The Routledge Handbook of Spanish as a Heritage Language

Kim Potowski, Javier Muñoz-Basols

The Lexicon of Spanish Heritage Language Speakers

Publication details
Marta Fairclough, Anel Garza
Published online on: 08 May 2018

How to cite :- Marta Fairclough, Anel Garza. 08 May 2018, The Lexicon of Spanish Heritage Language Speakers from: The Routledge Handbook of Spanish as a Heritage Language Routledge
Accessed on: 13 Sep 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
12
THE LEXICON OF SPANISH HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

Marta Fairclough
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, USA

Anel Garza
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE, USA

Introduction

“Words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed” (Read 2000: 1). But the body of words that a person knows, i.e., their vocabulary knowledge or lexicon, is a complex construct that includes several dimensions. Nation (2013) distinguishes between receptive and productive vocabulary, recognizing that productive skills require higher levels of knowledge than receptive skills. Two other dimensions that have been traditionally studied as part of lexical competence are vocabulary size or breadth and vocabulary depth. Some internal (e.g., age of acquisition) and external factors (e.g., linguistic contact) can have great impact on an individual’s vocabulary. In addition to studies measuring vocabulary from those different perspectives, a number of researchers have looked at correlations between measures of vocabulary knowledge with other language skills such as reading and listening comprehension, and even with general language proficiency (Schmitt 2010). However, most of the studies have focused on the English language, while here the focus is on Spanish.

Despite the complexity of lexical knowledge and the importance of vocabulary in language learning, research in this area, especially from learners whose target language is Spanish, has been neglected in favor of acquisition of grammar (Lafford et al. 2003). Even less is known about the vocabulary knowledge of heritage Spanish speakers. After a brief explanation of several aspects of vocabulary and key issues regarding lexical knowledge, use, and acquisition, the chapter will present an overview of research carried out to date on the lexicon of SHL speakers. The chapter will then offer some recommendations for practice and suggest a future research agenda.
The notion of vocabulary and its dimensions: some key issues

**Defining vocabulary**

Read and Chapelle (2001: 1–2) summarize several perspectives on “vocabulary” as a construct. From a pragmatic point of view, some propose that vocabulary should always be in context (Singleton 1999) – i.e., it can only be truly examined within a specific situation or discourse – while others perceive it as simply memorized lexical units (Skehan 1998). Many think of vocabulary as consisting of individual word forms (Laufer 1998; Laufer and Nation 1999). However, to the question of “What is a ‘word’?” Read (2000: 17–19) explains that a “lemma” is a base plus its inflected forms and a “word family,” a set of words that share a common meaning. The author distinguishes between function or grammatical words (e.g., prepositions, articles) and content or lexical words (e.g., nouns, adverbs). Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) use as the main unit the lexeme (or lexical item), which is “an item which functions as a single meaning unit, regardless of the number of orthographical words it contains. Fly, pain-induced, and put your nose to the grindstone are all lexical items” (1997: 329). Using this type of formulaic sequence as examples, also known as “collocations,” “chunks,” and “multi-word units” (Wray 2002), Schmitt (2010) illustrates that “Vocabulary typically behaves not as single words which are held together by syntax, but rather has a strong tendency to occur in multiple word phraseological units” (2010: 117).

**Learning a word in L1 and L2: types of lexical knowledge**

In the broadest terms, researchers distinguish between size or **breadth** of lexical knowledge (i.e., the number of known words, even if that knowledge is limited to some aspects of its meaning) and **depth** of knowledge (i.e., quality of vocabulary knowledge). We now describe each one in detail.

Regarding size, the vocabulary of an educated native speaker is considered to be around 15,000 to 20,000 word families (Nation and Waring 1997). The number of words needed to read authentic texts in a second language appears to fluctuate between 3,000 to 5,000 word families. However, most of this data comes from English, and “typical vocabulary size” appears to be a flexible concept that varies from one language to another (Meara 2003: 271). In Spanish, an educated native speaker’s lexicon is estimated to be comprised of about 30,000 words, while the average number of words shared by members of a community seems to range from a surprisingly lower 3,000 to 5,000 items (Alvar Ezquerra 2004: 21). Davies (2005) posits that “a frequency list with about 4,000 words would cover about 90% of all words that would be heard in a ‘typical’ conversation, that 7,000 words would achieve 90% coverage in fiction writing, and 8,000 words for non-fiction” (2005: 110).

