The role of textbooks in promoting communication goals

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Abstract
Contemporary course and program goals often focus on the development of proficiency and invoke the National Standards as guiding principles of content. Beyond fulfilling basic graduation requirements, many 21st century learners recognize the importance of communication in the language they are studying. However, some learners claim to be able to do little in the target language after fulfilling the required courses and do not continue on to higher level studies. This article calls into question instructional materials utilized for courses and reveals a disconnection between theory and practice. An examination of beginning Spanish textbooks demonstrates a perpetuation of traditional content and practices. In addition, there exists a disproportionate number of traditional, mechanical, grammar-based practice versus creative language tasks (CLT) or tasks that encourage students to interact in creative, authentic, and real world situations. Programs that are closely defined by a publisher-prepared textbooks may be unable to meet student and professional goals of communication.

Introduction
Three decades of research in second language acquisition have brought about a general professional consensus among second and foreign language educators. Most would agree that language proficiency should be the
overarching and main goal of language instruction (Bell, 2005). Furthermore, instructors have been urged by researchers and professional organizations to provide multiple opportunities to expose students to optimal input, to encourage creative student production, and to promote interaction and negotiation of meaning (Burke, 2010; Ellis, 2005; Frey, 1988; Krashen, 1987; Lee & Van Patten, 2003; Long, 1981, 1996; Pica et al., 1989; Sousa, 1995; Swain, 1985, 1995, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Van Patten, 2003). K-16 Content Standards have been created by task forces at the national and state levels to support the development of proficiency and communicative competence, while encouraging content driven lessons and experiential learning in and beyond the classroom setting (Standards, 2006). A uniform assessment tool for evaluating proficiency has been developed and updated by a nationally recognized organization (ACTFL, 2012). The profession has made gains with regard to the theory and principles of second language teaching, evident by these concrete examples.

From the students’ perspective, those who enroll in introductory university courses to comply with credit obligations often acknowledge that they do have learning goals beyond simply the fulfillment of a requirement. Recognizing the value of the content, students are interested in communicating effectively in the target language (Terrell, 1977). Many, however, do not continue their coursework beyond the basic requirement, due to a variety of factors, including time, money, and disillusionment with the results. Students claim to be able to do little in the way of communication upon completion of the credit requirement. How are world language educators failing them? An examination of beginning Spanish textbooks reveals a disconnection between theory and practice. There exists a disproportionate number of traditional, mechanical, grammar-based practice versus creative language tasks (CLT) or tasks that encourage students to interact in creative, authentic, and real world situations. Curricula that are closely defined by a publisher-prepared textbook (Angell, DuBravac & Gonglewski, 2008; Komoski, 1985; Schultz, 1991) may be unable to meet student and professional goals of communication.

The Textbook and Beginning Language Programs

The textbook as curriculum

The beginning textbook has become the “bible” or “instruction guidebook,” providing complete support for novice teachers and teaching assistants, and a page by page plan for veteran instructors, who may have little time or interest to pursue supplementation or adaptation of the textbook. Kramsch (1988) referred to the textbook as “the bedrock of syllabus design and lesson planning…” (p. 68). The fact that some instructors may not have a background in pedagogical training or applied linguistics adds to the acceptance of the textbook as the standard of content and accepted best practices of delivery. For some instructors, it is seen as “sacred and inviolable” (Joiner & Phillips, 1982, p. 108). In addition, a lack of adequate pedagogical training leads to the textbook being treated as “omnipresent and ever open” (Warriner, 1989, p. 82). And if it is always open and followed
religiously, the textbook determines what, when, and how the language is to be taught (Heilenman, 1991). Many departments or language sections tend to rely on the beginning language textbook to provide the continuity and consistency of presentation and content for multi-section courses. Therefore, one could summarize that the textbook is the customary curriculum of beginning language courses, defining learning objectives and instructor and learner behaviors (Ariew, 1982).

Materials development and the process of selection

By definition, materials that are developed and marketed to university programs and K-12 public school systems are done so with the hopes of lucrative gains for the publishing firm and its editorial staff (Heilenman, 1991; Heilenman & Tschirner, 1993; Joiner & Phillips, 1983; Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2003). A number of authors have described and documented the long process of publisher-produced materials development (Angell, DuBravac & Gonglewski, 2008; Heilenman, 1993; Heilenman & Tschirner, 1993; Schultz, 1991; Mares, 2003). While many authors will claim to have begun the process with the goal of writing materials that are innovative, creative, and relevant to learners, textbooks are inevitably a product of compromise (Ariew, 1982; Heilenman, 1993; Joiner & Phillips, 1982; Bragger & Rice, 2000). Since the marketability of authored materials is tested through paid peer reviews on numerous occasions, multiple revisions are required in order to meet the demands of prospective customers. Large volume sales depend upon the level of acceptance by colleagues in the decision making position and require large scale adoption by colleagues and universities across the country for the textbook to be considered successful and worthy of moving into a second edition development phase.

