

## **Thematic units and aspects of vocabulary knowledge in L2 Spanish textbooks**

### ***Unidades temáticas y aspectos del conocimiento léxico en los manuales de ELE***

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Learning vocabulary entails the development of several aspects of lexical knowledge. Concretely, Nation (2001) proposed nine aspects of particular relevance. This study aims at analyzing their treatment in four L2 Spanish textbooks. Seven vocabulary themes that were present in all textbooks, were selected for analysis since certain aspects of lexical knowledge are more likely to appear in specific themes. For example, greetings would promote the introduction of constraints of use since Spanish greetings depend on the formality of the situation and the relationship between interlocutors, whereas introducing the parts of a house would not implicate contextual constraints. Results show that textbook activities mainly focus on the form-meaning aspect of vocabulary knowledge, while all other aspects play little to no role in vocabulary learning activities. This situation is overall consistent across themes, indicating that even when a particular theme could foster a specific aspect of lexical knowledge, this was not fully exploited in any of the textbooks. Additionally, the presentation of vocabulary in communicative contexts seems to promote the practice of several vocabulary knowledge aspects, whereas words presented in decontextualized semantic clusters tend to be practiced exclusively in terms of the form-meaning link.

Keywords: lexical knowledge, textbooks, L2 pedagogy, vocabulary

#### **RESUMEN**

Aprender vocabulario conlleva el desarrollo de nueve aspectos del conocimiento léxico, según Nation (2001). El presente estudio analiza su tratamiento en cuatro manuales de ELE. Siete temas de vocabulario se seleccionaron para el análisis, ya que ciertos aspectos del conocimiento léxico tienen mayores probabilidades de aparecer en ciertos temas que en otros. Por ejemplo, en el capítulo sobre los saludos, se espera encontrar más actividades sobre las restricciones de uso de las expresiones aprendidas dependiendo del grado de formalidad de la situación y la relación entre los interlocutores. En cambio, el capítulo sobre las partes de la casa probablemente favorezca menos el tratamiento de dichas

restricciones pragmáticas. Los resultados muestran que la mayor parte de las actividades se concentran en el desarrollo de la asociación entre forma y significado, mientras que los demás aspectos se mantienen en un segundo plano. Esta situación es similar en los diferentes capítulos, lo cual indica que, aunque algunos temas podrían favorecer otros aspectos, esta ventaja no se explota sistemáticamente. Adicionalmente, la presentación de vocabulario en contextos comunicativos parece promover la práctica de más aspectos mientras que la presentación tradicional de listas de vocabulario promueve un enfoque exclusivo en la asociación entre forma y significado.

Palabras clave: conocimiento léxico, manuales, pedagogía de L2, vocabulario

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning is essential to the development of linguistic competence in a second language (L2), as a broad lexicon fosters both oral (Van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2012) and written comprehension (Hu & Nation, 2000), favors oral proficiency (Hilton, 2008) and plays a crucial role in academic achievement (Stæhr, 2008). Therefore, vocabulary should be a central component of the L2 classroom. To date, research on L2 vocabulary learning and teaching has mainly focused on investigating the number of words that learners need to know in order to observe such benefits (Nation, 2006). Indeed, since the lexicon of most languages is formed of a network of tens of thousands of word families, which amounts to a huge amount of individual words, it is necessary to adopt a clear criterion to help define the number of words that are most relevant for L2 learners. And this criterion is overwhelmingly clear in the literature: students need to learn the 2,000 – 3,000 most frequent words of their L2 prior to any other lower frequency vocabulary (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014).

However, establishing the list of words that should be emphasized the most in the classroom is only a starting point in order to develop L2 vocabulary teaching programs that address learners' needs. Once this list has been agreed upon, the emphasis needs to shift towards depth of vocabulary knowledge, and the different aspects that underlie vocabulary learning. For instance, some relevant questions to ask ourselves, as researchers and language instructors, are: What do learners need to know about a word in order to remember it in the long term? What type of lexical knowledge do they need in order to use those words in appropriate contexts? How can they organize their emerging L2 lexicon in ways that connect newly learned words with already-acquired vocabulary? Indeed, word knowledge goes beyond the mere recognition of form-meaning mappings (Nation, 2001) and is a multifaceted construct that needs to be studied in all its complexity. Thus, agreeing on the number of words to teach is not enough, when the real question is: What does it really entail to know each one of those most frequent words in a language?

