Abstract: In search of diversification of the teaching process, the paper suggests that foreign language can be acquired relying on word associations and at the same time involving binomial pairs. To provide a relatively substantial data on word associations a survey has been done. Two words for drinks and their word associates from the binomial perspective are at the core of the research. A couple of subsections can be distinguished in it as different groups of respondents have completed two types of a questionnaire. A comparison between the associations produced in a mother tongue and in a foreign language contribute to the understanding of the way words are stored in learner’s mind. In addition, the research leans on a couple of corpora which illustrate the aspect of language usage surprisingly different at times from what can be inferred from the answers of the informants.

Keywords: word associate, binomial, tea, coffee, English.

Tea/coffee in reference to culture

Knowing culture without knowing language is impossible [1] but the other way round is also true. Better understanding and command of language is facilitated by knowing culture specifics. Teaching language is described as teaching culture to some degree [2]. Regarding the nowadays variety of usage of English and the diversity of purposes that motivate learners to study it, Ivanova [3] points out that there is not a single society existing without a culture and „learning a language in isolation of its cultural background prevents people from becoming socialized“ [4]. According to Yule [4] greater discrepancies between two cultures are easily noticed and people adopt differences modifying cultural schemata, while minor peculiarities are often left unrecognized causing misinterpretation due to different schemata. Therefore, the cultural aspect in teaching any foreign language is one of the crucial factors for language acquisition and before starting to tackle the issue of the present paper from any other point of view, it would be worth introducing the topic in terms of culture and traditions. Brits are known as “a nation of tea drinkers”1. According to the data presented by Nannestad2 the nearly 300-year tradition seems to result in 100 million cups of tea drunk by British people daily as compared to 70 million cups of coffee drunk every day. Another source3 presents different numbers but the tea/coffee ratio is kept almost the same and tea still remains the favourite drink for all ages in the reports. Although British people have at least one cup of tea a day, it varies in quality and additives. Greenwood4 observes the unwritten rule about the lighter the tea, the higher the social class. With or without sugar is another indicator that is pointed out and the way milk is put in the cup, before or after the tea being poured out seems also important. Despite the fact that coffee consumption seems to increase significantly, tea still remains the favourite hot drink. Greenwood says that „Brewed tea has roughly half the caffeine of an equivalent volume of coffee...“ (ibid.) and due to it and the rest of its ingredients on a molecular level it has its refreshing power. Nevertheless, according to some recent resources on the Internet, coffee is getting more and more popular. Although in the US drinking tea has increased5, Americans have their own way of drinking it as they prefer it cold or even icy and they are „partial to ready-to-drink tea bags“(ibid.). The predilection for a particular drink seems to have left its imprint in language. While British have the slang word „cuppa“ for tea, Americans quite of-
ten use „cup of Joe” instead of coffee. These associations could be among the variety of other words and expressions that the words tea and coffee would easily evoke. Word associations are most probably culturally dependent and as pointed out even subtle differences are worth examining.

According to Nielsen Admosphere research, tea drinking is popular in Bulgaria, too. It is reported that almost all people (96%) drink it especially in winter. Hot herb tea is popular among older people, and young people prefer fruit tea. The prime motive for drinking tea is either to get warm or to improve health. In contrast, British people find more reasons to drink it. As Nannestad puts it, “Tea is the default response to a myriad of situations: waking up, shocking news, returning from a boozy night out, good news, breaking up, giving birth, meeting a friend, feeling uncomfortable, or feeling happy”. It is even considered that many Brits measure the time necessary for accomplishing a particular task by the number of tea cups that are supposed to be drunk.

Another Nielsen Admosphere’s research provides information about 85% of Bulgarian respondents enjoying coffee every morning. Only 6% of the Bulgarian respondents claim that they never drink coffee, but 60% admit that they drink more than one cup a day. 55% drink it where they live. In comparison 79% British adults drink coffee at home. Most coffee drinkers are concerned about environment and 30% take advantage of sellers’ discount for bringing their own thermos to be filled with coffee. 32% of British people who drink coffee like it with sugar, while seven in ten which is twice as much in comparison add milk or cream.

Perhaps the way tea is an inevitable part of communication for the British people, in a similar way having a cup of coffee has become an expression for meeting friends. How such facts affect language is described in a several-stage experiment.

**Procedure**

The goal of step one is to compare the word associations that Bulgarian students produce in their mother tongue and in the foreign language they have been studying. The association fields that these responses form can give a clue whether two stimulus words with the meaning of two drinks in Bulgarian result in similar or different associations from those when the stimuli are presented in the foreign language.