Innovation in textbooks lags behind research in second language acquisition and methodology, as market analysis has determined that the professionals who select textbooks or serve on selection committees tend to be conservative and resistant to change (Heilenmann, 1993; Tomlinson, 2003). Wong and Van Patten (2003) describe the current situation as one in which instructors enter the realm of teaching with pre-conceived traditional notions of the structure of textbooks. Thus, publishers fear that a major deviation from the norm will significantly affect large scale sales, and, consequently, they tend to offer conservative options that appeal to a large number of adopters. “The reality is that publishers will probably still play safe and stick to what they know they can sell…” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 9). Small scale alterations to content along with large scale changes to design and technology components are generally considered more palatable by publishing firms. Bragger and Rice (2000) describe the “illusion of change” that is evident due to the constant addition of ancillary material offerings that accompany a textbook. New editions and texts new to the market generally offer a repackaging of existing materials with some visual alterations and perhaps a marketing ploy based on a new theme in research, focusing on the appropriate and expected professional jargon of the day, such as “communicative,” “proficiency oriented,” “authentic,” “National Standards” or “functional language”. According to Heilenman (1993), since little
protection exists through patents and intellectual property rights, major successful innovations are not encouraged or possible, due to the fact that they could easily be slightly altered and immediately marketed by a competing company.

With over sixty beginning Spanish textbooks on the market, the selection process can be overwhelming. Yet a study by Angell, DuBravac, and Gonglewski (2008) found an underlying apathy toward textbook selection for beginning language programs. Based on an e-mail survey to university supervisors and coordinators, neither textbook reviews nor checklists or other tools of evaluation were determined to be in widespread use in evaluating current products on the market. The authors discovered the need for greater transparency and increased discussion regarding such a critical matter in language teaching. Finally, Angell, DuBravac, and Gonglewski (2008) suspect a general acceptance of the textbook as the overarching curriculum on the part of supervisors, textbook selection committees, and instructors and a less rigorous and critical examination of prospective textbooks as they correspond to a particular educational context. Bragger and Rice (2000) document this phenomenon by describing teachers who either do not take an active role in textbook selection or who evaluate texts based on “superficial characteristics” and the infamous “flip test” (visual appeal and a quick visual check for the presence of particular desired features.) Tomlinson (2003) claims that materials are more often evaluated based on visual appeal alone and judged by whether or not they conform to the instructor’s expectations of how a textbook should appear. This lack of interest in textbook content and structure of the beginning language program is further reflected by the relatively small number of articles published on the subject (Angell, DuBravac & Gonglewski, 2008; Bragger & Rice, 2000).

Previous studies demonstrate that authority appears to have been delegated to the beginning Spanish textbook to override or compromise professional experience, pedagogical research and best practices regarding the content of required introductory language courses (Heilenman, 1991). The purpose of this study is to complete a critical examination and analysis of a representative group of beginning Spanish textbooks in order to determine the extent to which the textbook curriculum ensures meeting program and self-proclaimed student goals. Specific research questions were as follows:

1. Has there been appreciable change with regard to the traditional grammatical syllabus of beginning, university-level Spanish textbooks?
2. What is the typical grammatical load per chapter of textbooks and does this allow time for communication tasks?
3. What is the average lexical load per chapter and to what extent does this agree with suggested amounts from pedagogical research?
4. How many tasks providing meaningful interactions in authentic, real world contexts are incorporated in beginning Spanish textbooks?

Determining whether or not introductory Spanish textbook curricula are assisting the profession and the clientele in meeting communication goals has high stakes for the effectiveness of language programs.
Methods of Analysis

Two sets of introductory textbooks were analyzed for the current study. The first set was comprised of 13 books published between 1965 and 2007. A second set of contemporary texts included 17 latest editions with publication dates ranging from 2008 to 2012. Refer to Table 1 for a complete list of all 30 textbooks included in this investigation.

Table 1. Introductory Spanish Textbooks 1965-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Course in Spanish</td>
<td>Turk and Espinosa</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>D.C. Heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-A Basic Course</td>
<td>Noble and Lacasa</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Holt, Rinehart and Winston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En contacto</td>
<td>Valencia and Merlonghi</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Spanish A Concept Approach</td>
<td>Da Silva</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Harper and Row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Claro que sí!</td>
<td>Garner, et al.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriba</td>
<td>Zayas-Bazán and Fernández</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Prentice Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivos de conversación</td>
<td>Nicholas and Dominicis</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>McGraw hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vistas</td>
<td>Blanco and Donley</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Vista Higher Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Dímelo tú!</td>
<td>Rodríguez, et al.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Thomson Heinle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imágenes</td>
<td>Rush, et al.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Sabías que…?</td>
<td>Van Patten, et al.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>McGraw Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Andal Curso elemental</td>
<td>Heining-Boynton and Cowell</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelante, Uno, Dos, Tres</td>
<td>Blanco</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Vista Higher Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portafolio</td>
<td>Ramos and Davis</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>McGraw-Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apúntate</td>
<td>Pérez-Gironés, Dorwick</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>McGraw Hill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The texts, across a 47-year span, were analyzed regarding total grammar points presented. A core list of grammar points was created based upon an accumulation of the grammar points found in all 30 textbooks. This core list can be found in Appendix A.

The contents of each of the contemporary introductory textbooks dating from 2008-2012 were analyzed in detail with respect to grammar, vocabulary and activity types. The beginning Spanish texts included for analysis are published in the format of one volume or alternatively are divided into two or three volumes to be utilized for as many as three semesters or quarters of study. Two of the textbooks, *Viajes* and ¡Apúntate!, represent shorter versions of an original textbook and carry different titles. Since these texts were not designated as “brief edition,” as has traditionally been done, they were treated as separate products and analyzed as such.

