

“Why do Teachers Always Want You to Talk Like People Don’t?”:  
A Study of Textbook Spanish Grammar and Its Use by Native Speakers

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Abstract

In high school Spanish foreign language classes, the emphasis is generally placed on speaking rather than formal writing (Glisan, p. 25). Spoken language, unlike written language, contains many different varieties. The textbooks used for these courses, however, oversimplify the target language and fail to show variability. Consequently, students learn that there is only one “right” way to speak. The purpose of this research is to determine to what extent specific structures used to relate means of transportation are covered in high school Spanish foreign language textbooks, and to compare this data with the frequency that the structures are used by native Spanish speakers. In order to accomplish this task, I determined how much material in each textbook is devoted to each structure. I then used corpora, or language databases, of spoken and written Spanish to establish how frequently they are being used by native speakers, uncovering differences between what is being taught in the high school classroom and what is being used by native Spanish speakers in different parts of the world. This study was designed to uncover these discrepancies in order to show that the structures in texts are not representative of all varieties of Spanish, and to inform teachers of the importance that students understand that what they are learning is not necessarily “the only way” to speak Spanish. In this way, curriculum developers and textbook writers can be persuaded to change the textbooks that they select and write for foreign language courses, and teachers can be provided with an appropriate way to supplement their existing course materials. In doing so, students will be better prepared for interaction in Spanish-speaking situations outside of the classroom.

“Why do Teachers Always Want You to Talk Like People Don’t?”:

### A Study of Textbook Spanish Grammar and Its Use by Native Speakers

Linguists use the terms *prescriptive* grammar and *descriptive* grammar to describe two very different perspectives and belief systems about what constitutes “correct” grammar usage. Prescriptive grammarians believe that grammar is a fixed set of language rules that produce structures that are either “correct” or “incorrect,” and these rules are taught through formal education to native and non-native speakers alike. These rules are usually associated with writing but are often applied to spoken language, and are sometimes determined by a national institution such as the Royal Spanish Academy or the French Academy. While there is no official institution for the English language, there are still widely accepted prescriptive rules that are taught in our school systems. For example, in the English language, American prescriptivists say that it is grammatically incorrect to end a sentence with a preposition. While this is an accepted convention of Standard Written English, prescriptivists expect it to be followed in spoken language as well.

However, for descriptive linguists, grammatical rules vary from dialect to dialect and speaker to speaker. The use of language is still rule-governed, but the rules are derived from the speech of native speakers rather than from an external source like an institution. Descriptive grammar is the grammar that is acquired by native speakers through observation as infants rather than by overt instruction. Therefore, anything that a native speaker would recognize or say in a given situation is descriptively grammatical. In this way, each dialect, or variety, of a language is equally “correct” because its speakers understand each other and use the same structures. Crucially, while descriptive grammar can be highly variable, it is not a “free-for-all”—there are still rules that govern it and structures that are not possible. For example, a descriptivist would consider the following to be an ungrammatical sentence because native speakers would never say

such a phrase: *No he pays attention never*. Descriptive grammar rules are those that speakers use intuitively to produce sentences in their variety of their language.

Prescriptive grammar is largely based on the “standard” variety of a language. A “standard” variety is that which is most widely viewed as “correct” among the language’s speakers, and sets norms that speakers of the language are expected to follow. This can be problematic because it causes speakers of the language to devalue all other varieties of that particular language. As Quirk revealed in 1990, schools focus on teaching the “standard” variety of a language in both first and second or foreign language classes, and teachers therefore do not teach language the way that it is actually being used in society, as demonstrated in the following anecdote: A mother reported that her eight-year-old son had been having trouble understanding the point of his elementary school grammar class. In one particular instance, he had been told that multiple negation (*I didn't say nothing* instead of *I didn't say anything*) was unacceptable; yet this same boy heard people using it all the time. Frustrated, he exclaimed, “Why do teachers always want you to talk like people don’t?” He had a right to be frustrated, since multiple negation is acceptable according to descriptive grammar rules, because it can be heard among native English speakers. It is not, however, an aspect of Standard English, and because of this it is socially stigmatized and generally viewed as “wrong.” As is often the case, schools tend to only teach from the “standard” variety of the language, treating language as though it is a fixed entity rather than variable.

