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# History Through First-Year Secondary School Spanish Textbooks: A Content Analysis

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## Abstract

*Although enrollments in secondary school Spanish have risen over the past few decades, the Spanish-speaking world (Latin America, in particular) tends to be underrepresented or absent in history textbooks. Given that not all students who take entry-level Spanish classes will continue to more advanced levels, the first-year Spanish textbook may be some students' first or only engagement with the histories of the Spanish-speaking world. Using content analysis, I evaluate four entry-level secondary school Spanish textbooks for the nations they include, the time periods they reference, and the ways in which those references are made. My analysis indicates that many nations, time periods, and concepts are excluded, resulting in reductionist views of history. The histories referenced tend to be exoticized, resulting in the Othering of contemporary groups. Further approaches are suggested.*

**Keywords:** Spanish textbooks, historiography, textbook studies, secondary education, content analysis

Where do the United States' secondary school students learn about the histories of the Spanish-speaking world? History classes would seem the most logical place, but previous studies of history textbooks have found their coverage of Latin America—the region home to most native speakers of Spanish—lacking. For example, Salvucci (1991) found that not one of the ten textbooks she evaluated “sustain[ed] its occasionally successful treatment” (p. 213) of Mexican history. Commeryas and Alvermann (1994) as well as Greenfield and Cortés (1991) found problems in the coverage of Latin American histories in general, with the latter asserting that “in [world history] courses, once the age of European exploration has passed, Latin America virtually disappears from history” (p. 289). Even in undergraduate world history textbooks, “Latin America barely enters the narrative” (Besse, 2004, p. 411). Furthermore, such criticisms are not new: Vito Perrone's 1965 study of primary- and secondary-school textbooks finds fault with the resultant student understandings of Latin American culture and history (as cited in Meier, 1969).

Such deficiencies are coupled with growing enrollments in Spanish courses. For example, in the 29 years between Perrone's 1965 study and that of Commeryas and

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Alvermann, Spanish enrollments increased from 12.3% to 27.2% of all public school students in the United States (Draper & Hicks, 2000). This trend does not appear to be weakening: in 2008, of the roughly 91% of secondary schools in the United States that offered a foreign language, 93% of them offered Spanish (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). As Draper and Hicks (2000) assert, “Spanish continues to dominate language instruction in the United States” (p. 1). However, enrolling in introductory Spanish classes does not ensure that students will continue with the language, either in secondary school (e.g., Speiller, 1988) or college (e.g., Alonso, 2007). As Pratt, Agnello, and Santos (2009) note, most students study the language for two years or fewer in secondary school. After secondary school, not all students of Spanish will enroll in college, and those that do may not enroll in Spanish courses; for example, surveys conducted by Pratt (2010) indicated that only 39% of secondary school Spanish students sampled intended to continue studying the language in college. In sum, then, the fact that more and more secondary school students take Spanish but do not necessarily continue it—coupled with the fact that that history textbooks do not adequately address Latin America—means that introductory-level secondary school Spanish courses constitute many students’ only engagement with Spanish and Latin American history.

It therefore becomes important to understand, in greater detail, how history is addressed in the entry-level Spanish language textbooks used in secondary schools. To that end, I evaluate depictions of the past in four such textbooks. Although I do not argue that Spanish language textbooks should double as Latin American history textbooks, their ability to depict history authoritatively, given the relative lack of corresponding content in history courses, makes such representations worth analyzing. Furthermore, as I will argue, their depictions of the past have consequences for understandings of both Latin American history and modern peoples.

The study involves three research questions about these representations: In commonly used entry-level Spanish textbooks, (a) which nations’ histories are referenced, (b) what time periods are referenced, and (c) how are the references made? Using content analysis, I find that history, as depicted in the textbooks sampled, is marked by trends of exclusion and exoticism; the resulting views of history are reductionist for the past and Othering in the present.

### **Literature Review**

Textbooks are the largest purveyor of course content in many classrooms (Ramirez & Hall, 1990) and are authoritative. As Kramsch (1988) notes, the idea that a textbook could have errors is unthinkable for most students. Furthermore, as Provenzo, Shaver, and Bello (2011) note, “any textbook becomes a signpost or a marker for the values and beliefs of the era in which it was written” (p. 1). As a result, it is unsurprising that hundreds of textbook studies have been conducted. In this section, I will focus on studies of representations of history and culture in language and history textbooks. Although the textbooks studied have changed over time, certain themes reappear across studies. These include the omission of historical events and conflict as well as emphases on light-skinned, middle-class experiences.

