

APPROACHING LEXICAL LOSS IN CANARIAN SPANISH UNDERGRADUATES: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: *Canarian Spanish is one of the most widely studied varieties of Spanish. Apart from significant distinguishing phonetic and grammatical features, this variety is notable for a number of characteristics at the lexical level. In their 2009 two-volume Diccionario ejemplificado de canarismos (henceforth DEC), Corrales and Corbella collected a total of 19,000 entries and 25,000 meanings and expressions, with examples taken from about 1,300 written records. All these Canarianisms represent the history, natural resources and popular knowledge in the Canarian dialect, thus showing the richness and variety of its vocabulary. Our aim here is to check whether part of this lexical repertoire is being lost, as previously warned of by Medina (1997). We provide data obtained in a survey completed by 100 young university students of Canarian origin at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on their knowledge and use of a small corpus of Canarianisms taken from the DEC.*

Keywords: *Sociolinguistics, lexical loss, active and passive vocabulary, Canarian, Spanish.*

Language death is a terrible loss, to all who come into contact with it: Facing the loss of language or culture involves the same stages of grief that one experiences in the process of death and dying. (Crystal, 2000: 163)

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of words is one of the most fascinating areas of linguistics. The vocabulary of a language can be analysed from many and varied perspectives to find out about its origin and meaning, how it changes or how words relate to one another, but also to get insights on how we use them to view the world and, most importantly, as markers of regional identity. Many sociolinguists have proved that lexical choices can establish in-group solidarity and that regional identity can be indexed by lexical items that effectively convey in-group solidarity. According to Childs and Mallinson (2006: 3), “lexical items may take on marked significance as symbolic vehicles through which speakers assert and negotiate their ethnic identity”. The reason is that language is recognized as “the primary index, or symbol, or register of identity” (Crystal, 2000: 40), this concept of identity being defined as “what makes the members of a community recognizably the same. It is a summation of the characteristics which make it what it is and not something else – of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’” (Crystal, 2000: 39).

Despite this significant role as identity marker, it is a fact that one of the aspects of a language that may show rapid change is that of the lexicon. This is hardly surprising since it is the linguistic level which most closely connects with reality, clearly reflecting all the concepts, entities, objects and changes that take place in the physical world. Of course, it is nouns and some verbs that change, but not prepositions or pronouns.

In this process of constant change, some words are felt to be old, while others are perceived as new. These changes in vocabulary do not hamper communication since usually traditional, old words live together with the new ones for some time. Besides, some new words may not last long; just like some fashions, they may be very ephemeral. Many new words are introduced into the language with the influence of other languages, new technologies, novelties in clothing or changes in customs. They may become quite fashionable, and speakers like to use those words which are modern and prestigious. At the same time, some things may die and bring into disuse the words required to make reference to them. Similarly, some words are so closely intertwined with cultural elements that, when the latter evolve and disappear, so do the former. This has already happened to many words referring to country tools, domestic appliances, old customs or celebrations.

Nowadays, a considerable number of words that belong to the realm of our cultural heritage are no longer used in our urban speech, let alone in the media. They are felt to be old, rustic or provincial, so speakers regard them with suspicion until they become moribund words (García-Mouton and Grijalbo 2011: 16-17). As Crystal (2000: 22) remarks, “Knowledge of vocabulary declines, with younger people familiar with only a proportion of the traditional vocabulary known by older people, and older people being unfamiliar with or antipathetic to the borrowed vocabulary that is replacing it”.

Within the context of Canarian Spanish, the publication of Corrales and Corbella's 2009 two-volume dictionary of Canarianisms placed the enormous richness and variety of Canarian Spanish vocabulary on record. This work covers a total of 19,000 entries and 25,000 meanings and expressions which are typical of the Canarian lexicon, with examples taken from about 1,300 written records. All the words collected represent the history, natural resources and popular knowledge, as well as the past and present of the Canarian dialect. It includes terms used in popular and educated speech, together with the old and the new voices employed in both rural and urban areas, words belonging to traditional spheres (such as local sports, agriculture or the maritime context) and also the new creations promoted by the media. Although other dictionaries have been published before and after the one in point here, by these and other authors, the *Diccionario ejemplificado de canarismos* (henceforth *DEC*) is considered to be the most comprehensive.

This paper aims at checking whether a small sample of that vocabulary is being lost, as previously warned of by Medina (1997), by offering a preliminary assessment of the extent to which Canarian university students know and use words which are typical of their variety. Our article is organised as follows: First, we comment briefly on the origin and status of Canarian Spanish, devoting a subsection to the role of the pre-hispanic language in the formation of its lexical repertoire. After referring briefly to some previous empirical studies on the knowledge and usage of Canarianisms, we describe our initial hypotheses and research procedure. Then, we provide and discuss the data obtained in a survey completed by 100 young undergraduates of Canarian origin at the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (henceforth, ULPGC). The paper finishes with some concluding remarks and a few suggestions for further research.