The titles of 60 contemporary textbooks were entered into an Excel file as a sampling frame. The Excel software generated a list of 17 texts as a random sampling. Care was taken to input introductory textbooks from all publishing firms with at least three beginning Spanish texts on the market. Textbooks were not pre-screened for content prior to the commencement of the data collection.

**Grammar**

Two issues regarding grammar were analyzed for this study. First, a complete count of grammar points per textbook was calculated as a percentage of the total number of grammar points contained in the core list. The 47 year span covered by these introductory texts was examined to determine historical trends in grammatical coverage. For the total grammar count, ¡Anda! was not included, since volume one, *Curso elemental*, is intended to cover less material than the other texts, yet including volume 2, *Curso intermedio*, would span a longer period than
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The second issue that was examined involved the grammar load per chapter of the 17 contemporary texts. This analysis included an initial calculation using the scope and sequence of each textbook. Further examination of each chapter's content was necessary to capture grammar presentation included in boxes and side bars. These additional grammar points were included in the data collection. An overall number of grammar points per text was determined as well as the average number per chapter for each text. *Dos mundos* is the only text that contained four introductory chapters, labeled ‘pasos.’ In order to effectively compare this text to others, an average of the grammar points in the four *pasos* was calculated and used as a “chapter.”

**Vocabulary**

A calculation of the total number of lexical items per chapter was determined using the 17 current Spanish introductory textbooks listed in Table 1. This calculation represents the number of lexical items per chapter that students are expected to learn or master during the course of the introductory sequence. Vocabulary lists with English translations at the end of the chapter were the starting point for this calculation. However, some textbooks include additional lexical items in boxes placed throughout the chapter and are not necessarily present in the bilingual vocabulary list at the end of the chapter. These additional items, as well as lexical phrases presented in both vocabulary lists and boxes, were included in the total calculation for each chapter. In order to calculate a total per chapter for the textbook *¡Hola amigos!,* each visual display with labeled drawings had to be utilized, since the book did not have a summary list at the end of its chapters. For the text *Dos mundos,* similar to the treatment of the number of grammar points per chapter, an average of the total number of vocabulary items for the first four *pasos* was assessed for the preliminary chapter.

**Activities and Tasks**

A three-chapter sequence in each text was chosen as the basis for assessment of activities and tasks. Chapters four, five and six represent a mid-way point for the majority of the books in terms of the number of chapters and would likely be studied toward the latter half of a first-semester course. The total number of all activities and tasks within the three chapters of each of the seventeen contemporary texts was first tabulated. Additional activities from the side bar of the instructors’ manual, workbooks, and websites were not included. Chapter activities and tasks were then examined carefully to determine whether or not they matched the description of a creative language task (CLT): authentic, real life tasks that involve creative language interaction. Finally, the total number of CLTs was determined across the same three chapters for the group of seventeen current textbooks listed in Table 1.
Results

A tabulation of the number of grammar points in each textbook was completed, and the results are shown in Figure 1. The number of grammar points has not changed appreciably over the 47 years spanned. To illustrate this, the average of the 13 textbooks published between 1965 and 2007 was not found to be significantly different than the average of the set of 16 contemporary textbooks published since 2008. The former group averaged 58.0 ± 4.8 SD grammar points and the contemporary texts averaged 55.9 ± 4.7 SD grammar points (p value = 0.26).

![Figure 1. Percentage of Total Grammar Points per Textbook](image)

Figure 2 shows the average number of grammar points per chapter for each of the 17 contemporary textbooks published between 2008 and 2012. Error bars in this graph reflect the standard deviation in the grammar point count among the chapters of each textbook. The overall average, among these textbooks, of the average number of grammar points per chapter is 3.80 ± 1.13 SD. Notably, the standard deviation interval for each individual textbook overlaps with the standard deviation interval for the overall average.

The average vocabulary count per chapter for all 17 textbooks is plotted in Figure 3. Error bars represent the standard deviation in the vocabulary count per chapter for each textbook. Across all books, the overall average chapter lexical load is 115 ± 41 SD with individual textbook averages ranging from 72 to 202. The highest lexical item count in an individual chapter was 273 and the lowest was 31. Just as observed for the grammar point counts, nearly all standard deviation intervals for individual texts overlap with the standard deviation interval for the
overall average. The exception was *Dos mundos*, the text with the highest average vocabulary count per chapter.

**Figure 2.** Average Number of Grammar Points per Chapter

**Figure 3.** Average Vocabulary Count per Chapter
Table 2 shows the number of CLT that were identified in three select chapters for the 17 contemporary Spanish textbooks. The average number of CLT in the three chapters is 1.8% for this set of textbooks. In addition, six of the analyzed textbooks contain no CLT per chapter.