Before addressing these themes, it is important to discuss the analytical distinction between history and culture present in this paper. Previous studies of cultural topics in

Spanish textbooks have not made such a distinction. Their methods and objectives are such that distinguishing between depictions of the past and representations of the present is unnecessary, or their definitions of culture implicitly include history. For example, Elissondo (2001) defines culture as “a complex space of practices and significations constructed by people in their struggles to make their voices heard in the social space” (p. 72). In their study of business Spanish textbooks, Grosse and Uber (1992) define culture as “patterns of everyday living and business/economic culture that pertain to a particular Hispanic group or country” (p. 224). By contrast, Azripe and Aguirre (1987) intentionally leave the term undefined. The authors of these studies of Spanish textbooks defined culture very differently, but in ways that enable them to evaluate representations of history if they so chose. For example, Azripe and Aguirre (1987) find inaccurate historical information in some of the 18 textbooks they evaluated. Others, like Grosse and Uber (1992), do not explicitly include historical content in their analyses. As a result, studies of “culture” as such analyze representations of the past and present.

In this study, however, I examine history and not culture. Because culture is less relevant to this study, I leave the term undefined. I define history below, in the Methods section. I do not intend to create a false history/culture dichotomy or to simply equate “the past” with “history” and “the present” with “culture.” Indeed, the relationship between the two concepts is more complex: the depiction of history in the present both influences and reflects the ways in which we view other modern cultures (Trouillot 1995; Vinall 2012), and culture affects the ways in which history is represented and understood (Sahlins, 2004). By separating culture and history and defining this study’s focus as the latter, I emphasize that this study deals with the depiction of past events, peoples, and places as opposed to depictions of modern ethnic groups (Azripe & Aguirre, 1987) or issues of race, class, and ethnicity (Elissondo, 2001). In that way, this study is more related to studies of history textbooks than the aforementioned studies of language textbooks.

### **History and Culture in Spanish Textbooks**

While many previous studies do not separate culture and history, the trends they find in cultural depictions often apply to historical representations. Azripe and Aguirre (1987) find a sample of first-year undergraduate-level textbooks marked by inaccuracies, stereotypes, oversimplifications, and omissions. The authors found incorrect historical statements including, for example, a characterization of the conflict in which Cuban writer and revolutionary José Martí died as an “unsuccessful rebellion” (Azripe & Aguirre, 1987, p. 126) rather than the successful War of Independence. Elissondo (2001), evaluating the visual content of three undergraduate-level Spanish textbooks, finds biased perspectives in visual representations: most photos depict light-skinned, middle-class Latin Americans living in leisure and tranquility. Depictions of history reinforce this perspective by focusing on the prevalence of European descendants in Argentina without explaining the colonizing processes that enabled their prominence (Elissondo, 2001).

Fewer authors have examined secondary school Spanish textbooks, but those who have report similar deficiencies. Ramirez and Hall (1990) find that the five Spanish textbooks they sampled omitted most countries of the Spanish-speaking world, Spanish-speaking groups in the United States, as well as mentions of conflict and social class.

Although they do not explicitly analyze historical representations, mentions of their category of “folklore/history” account for only around 5% of the cultural themes they found in the textbooks they sampled (p. 51). With the intention of updating Ramirez and Hall (1990), Hermann (2007) analyzes four Spanish textbooks to determine relative country representations; themes derived from lessons, visuals, and dialogue; and representations of people. She finds that “the implicit *raison d’être* of language education according to the photographic and cultural content demonstrated in these textbooks remains teaching students how to travel and shop in exotic vacation destinations” (p. 131). Herman (2007) also finds “avoidance of discussion of societal-level issues that might aid teachers in . . . connecting to other course content in the students’ school experience” (p. 125). The failure of Spanish textbooks to address social issues is not a new problem. In 1945, Arce found lack of attention to social conditions in seven Spanish textbooks; although she included history in her analysis, it did not figure into her conclusions beyond suggestions that teachers should compensate for the deficiencies of their textbooks.

### **The Spanish-Speaking World in History Textbooks**

The Spanish-speaking world has more often been a topic of study in secondary school history textbooks than in Spanish-language textbooks. Salvucci (1991) evaluates ten secondary school history textbooks approved by the Texas Board of Education between 1986 and 1992 for the ways in which they present Mexico, Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans. While acknowledging that the textbooks sampled had improved over earlier editions, she finds a neglect of pre-Hispanic cultures; one-sided accounts of events like the Texas Rebellion, French Intervention, and Mexican Revolution; and no treatment of post-Revolutionary Mexico. Greenfield and Cortés (1991) form similar conclusions from the depictions of Mexico in primary and secondary school textbooks: “The Mexican experience emerges mainly as a series of reactions to larger United States concerns and as a series of phenomena that provoked the United States to respond” (p. 290). Cruz (1994) corroborates this finding: “[For the most part, the Mexican-American and Spanish-American Wars are the only] two situations in United States history where Latin Americans are mentioned and Latin America is studied to some degree” (p. 55).