To answer this question, Nation (2001) proposed that lexical knowledge involves nine different aspects: spoken form, written form, word parts, form and meaning, concept and references, associations, grammatical functions, collocations and constraints of use. For each of those aspects, learners need to develop receptive (R) and productive (P) knowledge, as summarized in Table 1.

Form	spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?
		P	what word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	concept and references	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	constraints of use	R	Where, when, and how often would be expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

Table 1. Aspects of word knowledge (Nation, 2001: 49)

In this context, it seems necessary to assess to what extent current teaching practices take all of these aspects into account and provide L2 learners with sufficient opportunities to practice them in the classroom. One way of studying whether this is the case is by analyzing how vocabulary is presented in L2 textbooks, since these constitute one of the pillars of curriculum design in L2 courses and instructors rely upon them when organizing lesson plans and classroom activities (Garton & Graves, 2014; Guerrettaz & Johnson, 2013; Marcos Miguel, 2015; Shower, 2010). Thus, as stated by Cubillos in his recent state-of-the-art review on Spanish language textbooks in the US (2014: 206): «textbooks are powerful indicators of prevalent pedagogical paradigms, and that the content analysis of published titles can provide a snapshot of established practices and perspectives on language teaching and learning».

When it comes to research on vocabulary in L2 textbooks, most studies have focused on word frequency, that is, studying to what extent language textbooks include high-frequency words in order to address the students' need to be exposed to relevant, everyday life, vocabulary (Davies & Face, 2006; Lipinski, 2010; Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010). In this respect, the literature offers a very clear and consistent picture: contrary to what would be expected based on the suggestions from the literature, textbooks do not base vocabulary selection decisions on lexical frequency. This pattern has been found in textbooks for different L2s and proficiency levels.

While the role of word frequency in textbooks' vocabulary selection has been studied repeatedly, few studies have analyzed to what extent the different aspects of vocabulary knowledge are taken into account in L2 textbooks' vocabulary exercises. In a context where the amount of vocabulary that is taught and is really relevant to the students is limited, it is necessary to analyze how the vocabulary included in the

textbooks is actually practiced and whether such practice favors the development of the different aspects of word knowledge. To the best of our knowledge, the only two studies to date that have addressed this issue were conducted by Brown (2011) for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks and Neary-Sundquist (2015) for L2 German textbooks. No study has looked into this question yet in the context of L2 Spanish textbooks.

The main goal of both Brown and Neary-Sundquist was to study the extent to which L2 textbooks offer practice opportunities for the nine aspects of word knowledge proposed by Nation (2001). The descriptions of activities that were considered to tap into each word knowledge aspect in both studies are presented in Table 2.

Spoken form	An activity that requires students to notice the spoken form of an item or to produce its features. An activity that involves matching the spoken form to the written form. Activities that include the spoken form of items (for example, in a listening passage), but draw no special attention to the form are not included.
Written form	An activity that focuses students' attention on the spelling of items. Activities that involve reading or writing the items as part of the process of doing something else are not included.
Word parts	An activity that focuses attention on the parts of a word, for example by comparing the different forms of a word. An activity that involves the parts of a multi-word item.
Form and meaning	An activity that involves matching forms and meanings (expressed as, for example, definitions or pictures). An activity that involves recalling forms from meanings or recalling meanings from forms. An activity that explains the meanings of items.
Concept and referents	An activity that involves considering what is and what is not included in a word's meaning, for example by comparing similar items.
Associations	An activity that involves matching items with or producing synonyms or opposites or that asks students to group items under different categories.
Grammatical functions	An activity that requires students to manipulate a word in some way with respect to a sentence, for example, by adding it to the sentence in the correct position. An activity that explains the patterns an item appears in or that asks learners to find these patterns. Activities that simply ask students to use the items in speech or writing are not included.
Collocations	An activity that involves matching the parts of a collocation or that requires the addition of one half of a collocation.
Constraints on use	An activity that involves matching items from different registers or classifying items as belonging to different registers. An activity that explains the constraints on an item.