Learning a word appears to be a process that moves from receptive to productive knowledge. The difference between the two is defined by Nation (2013) in this way:

Essentially, receptive vocabulary use involves perceiving the form of a word while listening or reading its meaning. Productive vocabulary use involves wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken or written word form.

2013: 47
Therefore, receptive vocabulary size is estimated to be larger than the active lexicon, although it is not clear how much larger it is (Eyckmans 2004: 12).

Regarding vocabulary breadth, as Cameron (2002) posits, “clearly, there is much more to knowing a word than just recognizing it . . . Deep word knowledge includes spelling, word associations, grammatical information and meaning” (2002: 149–150). To this list, when dealing with an L2, Mochida and Harrington (2006) add that “functional knowledge of a word can include the ability to recognize the form, translate it into the L1, recognize it in context, or accurately use it in an informative context” (2006: 95). A further aspect of vocabulary development that needs to form part of any theoretical model is how vocabulary knowledge is used productively in communication. Lafford et al. (2003), making reference to Nation (1990) and Nation and Waring (1997), indicate that “knowledge of a word requires an understanding of its spoken and written form, frequency, grammatical patterns and collocations, semantic, pragmatic, stylistic and register constraints, sociolinguistic aspects, and connotations as well as its associations with other related words” (2003: 134).

**Vocabulary research with heritage Spanish speakers**

Several factors may have an impact on a heritage speaker’s knowledge of vocabulary. First, we will briefly discuss dialectal variation in the lexicon of US Hispanics. Then, the following sub-sections will describe some key studies regarding vocabulary among this population as it correlates with: (a) age of acquisition, (b) receptive knowledge, and (c) productive knowledge.

**Dialectal lexical variation**

As noted in the introduction to this volume, the 54+ million Hispanics in the United States come from all Spanish-speaking countries. In 2016 the majority (64%) of US Latinos were of Mexican background, 9.4% Puerto Rican, 3.8% Salvadorans, and 3.7% Cubans, and the remaining included individuals from other Spanish-speaking nations. While all Spanish varieties share the vast bulk of lexicon, each of these dialectal groups has vocabulary that differs from region to region – typically (but not always) words that are of relatively lower frequency.

Lipski (2000) underscored the difficulties that emerge when regional vocabulary from one country is used with speakers from other regions/countries, causing alienation or lack of understanding to speakers of other varieties, especially children in transitional bilingual programs, in which educational materials contained primarily Mexican (or occasionally Caribbean) vocabulary. The author explained that “Mexican’s ándale (let’s go), papalote (kite), güero (blond, fair-skinned), chamaco and huerc (child), lana (money), and popote (soda straw), are all unknown to Salvadoreans” (2000: 198). Lexical regional variety also confuses speakers from different backgrounds when different Spanish words are used for one same referent. For instance, the word chucho, meaning ‘light switch’ to Cubans, means ‘dog’ among Nicaraguans and Guatemalans, or chele is used as ‘blond, fair skinned individuals’ among the former, while canche is the term used by the latter (Lipski 2000). Regarding the Mexican American variety, traditional sociolinguistic research (e.g., Sánchez 1982; Valdés 2000) has revealed the presence of some archaic forms (e.g., aina, pos) which are also typical of working-class or rural speakers in many parts of the Spanish-speaking world and are often stigmatized (Bernal-Enríquez and Hernández-Chávez 2005; Parodi 2008). According to Zentella (1990), the fact that all these varieties of Spanish coexist in the United States may either lead to maintenance of each group’s lexicon; assimilation to the largest or most prestigious variety; or lexical leveling the production of a new lexicon shared by the majority. She also notes that in many cases, Anglicisms play the role of neutralizer
between competing dialectal variants, acting as the lingua franca that resolves the conflict without favoring one group at the expense of another (1990: 1101). A common example is cake, which in Spanish can be torta, tarta, pastel, or bizcocho, and as a result many U.S. Spanish-speakers simply use the Anglicism queic.

