



DEPARTMENT OF
FRENCH AND ITALIAN
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE CROISSANT-BACON PHENOMENON:
Prototypical vocabulary and cross-cultural implications for
the selection of lexical items in pedagogical resources

Wednesday,
May 2nd, 2018



10:00am



GA 1060

Dissertation Defense by Sarah-Kay Hurst
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The teaching and learning of vocabulary are especially pertinent questions for foreign language pedagogy (Bogaards, 1994; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Schmitt, 2010; Nation, 2013), and a judicious selection of words for pedagogical materials merits reflection. This dissertation considers sixteen core categories such as “Breakfast foods and beverages” and “Professions, jobs, and trades,” comparing Hexagonal French and American English to determine to what extent category construction is cultural.

Since lexical items for such core categories are indispensable for the domains they characterize, yet do not rank highly on frequency lists, these words are best unearthed using notions from *Prototype Theory* (some category members are more central than others, see Rosch, 1978; Geeraerts, 2010) and *Lexical Availability* (some words are infrequent yet essential and easily come to mind when needed, see Gougenheim et al., 1967; Rodriguez, 2006). This study, deploying prototypicality and availability, solicits the enumeration of typical words for core categories to compare the intuitions of one hundred native speakers of Hexagonal French and American English. The results of this spontaneous recall task are then compared with items included in U.S. university textbooks and bilingual dictionaries.

The results reveal that the most salient and prototypical items are often quite different in the two languages, highlighting items that are especially pertinent for the target (L2) culture (emphasizing target culture appropriateness) and the native (L1) culture (underscoring personal interests and tenets of prominent communicative approaches, see Brandl, 2008; Richards & Rogers, 2014). Presenting this vocabulary using strategies such as Venn diagrams that encourage active exploration of differences in category construction may enhance awareness and serve as a springboard for cultural discovery. Thus, this study proffers suggestions for the treatment of core categories in pedagogical resources and promotes an empirical rather than intuitive approach to questions of vocabulary selection, presentation, and cultural exploration.

DISSERTATION
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If you would like to attend, please contact the chair, Dr. Kevin Rottet, at
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