Table 2. Description of typical activities for each word knowledge aspect in Brown (2011: 88)

Brown (2011) and Neary-Sundquist (2015) followed a similar methodology for their analyses: they analyzed odd-numbered units from the textbooks, and all activities that showed a clear focus on vocabulary were included in the studies. This means that the authors did not analyze only the activities from the vocabulary sections of the units, but rather any activity that did somehow focus on vocabulary. Both studies present similar results and reveal a lack of emphasis on aspects that are not related to the association between a lexical form and its meaning. Thus, activities that focused on aspects such as written form, collocations or constraints of use were

almost nonexistent in both studies. This reduced variety of options in vocabulary practice activities might prevent learners from developing a deep vocabulary knowledge, thus hindering their chances of remembering the words in the long term. The limited scope of vocabulary activities may also preclude the use of some words to very specific contexts presented in the textbook, without allowing learners to develop a complete understanding about when and how these words can be used.

Nonetheless, not all vocabulary aspects -except for written and spoken form, as well as meaning and form- are as relevant for all themes in the textbooks. For instance, while it is imperative for learners to develop a clear knowledge of the constraints of use in greetings, due to the pragmatic implications of using a more formal or informal greeting depending on your interlocutor, this specific aspect may not be as relevant when learning the vocabulary of the parts of the house, where few pragmatic constraints exist. The same happens with the word parts aspect, which can be practiced more efficiently when a particular theme includes several compound or derived words. For instance, it seems more relevant to practice the use of derivational suffixes in the context of the vocabulary of the professions (e.g., *bake* -> *baker*, *act* -> *actor*, *art* -> *artist*) than in that of the clothes (e.g., *skirt*, *pants*, *socks*), which tends to mainly include morphologically simple words (Robles-García & Sánchez-Gutiérrez, 2016).

In this context, while Brown (2011) and Neary-Sundquist (2015) offer a compelling picture of the overall treatment of the different aspects of vocabulary knowledge in L2 textbooks, they fail to account for the differential relevance of certain aspects in specific themes. For example, it may be true that there are overall few activities that focus on practicing constraints of use, however what is really relevant is whether this aspect is practiced in vocabulary themes that require its learning or that would, at least, offer a natural starting point for the discussion about it. Indeed, the fact that no exercise on constraints of use is included when teaching the vocabulary of the clothes or the parts of the house is not as informative as finding out that this is the case when teaching the greetings.

The present study aims to complement previous literature on vocabulary knowledge aspects in L2 textbooks by differentiating among a variety of themes and their relation to specific aspects. Additionally, this will be the first study of this kind for L2 Spanish textbooks. The purpose is to select specific themes that are expected to foster the teaching and practice of certain aspects and study whether or not the textbooks respond to these expectations. For instance, are constraints of use activities emphasized in the vocabulary section about greetings? Is there a specific focus on word parts in the unit about the vocabulary of the professions? Concretely, the research questions for this study are:

1. What aspects of word knowledge are more and less practiced in elementary Spanish language textbooks?
2. How does the distribution of activities related to each word knowledge aspect vary depending on the specific themes that are analyzed?

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Textbook Corpus

Four elementary Spanish textbooks from three different US publishers were analyzed and are presented in Table 3. All of them are broadly used in American universities. Three of these textbooks (*Nexos*, *Pura Vida*, *Vistas*) are divided into units that include several different sections (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, writing, or reading sections) and clearly distinguish between vocabulary sections and those devoted to other skills or knowledge types. In this context, the scope of the analysis was limited to exercises that were part of vocabulary sections. The rationale was that, if we want to assess what textbook creators consider as vocabulary activities and what type of word knowledge aspects are covered in those activities, it is imperative to only look at exercises that are specifically meant to tap into vocabulary knowledge. Indeed, while it is true that fill-in-the-blank exercises in grammar sections of the textbooks require some knowledge of the verbs to be conjugated, the main aim of the activity is not to reinforce vocabulary learning, but rather to train the students into proper conjugation strategies. Nonetheless, such a narrow approach might not be applicable to other types of textbooks that have more blurry separations between lexical and grammatical exercises. For instance, in the fourth book that was considered in this study, *Protagonistas*, no clear distinction is made between vocabulary versus grammar sections and other types of skills and contents. Thus, all activities that directly aimed at practicing vocabulary had to be taken into account, independent of where they were placed in the textbook.