**Age of acquisition**

Age of acquisition (AoA) is a construct that refers to the chronological age at which certain information (e.g., a lexical item) is acquired by an individual. Cameirão and Vicente (2010) describe it as an important psycholinguistic variable because it affects the speed and accuracy of lexical processing in tasks such as word naming, picture naming, and lexical decision (2010: 474). Studies on brain activity in monolingual subjects have shown that words learned in early childhood stimulate brain areas related to the processing of speech sounds (auditory processing), while words learned in late childhood are associated with brain activity in areas related to the effortful processing of meaning (Fiebach et al. 2003 in Hernández 2013). Even as adults, words are accessed in the same way as they were learned, with individuals “sounding out” early-learned words but making connections to words with similar meanings in the case of late-learned words (Hernández 2013). It has also been shown that words learned earlier in life are accessed more accurately and at a faster rate than those acquired later, and that this AoA effect is independent of word frequency (Bonin et al. 2004; Carrol and White 1973a, 1973b; Ellis and Morrison 1998). Ellis and Lambon Ralph’s (2000) explanation for this word AoA effect has to do with the fact that words that are learned early enter the lexical system first and form stronger links (phonological, semantic, orthographic) than those words that enter later because there is less flexibility for late-learned words to influence the system (Hernández 2013: 20).

AoA affects processing of not only L1 lexicon, but also L2 lexicon. Izura and Ellis (2002) found AoA effects in both the L1 and the L2 in object naming and lexical decision tasks of Spanish L1 speakers who started learning English as L2 in Spain after age 10. For example, they were able to recognize and produce early-acquired English words faster than late-acquired English words. Their follow-up study with visual translation and lexical decision tasks (2004) confirmed the previous findings. They concluded that early-acquired words in Spanish L1 and English L2 were processed faster and more accurately than words acquired later in Spanish L1 and English L2, respectively.

In the case of heritage learners, a common occurrence is L1 attrition (i.e. heritage language erosion), and lexical access is one area that has been shown to be vulnerable to attrition (de Bot 1998; Weltens and Grendell 1993). A study of three generations of Dutch immigrants in New Zealand performing picture-naming and picture-word matching tasks in both Dutch and English (Hulsen 2000) showed that production is affected more than comprehension in the heritage language, and that second- and third-generation speakers are more affected than first-generation speakers. In addition, children and immigrants arriving in a new country before puberty lose their L1 vocabulary at a faster rate than adult immigrants. This coincides with Polinsky’s (2005) findings for Russian heritage speakers. In lexical recognition and translation tasks of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, she also found that Russian native speakers showed balanced control of the three word classes, while heritage speakers of low proficiency showed lower retention of nouns and adjectives than of verbs. Montrul and Foote (2014) studied the role of global AoA of Spanish and the AoA of individual words on the speed and accuracy of lexical access in SHL learners and late L2 learners of Spanish with similar proficiency levels and whose dominant language is English. Both groups performed a lexical decision task in Spanish and an English-Spanish translation decision task. Both groups tended to be faster and more
accurate on nouns than on verbs and adjectives, although the difference was not statistically significant. In terms of global AoA of L1 and L2, the results showed no differences in accuracy, but the L2 learners were faster in their responses than the heritage learners. In terms of word AoA, there were differences within the groups: heritage learners were faster and more accurate than L2 learners with words learned early in L1 Spanish, while the L2 learners were faster and more accurate than heritage learners with words learned early in L2 Spanish. The results suggest that visual word recognition is not affected by ‘maturational effects’ (i.e., no effects of age for acquisition of lexical items). The effect of AoA of words shows that lexical access depends mostly on the language-learning experience and the context and modality of acquisition. While SHL speakers are exposed to Spanish at home since early childhood and learn the HL primarily via aural input, L2 learners acquire Spanish usually around puberty and mainly in the classroom, where they learn words through both aural and written input. That is, earlier learned lexicon was responded to more quickly and more accurately by both heritage learners and second language learners.

**Receptive lexical knowledge**

Several studies about SHL learners’ receptive vocabulary knowledge were conducted using a lexical decision (or “lexical recognition”) task, a two-choice procedure in which a string of letters stimulus is presented and participants have to decide if it is a real word or not (Fairclough 2011). Fairclough and Ramírez’ (2009) pilot study found a high correlation between general language proficiency and a 200-word test that included high frequency Spanish words (Davies 2006) and pseudowords to control for guessing.

If vocabulary levels do reflect language development more generally, and if existing tests can be shown to be valid and reliable, then vocabulary testing might offer a relatively quick and easy way for researchers and schools to monitor progress in language development.