Because the “standard” variety of a language is widely accepted as “correct,” particularly among teachers, foreign language programs are often based on one particular fixed variety of a language, which may in fact be quite different from other varieties of the same language used in different parts of the world. While it is essentially impossible for teachers and textbooks to cover

all varieties of any given language, they polarize language learning so that every structure is either said in a “right” or “wrong” way, never discussing the possibility that there might be numerous different acceptable ways to say the same thing. This is problematic, since according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL), the purpose of foreign language classes is to allow students “to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad” (2006). Students need to be learning that language is variable and that the textbook version of the language they are learning is not necessarily representative of what native speakers actually *use*. A usage-based approach to teaching is a far more effective way of increasing the spoken fluency of foreign language students while also countering the belief that there is only one “right” way to talk.

Arguably, it would be most effective for students’ speaking abilities to learn Standard Spanish first in the foreign language classroom, but crucially students must also be exposed to other varieties or dialects of the language to ensure that students do not think there is only one “correct” Spanish. This study has been designed to determine which structures might be good candidates to incorporate in a usage-based approach and to provide foreign language curriculum developers with a more usage-based view of Spanish grammatical structures. Armed with these facts, foreign language teachers in American high school classrooms will be better equipped to provide students with the knowledge of a second language that would promote an attitude that language is not fixed and that there are multiple versions that are used.

### Problem

In elementary school language arts classes, even native English-speaking children are taught structures that are viewed as fixed and standard, even though in reality they continually change. For instance, many adult American English-speakers would not be able to state the

difference in meaning between the words *further* and *farther*. *Further* has historically been used to state degree, whereas *farther* has been used for distance. Prescriptively speaking, therefore, it would only be correct to say, “*He walked farther down the road,*” as this word is used to describe distance. However, in contemporary American English usage, it has become the norm to use either word in such a context. The average American English speaker would not think twice about saying, “*He walked further down the road.*” In fact, the word *further* is actually statistically being used more frequently than *farther* is by native English speakers (Watt 2000). In the future, this will lead to *farther* becoming obsolete. Prescriptive rules can become problematic in such cases as this because since they are fixed, people think that speakers of the language are starting to use words incorrectly, when in fact the language is constantly changing and what is considered acceptable is as well. Nevertheless, it is common in elementary school classrooms for children to be told that they are misusing these kinds of words or phrases.

Essentially, the same thing is occurring in American high school foreign language classes. According to textbook Spanish, for example, students might be taught to use a preposition such as *por* to describe a means of transportation. An example of this usage occurs in the following:

- (1) Llegué por tren.  
I arrived by train  
'I arrived by train.'

However, a native Spanish speaker might also say:

- (2) Llegué en tren.  
I arrived in a train  
'I arrived by train.'

Both of these examples are descriptively correct-- they are simply different variations of the same utterance. This is an interesting situation, because while of course textbooks cannot account for all varieties, the concept of language variation itself is critical for foreign language

students to understand. As it is, the very fact that language varieties exist is ignored in order to promote the prescriptive belief that only one form of Spanish should be taught.

It would be impractical to expect students to learn every variation of every concept. However, teaching that there is only one “right” way to speak inherently devalues all other varieties. Students need to be aware that other varieties exist, and furthermore, that they are also completely acceptable ways to talk. The idea that must be included in order to further foreign language students’ understanding of the language that they are learning is a view that does not devalue other language varieties.

### Literature Review

The only way to get textbooks to change and include information on the many varieties of the Spanish language is to educate current teachers and curriculum developers on the disparity between what content is being taught and what should be taught, and therefore to change their attitudes towards language as a whole. Retaining today’s textbooks’ content perpetuates the attitude that language is fixed and there is consequently only one “right” way to talk. Nearly forty years ago, Bull and Lamadrid (1971) interviewed a textbook editor who explained that publishers avoid changing traditional standard grammar rules in textbooks because they “can’t sell books with rules that upset the teachers” (p. 454). Teachers join committees to choose textbooks, so publishers are retaining such rules out of fear that if they removed them, they would lose business from teachers who were unhappy with the changes.