Table 2: Percentage of Activities Classified as CLT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Average Total Activities</th>
<th>% CLT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelante, Uno, Dos, Tres</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Anda!, Curso Elemental</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apúntate</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriba</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Con Brio!</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dicho y hecho</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dos mundos</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Spanish</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploraciones</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gente</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hola Amigos, Volume 1</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaicos</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plazas</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portafolio</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puntos de partida</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Sabías que...?</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viajes Introducción al español</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Amount of Grammar

Grammar content in introductory Spanish textbooks is organized by the same grammatical syllabus that has been implemented since the early decades of foreign language instruction in this country. Thus, the underlying basis for instructional practice continues to be focused on the mastery of a core list of 62 grammatical structures. The review of 29 texts over a period of 47 years brings to light the inclusion of the same 62 grammatical points from decade to decade. Little variation exists in the number of grammar points included in the 29 textbooks analyzed for this study. Although three texts each incorporate less than 50 grammar points, the other 26 textbooks demonstrate the continued tendency to include as many core structures as possible. Why has the scope and sequence remained virtually unchanged over many years? The answer to this question
lies with the demands of the market, determined by Spanish instructors across the country. Heining-Boynton (2010) claims that this insistence on the part of instructors to teach all of the grammar tenses and grammar points in beginning courses dates back to the time when the goal of foreign language instruction was reading and translation. Cole and Strict (1981) describe the “text-teacher-student trilogy” in which teachers as students study with textbooks that are organized via a traditional grammatical syllabus. After years of study, these students become teachers who teach using similar textbooks and perhaps even one day work as authors designing textbooks with the same grammatical syllabus. The cycle of maintaining traditional organizational practices remains unchanged. Musumeci (1997) supports this claim:

Today the role that materials play in fostering change remains suspect. A perusal of current second and foreign language textbooks suffices to reveal a continuing reliance on a grammatical syllabus to structure textbooks. Language learning objectives remain stated in terms of structures that learners will be able to manipulate at the end of a specific period of instruction with little regard for developmental orders of acquisition or the transitory nature of instructional effects…. (pp. 128-129)

Indeed a heavy reliance on the grammar syllabus as the organizational core of the language course may still be evident (Finnemann, 1987).

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) argued that “Teachers do not need to teach all the grammatical properties of the language; they focus on those grammatical features which are useful to students and teachable and learnable” (p. 174). And Bernard (1965) wrote, “Grammar should be studied from the standpoint of expression of ideas and the facilitation of communication” (p. 67). However, some instructors will likely confess that they are unable to follow this advice. They report an urgency to complete the course, and to “cover” the book. In so doing, this rush to cover grammatical content reduces the course to a manipulation of complex grammar points that students struggle to “master.” In these instances, the required Spanish course sequence becomes a grammar course, a course in which students practice structures in order to fill in the blanks correctly on an exam. Some instructors may give up on expecting production and providing for interaction that leads to real communication, since there is no time. Instructors may fear that developing communication skills is not possible if students are still struggling with the mechanical manipulations. There is also little time to incorporate cultural themes, since, if they are presented at the end of the chapter, they are typically skipped over in order to wade through all of the grammar content (Dorwick & Glass, 1983). The end product of a two- or three-semester requirement is a student who may not be able to communicate much beyond a few formulaic statements, and likely does not “…attain even a minimal level of communicative competence” (Terrell, 1977, p. 326). Therefore, the rigid and traditional scope and sequence of textbooks encourages the continued practice of basing the course on a traditional grammar syllabus. It discourages moving in the direction of Tedick and Walker’s (1982)
concept of treating grammar on a need-to-know basis and organizing instruction by content themes, authentic texts, or social and cultural situations.

With regard to the number of grammar points per chapter, the trend has been for publishers to present an equal number of grammar points per chapter to provide consistency for programs to plan their semester or quarter. Thus, each chapter is divided evenly over the weeks of the period of instruction, a practice that assumes all grammar points require equal time to “master.” Based on the demands of the profession, an equal division of grammar points across chapters eases the complications of creating a course syllabus. Some texts combine grammar points into one listing, such as “comparisons of equality and inequality” or “definite and indefinite articles,” while others present them as separate grammar points, always in an attempt to maintain the required balance. Other texts insert additional grammar points throughout the chapter in boxes with labels such as “Nota de lengua,” “Atención,” “Ayuda,” “y algo más,” in order to fit in all of the necessary grammar points, while at the same time maintaining the consistency. Finally, in some textbooks that seem to have reduced the traditional grammatical syllabus, the additional grammar points, explanation and practice activities, especially for complex verbal constructions, are included as an addendum following the final chapter of study or as the first appendix. In almost all of the textbooks examined, this consistency of presenting a particular number of grammar points per chapter is demonstrated. In the case of Puntos de partida and its off-shoot Apúntate, there are 18 total chapters. Thus, the grammar points are extended over more chapters and the last six chapters of the books contain only two grammar points per chapter.

If the chapters of an introductory textbook were divided equally for purposes of syllabus design, assuming that the textbook is “covered” in its entirety, the syllabus may allow for one day per grammar point. A sample syllabus from 2010 for the second half of a semester of study is presented in Appendix B to illustrate the short amount of time that can be devoted to grammar points in a chapter if the instructor follows the practice of “covering” the textbook. A beginning student enrolled in a course following this syllabus would be expected to “master” or “acquire” the following grammar points in fifteen class meetings: *ir, stem-changing verbs in the present, irregular present tense verbs, estar with conditions and emotions, ser and estar, present progressive, direct object nouns and pronouns, saber and conocer, indirect object pronouns, regular and irregular preterit verbs*. This organizational practice assumes that all grammar points are created equal and require the same amount of time to “acquire.” The implication is that students learn all grammatical points at the same levels of development. Research indicating stages of development and a natural order of acquisition is ignored (Pienemann, 1984, 1989; Wolfe Quintero, 1992). Finally this organizational practice disregards the established ACTFL (2012) Oral Proficiency level descriptions of what learners are able to do with the language via spontaneous speech production.