*Cameron 2002: 151*

Fairclough & Ramírez’ study was replicated by Fairclough (2011) with a larger group of participants (N = 330). The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the lexical recognition task as a placement tool that distinguishes among levels of Spanish L2 and HL learners. University students from four different levels (in addition to a control group of bilingual graduate students) completed the test, which correlated well with other measures of language proficiency. However, while the lexical test based on the 5,000 most frequent words in Spanish worked well with Spanish L2 students and lower level HL learners, a lower frequency lexicon would be needed to avoid the ceiling effect with higher proficiency students. By measuring and comparing the number of words SHL learners know, parameters could be determined to differentiate among different levels of proficiency in the heritage language. Results of a later study (Fairclough 2013a) showed that the receptive SHL students enrolled in first year Spanish courses (i.e., “Receptive” refers to students lacking in productive abilities, but able to comprehend basic oral and written material) who participated in the research had a lexicon of up to 3,000 words, two-thirds of them from the highest frequency bands, while higher proficiency SHL learners recognized at least 90% of the 5,000 most frequent words in Spanish.

Velásquez (2015) looked at the correlation between lexical knowledge and reading comprehension in a study with 240 beginner, intermediate, and advanced SHL university students. Participants completed two lexical recognition tests and two reading comprehension tests. The results showed that 98% vocabulary coverage was needed to show “adequate” (70%)
Spanish heritage language speakers

comprehension of the text. Velásquez concluded that the relationship between lexical competence and reading comprehension is not linear (i.e., the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension does not increase proportionally) as suggested by Schmitt et al. (2011), with other factors such as grammatical knowledge, ability to infer meaning, text difficulty, and length contributing to the reading comprehension process.

**Productive lexical knowledge**

“Available lexicon in defined as (1) the sum of words that speakers have in their mental systems and (2) whose use is conditioned by a particular topic” (Moreno Fernández 2007: 41). Given a semantic field (e.g., transportation) individuals will produce, in a pre-determined amount of time, all the words that come to mind related to that field. The lexical availability of native speakers of Spanish has been widely researched, both in monolingual contexts (Ávila Muñoz and Villena Ponsoda 2010; Hernández Muñoz 2006, 2015; Hernández Muñoz et al. 2006, among many others) and in language contact situations (see Samper Padilla et al. 2003 for an overview, as well as Nielson Parada, this volume, about Spanish lexicon among Chileans in Sweden). However, relatively less research on lexical availability has been conducted among Spanish-English bilinguals in the United States. We will review three of these studies here.

Cooper (1971) used a word naming task with Puerto Ricans in New Jersey to examine specific social domains: family, neighborhood, religion, education, and work. The task consisted of producing within one minute as many words as they could that were associated to the specific context. Results showed that participants produced more words in the language they normally used in each domain. That is, if they used mostly Spanish at church, they produced more words in Spanish in the “religion” domain, and if they used mostly English at work, they produced more words in English for that domain.

Moreno-Fernández (2007) looked at the presence of Spanish and English in the available lexicon of first- and second-generation Hispanic adolescents in Chicago. The author elicited vocabulary associated with 22 different semantic fields including parts of the body, clothing, parts of the house, school, and transportation. Word frequency and “availability index” were calculated. Results showed that overall only 15% of produced words were Anglicisms, and among the 20 most commonly listed words in each semantic field, only 6.5% were Anglicisms. This suggests that the Spanish lexicon of young American Hispanics is less influenced by English than may have been suspected. The author also found an inverse correlation between Spanish proficiency and English production: the higher the level of Spanish in which students were enrolled, the lower the number of English lexical items they produced. Similarly, Garza (2013) found that as the level of Spanish proficiency increases, English transfer phenomena decrease.

Following traditional methodology designed for lexical availability studies (López Meirama 2008), Fairclough (2010) conducted a study with 150 heritage language learners enrolled in first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year Spanish courses. Participants completed a timed vocabulary task in which they were asked to generate words based on 12 different semantic fields (e.g., parts of the body, nature, animals, education). The frequency and availability indexes were calculated and compared to those from studies in monolingual and other bilingual contexts. The results showed that the longer SHL students studied Spanish, the closer the results matched those of participants from the monolingual studies, which suggests a positive role of heritage language study in lexical development.

Other studies of productive lexical knowledge include academic vocabulary, lexical richness, and code-mixing.
Garza’s (2013) vocabulary types in the analysis of written and oral academic texts include formal, technical, colloquial, and stigmatized forms. The vocabulary in the written samples shows a gradual decrease in colloquial items and stigmatized forms as the educational level increases (Group 1 to Group 4), and a gradual increase in words classified as formal. Technical vocabulary is also lower in educational group 1 compared to Groups 2, 3, and 4, although in this category, Group 3 displays the highest percentage of all groups. The oral samples also evidence a gradual decrease in colloquial items and stigmatized forms. Formal vocabulary is lowest in Group 1 and highest in 4, although the pattern of increase is not continuous (Group 2 has a higher percentage than 3). Technical vocabulary also increases, but Group 3 has the highest percentages in all four groups. Overall, these results show a positive influence of increased exposition to Spanish in the heritage courses, as there is a gradual increase in formal and technical vocabulary, and a gradual decrease in colloquial, transfer, and stigmatized/archaic forms in both the written and oral academic registers of these students. The results of these studies are not surprising since it is a well-known fact that heritage language speakers acquire the minority language in a natural context (usually orally and within the home environment), with limited exposure to formal registers, which are learned in academic settings.