Over twenty years later, Glisan and Drescher (1993) showed that second language learners were still studying forms that are not used by native speakers of the target language. They used a self-developed corpus of 24,500 words and six of the most commonly used Spanish textbooks in American universities to compare the frequency of numerous structures that were

either common among native Spanish speakers, as represented by the corpus, or in Spanish textbooks. They studied language varieties from eight different countries, including Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Panama, Honduras, and El Salvador. Even though this research dealt with college-level textbooks, college and high school textbooks are made by the same publishers and contain much of the same content- they are simply designed for different levels. Glisan and Drescher concluded that teachers are wasting time teaching and reviewing structures that are hardly ever used by native speakers, and that this time could be better spent covering those forms that have been traditionally neglected. They added that “despite today’s widespread acceptance of teaching language for oral communication, current textbook grammar is still a reflection of classical grammatical rules based on formal, written language” (p. 25). By educating teachers and curriculum developers on the difference between the language being taught in the classroom and the language being used by native speakers, publishers can begin to change the way their textbooks are written to teach foreign languages to achieve both effective teaching of students and retention of their customers.

According to Valdés et. al. (2003), “much attention is given in many foreign language [classes] to... providing a model of a standard target language free of vulgar colloquialisms and popular jargon” (p. 8). They interviewed 43 participants in order to reveal perceptions of different varieties of Spanish in America, and summarized them by stating, “talk of correctness, error-free language, and academy-sanctioned usage revealed a purist perspective within which language was seen to be divided into acceptable and unacceptable elements” (p. 16). This polarization of the language is dangerous to foreign language students because it teaches them that even certain native Spanish speakers speak “bad” Spanish, which in no way prepares students for interaction outside the classroom. After analyzing the interviews, Valdés determined



that speakers from Spain and from countries with European-descent populations such as Chile or Argentina had the highest overall perceived prestige (p. 9). Speakers from countries with indigenous populations, such as Mexico and Peru, and countries with populations of African descent like Colombia and Venezuela are thought to speak “worse” Spanish, and U.S. Latinos were classified as having the least amount of prestige (p. 10). Interviewees described “good” Spanish as pure, formal, and error free (p. 14). It is perceptions such as these that are perpetuating the presentation of Spanish as a fixed language, without variation, in the foreign language classroom.

Glisan and Drescher (1993) concluded that “unfortunately, the most widely respected and adopted college textbooks treat all structures as being equally important in speech, failing to devote more attention to grammar [structures] that [are] most prevalent in speech” (p. 30). For example, Glisan and Drescher found that the nominalized expression *lo que (that which)* is a very common structure in the spoken language of native Spanish speakers. An example of this expression can be seen in the following sentence:

(3) Lo que hiciste era muy generoso.  
 it that you did was very generous  
 ‘What you did was very generous.’

However, it was given only minimal attention in textbooks, often placed at the end of a paragraph or included only in a summary of information. Further, not one of the six textbooks in the Glisan and Drescher study devoted any exercises for students to practice this structure, despite its frequency by native speakers.

One of the most interesting findings of Glisan and Drescher’s 1993 study is that while pronoun use is highly prevalent among native Spanish-speakers, the use of double-object pronouns, where two pronouns occur adjacently, was nearly nonexistent. Such pronoun structures occur in sentences such as the following:

(4) Se lo dio a ella.  
to her it he gave to her  
'He gave it to her.'

However, their data indicated that native Spanish speakers typically drop the indirect object pronoun (*se* in this case), leaving, "*Lo dio a ella.*"

(5) Lo dio a ella.  
it he gave to her  
'He gave it to her.'

Nevertheless, all six of the textbooks that were studied presented at least a full page devoted to the use of double-object pronouns. Not one of them discussed the frequency of use of this structure, but all gave between three to seven exercises for students to practice using it. This demonstrates the way that grammar is being treated as separate from actual usage in foreign language texts, because context was almost completely ignored in the textbooks. Students are not learning the different uses, purposes, and frequencies of such structures.

Using structures that are representative of native speaker use prepares foreign language students for interactions with native speakers outside the classroom. Dubin (1986) recommended that authentic texts, such as novels or newspapers, be used more in language classrooms so that students are exposed to language that they will actually use, rather than structures that either native speakers do not use or structures that may be variable. When textbooks are used that teach language as fixed, foreign language students do not become adequately prepared for life outside the classroom, where they will likely encounter native speakers. For example, students learning from one of the textbooks that Glisan and Drescher studied (1993) would more than likely consistently use double object pronouns in their everyday speech, even though it has been shown that native Spanish-speakers often drop one of the pronouns. If textbook editors continue to refuse to update their books, as was demonstrated by Bull and Lamadrid back in 1971, authentic texts may be the only appropriate alternative for

language teachers. This study will extend previous research in order to help change teachers' attitudes about language as a system, as well as provide them with ideas to supplement their textbooks to account for language variation. In this way, students can be more prepared for interaction outside of school with native speakers of various dialects of their target language.