The concept of teaching language as subject rather than object is maintained in introductory Spanish textbooks through the coverage of a relatively consistent amount of grammar points. Given the traditional model of grammatical syllabus design and the amount of grammar per chapter, one must ask at the completion
of the language requirement, if students are able to communicate at some level of competence or are they simply able to manipulate all or many of the grammar points covered in the text on a paper and pencil test? According to Tschirner, (1996) “…our present grammar sequences are far too ambitious, and are more likely to overwhelm than to help language learners” (p. 10). The call to reduce the exhaustive list of structures introduced at the earliest levels has been issued by many (Ariew, 1982; Belasco, 1972; Heining-Boynton, 2010; Rex, 2011; Terrell, 1977; Tschirner, 1996; Valdman, 1978). In fact, Heining-Boynton (2010) claimed that no research exists that supports teaching all major grammar tenses and grammar points in the first two semesters. Ironic though it may seem, perhaps presenting less may in effect yield more in the way of language production. If the grammar expectations were reduced, instructional time would be available for instructors to work with students more intensively on proficiency rather than on mastery of grammar points. However, given that grammar continues to be presented in traditional amounts, there exists the danger that this can actually encourage a focus on ‘covering’ material and inhibit programs from meeting proficiency goals.

Vocabulary

A review of research uncovers a growing interest in second language vocabulary acquisition since the mid-1980s (Coady & Huckin, 1997). The lexicon of the second language plays a central role in the language learning and its acquisition is a key element in the development of proficiency (Terrell, 1977). The novice speaker, according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012), is described as one who can produce lists of words and formulaic expressions. Thus, lexical items are of critical importance to the language learner in order to comprehend and express oneself orally and in writing.

Recommendations for vocabulary acquisition and the number of lexical items to teach per class period range from seven (Sousa, 1995) to ten (Schmitt, 2000). Thirty words per class hour is cited, but only for gaining initial partial knowledge (Schmitt, 2000), and 50 words per week is recommended only if vocabulary acquisition is the only focus of the course. Proposed by Meara (1995), this notion involves students concentrating on acquiring their first 2,000 words at the very onset of language studies to provide a strong vocabulary base. Other researchers have focused on the way in which vocabulary acquisition occurs. Lee and Van Patten (2003) purport that the mere existence of vocabulary lists “…suggests to learners that vocabulary acquisition is a matter of memorizing second language equivalents of first language words” (p. 37). Instead, the authors point to the concept of binding, developed by Terrell (1986). According to Terrell, binding is the cognitive and affective mental process of connecting a form with its meaning, but not necessarily with its translation (1986). Terrell’s concept of binding coincides with brain research on the important and powerful role of emotion (Jensen, 1997) in the acquisition of new material. Schmitt (2000) claims that vocabulary is acquired through multiple exposures, thus pointing to the importance of recycling
or repeated reintroductions of lexical items in order to aid in the acquisition process.

Altman (1997) supports this claim, citing the need for repeated use of vocabulary in meaningful situations in order to lead to automaticity and the acquisition of lexicon. Several researchers stress that instructors should provide affective activities and purposeful tasks that are described as meaningful, authentic, contextually rich, input enhanced, personal and engaging for the learner (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Heilenman, 1991; Joiner & Phillips, 1982; Lee & Van Patten, 2003; Schmitt, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Allen (1993) recommends utilizing classroom situations wherein the learner perceives a need for the new lexical items. In addition, a study by Kim (2008) found that opportunities for meaningful peer collaboration assist students in acquiring vocabulary in the second language. Finally, Joiner and Phillips (1982) claim that “Students produce more creative and expressive responses and memory task is lessened when the new information is something they want to be able to say” (117).

Providing a long bilingual vocabulary list for each chapter of a beginning text runs the risk of overwhelming the learner, especially if the instructor follows traditional expectations that all lexical items included in the list must be mastered. In addition, if assessment practices adhere to the traditional goals of mastering all items on a vocabulary list, the learner is obligated to commit to memory the entire list in order to earn an acceptable grade on an exam or quiz. However, the research presented above recommends the presentation of only seven to ten lexical items per class session, along with reentry of previously presented items. Additional vocabulary could be presented formally, but only partial control should be expected. If one is to consider that typically a two-week period is dedicated to a chapter in a beginning textbook, with three to four class sessions per week, 60 to 80 lexical items could be considered a fair goal for students per chapter. Although many textbooks divide the lexical items into categories over a series of sections per chapter, the data demonstrate that those textbooks analyzed in this study average between 72 and 202 words per chapter, with some texts including very high expectations for vocabulary acquisition.

Textbooks vary as to the manner in which they organize the lexical load. In the case of Mosaicos, page numbers indicating the location of actual vocabulary displays are included on the bilingual vocabulary page at the end of each chapter. This eliminates the need for the publisher to repeat these thematic groupings in the vocabulary section at the end of the chapter, reducing printing costs by perhaps a page or two per chapter, while also creating what appears to be a shorter vocabulary load. In some of the textbooks, such as Arriba and ¡Anda!, there seems to be a concern to provide some consistency in amount of lexical items across all chapters, although this is not completely achieved. One text, Exploraciones, includes more specialized terms, such as airport security, art museums and galleries, zoo and farm animals and environmental engineering, than any of the other texts analyzed. These specialized terms relate to the themes of the chapters, and are more prevalent in the latter half of the book.
Consideration should be given to the fact that not all lexical items meet the communication needs of all learners. Recommendations call for allowing students to individualize and personalize textbook vocabulary lists (Joiner & Phillips, 1982; Williams, Lively & Harper, 1998). This may require adding to the published textbook list, eliminating some items that do not relate to students, especially specialized terms, and adjusting pedagogical practices in the areas of task design and assessment.

