), *Words That* (em <https://www.crucigrama.org/index.php> e <https://www.crucigrama.org/index.php?ActivarSopa=1>) or *Amarelinha Hobbies* (cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/pasatiempos/default.php), among many others (Accessed on: 12 June 2021).

A possible result would be the example of a crossword puzzle that we offered in activity 2, in the lexicon of colors.

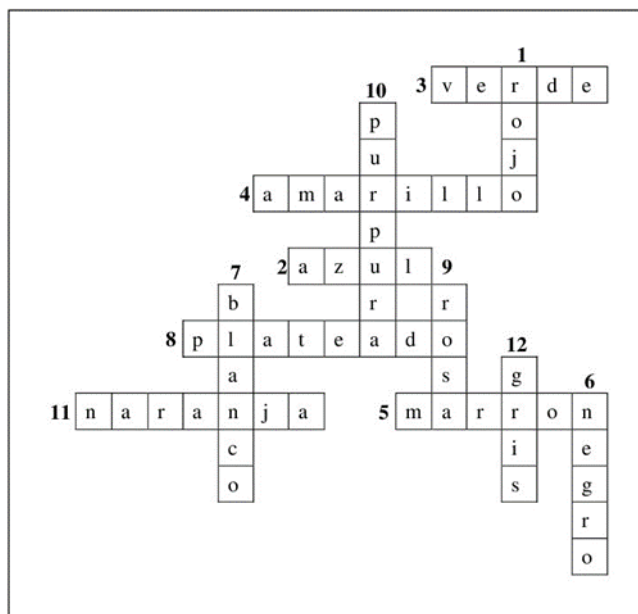
Activity 2 – Simple Crossword with Definitions

Resolva as seguintes palavras cruzadas com as pistas fornecidas:



1 Cor do sangue ou fogo
2 cor do céu claro ou do mar em um dia claro
3 cor da grama e das folhas na maioria de plantas e árvores
4 Cor dos limões ou da manteiga
5 Cor da terra ou do café
6 A cor mais escura; cor da noite ou do carvão
7 Cor da neve ou do leite
8 Cor que olha como a prata
9 Cor vermelha pálida; cor que você tem se misturar vermelho e branco
10 cores que você tem se misturar azul e vermelho
11 cor das laranjas
12 cor do fumo ou das cinzas

Solution



Legend: 1 – red, 2 – blue, 3 – green, 4 – yellow, 5 – brown, 6 – black, 7 – white, 8 – silver, 9 – pink, 10 – purple

Source: Author data

Note that to define the colors above we resorted to a mixture of hyperonymic (MARTÍNEZ DE SOUSA, 2009, p. 159) or periphrastic (PORTO DAPENA, 2014, p. 92-93) definitions, in which the descriptor or general term color appears followed of specific differences (specifically, of universal natural elements that exhibit it), and ostensive through verbal images, as is the common case in the case of colors (PORTO DAPENA, 2002, p. 281; 2014, p. 61). However, to provide didactic definitions, in metalexiconic studies, the type of definition known as communicative is generally recommended, which is more pedagogical, formulated with simpler syntax and frequently used common words (sometimes using definers) that are their possible lexical combinations manifest in the revised usage (BAJO PÉREZ, 2000, p. 44-45). They are also usually written using formulas with an attributive, conditional, or

temporal structure, such as slogans: *crazy*⁵, *mark*⁶, *sink*⁷, *mucous*⁸, *procreate*⁹, *overflow*¹⁰, or *summary*¹¹ in *DESAL*.

Definitions through a question that consists of filling in gaps with a phraseological unit that contains the word being searched for as a lexical component

This third method of providing definitions works in conjunction with semantic fields with phraseological units, and consists of replacing the "clue", the classical definition, with some multi-verbal¹² lexicon that contains as an integral lexical element the lexical piece sought, required by an empty box. For example, if we perform a crossword puzzle on the semantic field of the human body (such as phrases that contain somatisms as an integral lexical subcomponent), to ask for the *ear* of the lexical unit, we would offer the verbal phrase to talk my _____ off instead of the definition of the concrete of lexia. In this way, we would also work on the acquisition or review of phraseology in the classroom, conceived here basically as an activity to reinforce the vocabulary and multi-verbal lexical units learned in the classroom, although the teacher could also propose it as an extension activity.

To search for these phrases, you can use the complete lists by García-Page Sánchez (2008, p. 372-377)¹³ or the specialized works on phraseology for Spanish students by Dante

⁵ "A place or thing is poor if it is neglected or dirty, or if it is bad or of poor quality: *He stayed in a very bad hotel, which even smelled bad*" (*DESAL*, n. v. *terrible*).

⁶ "A person marks a path by placing marks on it, or a thing marks itself as a mark: *They had a signaling system based on landmarks that marked the path*" (*DESAL*, n. v. *To be sure, there is no need to*

⁷ "A ship sinks when it sinks. The people who travel on it also get shipwrecked: *When their ship sank, two sailors arrived on a desert island*" (*DESAL*, n. v. *shipwreck*).