### Methodology

In order to provide research that is relevant to today's foreign language teachers, it was important for me to collect data from high school Spanish textbooks that are representative of what is being used in today's classrooms. After consulting with a teacher on a textbook selection committee, I chose nine textbooks at level three or higher. They came from a variety of publishers, and they were all published within the past twenty years. These are considered to be recent textbooks because the content in language textbooks rarely changes in any significant way between editions. The following table provides information regarding which textbooks were studied.

Table 1

#### *Studied Textbooks and Related Information*

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
<i>¡Buen Viaje! 3</i>	Schmitt, C.J., & Woodford, P.E.	2005	Glencoe
<i>Galería de arte y vida: Nivel avanzado</i>	Adey, M., & Albini, L.	2004	Glencoe
<i>Dos Mundos</i>	Terrell, T.D., Andrade, M., Egasse, J., & Muñoz, E.M	2002	McGraw-Hill
<i>¡Ven Conmigo! 3</i>	Humbach, N.A., & Ozete, O.	2000	Holt, Rinehart & Winston
<i>Paso a Paso 3</i>	Met, M., Sayers, R.S., & Eubanks Wargin, C.	1996	Heinle & Heinle Publishers
<i>Abriendo paso: Gramática</i>	Díaz, J.M., & Collins, S.J	1995	Heinle & Heinle

			Publishers
<i>Horizontes: Gramática y conversación</i>	Ascarrunz Gilman, G., & Zwerling Sugano, M.	1994	Heinle & Heinle Publishers
<i>Spanish for Mastery 3</i>	Valette, J., Valette, R.M., & Carrera-Hanley, T.	1994	D.C. Heath and Company
<i>Somos Así 3</i>	Funston, J.F., Guitart, J.M., Koch, D.M., & Lambert Nicosia, R.	1991	EMC Publishing

I chose to focus on the grammatical use for *por* in Spanish that is used to describe a means of transportation. It is common for high school textbooks to explain this structure as being used to relate “manner or means.” The following example demonstrates this use:

(5) Viajaron por avión.  
 they traveled by plane  
 ‘They traveled by plane.’

I was interested in this particular structure because a professor had told me that it was *never* used by native Spanish speakers, and that high school textbooks were consequently teaching false grammar structures. I chose to research using the words *avión* and *tren* in particular because of their frequency in phrases like “I traveled by plane.” I examined the books and determined how much text was devoted to this structure through counting how many pages covered it and how many activities were available for students to practice it in. To compare the findings from the textbooks with native speaker usage of *por*, I used a corpus of spoken Spanish language data, CREA (*Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual*), a Spanish corpus produced by the Royal Spanish Academy, to calculate the frequency of the above mentioned structure. Half of the data from this particular corpus was collected from Latin America, and half from Spain. Further, ninety percent of the data was from written texts, while ten percent was oral data. This is common among corpora, since oral data is much more difficult to collect and code. A variety of topics were covered in the corpus, including science and technology, social sciences, politics and

economics, art, daily life, health, and fiction. The following table details the amount of data that was collected from each studied country.

Table 2

*Country Distribution among Latin American Data*

<u>Countries</u>	<u>Percent (%) of Data Retrieved</u>
Mexico, southwest United States, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador Nicaragua y Costa Rica	40 3
Cuba, Puerto Rico, Panama, Dominican Republic, coasts of Venezuela and Colombia, northeast United States	17
Rest of Venezuela and Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia Chile	20 6
Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay	14

As is demonstrated in the following table, the data was collected between 1975 and 1999, with far more data from the more recent years.