In step two a conjunction is added to each of the two stimulus words. Another group of Bulgarian students are examined in both languages to find out whether this sort of expansion makes any difference. But the main reason for the attachment of the conjunction is to facilitate binomial production.

Step three focuses on the results from an online survey created to check the preference to any of the three options. The choices made by a small number of native speakers and some Bulgarian people living in the UK are considered in search of similarities and differences.

Step four is the final part of the study intended as a catalyst for clearer results. Tea/coffee followed by the conjunction „and“ are searched for in Brigham Young University-British National Corpus (BYU-BNC). The data in Bulgarian National Corpus (BNC) is used for the corresponding words чай/кафе followed by i (and).

All these steps are expected to lead to one and the same direction, i.e. binding word associations with binomials. The importance of the latter could be expressed metaphorically as one of the shortcuts to native-likeness in speech. This is closely related to foreign language teaching where knowing similarities along with differences between the mother tongue and the language being taught should be counted an advantage for language acquisition.

**Word associations**

In order to show part of the diversity of associations an experiment, similar to word association test, was conducted. The participants are 13 Bulgarian students at College-Dobrich who have been studying English for at least two years. They are of different age ranging from 20 to 42 where the average age is 26. Their level of language proficiency is also diverse, from A1 to B2.

The students were given a sheet of paper with seven stimulus words from the food domain. The words tea and coffee were not put one after the other in the list. The participants were given the stimuli in Bulgarian and were asked to write the first word that comes to mind after reading the stimulus word silently. The approximate time for writing a response word to all of the given stimuli was 2 minutes. After that another sheet of paper was given to the students and they were asked to follow the aforementioned procedure with the same stimuli but written in English and the answers had to be written in the foreign language, too.

The response words outline the association field of the stimuli in Bulgarian and in English. Figure 1 below represents the words received as answers to the stimulus word чай (tea) in Bulgarian. The number of their occurrences in not equal and the diagram presents it clearly with the larger space for the repeated words. On the one hand, the equal distance in the circle gives idea about the way they appear as words that all come first to mind. On the other hand, some of them seem semantically closer than others but it is hardly possible to measure it and present it in a figure.
Figure 1. Association field of the stimulus word chay (tea) in Bulgarian according to the informants.

The dominant association words in Figure 1. are bilka (herb) and limon (lemon). It is different from the data in Figure 2. which lacks any repeated answers.

Figure 2. Association field of the stimulus word tea in English according to the informants.

Further comparison between the results visualized my means of the two figures recognizes some more discrepancies. Although part of the constituents (1/3) have similar meanings, there are different words (2/3) suggested as well. While the representatives of Figure 1. seem to be paradigmatic associations and only one is of syntagmatic type, the second figure offers four words of syntagmatic relations, all of them different from the one in the first figure. These facts suggest that most of the students have probably developed different systems for the two languages in their mind. The power of association to help learners recall words more easily is undeniable in learning new words as Russ10 mentions it since meaning alone is not enough.

In terms of coffee the same group gave responses in Bulgarian as in Figure 3 and in English as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 3. Association field of the stimulus word kafe (coffee) in Bulgarian according to the informants.

Although repeated only twice, there are dominant associations in Bulgarian (mlyako (milk) and sutrin/utro (morning)). The dominant associations in English are also two and they occur twice but they are different words (friends; energy). Again about 1/3 of all the response words in the students’ mother tongue overlap with the
words in the foreign language. Unlike the results of the stimulus word tea, coffee receives only one response of syntagmatic relation type for both languages.

![Figure 4. Association field of the stimulus word coffee in English according to the informants.](image)

A question arises whether the results would be similar if the conjunction „and“ is added to each stimulus word. Enlarging the structure this way is expected to open the door for producing binomials which is facilitated on the one hand by the fact that almost all the reaction words given as a response were nouns and on the other hand, the evidence that binomials share one and the same word class for both conjuncts as a rule. Russ (ibid.) cites Deignan et al. (1996) to underline the important fact that native speakers are apt to use coordinate associations more than second language speakers. In terms of coordination as one of the paradigmatic relationships Precosky pays special attention to binomial collocations.

**In search of binomials**

The experiment depicted so far was a bit modified by adding „and“ after the same seven stimulus words and another group of 9 Bulgarian students at College – Dobrich who have been studying English for at least a year (age 24 to 48; average 34) were given a piece of paper to write the first word that would come to mind after each given item. The results show an almost complete overlap of the response words in students’ mother tongue with the words in the foreign language they study as presented in Figure 5 A) and B).