<b>Publisher</b>	Cengage	Wiley	Vista Higher Learning	Vista Higher Learning
<b>Title</b>	<i>Nexos 3e</i>	<i>Pura Vida 1e</i>	<i>Vistas 5e</i>	<i>Protagonistas 2e</i>

Table 3. Textbooks used in the analyses

Most Spanish language textbooks published in the US follow similar divisions to those in *Nexos*, *Pura Vida* or *Vistas*, and few textbooks follow the same structure as *Protagonistas*, which does not strictly separate activities into aspects of linguistic knowledge or skill types. These differences are due to the fact that the vast majority of elementary Spanish textbooks are organized around a mainly structural syllabus, while only recent books such as *Protagonistas* aim to offer a more functional, task-based approach (Cubillos, 2014). In this context, units correspond to tasks, rather than linguistic contents and, as such, lexical and grammar information is introduced as part of the tools needed to complete targeted tasks. Therefore, it seems relevant to observe if these two types of syllabi present different patterns in terms of the number and type of vocabulary activities that they include for each vocabulary theme. Indeed, it could be hypothesized that the more task-based the approach, the more aspects related to real-life language use (i.e., grammatical functions, constraints of use, collocations) will be introduced. Alternatively, textbooks that introduce grammar and vocabulary in a more decontextualized way may present more activities that focus on form (i.e., spoken form, written form, word parts) and meaning (i.e., form and meaning, associations, concept and referents).

## 2.2. Selection of themes

Brown (2011) and Neary-Sundquist (2015) selected complete units as their targets of analysis, chosen at random (i.e., odd-numbered units). Thus, in both studies, the results of the analyses from all units were collapsed into a single account of the number and percentage of activities that tapped into each vocabulary knowledge aspect. As such, no distinctions could be made between different themes, in which the various word knowledge aspects may have carried different weights (e.g., more word parts in the professions than the clothes due to the higher number of morphologically complex words in the former theme). In order to offer a more fine-grained analysis of how each aspect is treated in the textbooks, in this study, the units of analysis were themes instead of textbook chapters. This entails that activities related to some themes might be spread across several chapters or units. For example, it would be possible that the vocabulary of the professions is taught in the chapter about introductions, where students learn how to give personal information about themselves and is then reintroduced in the chapter about family members, where one learns how to describe people in their families. Thus, activities were selected from all units that included some contents that fitted into each one of the selected themes.

The seven themes that were chosen are presented in Table 4, along with the aspects that could be expected to appear in each one of them. For instance, the distinction between formal and informal situations and the different types of expressions that can be used in each situation is a highly relevant aspect of learning how to greet or say goodbye. Thus, it could be expected that exercises that focus on greetings and goodbyes introduce the *constraints of use* that need to be taken into account when performing this type of interaction.

Theme	Expected word knowledge aspect
Greetings and goodbyes	Constraints of use
Professions	Word parts
Hobbies and pastimes	Grammatical functions
Daily activities	Grammatical functions
Parts of the city	Concepts and referents
Parts of the house	Collocations
Parts of the body	Collocations

Table 4. Themes and their expected word knowledge aspects

In the case of the vocabulary of the professions, three suffixes, *-dor*, *-dero* and *-ista*, are particularly productive and form transparent pairs of words, such as *vender* [to sell] -> *vendedor* [seller], *pescado* [fish] -> *pescadero* [fish seller], or *piano* -> *pianista* [piano player]. While *-dor* creates names of professions based on the actions that are performed (e.g., *vendedor*), *-dero* specializes in the formation of profession nouns (e.g., *pescadero*) that derive from the product that is sold (e.g., *pescado*), and *-ista* is even more specific, as it forms profession nouns (e.g., *pianista*, *futbolista* [football player]) for individuals who play a musical instrument (e.g., *piano*) or a sport (e.g., *fútbol*). Thus, professions vocabulary offers a fertile ground for the introduction of *word parts*.