Activity and Task Design

Since the 1980s the profession has experienced a push toward oral proficiency (Higgs & Clifford, 1982) and a continued and growing trend toward encouraging learners to communicate in and beyond the classroom setting. Given today’s communication goals, one would expect a crucial update in textbooks regarding task and activity design that reflects current theory and best practices. In 1972, Paulston classified textbook and classroom exercises as mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills and described these as a necessary and optimal practice progression for learning a language. Littlewood (1984) devised a “framework for teaching” which includes a progression from pre-communicative to communicative activities. Pre-communicative activities are repetition and pattern drills, grammar exercises and other activities that require conscious attention to specific linguistic elements. In contrast, communicative activities are more natural, “whole task” practice in which the learner’s attention is specifically focused on the desired meaning to be communicated (p. 92). Although current research urges instructors to move away from mechanical drills and meaningless manipulation of grammatical forms (Wong & Van Patten, 2003), mechanical drills continue to dominate the types of “activities” found in today’s textbooks, following all grammar explanations in the typical organizational format (Finneman, 1987; Schultz, 1991). In some cases these drills have been updated in the sense that they are likely to be presented as contextualized “activities,” and sometimes accompanied by instructions for pair completion. However, the learner is still only required to manipulate forms and comprehension of the meaning of the forms is not necessary to complete the drill. Therefore, the efforts to update the basic mechanical drill do not make it more communicative and open-ended. The reality is that the majority of classroom practice, if one utilizes a consecutive page-by-page coverage of the textbook, remains form focused and mechanical in nature.

Second language acquisition research has repeatedly called for instruction to focus on more communication based contexts in which students are expected to express their own ideas, thoughts, feelings and opinions in open-ended situations (Garton, 1995; Heining-Boynton, 2010; Joiner & Phillips, 1982; Lightbown, 1991; Swain, 1991; Terrell, 1977). Assessing the typology of the remainder of Paulston's drill types, Aski (2003) asserted that meaningful drills involve no authentic communication, since “…students do not generate and negotiate their own meaning in original constructions. (p. 59). According to her study, Aski (2003) takes the stand that the typical communicative drills in the Italian textbooks that she analyzed are very formulaic, structured and significantly focused on form. The
author also found that many communicative drills require only yes/no answers or contain contrived questions to stimulate student responses. Finally, the author discusses communicative language practice as moving beyond the focus on form toward goals of negotiation of meaning and interaction. Examining two grammar points in seven beginning level Italian texts, the author found that only 3% of all activities could be considered communicative practice for one grammar point, and for the other, only 14%. Overall Aski concluded that there was little emphasis on communicative language practice in the textbooks that she analyzed.

Similar results were found in the current study of contemporary introductory Spanish textbooks, with only 1.8% of all chapter activities classified as CLT in a set of seventeen texts. An expanded version of Aski’s classification of communicative language practice was derived from Nunan (1993) in order to include the notion of task based instruction. Tasks “(1) are systematically linked to things the learners need to do in the real world, (2) incorporate what we know about the nature of successful communication, and (3) embody what we know about second language acquisition” (p. 63). According to Byrnes (2001), the use of tasks involves an “…explicit focus on meaning making in context” (p. 176). Therefore, using the term creative language tasks (CLT) categorizes classroom activities that are not contrived, but instead can be described as authentic, real life tasks that involve creative language interaction. In addition, they are comprised of interpersonal negotiations, exchanges of information and spontaneous and unpredictable language for a purpose.

Results of this analysis demonstrate that textbooks do not deliver on providing sufficient activities in the form of CLT; activities that push students to create with the language in authentic, real world situations. Current texts do contain activities that, at first glance, resemble the CLT classification. It should be noted that these were not included in the overall tabulation for two reasons. The first involves activities in which the students are given an open-ended situation, but then told in English exactly how to express themselves and what to include in their responses, in which case it is more of a translation exercise. The following example illustrates this point:

5-23 Datos personales. Con un(a) compañero(a) de clase, haz y contesta preguntas con los verbos ser y estar sobre los siguientes temas.

1. La personalidad. Ask about his/her personality in general.
2. La salud: Ask about his/her emotional and physical state today.
3. El pueblo: Ask about his/her hometown, where it is, what it looks like, and whether it’s big or small.
4. La familia: Ask about his/her family (size, ages, physical features, personalities).

(Hershberger et al., 2012, p. 166).
5-23 Personal Facts with a partner from class, compose and answer questions with the verbs *ser* and *estar* about the following themes:

1. Personality
2. Health
3. Town
4. Family

The second reason entails the inclusion of an example for the learner in Spanish that provides all of the linguistic and lexical information necessary to complete the task. Thus, the task is more of a substitution of one’s own personal information, as in the following examples:

**ENTREVISTA.** Interview two classmates to find out where they are going and what they are going to do on their next vacation.

*Modelo:*

Estudiante 1: ¿Adónde vas de vacaciones (for vacation)?
Estudiante 2: Voy a Guadalajara con mis amigos.
Estudiante 1: ¿Y qué van a hacer (to do) ustedes en Guadalajara?