Table 3

*Time Distribution of CREA Written Data*

<u>Years</u>	<u>Percent (%) of Data</u>
1975-1979	10
1980-1984	15
1985-1989	20
1990-1994	25
1995-1999	30

In addition, I used the Sketch Engine Web Corpus to support the data that the CREA corpus presented. This corpus contained 116,900,060 words, but it did not specify the origin of the content regarding language varieties. This corpus was useful because rather than simply telling

me how often each studied phrase was used, I was able to get a list of collocates, or words that appear next to a particular word. For this method of data collection, I entered different means of transportation and obtained a list of the most popular words to occur before each entered word. In obtaining data that was collected from two different methods, I was able to attain more accurate results.

### Results

The data from the CREA corpus indicates that usage of *por* in transportation contexts among native speakers is frequently different from that which is taught in high school Spanish textbooks. The textbooks report the following as the “correct” way to relate a means of transportation:

- (7) Es mejor que vayas por avión.  
 it is better that you go by plane  
 ‘It’s better that you go by plane.’

However, in a conversation among native speakers, one could instead hear:

- (8) Es mejor que vayas en avión.  
 it is better that you go in a plane  
 ‘It’s better that you go by plane.’

The CREA corpus shows that the use of *en* rather than *por* is actually *more* prevalent among native Spanish speakers to express a means of transportation. A search for the phrase *en avión (by plane)* retrieves 43 results from spoken Spanish. When searching for the phrase *por avión (by plane)* with the same parameters, however, only eight results are obtained. Similarly, *en tren (by train)* displays 28 results from the spoken language data, while *por tren (by train)* only shows seven.

Table 4

*CREA Oral Data*

<u>Country</u>	<i>En avión</i>		<i>Por avión</i>	
	<u>Raw</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Raw</u>	<u>Percentage</u>

	<u>Occurrence</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Occurrence</u>	<u>(%)</u>
<i>Spain</i>	19	44.18	3	37.5
<i>Argentina</i>	4	9.3	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>
<i>Mexico</i>	4	9.3	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>
<i>Venezuela</i>	11	25.58	4	50
<i>Chile</i>	1	2.32	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>
<i>Cuba</i>	3	6.97	1	12.5
<i>Costa Rica</i>	1	2.32	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>

In a search of both written and spoken Spanish, there is an even greater difference in the use of ‘por’. While *en avión* brings up 517 instances of use, *por avión* displays 98. Likewise, *en tren* obtains 405 results, while *por tren* only shows 50.

Table 5

*CREA Oral and Written Data*

<u>Country</u>	<i>En avión</i>		<i>Por avión</i>	
	<u>Raw Occurrence</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>	<u>Raw Occurrence</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
<i>Spain</i>	286	57.42	28	30.43
<i>Argentina</i>	48	9.63	9	9.78
<i>Mexico</i>	29	5.82	8	8.69
<i>Colombia</i>	27	5.42	3	3.26
<i>Venezuela</i>	24	4.81	14	15.21
<i>Chile</i>	21	4.21	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>
<i>Peru</i>	17	3.41	5	5.43
<i>Cuba</i>	12	2.4	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>
<i>United States</i>	12	2.4	11	11.95
<i>Costa Rica</i>	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>	3	3.26
<i>Guatemala</i>	<b>No data</b>	<b>No data</b>	3	3.26
<i>Other</i>	22	4.41	8	8.69

Such differences in these reported numbers show that there is actually more usage of *en* for such constructions than *por*, which is the only structure taught in Spanish textbooks. However, *por* is

not obsolete, and should therefore not be taken out of textbooks completely. It is used more frequently in countries like Venezuela and the United States than in other countries, which suggests variation between dialects.

The Sketch Engine Spanish Web Corpus produced a ranking of the most frequent collocates of *avión* (*plane*) and *tren* (*train*). The following tables provide collocates of *avión* and *tren* that appeared immediately before each word.

Table 6

*Collocates of Avión*

Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	<b>6</b>	7	8	9	10	<b>11</b>	12
Collocate	el	un	los	de	del	<b>en</b>	,	al	El	y	<b>po r</b>	Un
Translation	the	a	the	of	of the	<b>in</b>	,	to the	The	an d	<b>by</b>	A
Frequency	66 1	63 3	45 9	39 0	350	<b>25 5</b>	10 5	103	101	76	<b>65</b>	44

In the above table, *en* is the sixth most common word to appear before *avión*, and it was used in this position 255 times. *Por*, meanwhile, was still used 65 times in such a position. These numbers support the findings from the CREA corpus-- it is clear that both *en* and *por* can be used with means of transportation, and further, that *en* appears more frequently. The following table shows that the same is true with *tren*.