Both the themes related to pastimes and to daily activities include a significant number of verbs. Given the highly inflected nature of Spanish verbs, a great challenge in learning these is to be able to use them appropriately in sentences, applying the adequate ending to the root and correctly placing the conjugated verb in a sentence. Thus, a major emphasis on *grammatical functions* would be expected in those two themes.

Brown (2011) suggested that prepositions and adverbs of place offer a cluster of words that requires to pay most attention to meaning nuances. For example, the meaning of *al lado* [next to] includes that of *a la derecha* [on the right] and *a la izquierda* [on the left], while *cerca* [close to] and *al lado* are not always interchangeable, even though they present some meaning overlap. Making sure that learners get to practice these differences and similarities would be extremely useful in order to encode these words as separate units. Thus, it could be expected that the theme where these words are introduced, namely, the parts of the city in the four textbooks analyzed, would include more exercises that practice *concepts and referents* than would be the case in other themes.

Two themes that could easily fit some relevant exercises to practice collocations are the parts of the house and the parts of the body. Indeed, most of the chores in Spanish are formed as verb-noun collocations such as *poner la mesa* [set the table] or *hacer la cama* [make the bed]. When it comes to the parts of the body, this theme is generally embedded in the context of a visit to the doctor, where collocations such as *recetar un medicamento* [prescribe a medication] are especially prevalent. Additionally, knowing the vocabulary of the parts of the body is also key to understanding some frequent Spanish idioms, such as *estar hasta las narices* [literally: to be up to the nose; figuratively: to be fed up]. Given the recurrence of useful collocations and idiomatic expressions in these themes, they should probably provide repeated opportunities to develop the *collocations* aspect of word knowledge.

The remaining four aspects of vocabulary knowledge -*spoken form, written form, form and meaning, and associations*- were not matched to any particular theme. This decision is due to the fact that (1) no clear match could be found between these aspects and the themes that appeared in all textbooks and (2) these aspects could all be introduced in any vocabulary theme.

### 3. RESULTS

As can be observed in Table 5, the overwhelming majority of activities in all textbooks focus on meaning and form. Concretely, an average of eight activities of this kind appear in each theme, which represents approximately 78% of the total number of activities. While it is true that there is significant variation across textbooks and themes in the specific number of meaning and form activities, such variation is only the result of the varied number of activities in the different themes. For instance, the two themes that only present two meaning and form activities are also those that include the most limited total number of total activities. The theme about professions in *Protagonistas* offers a total of four activities while the one about the parts of the body, in the same textbook, includes only two activities that are specifically devoted to practicing the vocabulary of body parts. Thus, in both cases, the meaning and form activities still represent between 50% and 100% of the total number of activities for



those themes. Additionally, themes that include a higher number of activities also present mostly form and meaning exercises. Thus, an increased number of activities does not necessarily indicate a varied approach to vocabulary learning that takes several different word knowledge aspects into account. Only in the theme that corresponds to greetings and goodbyes, in *Pura Vida*, do form and meaning exercises cover less than 50% of the total number of activities.

Associations are the next most practiced aspect of vocabulary knowledge, covering 7.64% of the total number of activities in the textbooks. However, the average number of activities of this sort across themes is of less than one, which means that most themes presented zero of these exercises. In this case, all textbooks include at least one activity of this type in at least one of the analyzed themes, even though there are clear differences across them. For instance, none of the exercises devoted to the parts of the city or the professions include any activity that promotes the practice of associations and, of all the exercises on daily activities, only *Vistas* includes one that fosters this particular aspect of word knowledge. The themes with most exercises of this type are hobbies and pastimes as well as greetings. For example, *Nexos*, page 234, exercise 1, and *Vistas*, page 118, exercise 6, require students to associate a pastime with a place where it can be carried out. Another alternative of association exercises for that theme is that proposed in *Protagonistas*, page 138, exercise 2, where students had to organize a series of hobbies under three categories of activities: cultural, fun or gastronomic. When it comes to greetings, a typical associations exercise is to decide whether a series of expressions are used to greet someone or to say goodbye or to associate a question (e.g., *Hola, ¿qué tal?* [Hello, how are you?]) with an answer (e.g., *Bien, ¿y tú?* [Fine, and you?]).