⁸ "We call a child or young person a brat when they are annoying or impertinent because they want to behave like an old person: *You are nothing but a vain brat.*" (*DESAL*, n. v. *Brat, -a*).

⁹ "Animals procreate when they have children: *The rabbits began to procreate and spread*" (*DESAL*, s. v. *procreate*).

¹⁰ "A vase overflows if it is so full of liquid or something else that it overflows the edges: *I left the tap running and the sink overflowed*" (*DESAL*, n. v. *overflow*).

¹¹ "A trial or judicial process is summary if it dispenses with certain formalities to make it faster than usual: *trials in death penalty cases in China are distinguished by being summary, often with the sentence previously decided*" (*DESAL*, n.v. *Summary, -a*).

¹² Observable as a phraseological unit from a broad point of view, such as phrases, collocations, syntagmatic compounds and even parems; *vid.* Pastor de Corpas (1996).

¹³ In this study we can find very useful lists that group a large number of phrases that would integrate specific semantic fields (with an interesting cultural component, in addition), such as animals (wearing a , not seeing three on a donkey, having a turkey, seeing the bulls of outside, being like a goat, playing the goose, seeing the wolf's ears), colors (putting green, seeing life in pink, being hot red), domestic objects (having the frying pan by the handle, not having broken a plate, playing the towel, stick the sheets on you, pull the blanket, come out of the closet, be like a watering can, to know what a comb is worth), clothes (not reaching the sole of the shoe, putting on boots, putting on an eleven-yard shirt , changing your coat, pulling up your pants, taking off your hat), national place names (between Pinto and Valdemoro, being on the moon in Valencia, passing through the hills of Úbeda, from Madrid to the sky, being in Babia) and a long etcetera.

Hernández (2003) – very useful when classifying phrases by communicative functions –, Vranic (2010), Guerrier and Sánchez (2014; 2015) – with a very communicative visual and humorous approach – and Leal Riol (2011) – with useful frequency classifications of locutions its communicative function and its equivalents in English.

The use of phraseology in the E/LE class is important not only because of its frequency in Spanish (CORPAS PASTOR, 1996, p. 20-21; RIVAS GONZÁLEZ, 2008) but also because it would help to establish structures that could be shocking or difficult for students. Thus, for example, the nouns *(the) tomato* or *(the) apple*, which are masculine and feminine respectively in English, differ in terms of grammatical gender in their respective German voices (*die Tomate; der Apfel*), so that the acquisition of recurring stereotypical comparisons such as *(putting someone) red like a tomato*¹⁴ or *(being someone) healthy like an apple*¹⁵ would be decisive for the morphological fixation of gender in German language students. The same would result in gender-divergent German and Spanish zoonyms, such as the German masculine *der Frosch* (the frog) and *der Floh* (the flea) or the neuter *das Ente* (the duck) if we use phrases with morphological fixation, such as *when frogs grow hair*¹⁶, *have (someone) bad fleas*¹⁷, or *pay (someone)*¹⁸ *the duck*.

Furthermore, to offer the definitions of the various phraseologisms that are used, we can turn to a wide variety of specialized dictionaries in Spanish – or use them as a basis to elaborate our definition – such as the Dictionary of Sayings and Phrases Made from Buitrago Jiménez (DDFH, 1995), the Documented Phraseological Dictionary of Current Spanish by Seco, Andrés and Ramos (DFDEA, 2004), or the series DICLOVER (2002), DICLOCADV (2005), DICLOCNAP (2008) and DiLEA (2019) by PENANÉS MARTÍNEZ, the latter online¹⁹.

We offer, as an example, activity 3, conducted using the EclipseCrossword crossword generator, in the semantic field of animals.

¹⁴ "[Be] red with shame" (*Clav, n. v. tomato*); "Blushing, embarrassing. I cannot avoid it. As soon as he looks at me, even for a second, I turn red as a tomato" (DDFH, n. v. turn red as a tomato).

¹⁵ "[Be] very healthy. With a great physical appearance. I thought it was as healthy as an apple. It seems unbelievable that just two weeks ago I was between life and death" (DDFH, n. v. healthy as an apple).

¹⁶ 'Never' (DICLOCAVD, n. v. when frogs grow hair); "We say something will happen when the frogs grow hair to express that there is little chance of this happening or being noticed soon: He will go to London when the frogs grow hair: he is not able to go to the nearest city" (DESAL, n. v. frog).