2. CANARIAN SPANISH: ORIGIN AND STATUS

Canarian Spanish, one of the most widely studied varieties of Spanish (Medina, 1996: 10; Álvarez, 1996: 67; Corrales, Álvarez and Corbella, 2007 [1988]), is classified among the Atlantic varieties of Spanish, together with (Western) Andalusian Spanish and the Spanish of the Americas, due to some similarities at the phonetic and grammatical levels. Despite the many distinguishing features of this variety (Alvar, 1975; Almeida and Díaz-Alayón, 1988; Morera, 1990), here we will be concerned only with its vocabulary, which is characterised by:

- A number of archaisms from the Castilian Spanish that was used at the time of the conquest.
- Considerably higher number of loanwords from Portuguese or Galician-Portuguese, Latin American Spanish, and English than in Castilian Spanish.
- Some words remaining from the Guanche language spoken by the Guanche aborigines.

The interest of this last feature is undeniable as it is not shared with any other variety of Spanish. Although most scholars admit the limited influence of the Guanche vocabulary on the formation of the lexical repertoire of Canarian Spanish, we believe it well deserves the few lines we provide in the subsection below.

Trujillo (1981: 19), Déniz (1996: 330-1) and Morgenthaler (2008: 217) have underlined the fact that there is not a local prestigious standard variety of Canarian Spanish which could be institutionalised and used as the norm, given the internal variation that exists in this dialect. However, some studies (Morín and Castellano, 1990; González-Cruz, 2006; Morgenthaler, 2008) suggest that as a non-standard variety, Canarian Spanish seems to have shifted, or be in the process of doing so, from low to high status. In fact, the study of Canarianisms has attracted growing interest among researchers in recent years, with the appearance of several compilations of different lengths, besides the *DEC*. Among others the following stand out: Lorenzo, Morera and Ortega's *Diccionario de canarismos* (1995); Corrales, Corbella and Álvarez's *Diccionario diferencial del español de Canarias* (1996); Corrales and Corbella's *Diccionario histórico del español de Canarias* (2001); Morera's *Diccionario histórico-etimológico del habla canaria* (2006) and *Diccionario básico de canarismos* (2010) published by the *Academia Canaria de la Lengua*.

Such academic interest in Canarian Spanish has gone hand in hand with wider social and educational moves to promote various aspects of Canarian culture (González-Cruz and Vera-Cazorla, 2011: 18-19). Thus, its speakers – who historically tended to feel their dialectal forms (mainly their lexis and pronunciation) were inferior or inadequate for usage in formal contexts or in the presence of Castilian Spanish speakers (Ortega, 1981) – seem nowadays to

be showing some pride in Canarian Spanish and to understand that it deserves respect (Morín and Castellano, 1990; Morin, 1993; Almeida, 1994; Hernández, 2003; Morera, 2002), as long as it constitutes an important part of their intangible cultural heritage. However, as a dynamic, living dialect it still suffers the threat of various types of linguistic generalizations, that is, of processes of convergence towards the standard forms, possibly through the pressures of the Media. In line with Dalby's (2002: 256) ideas, we believe that not only every language, but also every dialect "offers its own classification of living things, natural phenomena and cultural concepts"; therefore, Canarian words represent "a different way of looking at, mapping and classifying the world" (272), hence, it is important to keep them alive.

The Guanche element

Many mysteries and uncertainties surround the history and origin of the Guanches, the primitive people living in the Canaries before the European conquest. Although there are several theories, most scholars seem to agree that they were closely related to the North African Berbers. After their incorporation into the Crown of Castile in 1496, the islands were settled by Spanish-speaking colonists from the continent, who imposed their language and culture on the native population. Although the sources indicate that they survived the conquest in considerable numbers, after a brief period of bilingualism the natives adopted the Castilian language and abandoned their own.

Regarding the pre-hispanic influence on Canarian Spanish, many authors, local and foreign, have contributed to their study (Glas, 1764; Bute, 1891; Abercromby, 1917; Álvarez-Rixo, 1991; Wölfel, 1996/1965; Trapero and Llamas, 1998; Trapero, 1999, 2007, among others). There are some references to the Guanche language in the historic and literary primary sources written soon after the Castilian conquest, but it is not until the second half of the XIXth century that proper linguistic studies begin to try to identify and characterise this dead language. Despite the many pages published on the topic, the study of the Guanche language is still to be completed, although a global description is obviously an impossible task, as Trapero (2007: 119) explains, since no phonetic or grammatical evidence remains, the only approachable domain being that of the lexicon.