The feature of lexical richness in the investigation by Fairclough and Belpoliti (2015) encompasses lexical density, lexical frequency, and lexical variation. The lexical density index in this study is calculated as the number of Spanish lexical words divided by the total running words. Proper names were subtracted from the total number of words. The 46.4% lexical index situates the written texts of these students approximately midway along Halliday’s (1989) written-oral continuum and reveals a large proportion of use of non-lexical items, which is indicative of an oral register. However, as Laufer and Nation (1995) point out, this measure by itself is not enough to measure vocabulary, and other measures are needed to clearly represent knowledge and use of words. Therefore, lexical frequency and variation are also included in the analysis.

Lexical frequency is measured by classifying all Spanish words into six levels based on Davies’ (2006) frequency dictionary and the CREA database. In terms of word frequency, the writing of these students shows a reduced vocabulary; with level 1K (the 1,000 most frequent words in Spanish) accounting for 92.9% of the vocabulary used. 2K level (from 1,000 to 2,000) words occur 3% of the time; 5K+ (over 5,000) words, 2.7% of the time, and 3K, 4K, and 5K words have frequencies of 0.8%, 0.2%, and 0.4%, respectively. Lexical variation, measured using both the Type/Token Ratio (TTR) and Guiraud’s index (Root TTR), reveals a high level of repetition of words. Overall, the analysis of lexical richness demonstrates that these learners still lack the lexical resources to develop their ideas.

Garza’s calculation of lexical density was also measured as the ratio of the number of content words to the total number of words. The results of both written and oral texts show a gradual increase in lexical density from Group 1 to Group 4 (G1 to G4), and the percentages in the written samples are higher than those in the oral samples, in accordance with Halliday’s (1989) observed differences between spoken and written language. These findings demonstrate advancement toward a more academic register as heritage students take more Spanish courses. The researcher’s study of word frequency was also based on Davies’ frequency dictionary. The written samples revealed a gradual decrease (G1 to G4) in the 1K category (the 1–1,000 most common words) and a gradual increase in the +5K category (less frequent words, i.e., the 5,000 + category). Words in the other frequency bands did not show a definite pattern, but what became evident was that G1 used less variety of words within each frequency band. In addition, the variety of vocabulary employed increased as the level of the students went up, with G4 showing greater vocabulary variety than the other groups. Unlike the written sample, which was obtained without any prior preparation on the students’ part, the oral presentations allowed...
for students to research their topic and prepare in advance. This was probably a contributing factor to the increased variety of words used by all groups in comparison to the written samples, as well as to the overall similarities in terms of percentages, within the frequency bands.

Fairclough (2006) described the different types of language mixing phenomena (single-word switches, borrowings, and calques as well as multiple-word switches and calques) in a context where participants would be expected to be in a “monolingual mode” (Grosjean 1997). The study was based on 150 samples written as part of exams completed by heritage learners of Spanish who placed into 5 different levels upon entering the Spanish program at the University of Houston. Results showed low percentages of English transfer in the analyzed samples (2.32%, or in terms of means, 7.15 words per average sample of 308 words). As expected, the influence of English appeared to decrease as competence in Spanish increased. Single- and multiple-word switches to English as well as loans and single-word calques were very sporadic. Multiple-word calques were the most frequent across the levels, yet the means were still very low when compared to the total number of words (total number of words produced: 46,244; total number of CS: 1,073; total number of multiple-word calques: 751). A follow-up study (Fairclough and Belpoliti 2015) also centered on the writing of beginning-level heritage learners (receptive bilinguals) in essays produced as part of a placement/credit exam. They found a relatively low percentage of lexical transfer (4.95%), with lexical creations emerging as the most frequent (2.50%). The low transfer from English in these receptive bilingual learners indicates that they seem to be in monolingual Spanish mode during the exam.