	Thematic units											
	Greetings and goodbyes				Professions				Hobbies and pastimes			
	N	V	PV	PT	N	V	PV	PT	N	V	PV	PT
Spoken form	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (22)	0 (0)	1 (13)	0 (0)	1 (25)	0 (0)	1 (10)	0 (0)	1 (5)
Written form	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Word parts	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Form and meaning	8 (72)	6 (67)	3 (37)	10 (38)	5 (100)	7 (87)	13 (100)	2 (50)	7 (63)	7 (70)	10 (91)	16 (80)
Concepts and referents	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Associations	3 (38)	2 (22)	0 (0)	2 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (37)	2 (20)	1 (9)	1 (5)
Grammatical functions	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (25)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (10)
Collocations	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Constraints on use	0 (0)	1 (11)	5 (63)	3 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total activities	11	9	8	27	5	8	13	4	11	10	11	20

Table 5 (a): Number of activities per theme and aspect of vocabulary knowledge (first part)

	Thematic units							
	Parts of the city				Daily activities			
	N	V	PV	PT	N	V	PV	PT
Spoken form	0 (0)	1 (11)	0 (0)	1 (15)	0 (0)	1 (12.5)	0 (0)	1 (25)
Written form	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Word parts	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Form and meaning	9 (100)	8 (89)	12 (100)	4 (57)	12 (100)	6 (75)	12 (100)	3 (75)
Concepts and referents	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Associations	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (12.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Grammatical functions	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (28)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Collocations	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Constraints on use	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total activities	9	9	12	7	12	8	12	4

Table 5 (b): Number of activities per theme and aspect of vocabulary knowledge (second part)

	Thematic units								Summary across themes			
	Parts of the house				Parts of the body				Sum	%	M	SD
	N	V	PV	PT	N	V	PV	PT				
Spoken form	0 (0)	1 (11)	0 (0)	1 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16	5.56	0.57	1.17
Written form	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4	1.39	0.14	0.76
Word parts	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (11)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1	0.35	0.04	0.19
Form and meaning	7 (100)	8 (89)	10 (77)	11 (70)	5 (72)	8 (89)	13 (87)	2 (100)	224	77.78	8	3.61
Concepts and referents	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0	0
Associations	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (14.5)	1 (6)	2 (28)	0 (0)	1 (6.5)	0 (0)	22	7.64	0.79	1.1
Grammatical functions	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9	3.13	0.32	0.72
Collocations	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (7.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (6.5)	0 (0)	2	0.69	0.07	0.26
Constraints on use	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10	3.47	0.36	1.1
Total activities	7	9	13	16	7	9	15	2	<b>Total number of activities: 288</b>			

Table 5 (c): Number of activities per theme and aspect of vocabulary knowledge (third part)

The third most practiced aspect in the textbooks is spoken form, with a total of 16 activities, which represents 5.56% of the total number of activities in all textbooks. However, *Nexos* and *Pura Vida* do not present any activity that falls into this category in any of the analyzed themes. Interestingly, each vocabulary section in *Nexos* starts with a video that includes some of the relevant vocabulary, which could have made it easier to foster the inclusion of spoken form activities. Nonetheless, all the activities that relate to the video concern general oral comprehension and none of them promotes the noticing of the spoken form of the words that are targeted in that specific section. Similarly, *Pura Vida* also includes cultural videos in each one of its units but these are not even related to the vocabulary theme of the chapter and, thus, do not promote a focused recognition of the spoken form of the target words. In this context, the case of *Vistas* is interesting. This book starts each vocabulary section with a short listening activity. While not all of such listening practices focus on recognizing the spoken form of the new words to be learned, it seems that the authors take more advantage of these oral materials as sources for spoken form identification exercises than do either *Pura Vida* or *Nexos*.