Table 7

*Collocates of Tren*

Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	<b>6</b>	7	8	9	10	11	<b>12</b>
Collocate	el	un	del	de	los	<b>en</b>	El	el	,	y	este	<b>por</b>
Translation	the	a	of the	of	the	<b>in</b>	The	the	,	and	this	<b>by</b>
Frequency	88 9	411	393	37 4	34 0	<b>211</b>	112	10 7	6 7	36	30	<b>30</b>



Despite these statistics, however, all nine analyzed textbooks described the use of *por* with the explanation of either “manner or means” or “by.” For example, the textbook *Somos Así* gives the example:

- (6) Es mejor que vayas por avión.  
 it is better that you go by plane  
 ‘It’s better that you go by plane.’

The following table details the exact phrasing of each studied textbook regarding this use of *por*.

Table 8

Explanations of *por*

Title	Explanation	Example	Page #
<i>¡Buen Viaje! 3</i>	Por is used to express means, manner, or motive.	La carta llegó por correo aéreo. (The letter arrived by air mail.)	361
<i>Galería de arte y vida: Nivel avanzado</i>	[Se usa <i>por</i> ] para indicar manera o medio.	El paquete llegó por correo. (The package arrived by mail.)	197
<i>Dos Mundos</i>	Por is also used to indicate means of transportation.	Voy a viajar por tren. (I’ll travel by train.)	365
<i>¡Ven Conmigo! 3</i>	Expresses mode of transportation.	Carlos fue por autobús. (Carlos went by bus.)	R23
<i>Paso a Paso 3</i>	By	Envié la carta por vía aérea. (I sent the letter by air mail.)	244
<i>Abriendo paso: Gramática</i>	By	Me mandó el paquete por correo aéreo. (He sent me the package by air mail.)	221
<i>Horizontes: Gramática y conversación</i>	Para indicar el medio o el modo como se realiza algo (by).	Enviaron el paquete por avión. (They sent the package by plane.)	304
<i>Spanish for Mastery 3</i>	Manner or means (by).	Viajamos por avión. (We travel by plane.)	109

<i>Somos Así 3</i>	Manner or means.	Es mejor que vayas por avión. (It's better that you go by plane.)	233
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The books that only use examples for this use of *por* that involve mail are actually accurate; *en* is not used in this manner in any dialect of Spanish. However, the problem with these books is that they do not differentiate between the use involving a physical object that is a means of transportation and that involving more of an abstract idea, like a form of delivery. *En* can be used with *avión* because one can physically travel *in* a plane. However, nothing can travel “*in* air mail,” (*correo aéreo*) because “air mail” is not a physical object that is used for transportation. Textbooks, however, do not explain this or even mention it, so students are consequently instructed to think that *por* is the only way to relate “manner or means,” and should therefore be used in every such utterance.

All of the textbooks contain at least one full page with a description of this use of *por*, and all except *Paso a Paso* and *Ven Conmigo* contain at least one exercise for students to practice their usage. Many of the textbooks even provide two or three different activities in order to reinforce learning. In doing so, all textbooks taught that using *por* is the only acceptable way to communicate a means of transportation. The problem does not lie in the fact that one would be misunderstood through using *por* in such a context—it would be an accurate usage—but rather that textbooks are presenting this particular feature as fixed and incapable of having variation. Even though *en* is never even mentioned in this context, it can be heard among native speakers from many different Spanish-speaking countries. The following table details how much content is dedicated to *por* and *en* in each studied textbook:

Table 9

Textbook devotion to *por* versus *en*

	# of Pages with Explanations		# of Activities	
	Por	En	Por	En
<i>¡Buen Viaje! 3</i>	1	<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>
<i>Galería de arte y vida: Nivel avanzado</i>	1	<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>
<i>Dos Mundos</i>	3	<b>0</b>	1	<b>0</b>
<i>¡Ven Conmigo! 3</i>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Paso a Paso 3</i>	1	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Abriendo paso: Gramática</i>	1	<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>
<i>Horizontes: Gramática y conversación</i>	1	<b>0</b>	1	<b>0</b>
<i>Spanish for Mastery 3</i>	3	<b>0</b>	3	<b>0</b>
<i>Somos Así 3</i>	3	<b>0</b>	2	<b>0</b>