Sánchez-Muñoz (2010) studied the oral production of heritage learners across registers, focusing on vocabulary features produced in the following three contexts ranging from most formal to least formal register: (1) class presentations, (2) interviews, and (3) conversations. Two of the three linguistic elements considered by Sánchez-Muñoz were lexical transfer of English words into Spanish (i.e., *deadline*), including fillers (i.e., *you know*), and lexical creations in Spanish based on English words (i.e., *endurar “endure”*). Confirming what one would predict – that there would be greater English use in more informal contexts – the highest percentage of switches to English occurred in conversations, followed by the interview, and finally in the presentations. The variation of these features across registers suggests that the Spanish spoken by these participants is not a monostylistic variety, but rather that they are able to differentiate among discursive situations (i.e., academic vs non-academic) and adapt their language accordingly, using the resources available to them.

The purpose of Fairclough (2013b) was to verify that 12 different high frequency calques were in the process of lexicalization in U.S. Spanish even though more widely used equivalent forms were previously taught in the classroom. The study compared 101 English-Spanish translations of three brief paragraphs completed by university students of Hispanic background from different proficiency levels. The results suggest that a number of calques are undergoing a process of lexicalization in that they were used by a considerable number of the participants in the sample. Some examples of the most frequent included “solicitud / aplicación” (*application*), “inscribirse / registrarse” (*register*), “universidad / colegio” (*college*), “tomar una decisión / hacer una decisión” (*make a decision*).

**Recommendations for practice and future directions**

A number of studies, mostly in English as an L2, have corroborated correlations between lexical knowledge with other linguistic measures including global language proficiency (e.g., Albrechtsen et al. 2008; Alderson 2005; Laufer 1992; Laufer and Goldstein 2004; Meara 1996; Mecartty 2000; Read 1997). With heritage learners, Polinsky (2006) and Polinsky and Kagan
Marta Fairclough and Anel Garza

(2007) observed a strong correlation between lexical and grammatical knowledge in heritage speakers of Russian in the United States. According to the authors, similar correlations were evidenced in studies of other heritage languages. The research presented in this chapter has shown correlations between vocabulary knowledge and general language proficiency, and more specifically with reading comprehension, writing, and speaking abilities.

Given such correlations, it is imperative to underscore the importance of the lexicon in language learning and make it a priority in instruction. Fairclough and Mrak’s (2003) error analysis of the speech of SHL speakers, for example, shows a very low percentage of morphosyntactic errors (about 2% of the total number of words produced), leading the authors to recommend a focus on vocabulary teaching in HL courses to expand learners’ lexical range and reduce their linguistic insecurity.

Although Fairclough (2011, 2013b) suggests that HL learners are usually at an advantage over L2 learners in receptive knowledge of basic Spanish vocabulary (defined as the 5,000 most frequent words), Swender et al. (2014) underscore HL learners’ limited vocabulary knowledge, especially when dealing with abstract topics and those beyond everyday experiences. Furthermore, Zyzik (2016) recommends that:

[i]n addition to simply learning more words (i.e., breadth of knowledge), vocabulary instruction tailored to HL learners should focus on improving depth of vocabulary knowledge. The ability to use a word productively involves many layers of knowledge beyond the primary form-meaning link.

Schmitt (2010: 26–28) lists a range of factors that facilitate vocabulary acquisition. According to the author, some of the following aspects should be focused on: frequency of exposure, attention focused on lexical items, intention to learn lexical item, manipulation of lexical item and its properties, a requirement to learn lexical item (by teacher, test, syllabus), and a need to learn and use the lexical item (for task or for a personal goal). The author states that practically “anything that leads to more exposure, attention, manipulation, or time spent on lexical items adds to their learning . . . even the process of being tested on lexical items appears to facilitate better retention” (Schmitt 2010: 28). A detailed explanation of all the factors that contribute to the acquisition of the lexicon is out of the scope of this chapter. For further information, please see Schmitt (2008, 2010), as well as other publications on vocabulary learning.

Finally, given the limited amount of vocabulary research, more studies from all the different perspectives and dimensions mentioned in this chapter are needed. Zyzik (2016) indicates that since vocabulary knowledge appears to be explicit for all language learners (including HLLs), L2 vocabulary research, methods, and materials are largely transferrable. Future studies on the lexicon of SHL speakers should be guided by L2 research and it could include studies about multi-word lexical items, vocabulary richness, comparison of the lexicon in different types of registers, depth of knowledge (e.g., word associations), among many other areas. A better understanding of SHL learners’ lexical knowledge and acquisition processes can help meet students’ learning needs and serve as a guide to professionals in the field.

Further reading


References


Marta Fairclough and Anel Garza


Spanish heritage language speakers