Research on the Guanche terms is certainly interesting since it is what makes Canarian Spanish lexicon different from the vocabulary of general Spanish. Díaz-Alayon (1991: 54) distinguishes the following three channels through which the pre-hispanic lexical component has remained and been transmitted up to the present. Firstly, the historical and administrative sources have to be considered. Obviously, in their accounts each scribe followed his own criteria and tended to collect a different number of Guanche terms, which were probably more or less Spanishized in their transcription. Secondly, some Guanche words have survived to a greater or lesser extent in the language substratum. Thirdly, we must mention the large group of toponyms that remain all over the islands.

Samper (2008: 164) believes that the Guanches' influence is limited to "a short list of words (approximately 120 today, according to Corbella, 1996) that, aside from those that survive in toponymy and anthroponymy, refer principally to flora, the terrain, fauna, and the worlds of agriculture and animal husbandry". More accurately, when comparing the incorporation of indigenous words into the Spanish used in the contexts of the American New World and the Canaries, Bravo-García and Cáceres-Lorenzo (2011: 105-7) underline the lack of prestige of the Guanche language, which might explain why only 25 Guanche terms were used in the official documents written between the times of the Conquest and 1550. They constitute a mere 17.69% of the total number of words of Guanche origin which are known nowadays, amounting to a total of 147, according to the records in the historical dictionaries. This contrasts with the higher number of words of Portuguese origin (128 up to 1550, and 1200 up to the present), which indicates the competition between the two languages in the formation of early Canarian Spanish lexical repertoire. This little information on the Guanche language and culture seems to suggest that the natives were treated as outcasts and that they experienced acculturation to a considerable degree (Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2007: 50).

Trapero (1999; 2007), who has studied the issue thoroughly, is conscious of the complex problems and drawbacks that surround the description of the Guanche language and explains them neatly (1999: 20-29). He complains that very few authors have based their research on the oral tradition, which is – he argues – the only primary source for linguistic issues and the only true one for living toponymy (2007: 52). In fact, he states that within the Guanche lexical elements, toponyms constitute 90% (Trapero, 2007: 111). Thus, although the Guanche language was lost very soon (two or three, at the most, generations after the Conquest), the Canaries have maintained a considerably wide and representative aboriginal toponymic corpus (Trapero, 2007: 20). This author is currently preparing a dictionary of Guanche toponymy (*Diccionario de toponimia guanche*). His 2007 work includes a provisional catalogue of Guanche terms currently present in the islands' toponymy, a collection of 1,803 lexical units, some of them with variants. In his opinion, any future study on the Guanche language must be complemented with the data obtained by scholars working in other disciplines, such as Prehistory, Archaeology or Anthropology. This will be helpful to shed more light on and determine the origin of the Guanches, the chronology of their arrival and the differences in their culture and identity.

Before describing our own research, we will refer briefly below to the valuable contributions of other authors who have investigated, more or less extensively, the vitality of certain Canarianisms in Canarian people's present-day speech.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several specialists have tested empirically the knowledge and usage of Canarianisms by today's Canarians. Medina (1997) surveyed a group of 30 university students of Spanish Philology at the University of La Laguna (Tenerife) to find out whether they knew a list of 60 Guanche terms, as well as their opinions about this type of word. He concludes that a considerable number of the words listed were unknown and poorly defined. Only two of the pre-Hispanic terms, *baifo* ('kid') and *gofio* ('a typical flour made of toasted corn and/wheat'), were recognised by all the informants, followed by *tabaiba* ('a bush') and *perenquén* ('a wall gecko'), which were known by 96% of the students, and *mago* ('countryman') by 93.3%. Most students confirmed their having heard some time many of the terms they were unable to define, especially from old country people. They were well aware of the fact that all this vocabulary was part of the rich Canarian ethnographic and linguistic legacy, but they considered it to be no longer in use or very restricted (Medina, 1997: 797).

When studying the Canarianisms collected by the famous Canarian writer Pérez-Galdós, Hernández and Samper (2003) included the results of their own research on the vitality of 174 of those words. They surveyed 40 informants from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, belonging to two different generational groups, with the following distribution:

- 10 men and 10 women with ages ranging between 25 and 35 (1st generation).
- 10 men and 10 women who were older than 55 (3rd generation).

Since previous studies have proved that informants with a low socioeconomic level tend to keep in use many words which are considered to be archaic, Hernández and Samper (2003) selected informants with a low profile in education (only primary studies) and in their professions (blue-collar jobs with a limited income). They differentiate between the active and the passive vocabulary in the informants' lexical repertoire and provide an index of lexical loss for each of the lexical units in their survey corpus: 39.6% (i.e., 69 out of the total of 174 lexical units) of the Canarianisms in their corpus remain active or living in the informants' speech, with 7 terms being known and used by all of them. It is interesting to note –as these authors do– that 4 of the 69 words in this group of high vitality are Guanche terms, namely *perinquén*, *baifo*, *beletén* and *tabaiba*.