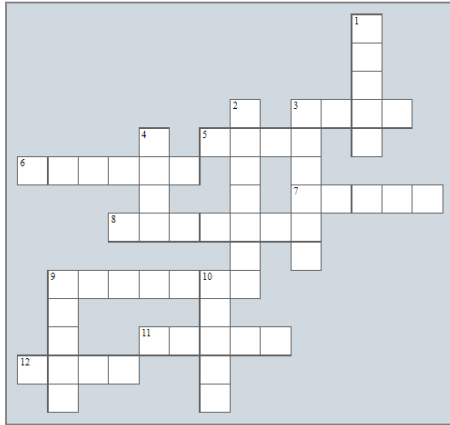
¹⁷ "[Have someone] bad mood" (DICLOCNAP, n. v. bad fleas); "Be angry. Be in a bad mood. Act on a bad idea" (DDFH, n. v. has bad grapes).

¹⁸ "Being unfairly punished or suffering the unpleasant consequences of something one is not guilty of: Mom, it was him, and I don't want to pay the price" (DICLOVER, n. v. pay the duck); "Suffer a penalty, a punishment or a sentence that it belongs to someone else: I wasn't the one who broke your car. Now, because of someone else, you don't want to leave it to me. As always, I end up paying the price" (DDFH, n.v. pay the duck).

¹⁹ Available at: <http://www.diccionariodilea.es/inicio> (Accessed on July 10, 2021).

Activity 3 – Crosswords defined by phrases

Locuciones con nombres de animales



Across

3. ser terco como una _____
5. llevarse el _____ agua
6. tener malas _____
7. estar como una _____
8. arrimar el ascua a su _____
9. dormir como una _____
11. no ver tres en un _____
12. verle las orejas al _____

Down

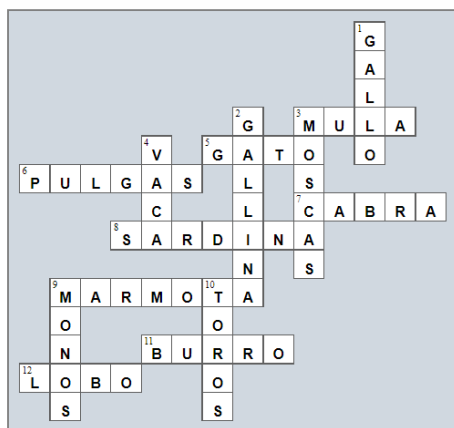
1. en menos que canta un _____
2. poner la carne de _____
3. por si las _____
4. ser más pesado que una _____ en brazos
9. tener _____ en la cara
10. ver los _____ desde la barrera

Caption: Phrases with animal names - Through: 3. be stubborn as a...; 5. Take... water; 6. Have more...; 7. be like a...; 8. Pull the ember towards your...; 9. sleep like a...; 11. not see three in one...; 12. see the ears at the side....;

Below: 1. unless you sing a ...; 2. put the meat...; 3. if the ...; 4. be heavier than a... in your arms...; 9. have...on the face; 10. see the...of the barrier.

Solution

Locuciones con nombres de animales



Across

3. ser terco como una _____
5. llevarse el _____ agua
6. tener malas _____
7. estar como una _____
8. arrimar el ascua a su _____
9. dormir como una _____
11. no ver tres en un _____
12. verle las orejas al _____

Down

1. en menos que canta un _____
2. poner la carne de _____
3. por si las _____
4. ser más pesado que una _____ en brazos
9. tener _____ en la cara
10. ver los _____ desde la barrera

Crusade Legend: 1. Rooster, 2. Chicken, 3. Mule, 4. Cow, 5. Cat, 6. Fleas, 7. Goat, 8. Sardine, 9.

Marmot/Monkeys, 10. Bulls, 11. Donkey, 12. Wolf

Source: Author's data

Final considerations

As observed throughout this work, the difficulty that can be offered by the definitions of lexicographic extraction of the linguistic clues provided in hobbies was addressed through three alternatives.

The first option consisted of pictorial definitions, although these were perhaps limited to lower levels (even if students could orally agree on meaning as a group, encouraging verbal interaction, perhaps more oriented at higher levels). The second alternative, on the other hand, would be to try to change, the teacher, the lexicographic definitions included in the learning dictionaries used. As an ideal option, a communicative definition would be chosen, although when nouns belonging to the same lexical field are offered (names of colors, animals, professions, etc.) it would be usual to define with a hyperonymic/periphrastic structure. If the learner was chosen to carry out the hobby for resolution by his peers, his independence,

heuristic dexterity, and handling of available sources would be encouraged, in addition to his writing skills. Finally, the third possibility would consist of a reinforcement activity based on the work on phraseology that has been studied in the classroom and would be based on hiding the word sought in a phraseological unit, offered as a "clue" instead of the classic definition. Through this last procedure, the phraseological field would be worked on, while it can serve as an activity to reinforce the acquired vocabulary.

As would be obvious, in the activities described, only a brief application proposal was offered, aimed at an abstract group of students, although the possibilities in lower-level classrooms (A1-A2) or higher (B2 onwards) were considered punctually. It must be the faculty who can direct the proposals presented here to the specific group of students with whom they work, making appropriate and suitable modifications.

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CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: Not applicable.

Funding: Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Data and material availability: Yes, they are available on their respective websites.

Authors' contributions: The author is unique, the signatory.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