*Protagonistas* is the book that presents a more systematic approach to the inclusion of spoken form exercises. Both *Protagonistas* and *Vistas* include exercises (that are not in the vocabulary sections) that specifically focus on the pronunciation of some sounds in Spanish that tend to be challenging for L2 students, such as the rolled *r*. Interestingly, these exercises are not based on the vocabulary of the units they are embedded into but, at least, they reveal an interest on the part of the authors, to include some awareness of the spoken form of Spanish words in general. In sum, the simple inclusion of oral comprehension exercises does not seem to directly result in an increased amount of practice of words' spoken form, as all books include some sort of oral input in each unit but these are generally unrelated to the target vocabulary or are not used for phonemic recognition. Alternatively, textbooks that include exercises that are devoted to pronunciation, even if these production activities are not directly related to the target vocabulary of the unit, tend to offer more opportunities for spoken form recognition practice as well. This points to the idea that what matters the most is not necessarily the availability of relevant oral materials but rather the awareness of the authors about the relevance of spoken form as an important aspect of linguistic knowledge.

The *constraints of use* aspect is the fourth in line, representing 3.47% of all analyzed activities. However, nine out of the ten total activities in this category are all included in exercises that focus on greetings and goodbyes. This is the most obvious case of a word knowledge aspect that can be introduced more naturally into a specific chapter than in others. For instance, knowing when to use a formal or informal greeting is extremely relevant when learning the different types of expressions that can be used to greet someone. Thus, this result is not surprising and provides evidence that a more fine-grained analysis of how the different aspects of word knowledge are treated in the textbooks is needed. Indeed, based on the general picture that sums and percentages of activities offer us, it simply seemed that constraints of use was an aspect that was underrepresented. While this is overall true, this aspect is not always underrepresented in specific vocabulary themes in which it is most relevant. Indeed, *Pura Vida* includes as many as five activities of this sort in the theme about greetings, and *Protagonistas* includes three of them. However, *Vistas*

includes only one activity and *Nexos* does not offer any activity on constraints of use in the vocabulary section devoted to greetings and goodbyes.

Activities that aim at practicing grammatical functions represent 3.13% of the total number of activities analyzed. This type of activity appears in most analyzed chapters (except the one about the parts of the body and the one about daily routines) in *Protagonistas*. However, in all other books, there is no trace of such exercises in the vocabulary sections under analysis. Interestingly, contrary to what was expected, the introduction of activities focused on grammatical functions does not seem to be favored in themes that comprise lots of verbs. This situation might be due to the fact that most of the textbooks analyzed include a specific grammatical section to practice conjugation and other aspects that are more related to the integration of words into sentences. The vocabulary sections, on the other hand, seem to focus quite specifically on the discovery and practice of words' meaning and form. Therefore, a typical pattern in all the textbooks analyzed is that verbs are presented in the infinitive form, with little attention to how they fit into sentences in the vocabulary section; while students are asked to conjugate them or choose the accurate forms of the verbs to introduce them in sentence gaps in the grammar section. This is confirmed by the fact that *Protagonistas* is the book that includes most examples of this type of activities, and it is also the only book that does not explicitly separate grammatical and lexical contents in its units.

Activities focusing on the three remaining aspects of word knowledge (i.e., written form, collocations and concepts and referents) are virtually nonexistent in the analyzed corpus of exercises. Only two activities on collocations are proposed across all chapters and these are both in *Pura Vida*. However, even though the number of activities is extremely low, both appear in the themes where they were expected to appear: the parts of the body and the parts of the house. In both cases (pages 134 and 392), an idiom is presented in a text and students are asked to guess what the idiom means based on the context. The two idioms are *de tal palo tal astilla* [*literally: from this stick, this splinter; figuratively: like father, like son*] and *costar un ojo de la cara* [*literally: to cost an eye from one's face; figuratively: to cost a lot*]. There does not seem to be any clear criterion to choose only those two idioms out of all the ones that could be presented as well. Additionally, none of the collocations that could have been exploited in these themes were even mentioned at any point.