The other side of the coin is represented by the 105 Canarianisms which are known or used by less than 50% of the informants. Specifically, there are 6 words which nobody knows or uses, so they have already disappeared from the informants' lexical repertoire, while 10 are still known but never or only very rarely used. Factors like age and gender are analysed, the main conclusions being that the former is especially relevant to explain the differences in knowledge and usage among the two generational groups of informants, while the latter is not. Interestingly, men tend to know more terms related to agriculture and the sea than women, which can easily be explained by the different social roles traditionally played by each gender.

Although Canarianisms is not their focus, other works worth-mentioning here are those published by the Canarian Government (1986), Samper (1998) and Samper-Hernández (2009). In 1986 the Department of Education of the Canarian Government edited their *Léxico del español usual en Canarias*, an inventory of about 2000 words of frequent usage in the islands. This lexical repertoire included some archaisms, a few pre-hispanic terms, some Americanisms and Portugueseisms and other words of various origins, all of them considered to be of special use in the Canaries. Among the Canarianisms registered we found three that were used in our questionnaire: *frangollo*, *gánigo*, and *desmayarse*, the latter with its special meaning 'to yawn'.

Samper (1998) participated in an international Project, coordinated by Lope-Blanch, to study the rules for educated speech in the main cities of the Spanish-speaking world. Interestingly, out of the 15,506 different responses obtained with a questionnaire based on 21 semantic fields, only one Guanchism was mentioned, namely, *perenquén* (precisely the Canarianism most widely known and frequently used by our informants, as we will see below). What they find remarkable about this word is the number of variants it has (*perinqué*, *perinquén*, *perenqué*, *perinquén*, *perinqué*).

More recently, Samper-Hernández (2009) studied the evolution of the available lexicon in primary and secondary students from Gran Canaria. She found that 5% of the total number of terms given by her informants could be classified as Canarianisms, their semantic fields being, in decreasing order, those related to 'food and drinks', 'the country', 'animals' and 'the kitchen and cooking utensils'. These domains seem to be closely linked

to the environment and local traditions, and therefore tend to favour the presence of dialectal words. Interestingly, 80 Canarianisms appeared in the first 100 positions, the conclusion being that they are highly available. On the other hand, the correlation between the informants' sociocultural level and their usage of Canarianisms was also confirmed in this research: speakers with the lowest sociolect tend to use a higher number of Canarianisms, while those with the highest sociolect showed remarkable, almost encyclopedic, knowledge of words referring to the natural environment, by giving a higher number of Canarianisms related to the domains of 'the country' and 'animals'. Therefore, Samper-Hernández (2009:402) concludes that speakers of the lowest social level seem to be more familiar with this type of word than those of a higher status.

4. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND MATERIALS

Conceived as a cross-sectional and therefore descriptive study, our research began with the following hypotheses:

1. We believed that a considerable number of the Canarianisms registered in the *DEC* would be unknown and rarely used by our informants (a particular section of the Canarian population, that of university youngsters) not only because many of them have to do with items of the Canarian natural environment (plants and animals) but because a large majority of the lexical units belong to the popular language used in the rural world, refer to country traditions or constitute a very informal and popular vocabulary which is associated with the elderly and is not used by the more modern, younger and more globalised sectors of the population.
2. We also assumed that since women have a reputation of being more conservative (or less innovative than men) regarding language usage (Trudgill, 1985; López-Morales, 1989; Holmes, 1992; Romaine, 1994; Almeida, 1999; Wardhaugh, 2002), perhaps our female informants would know and use a higher number of Canarianisms. Besides, women are said to have a wider lexical repertoire than men (Morín, 1993: 93).

Firstly, we decided to randomly select a sample of the lexical items from the wide dictionary corpus. Five ULPGC teachers of Canarian origin and ages ranging between 45 and 62 helped us in the selection process. They opened each of the two dictionary volumes four times at different points, to choose one item on a random basis, but trying to favour those words they themselves knew. Thus we obtained a first round of 40 words. Since we did not want our survey to be too long and tiring for the informants, we carried out a further selection to reduce the total number of words to 20¹. For this we just wrote each of the initial 40 words in a strip of paper, which we folded and put in a bag. Finally, 20 pieces of paper were blindly taken out of the bag by the researcher, thus obtaining our sample of 20 Canarianisms (see Table 1 below). Interestingly, eight of these terms are of Guanche origin, namely, *beletén*, *gánigo*, *guanil*, *jairo*, *mocán*, *perenquén*, *tabona* and *tajaraste*. The point is that though comparatively scarce, these Guanche terms are relatively popular.