It can be seen that with the exception of *Ven Conmigo* and *Paso a Paso*, textbooks are spending a considerable amount of time emphasizing the use of *por* over that of *en*. Even the two without activities for either structure continue to teach only *por*. Even if this is taught briefly in these two books, it is important to remember that the complete lack of *en* instruction will still impact the speech that students produce. One must also remember that it is common for textbooks to be packaged with an accompanying workbook to reinforce grammar learning. While these workbooks were not studied, it is extremely likely that they covered this same topic, and because workbooks are not designed to introduce new information, none of them that correspond to these textbooks would allow practice for the use of *en*.

The *Spanish for Mastery* and *Dos Mundos* textbooks are particularly interesting because they both contradict what they teach at some point. Despite *Spanish for Mastery*'s clear explanation that *por* describes "manner or means" (p. 109), it asks the following question in one of its exercises:

(8) ¿Prefiere viajar en tren o por avión?

he prefers to travel in a train or by plane

‘Does he prefer to travel by train or by plane?’

This clearly demonstrates that both structures are acceptable; however, the book gives no explanation as to why *en* is used in the same type of phrase as *por*. The question is supposed to reinforce learning to use *por*, yet *en* is used simultaneously. Without an explanation of this, students would likely either become confused upon noticing the discrepancy or attribute it to a typographical error. Similarly, despite *Dos Mundos*’ clear definition stating, “*Por* is also used to indicate means of transportation” (p. 365), it contains the following example earlier in the book (p. 344):

(9) Hicimos una gira en bicicleta por dos semanas.

we did a tour in a bicycle for two weeks

‘We went on a bike tour for two weeks.’

While it does not explicitly state that only *por* can be used in such a situation, it also does not explain why *en* is used to describe a means of transportation in this situation. In fact, the use of *en* in this way is never even mentioned; the example seems like an oversight rather than a learning opportunity.

Contradictions such as these demonstrate that publishers are aware of the multiple ways to express a mode of transportation; however, they still neglect to explain alternate usages or even mention that they exist. By just using *en* in an example or two, students are not learning anything; they are either becoming confused because the rule they just learned is not being applied consistently, or they are attributing such examples to mistakes made by the publisher. Without a clear explanation, these potentially valuable learning opportunities are wasted. It is clear that even though textbooks have locations where such lessons in variation would be appropriate and even helpful, publishers are not taking advantage of these opportunities. Instead, they are letting students believe that there is only one “correct” way to talk.

Overall, none of the textbooks covered in this study took variation into account when teaching a foreign language. While a few textbooks did not explicitly teach that *por* is the only way to relate a means of transportation, they nevertheless neglected to explain in any way that variation even exists within languages. This is a problem that was encountered among all nine studied textbooks, regardless of the fact that both corpora indicated different ways to discuss transportation that were used by native Spanish speakers.

### Recommendations

In order to teach students about variation within the Spanish language, teachers need to include supplemental materials and activities until publishers begin to change the way that textbooks view and present language. Included is a sample lesson plan that a high school Spanish teacher could use to incorporate language variation into the foreign language class. No particular class level is specified because the timing of this lesson within the curriculum depends on the students' abilities and needs, and the lesson can easily be adapted to meet them. For example, in a beginning Spanish class, the conversation could be held in English, while in a more advanced class, the entire lesson could be conducted in Spanish.

Objectives (National Standards): Students will be able to give examples of both lexical and grammatical variation in Spanish (3.2). Students will be able to explain what language variation is and understand the similarity between variation in Spanish and in English (4.1).

Materials: Copies of worksheet

Index cards

Chalk

Visualizer

Anticipatory Set: Tell students to think about English as a language. Is it fixed, or does it vary from one person to another? What are some things that their grandparents might say that they do not, and vice versa? Bring up examples like the words *groovy* and *bling*. Make a list as a class of lexical variation among native English speakers. Are words the only things that vary? Mention that in British English, *in future* means *from now on*, while *in the future* refers to *sometime in the future*. American English speakers use *in the future* for both meanings. See if students can come up with any other examples. Ask students if they would look down on those who said such things. Call on volunteers.