Concerning word parts, only one exercise appears in all the analyzed textbooks, and its placement in the unit about the parts of the body seems rather random and unsubstantiated. The exercise (*Vistas*, page 333, exercise 3) requires the completion of a text with words from the same word family than that of the words which are underlined. For example, *Cuando te enfermas, te sientes \_\_\_\_\_ y necesitas un \_\_\_\_\_* [*when you get sick, you feel \_\_\_\_\_ and you need a \_\_\_\_\_*], where the correct answers would be *enfermo* [*sick, ill*] and *enfermero* [*nurse*], respectively. Finally, *concepts and referents* is the only aspect that is not practiced in any activity at all.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Overall, results confirm the main finding in Brown (2011) and Neary-Sundquist (2015), namely, that textbook authors seem to consider that form-meaning mappings are at the center of word knowledge while all other aspects are secondary or even irrelevant. However, the aim of the study was to propose an additional layer of analysis to these shared findings. Concretely, it was hypothesized that if themes, rather than textbook units, were analyzed, some of these apparently invisible aspects of vocabulary knowledge might surface in specific themes. For example, we proposed that constraints of use would appear more when practicing greetings than the vocabulary of the professions, whereas word parts would present the exact opposite pattern. Results do confirm that activities about constraints of use are quite prevalent in explaining the different types of greetings and goodbyes, but all other hypotheses that were posited concerning associations of themes and vocabulary knowledge aspects were either not confirmed or only very partially so. For example, word parts were as ill-treated when presenting the professions as they were in all other chapters and the daily activities theme did not foster the practice of grammatical functions. In some cases, the trend seemed to go in the direction that was expected but only in specific books or in very limited proportions. For instance, the two examples of collocational knowledge were in the chapters about the parts of the body and the parts of the house. However, both cases appeared in *Pura Vida* and the choice of the two idioms seemed rather random, given that none of the most useful collocations that could easily be fitted into that theme were even mentioned.

In addition to the results obtained from comparing these aspects in different themes, some differences were also observed across textbooks. Concretely, when taking all the results into account, *Protagonistas* presents a broader range of types of activities than the other books, covering six out of nine aspects. *Nexus* is in the opposite situation, covering only two of the nine aspects of vocabulary knowledge, when the suggestions to the instructor are not included in the analysis. As was explained before, *Protagonistas* aims at offering a more task-based approach, whereas the other three books follow a very classical structural syllabus, where vocabulary, grammar, and each of the four skills are presented in separate sections of each unit. As was expected, a presentation of the materials that is less focused on structural aspects and puts more emphasis on communication and real-life interactions seems to allow for the integration of more aspects of word knowledge than a more de-contextualized approach. Indeed, it is easier to introduce activities about spoken form, collocations or constraints of use when students are expected to really use the words in realistic contexts. If, alternatively, they are only expected to understand what a word means in order to associate it with an image or complete a fill-in-the-gaps exercise, very few of the aspects are actually relevant.

In relation to this last finding, it is relevant to point out that the themes analyzed in this study presented different characteristics in terms of communicative relevance. While most themes were actually framed as lists of semantically clustered lexical items that offer little opportunities for actual communicative exchanges, the theme about greetings and goodbyes is the only one that clearly has direct applications in real-life contexts. Indeed, the parts of the house or the parts of the body are typical examples of semantic clusters, presented as vocabulary lists that can be practiced without a specific context. While most textbooks try to integrate some

type of communicative activities even for these list-based themes, such activities are ultimately quite unnatural, due to the necessity of incorporating so much vocabulary of a same semantic cluster. For example, most of the textbooks include an activity where students go to the doctor and describe their symptoms. This activity aims at practicing the vocabulary of the parts of the body. Thus, instead of focusing on the useful collocations that are used by the patient and the doctor when they interact, or on the pragmatic implications of the doctor-patient relationship, students have to come up with an exaggeratedly long list of symptoms in order to include as many words as possible from the vocabulary list of the parts of the body. Because the aim was not to actually practice how to go to the doctor but rather to practice the list of vocabulary that was just learned in a somewhat contextualized activity, there was no need to develop any real communicative strategy that would necessitate a deeper knowledge of the words, and of how and when they are used and combined in frequent collocations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at offering a thematic-based analysis of the treatment of the different aspects of word knowledge in L2 introductory Spanish textbooks. Results indicate that, contrary to our hypothesis, very few of the vocabulary knowledge aspects that were expected to match with a specific theme actually did so. Instead of the themes, what seemed more relevant in determining the number of different aspects that were practiced was communicative need, as the necessity to actually convey meaning in order to complete a task. Indeed, when a theme or textbook promotes activities that entail real communicative need, more aspects of word knowledge are introduced and practiced.

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