Although some of the Canarianisms in our survey corpus can have several meanings, in general the words selected can be broadly classified as belonging to the following semantic areas:

- * Animals: *bocinegro*, *capirote*, *jairo*, *perenquén*
- * Plants and trees: *mocán*, *oreja de burro*, *pico de paloma*, *viñátigo*, *yerba de vidrio*
- * Natural world: *piedra viva*, *tabona*
- * Words related to cultural traditions: *beletén*, *botana*, *gánigo*, *guanil*, *frangollo*, *tajaraste*
- * Popular verbs and adjectives: *chirgarse*, *esmayarse*, *desmandarriado*

¹ Admittedly, our sample of 20 randomly-selected words can hardly be considered as representative of a corpus of 19,000 lexical units, as they just mean a mere 0.10% of the total. However, our study is a preliminary one, not intended to be exhaustive. Similarly, we justify the number of informants by resorting to Labov's (1966: 170-71) claim that when dealing with linguistic behavior it is only necessary to study a 0.025% of the whole population. Our sample of 100 informants constitutes 0.5% of the total number of students at ULPGC (n= 20,000), therefore it is representative.

Table 1 below provides a description of the meanings of our sample of Canarianisms², as well as possible equivalents (when there is one) in general Spanish.

Table 1. Meanings and equivalents in general Spanish for the 20 Canarianisms in the survey.

CANARIANISMS	MEANINGS	General Spanish
1. BELETÉN	'Colostrum, the first milk produced by goats, sheep or cows after giving birth'	<i>Calostro</i>
2. BOCINEGRO	'A fish'	
3. BOTANA	'A leather case to cover a fighting cock's spur'	
4. CAPIROTE	'A bird'	
5. CHIRGARSE	'To get frightened'	<i>Asustarse</i>
6. DESMANDARRIADO	'Dishevelled, dressed in a slovenly way'	<i>Desaliñado</i>
7. ESMAYARSE	'To be starving / to yawn'	<i>Tener mucha hambre / bostezar</i>
8. FRANGOLLO	'A typical dessert made of corn'	
9. GÁNIGO	'A clay pot'	<i>Vasija de barro</i>
10. GUANIL	'An unmarked animal'	
11. JAIRO	'A billy-goat'	<i>Macho cabrío</i>
12. MOCÁN	'A tree'	
13. OREJA DE BURRO	'A garden plant'	
14. PERENQUÉN	'A wall gecko'	<i>Salamandra, lagartija</i>
15. PICO DE PALOMA	'A plant'	
16. PIEDRA VIVA	'A very hard basalt stone'	
17. TABONA	'A Guanche knife / an obsidian stone'	
18. TAJARASTE	'A typical dance / a tambourine'	
19. VIÑÁTIGO	'A tree and/ or its wood'	
20. YERBA DE VIDRIO	'A plant'	

With this material we designed a very concise chart so that our informants could supply in it information about their knowledge and use of each of these terms. What we wanted to know was simply

- a. whether they knew the meaning or at least a general referent for each Canarianism,
- b. whether they ever used them and with which frequency (never, sometimes or often),
- c. what type of speakers they thought would probably use those words,
- d. how they felt about their (not) knowing those words.

This short questionnaire was distributed in two of the ULPGC campuses (*Tafira* and *Obelisco*) among 100 students of various specialities in Sciences and Humanities, respectively, between September and October 2012. Our informants were 50 female and 50 male students with ages ranging between 19 and 24. Most of the female participants (43) were students at the faculty of Philology, while only 11 male informants studied there. The rest of the participants studied at the faculty of Economics (7 female and 18 male). All these students belonged to intact groups whose teachers kindly gave us permission to survey. Informants participated voluntarily, the only requirement for them being to have Canarian origin and upbringing. The rest of the male participants were contacted individually or in small groups in the *Tafira* campus and were students at the faculties of Engineering (12) and Computer Science (9).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tables below summarise the main results obtained in our survey. Table 2 shows global results regarding our informants' correct or relatively correct knowledge of the meaning of the proposed Canarianisms and the usage they make of them. Table 3 provides more specific data, considering our informants' responses by gender, as

² It is important to give here the definition of the concept of Canarianism used by the DEC's authors, who refer to any "word, phrase or way of speaking peculiar to the inhabitants of the Canaries, whose use has settled into both the spoken and written language." What Corrales and Corbella (2009: xvi) mean by peculiar is: "not only words exclusive to the Canaries but also those used in Spanish-speaking areas –paying attention to the history and geographical position of the archipelago, meeting point for the words that circulated around the Atlantic– the use or different labelling of the words (the more frequent use of hereditary terms or of certain variants, the continued use of words considered archaic in standard Spanish, variation or specialisation of a meaning, the adaptation of nautical or agricultural terms to the everyday language, the different diastatic or diaphasic updating for some words the different syntactic combination, the abundant lexicalisation of diminutives, changes in grammatical categories, etc.)" (Our translation).

well as by degree of knowledge. We specify if they are able to provide a more or less complete description of the meaning of the word or if they simply give a very general referent; likewise, we make a distinction in their frequency of usage, that is, whether they use the word very often or just sometimes.