**INTERVIEW**

*Model:*

Student 1: Where are you going for vacation?
Student 2: I am going to Guadalajara with my friends.
Student 1: And what are you all going to do in Guadalajara?
Student 2: We are going to visit some monuments and museums.

**3-17 Mis parientes favoritos.** Describe to your classmate three of your favorite relatives. Define the family relationship.

*Modelo:*

Mi abuelo favorito se llama…. Tiene….años. Es de… Es muy inteligente… Es el padre de mi madre.

You may be called upon to share information about your classmate with the class.

El abuelo favorito de (classmate’s name) se llama… (Potowski et. al., 2012, p. 85).

**3-17 My favorite relatives.**

*Model:*

My favorite grandfather’s name is…He is …years old. He is from…He is very intelligent…He is my mother’s father.

The favorite grandfather of (classmate’s name) is named…

**D. La casa ideal.** What is your dream house like? What would it be? What amenities would it have? Describe the details to a partner, who will try to draw a floor plan as you speak.

*Modelo:*

Mi casa ideal está en______. Es ____ y tiene ______.

La cocina está al lado de ______. También hay______. (Ramos & García, 2009, p. 84).
D. The ideal house.
Model: My ideal house is in _______. It is _____ and it has ____.
The kitchen is next to _______. There is also _____.

The following example illustrates a combination of the use of both a model in Spanish with the linguistic variables as well as English statements to be translated.

B. Entrevista: ¿De dónde eres? Find out as much information as you can about the location of each others’ hometown or state, or about the country you are from. You should also tell what the weather is like, and ask if the other person would like to go there with you.
Modelo: E1: ¿De dónde eres?
E2: Soy de Tylertown.
E1: ¿Dónde está Tylertown?
E2: Está cerca de…(Knorre et al., 2009, p. 169).

B. Interview. Where are you from?
Model: Where are you from?
S2: I am from Tylertown.
S1: Where is Tylertown?
S2: It is close to…

While these activities or exercises provide language practice, they do not provide the type of language interaction that meets the CLT specifications described above. As identified in Table 2, within the three chapters of the 17 recent textbooks, only 1.8% of all the textbook activities were found to be CLT. The following examples illustrate tasks identified as CLT:

Situaciones
Role A. You and your little brother/sister have to do some chores at home. Since you are older, you tell your sibling three or four things that he/she has to do. Be prepared to respond to complaints and questions.

Role B. You and your older brother/sister have to do some chores at home. Because you are younger, you get some orders from your sibling about what you have to do. You do not feel like working, and you especially do not like being bossed around, so respond to everything you hear with a complaint or a question. (Castells et al., 2010, p. 174).

Situaciones
Estudiante A: Tu compañero/a de cuarto te invita a una fiesta con sus amigos, pero sus amigos no te gustan mucho y no tienes ganas de ir con ellos. Inventas excusas.

Estudiante B: Vas a una fiesta con tus amigos. Invitas a tu compañero/a de cuarto pero es tímido/a y piensas que no quiere ir porque tiene vergüenza (is embarrassed). Insiste. (Potowski et al., 2012, p. 159).
Situations
Student A: Your roommate invites you to a party with his/her friends, but you don’t really like the friends and you don’t feel like going with them. Invent some excuses.
Student B: You are going to a party with your friends. You invite your roommate but s/he is timid and you think s/he does not want to go because s/he is embarrassed. You insist.

Contraste cultural
En grupos de tres, hablen de los siguientes aspectos de sus familias. Después, establezcan dos o tres contrastes entre sus familias y una familia hispana típica.
• Mujeres de sus familias que son profesionales o empleadas. Incluyan más de una generación.
• Quehaceres domésticos que hacen los hombres de sus familias.
• Responsabilidades con respecto a los hijos en sus familias. (Lucas Murillo & Dawson, 2010, p. 211).

Cultural Contrast
In groups of three, talk about the following aspects of your families. Then, establish two or three contrasts between your families and the typical Hispanic family.
• The women of your families who are professionals or hold other jobs. Include more than one generation.
• Household chores that the men of your families do.
• The responsibilities of the children in your families.

However, due to the low percentage of CLT found in the 17 contemporary texts, the current analysis confirms earlier claims that a preponderance of traditional focus on form practice (Johnson & Markham, 1989; Schultz, 1991) is maintained as the norm in beginning textbooks. In fact, if one considers the number of pages of the typical beginning text that are dedicated to grammar explanations, grammar charts and diagrams and mechanical, non CLT activities, the largest portion of the text is devoted to traditional linguistic content that does not support the profession’s professed communication goals.

Recommendations: A Continued Call for Change

An increased call for a change in materials is found in publications over the past two and a half decades (Bragger & Rice, 2000; Bynes, 2001; Komoski, 1985; Heilenman & Kaplan, 1985; Heilenman, 1991; Rex, 2011; Schultz, 1991). However, an examination of the issue reveals that in general the profession and the market may be resistant to change, and the textbook continues to encourage traditional practices. Dorwick and Glass (2003), both executives in the publishing industry with direct responsibilities for foreign language materials development, point to “minimal changes in materials and behaviors” and admit that “…there is less real change in materials than one might imagine (p. 593). Van Patten (1998) further argues that the “universality” of beginning language textbooks in content and subsequent treatment of the content is reflected in the same “universality”
among the instructors who use them. If required language courses are based on a textbook, then the perceptions contained in the textbook are practiced by those who are employed to instruct the courses (Van Patten, 1998). Beginning programs are based on materials that neglect research and ignore students’ communication goals, representing a complete mismatch with the gains we have made regarding theory, research, standards and measurement of proficiency. Therefore, by the very nature of the current textbook, second language teachers are likely to fall short of effectively preparing students to participate in purposeful and real communication in the target language.