Instructional Input: Say that the same thing happens in Spanish. Language changes over time, and also by location. Because of this, it is perfectly acceptable for people to have different ways to say the same thing. In Spanish, for example, many speakers use the sentence *Viajé **por** avión* to say *I traveled by plane*. However, many others instead say *Viajé **en** avión*. Neither is wrong or worse than the other; they are just different. Likewise, different words can be used to mean the same thing. Some may be more popular in certain areas than in others. For example, one would say *conducir* to mean *to drive* in Spain, but *manejar* in Latin America.

Guided Practice: Go through the worksheet in Appendix A as a class, having students guess what the change might be in each sentence before giving the answer. The sentences given are meant to be a beginning; add any that would be relevant to the level of the students and the current unit being studied.

Activity: Have students work with a partner. Each student must write two sentences on an index card that can be said in more than one way. One sentence must vary in vocabulary, while the other needs to vary grammatically. When one partner tells the other one of the

sentences, the other partner needs to respond with an alternate but equivalent sentence.

This must then be written under the original sentence. Collect the cards, pass them out at random, and have students read the first sentence on their new card to their partner. Their partner must give the alternate sentence. See if students come up with new alternate sentences that differ from those already written on the card.

Assessment: Have each pair present one set of sentences to the class afterwards, and collect the index cards (make sure students write their name on their original card before redistributing them).

### Conclusion

This study has extended previous research in foreign language teaching in order to improve awareness among educators and curriculum developers of the discrepancies between the many varieties that are used by native Spanish speakers and the way that language is being taught in high school foreign language classrooms via textbooks. With this information, teachers will be able to supplement existing textbooks through the use of other teaching materials in order to improve the education of their students until publishers can be persuaded to revise what information is covered in their texts. With teaching methods based on native speaker use as well as on a perspective where a language's grammar is not a single fixed system, students will be more prepared to interact with native speakers, which is one of the many goals of such classes. Although it is not likely that textbook editors will initially be willing to change the way their series are organized, if enough teachers begin to see the value of taking cues from native speakers, eventually the publishers will have to change their textbooks' content in order to retain their business. Again, though it would not be possible to incorporate all dialects of Spanish in textbooks, a view that does not devalue other language varieties is the idea that must be included

in order to further foreign language students' understanding of the language that they are learning.

As with any research, there were limitations that could not be avoided. The CREA corpus may not be representative of all different varieties of Spanish spoken by speakers of different social classes, ages, or regions within a given country. For example, I am aware that the corpus was slightly biased towards the varieties of Spanish spoken in Spain, since those speakers comprised fifty percent of the data, while the remaining fifty percent consisted of speakers from all of Latin America. I also had to use written data in addition to oral data, and since written language is generally much more formal and follows many more prescriptive rules than spoken language does it could have skewed my results. However, using data from written sources is acceptable because it did not constitute the forefront of my research. In addition, determining a representative sample of textbooks was a surprisingly difficult and somewhat subjective task, since there is no list of the most popular Spanish high school textbooks used in the United States, and publishers were not particularly forthcoming with information.

There will always be room for future studies in this area-- there are many different varieties of many different languages that remain to be studied, and there will always be new textbooks to analyze. In addition, there are many different levels of foreign language education, ranging from the elementary school years all the way to the university level. The business aspect of the textbook industry should also be studied, specifically publishers' decisions on how and why they control what information is placed in textbooks, and more research is necessary to determine teachers' attitudes toward both the *por/en* distinction and language variation in general. Overall, this is a relatively new area of research that requires further study. The purpose of this research was to inform foreign language teachers that their textbooks may not be



adequate as primary teaching tools, and further study will be needed in order to determine what steps must be taken next.

## Appendix A

## Los idiomas no son fijos

(Languages are not fixed)

Direcciones: Escriban un alternativo aceptado por cada frase.

(Directions: Write an acceptable alternative for each phrase.)

1. Viajé **por** avión.

(I traveled by plane.)

Viajé **en** avión.

2. ¿Cómo **estás**?

(How are you?)

¿Cómo **estai**?

3. Dormiste **por** ocho horas.

(You slept for eight hours.)

Dormiste ocho horas.

4. Voy a salir con mi

Voy a salir con mi **pololo/a**

**novio/a esta noche.**

(I'm going to go out with my boy/girlfriend tonight.)

esta noche. \_\_\_\_\_

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