The most interesting results are those in Table 4, which contrasts the terms known and used, forming the active vocabulary, and those that are simply known but never used, thus forming the passive vocabulary. The latter represent the initial step which may lead a word towards disappearance or loss (Hernández and Samper, 2003: 42). These data allowed us to establish the percentage or degree of lexical loss for each word.

Table 2. Global results regarding general knowledge of meaning and usage.

CANARIANISMS	Number of informants who give a relatively correct meaning	Number of informants who give a wrong meaning	Percentage of informants who do not know the meaning	Number of informants who ever use the word	Percentage of informants who NEVER use the word
1. BELETÉN	28	1	72%	15	85%
2. BOCINEGRO	24	1	75%	10	90%
3. BOTANA	0	1	100%	0	100%
4. CAPIROTE	19	22	81%	8	92%
5. CHIRGARSE	2	10	98%	1	99%
6. DESMANDARRIADO	33	12	67%	23	77%
7. ESMAYARSE	27	16	73%	17	83%
8. FRANGOLLO	52	3	48%	17	83%
9. GÁNIGO	1	2	99%	1	99%
10. GUANIL	2	2	98%	1	99%
11. JAIRO	10	13	90%	8	92%
12. MOCÁN	12	1	88%	4	96%
13. OREJA DE BURRO	1	6	99%	0	100%
14. PERENQUÉN	91	4	9%	76	24%
15. PICO DE PALOMA	3	4	97%	1	99%
16. PIEDRA VIVA	4	8	96%	1	99%
17. TABONA	1	2	99%	0	100%
18. TAJARASTE	11	20	89%	7	93%
19. VIÑÁTIGO	14	5	86%	7	93%
20. YERBA DE VIDRIO	1	0	99%	0	100%

Table 2 above shows that only two Canarianisms stand out as being really well known by more than 50% of the informants; they are *perenquén* (91) and *frangollo* (52), although the former is much more often used (76%) than the latter (17%). They are followed, in decreasing order of degree of knowledge, by the following: *desmandarriado* (33), *beletén* (28) and *esmayarse* (27).

Interestingly, a considerable number of informants give a wrong meaning for the following Canarianisms: *capirote* (22), *tajaraste* (20), *esmayarse* (16), *jairo* (13) and *desmandarriado* (12). It is also noticeable that only seven of the Canarianisms in our survey corpus have an equivalent in general Spanish. In this group, only *perenquén* seems to be favoured versus the more general terms *salamandra*/*lagartija*.

Equally outstanding is the case of those terms which none (100%) or almost none (99%) of our informants use, such as *botana*, *tabona* and *yerba de vidrio* (100%), and *chirgarse*, *guanil*, *pico de paloma* and *pedra viva*, which just have one user (99%). Another remarkable observation that can be made has to do with the number of informants who give a wrong meaning for some of the terms. This is the case of *capirote* (22), *tajaraste* (20), *esmayarse* (16), *jairo* (13), *desmandarriado* (12) and *chirgarse* (10). In most of them, the reasons for the errors are relatively easy to understand. Thus, *capirote* is used in general Spanish to refer to a very sharp-pointed hat that is typically worn by the participants in religious processions at Easter. The similarity in form between the two Guanche words *tajaraste* and *tajinaste*, explains why many informants erroneously gave the latter's meaning ('a plant') for the former, which refers to 'a dance'. Likewise, *esmayarse* ('to be hungry/to yawn') was confused with *desmayarse* ('to faint') and *chirgarse* ('to get frightened') with *chingarse* ('to splash yourself'). *Jairo* ('a billy-goat') was mistaken as a proper name since in fact there is a Latin-American singer called Jairo, who used to be quite popular some years ago. Finally, Table 3 below shows more specific data regarding degree of knowledge and frequency of usage, both classified by gender.

Table 3. Results by gender and degree of knowledge and usage.

CANARIANISMS	Number of men and women who give a complete and correct meaning		Number of men and women who give a partially correct meaning		Number of men and women who use the word frequently		Number of men and women who use the word sometimes	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. BELETÉN	10	5	6	7	0	1	9	5
2. BOCINEGRO	19	5	0	0	2	0	4	4
3. BOTANA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. CAPIROTE	13	4	2	0	1	1	5	1
5. CHIRGARSE	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
6. DESMANDARRIADO	13	15	4	1	3	6	7	7
7. ESMAYARSE	12	15	0	0	2	5	4	6
8. FRANGOLLO	25	25	1	1	1	1	8	7
9. GÁNIGO	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
10. GUANIL	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
11. JAIRO	4	5	0	1	2	3	1	2
12. MOCÁN	8	1	1	2	1	0	1	2
13. OREJA DE BURRO	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14. PERENQUÉN	45	46	0	0	11	17	22	26
15. PICO DE PALOMA	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
16. PIEDRA VIVA	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
17. TABONA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
18. TAJARASTE	5	5	0	1	0	3	2	2
19. VIÑÁTIGO	3	2	5	4	1	0	5	1
20. YERBA DE VIDRIO	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3 above shows more men than women give complete meanings for 12 words, their scores being remarkably different in four of them, namely *beletén*, *bocinegro*, *capirote* and *mocán*. Women only slightly surpass men in their knowledge of four words: *esmayarse*, *jairo*, *perenquén* and *tajaraste* (if we sum the number of complete and partially correct answers). In turn, Table 4 below shows the extent to which each of the Canarianisms studied belongs to our informants' active or passive vocabulary, as well as the corresponding index of lexical loss for each word.