![Figure 5. A) Response words to chai and… in Bulgarian according to the students.](image)

![Figure 5. B) Response words to tea and… in English according to the students.](image)
The picture seems more or less the same in quantity what concerns the stimulus word coffee in the two languages (Figure 6 A) and Figure 6 B). In terms of quality, it can be summarized that students associate the Bulgarian word kafe (coffee) mostly with tsiqara (cigarette) and voda (water), the latter being produced more often in English as well. Two more words in English are chosen more than once, i.e. tea, and milk. According to the survey both tea and coffee and the reversed coffee and tea are among the preferred binomials but only a deeper research including more examples or/and informants could answer the question about ir/reversibility of the pair.

The different number of participants makes it difficult to decide if the presence of the conjunction restricts the opportunities for diversity in answers or not but the overall impression seems to be that there are less response words in both languages if „and“ is added. Most of the suggested answers do not look like proper fixed binomial pairs. To exclude the superfluous and focus on true binomial pairs only, a survey with three options was spread out. The predilection for a particular word is to direct towards more established word pairs. Two groups of participants were expected to give a clue about the issue. Group I consists of three native speakers (aged 50 and above), and Group II encompasses 13 Bulgarian people who have been living in the UK for 8 to 13 years. Their age varies from 16 to 55. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1. Survey results (three options for tea and.../coffee and...)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First conjunct</th>
<th>Second conjunct</th>
<th>Number of occurrences according to the survey (Group I 3 native speakers)</th>
<th>Number of occurrences according to the survey (Group II 15 Bulgarian people living in the UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tea</td>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sugar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>biscuits</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>sugar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>milk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chocolate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the difference in the number of the respondents a very clear tendency could be observed. Table 1. displays definite preference of Group I to the biscuits option which is also favoured by most people in Group II in terms of „tea and“. When coffee is the first conjunct, the choice is split between milk and chocolate in the first group. Although for both groups most participants preferred to choose milk, the answers of Group 2 for coffee are more unified as compared to the choice they have made for tea. Some more information on the occurrences is provided with the last stage.

Corpora
Tea and coffee turns out to be the most frequent pair in both corpora and in both languages (128 occurrences in BYU-BNC and 41 in BNC) respectively. Tea and biscuits (37 occurrences in BYU-BNC and 17 in BNC) takes the second place and tea and sugar ((14 occurrences in BYU-BNC and 6 in BNC) appear to be the most unusual combination.

Surprisingly, coffee and chocolate is the most common pair in both corpora (7:7 occurrences). At the same time the same number is counted for coffee and sugar in BNC, though. Coffee and milk is regarded the least probable according to both corpora.

Conclusion and further work
The first part of the experiment helps to see the diversity of association words that tea as a stimulus word evokes. Among all these mostly non-repeated responses is the reaction word kafe in Bulgarian. Adding the conjunction opens the door for the binomials tea and coffee, and tea and biscuits, the latter of the pairs being preferred by all native speakers in the survey. But according to the corpora the former pair is more often used. Perhaps this a rationale good enough to explain the reason to direct the attention of the students to these words, except the orthographic specificity of both and the pronunciation peculiarity of biscuits.

According to the Bulgarian students coffee is associated with zahar (sugar) and mlyako (milk) in Bulgarian, and with milk in English. Adding the conjunction results in responses such as milk and sugar. Since some of the native speakers and most people in the group of the Bulgarians living in the UK have chosen milk as an option, the striking difference with the results from the corpora where chocolate is mostly used can serve as basis for discussion about different cultural schemata.

Involving word associates and binomials in the process of teaching foreign language could be done in numerous ways. Word associations could be used in a pre-teaching vocabulary task where teachers can include elaborately chosen words associated with the new word that is introduced. Felicitous binomial pairs can have their place there as well. Discussions on cultural differences and preference on the topic can facilitate the development of speaking skills.

References:
1. Angelov, B., Gyurova, V., Gyurov, D., Malinova, L., Milenova, M., Baeva, M., Zhelyazkov, St., Velinova, T., Problemi na rannoto chuzhdoezikovo obuchenie, Parva chast.Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2002.

(Endnotes)
11. https://survey.bg/s/yk+biCg6bG link to the survey designed for native speakers.
12. https://survey.bg/s/ez71bHFIlL link to the survey designed for Bulgarian people living in the UK.