

Spanish language textbooks as conceptual networks: mapping paradigmatic intersections in Mexico's official curriculum (1959–2024)

Abstract

This study examines the conceptual and terminological architecture of official Spanish language textbooks distributed by Mexico's National Commission of Textbooks (Conaliteg) from 1959 to 2024. It proposes that linguistic content in these materials does not follow a linear, paradigm-by-paradigm progression. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic network in which concepts and terms from distinct linguistic traditions co-exist, overlap, and interact.

The central argument is that Spanish language content in Conaliteg textbooks forms an evolving conceptual system — a network of nodes and relations that cuts across the boundaries of five identifiable linguistic paradigms: structuralist, generative, functionalist, sociolinguistic, and communicative. Rather than displacing one another, these paradigms contribute layers to a shared terminological space. The result is a hybrid, non-hierarchical system that reflects broader tensions in language education between prescriptivist norms and descriptivist, variation-sensitive approaches.

A mixed-methods design is applied to a corpus of 36 digitised textbooks drawn from Conaliteg's historical catalogue. Quantitative analysis uses Sketch Engine to identify n-grams, collocations, and keywords that signal paradigmatic affiliations and shifts over time. Qualitative discourse analysis examines learning objectives, conceptualisations of language, pedagogical activities, teacher and learner roles, and content selection — including the relative weight given to grammar rules versus linguistic diversity.

Preliminary findings indicate that structuralist elements, such as rule-based grammatical description, persist well beyond the curricular reforms of the 1990s. At the same time, communicative and sociolinguistic orientations emerge as new nodes in the network, enriching rather than replacing earlier frameworks. These cross-paradigm connections are particularly visible in the metalinguistic vocabulary shared across editions.

This longitudinal study contributes to linguistic historiography and language education research. It offers a network-based analytical lens for understanding how official pedagogical discourse integrates and reframes competing linguistic traditions. Findings have direct implications for curriculum design, particularly for inclusive practices in multilingual and digital learning environments.

Keywords: linguistic paradigms, language textbooks, corpus linguistics, language education, conceptual network.

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