Since textbooks lag behind research in second language acquisition (Saraceni, 2003), relying on them to define program goals, curriculum, and teaching practices dangerously perpetuates traditional instructional perceptions and practices. In fact, Musumeci (1997) identified the need for instructors to understand and adopt the best practices supported by SLA research and demand that these are reflected in materials developed by publishing houses. However, since it is clearly not through the textbook that second language theory from the last three decades is transferred into practice, it is evident that current textbooks are not the answer and our programs should not be based upon them. The careful selection process proposed by Angell, DuBravac and Gonglewski (2008) and others is likely not to result in productive gains, since the materials are more similar than they are different.

The gap that has existed in the profession with regard to theory and practice (Grove, 2003; Rex, 2011; Van Patten, 1998) cannot be solved by a textbook. Instead, language departments and programs must begin to examine the challenges of training and to address the fact that these issues cannot be resolved by adopting a textbook with all of the latest professional jargon and technological enhancements. Instead, departments can offer methods courses and workshops for new faculty, instructors, teaching assistants, and even pre-service teachers to address the limitations of publisher prepared materials as well as strategies for the selective use of such materials. Educating colleagues as to the shortcomings of these educational materials with regards to meeting communication goals will go a long way in addressing professional development needs. In addition, a deliberate examination of SLA research, the National Standards for Foreign Language Education for K-16 and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines will assist programs in the adoption of goals and objectives that are independent of any commercially prepared materials. Devising appropriate and authentic assessment tools based on program goals will also serve as a means of guiding colleagues toward instruction that is focused on meeting program and communication goals and not on covering a textbook. Realizing that tailor-made materials can meet the needs of specific student groups in particular learning situations more effectively than the ‘one size fits all’ publisher produced materials, programs can involve all instructors in active articulation of effective instructional practices that more closely align with SLA theory and research. One qualitative study by Cerar (2003) reported positive learner responses to a comprehensive, internet-based curriculum for intermediate and conversation courses. Integration of authentic materials, high interest and
customized themes and strategies for engaging learners actively in experiential learning through real communication with native speakers was listed as a key feature of the curriculum design. Thus, for introductory courses, creating locally prepared flexible handbooks for students can become a tool for facilitating students’ written and oral communication through the integration of multiple sources and resources, including and above all those that are prepared, tested, and evaluated by a group of actively involved instructors. Units of study that integrate current issues, research and specialty areas of colleagues in the language department, as well as resources in the local community prove to be more authentic, meaningful and personal to all. If such a project is not possible, another option to resolve some of the issues with introductory textbooks may exist in the form of a thorough customization of existing materials, including removal of chapters, vocabulary, grammar points, along with the addition of department authored CLT. Instructors have the opportunity of investing in the entire process and examining more deeply the most efficient and effective way to develop real communication.

**Future Explorations**

The current study examined a group of 47 introductory Spanish textbooks from various publishing firms with regards to amount of grammar, vocabulary and CLT. Considering the number of texts on the market and the small number of studies that have included data analysis, there are additional topics which merit examination. Future work could consider marketing data for specific textbooks allowing the comparison of successful and unsuccessful texts regarding the amount of grammar, vocabulary and CLT. Additionally, the analysis and identification of alterations to textbooks based on market feedback and market trends from edition to edition would be a worthwhile project. Finally, a study of sequence of the contemporary grammar syllabus would be important to determine how grammar sequences align with second language acquisition research on the developmental order of acquisition.

**Conclusion**

Although many instructors recognize the important role of meaningful communication and interaction in language learning, the most negative factor in second language classes today continues to be the reliance and/or over-reliance on educational materials (Hammerly, 1982) that do not align with research findings. Evidence from this study points to the continued reinforcement of traditional practices found in beginning college-level Spanish textbooks, especially with regard to grammar scope and sequence, amount of vocabulary and activity design. In its current state, the beginning Spanish textbook offers limited promise for the development of communication goals.

Experienced language educators do admit that there is no ideal textbook. The time has come to address the ineffective aspects of our programs and to take serious measures to match our profession’s goals with our practices. For most programs across the country, beginning language courses are the “bread-and-butter of larger
departments and the recruiting ground for minors and majors” (Angell, DuBravac & Gonglewski, 2008, p. 570). Outside competition from sources such as for-profit online programs and heavily marketed software packages that promise significant gains in a short amount of time is yet another reason to consider implementing measures to evaluate and improve university introductory language programs. In an age when education is increasingly held accountable for student engagement and success, it seems that the call for change should be stronger than ever before. Ensuring that our students meet program and their own personal objectives of real, meaningful, spontaneous communication will only take place if and when the profession recognizes the textbook as an “insufficient and deficient medium” for language learning (Schultz, 1991, p. 173) and looks beyond the textbook as the “quick fix” for the introductory sequence.

References
The role of textbooks in promoting communication goals


The role of textbooks in promoting communication goals

APPENDIX A

Grammar List: Beginning Spanish Textbooks (62 Total)

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