Table 4. Percentages of active vocabulary, passive vocabulary and lexical loss.

CANARIANISMS	ACTIVE VOCABULARY (words known and used)		PASSIVE VOCABULARY (words known but not used)		PERCENTAGE OF LEXICAL LOSS
	(M+F)	Total	(M+F)	Total	Total
1. PERENQUÉN	(33 + 43)	76	(12 + 3)	15	9%
2. DESMANDARRIADO	(10 + 13)	23	(7 + 3)	10	67%
3. FRANGOLLO	(9 + 8)	17	(16 + 19)	35	48%
4. ESMAYARSE	(6 + 10)	16	(6 + 6)	12	72%
5. BELETÉN	(9 + 6)	15	(7 + 7)	14	71%
6. BOCINEGRO	(6 + 4)	10	(14 + 0)	14	76%
7. CAPIROTE	(6 + 2)	8	(7 + 2)	9	83%
8. VIÑÁTIGO	(6 + 1)	7	(2 + 5)	7	86%
9. TAJARASTE	(2 + 5)	7	(3 + 1)	4	89%
10. JAIRO	(3 + 5)	8	(1 + 1)	2	90%
11. MOCÁN	(2 + 2)	4	(7 + 1)	8	88%
12. PIEDRA VIVA	(1 + 0)	1	(3 + 0)	3	96%
13. PICO DE PALOMA	(1 + 0)	1	(2 + 0)	2	97%
14. CHIRGARSE	(0 + 1)	1	(1 + 0)	1	98%
15. GUANIL	(1 + 0)	1	(1 + 0)	1	98%
16. GÁNIGO	(1 + 0)	1	(0 + 0)	0	99%
17. OREJA DE BURRO	(0 + 0)	0	(1 + 0)	1	99%
18. TABONA	(0 + 0)	0	(1 + 0)	1	99%
19. YERBA DE VIDRIO	(0 + 0)	0	(1 + 0)	1	99%
20. BOTANA	(0 + 0)	0	(0 + 0)	0	100%

The figures above indicate that only one word, *perenquén*, is safely registered in our informants' lexical repertoire, reaching the highest percentage (76%) within the active vocabulary and the lowest index of lexical loss (9%). It is followed at great distance by *desmandarriado* and *frangollo*, which seem to compete for second position in our ranking since, although the former is more actively known and used (23%), the latter scores higher (35%) in the passive vocabulary. This means that *frangollo* obtains a lower index of lexical loss (48%) than *desmandarriado* (67%).

The next three words in the list (*esmayarse*, *beletén* and *bocinegro*) are still slightly known and used by our informants, with their lexical-loss index in the 70s. It is obvious that the next five terms (*capirote*, *viñátigo*, *tajaraste*, *jairo* and *mocán*) are in a very dangerous situation, with only about ten of our informants knowing and using them. The case of the following words is also clear: except for *pedra viva* and *pico de paloma*, recognized respectively by merely 4 and 3 informants, the rest of the Canarianisms in the list are just known by one informant, *botana* being utterly unknown.

Regarding the third question in our survey (what type of speakers would probably use those words according to our informants) we must say that not all students gave an answer, neither referred to all the words. The reason is possibly that they were not familiar with those terms, so they did not know who would use them. Table 5 below summarises our informants' responses to this question (some answers included more than one option).

Table 5. Informants' opinions about who would use each of the Canarianisms.

CANARIANISMS	Who uses it? →					Specialists in the field / professionals
	Do not know	Anyone/all Canarians	Country people	Older people		
1. BELETÉN	72	4	13	11	0	
2. BOCINEGRO	92	5	5	5	13	
3. BOTANA	92	0	3	5	0	
4. CAPIROTE	69	7	9	15	0	
5. CHIRGARSE	89	3	3	5	0	
6. DESMANDARRIADO	65	18	5	12	0	
7. ESMAYARSE	65	10	7	18	0	
8. FRANGOLLO	62	10	8	13	7	
9. GÁNIGO	91	1	3	5	0	
10. GUANIL	87	0	4	9	0	
11. JAIRO	84	2	5	8	1	
12. MOCÁN	85	1	5	6	3	
13. OREJA DE BURRO	87	0	3	8	2	
14. PERENQUÉN	29	37	17	17	0	
15. PICO DE PALOMA	84	0	5	5	6	
16. PIEDRA VIVA	85	3	4	7	1	
17. TABONA	89	2	3	5	1	
18. TAJARASTE	77	7	3	6	7	
19. VIÑÁTIGO	82	4	7	5	2	
20. YERBA DE VIDRIO	92	0	3	5	0	

As can be observed, a large majority of our informants seem to have very little or no idea about who would use the Canarianisms in the survey. In a few cases, it is only a small percentage (always less than 20%) of informants that mention older people (e.g., *esmayarse*, 18%), or country people (*perenquén*, 17%) as possible users. Once again, *perenquén* is the Canarianism that obtains the highest percentage (37%) of informants who believe it can be used by anyone, i.e., by all Canarians. Likewise, the word that obtains the highest percentage of informants who believe it can be used by specialists is *bocinegro* (with just a 13%).

Last, but not least, the fourth question brings to the fore the issue of the cultural and social significance of lexical choices, and tries to determine the extent to which our informants feel these and other Canarianisms play a role in the construction of regional identity and in-group solidarity. In short, what we wanted to find out was how our informants feel after checking that they (do not) know (many of) these Canarianism, and whether these undergraduates actually felt the emotions of loss mentioned by Crystal in the epigraph quoted above. Table 6 below summarises their answers:

Table 6. Our informants' feelings about their (not) knowing the selected Canarianisms.

FEELINGS	N / %
It's a real pity/shame that they do not know the words and they may be lost	58
Relatively happy/proud about knowing at least some	3
Curious about the meanings of the words they do not know	6
Not worried at all for not knowing (some of) the words	3
Surprised at not having heard/seen some/many of the words	9
Losing the words of another generation is normal	6
Nothing, no feeling at all	12
No answer	3

As can be observed, 58% of the students –a relatively large though not overwhelming majority– feel ashamed and concerned that they do not know or use these words and that they are disappearing, simply because they believe they constitute an important part of their Canarian identity, which is something “they feel proud of”. Some complained that in their vocabulary many words were being replaced by more modern ones or even foreign words. This seems to reveal that they are aware of the significance of preserving and not losing this lexical legacy, which confirms to a considerable extent the reality of their “emotions of loss” as referred to by Crystal.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The data obtained in this survey seem to indicate that our first hypothesis was correct: a majority of the Canarianisms in our small survey corpus is rather unknown and rarely or never used by our informants, with just a few exceptions. Only one word, *perenquén*, seems to be firmly established in the list of active vocabulary (being known and used by 76% of our informants), and it is followed at great distance by *desmandarriado* (23), *frangollo* (17), *esmayarse* (16), *beletén* (15) and *bocinegro* (10). The remaining terms are only known and used by less than ten of the informants. One word, *botana*, has already disappeared from our informants’ lexical repertoire since none of them know it or use it, while other seven words stand in the lowest levels of the ranking with merely two or fewer informants who know them and occasionally use them, or simply have them in their passive lexical repertoire.

The findings also show that our second hypothesis cannot be validated since women only give more completely or partially correct meanings than men for just four words: *esmayarse*, *jairo*, *perenquén* and *tajaraste* (see Table 3).

In the light of these data, it seems obvious that a majority of the words in this particular corpus of Canarianisms constitute lexical material that tends to disappear (Medina, 1997: 796). In the long run, most of it will probably end up being merely passive vocabulary that only a minority of Canarian Spanish speakers will be able to recognize. This preliminary assessment of our undergraduates’ knowledge and usage of Canarianisms is therefore negative: they seem to be currently suffering considerable lexical loss. When they realize this is the case, most of them feel sorry and concerned about it and say it is important to maintain this vocabulary which provides them and their region with their own cultural identity.

Notwithstanding, further research with larger samples of both Canarianisms and informants is probably needed to confirm these preliminary results. Following Morgenthaler’s (2002) line of thought, it will also be of interest to investigate the extent to which the current process of globalization is affecting the cultural and linguistic identity of our Canarian youngsters. They are the new generation of speakers of Canarian Spanish and their role in maintaining or changing the future of this variety is crucial.

A final question to pose at this stage is “what can be done to prevent this and further lexical loss?” Unfortunately we are not in a position to give a clear answer, since this raises a host of issues which have not been discussed here. As Crystal (2000: 127-8) admits, when dealing with language death –which we believe can also be applied to lexical loss– “clusters of factors interact in subtle ways”. Using his words, we cannot but conclude as follows:

There is still so much that we don’t know. What motivates the members of a community to work for their language? Why do some communities become so involved and others do not? [...]. Nor is the range of factors and how they interact completely understood. We know a great deal about why languages become endangered and die, and why people shift from one language to another, but we still know very little about why they are maintained, and why people stay loyal to them.

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