These studies of Spanish textbooks focus on the misrepresentation of culture, omission of conflict, and paucity of historical information, while studies of history focus on depictions of the past in history textbooks, marked frequently by patterns of exclusion. A missing link is the study of the historical content of Spanish-language textbooks. Recent research has begun to address this fault (e.g., Kramsch 2012). For example, Vinall (2012) evaluates an activity related to the historical legacy of the Conquest of the Americas in an undergraduate-level Spanish textbook. The activity includes a photograph of two tourists buying a purse from an indigenous woman, an explanation that suggests that suspicion towards foreigners is a legacy of the Conquest, and three questions about getting to know people. In Vinall’s analysis, the activity essentializes the identities of the figures in the photograph, reducing them to generic indigenous figures and Western tourist figures. The purse, a fetishized object, emphasizes the commercial aspect of the relationship between the figures and masks a history of asymmetrical power relations. The result is that, rather than encouraging students to interrogate the legacy of the

Conquest, the textbook reinforces a single narrative: Indigenous people mistrust foreigners because of the Conquest. I share this concern with depictions of the past in Spanish-language textbooks, but I will focus on broad trends in the depiction of history in secondary school textbooks, as opposed to single, in-depth examples from undergraduate ones.

## Methods

### Sampling

Strategies for sampling textbooks in previous studies have varied, given that textbook publishers do not release sales numbers (Herman, 2007). For example, Ramirez and Hall (1990) polled eighteen secondary school Spanish teachers and their colleagues for the textbooks they used, while Azripe and Aguirre (1987) consulted *Books in Print* and subsequently requested their textbooks from publishers. In hopes of collecting a representative sample, I opted to follow Herman (2007) instead:

A sales and marketing agent for one of the publishers . . . did privately estimate to me that, combined, these four textbooks represent something approaching 80% of the market for high school Spanish students in the US. While it appears difficult or impossible to confirm such numbers, certainly the publishers of the textbooks that I reviewed—i.e., Prentice Hall, McGraw-Hill, McDougal Littell, and Holt, Rinehart & Winston (and their international parent corporations)—represent the vast majority of high school textbook production for the US. (p. 125-126)

I then ordered, via interlibrary loan, the most recent editions possible of the textbooks Herman sampled (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Textbooks Sampled in Study*

Title	Authors	Year	Level	Publisher
<i>¡Buen viaje!</i>	Conrad J. Schmitt Protase E. Woodford	2008	1	McGraw-Hill
<i>¡Exprésate!</i>	Nancy Humbach Sylvia Madrigal Velasco Ana Beatriz Chiquito Stuart Smith John McMinn	2008	1A/1B*	Holt, Rinehart, and Winston
<i>¡En español!</i>	Estella Gahala Patricia Hamilton Carlin Audrey L. Heining- Boyonton Ricardo Otheguy Barbara J. Rupert	2004	1	McDougal Littell

<i>Realidades</i>	Peggy Palo Boyles Myriam Met Richard S. Sayers Carol Eubanks Wargin	2011 1	Prentice Hall
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*Note.* All textbooks were teachers' editions; however, the content directed at teachers was not considered in the analysis.

\*Although A and B editions are targeted towards middle school, considering both together and excluding the bridge chapters yields the same content as a first-year secondary school textbook.

### Content Analysis

This study employs qualitative content analysis, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005): "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p.1278). First, I generated three categories based on my research questions: national referent, time period referenced, and style of reference. The first category, national referent, was drawn from Herman (2007), while the latter two, time period referenced and style of reference, come from a distinction made by Trouillot (1995). He notes that history, in its typical usage, has two meanings: "both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts" (p. 2). He labels the former *historicity one* and the latter *historicity two*. The coding of the time period to which the reference alludes addresses *historicity one*, "what happened," while the coding of the way in which the reference is made addresses the construction of *historicity two*, "that which is said to have happened" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 2). In other words, the aim is to understand both the histories presented and how they are narrated.

Second, I skimmed each textbook to locate and mark references to history. *History* denotes a textual reference to a defined past actor, event, or context that exists outside of the textbook, in English or Spanish (translations of references originally made in Spanish are mine). Thus, I counted "after conquering Tenochtitlán in 1521, the Spanish constructed their capital on top of the capital of the Aztecs" (Gahala, Carlin, Hening-Boynnton, Otheguy, & Rupert, 2004, p. 162) but excluded "last weekend, José, some friends, and I went skiing" (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 284), because the latter refers to an event in a past that exists only in the textbook. Third, I generated a list of mutually exclusive codes for each category after a close reading of the located references. Fourth, I reviewed the marked references and applied one code per category to each reference; in the event that more than one code was necessary, a *multiple* category was used. The result was a table containing every historical reference, each described in terms of the nation to which it referred, the time period to which it referred, and the way in which it was made. I will explain each of these categories and the codes they contain below.

**National referent.** The national referent category was drawn from Herman (2007, p. 145-146), with some modifications (specifically, the collapsing of distinctions between regions of the United States). I applied codes (e.g. "Mexico," or "Ecuador") in this category based on the mention of a nation in the reference itself, or the context of the reference in the textbook section (often organized by country and theme). The term *nation* is used in its broadest sense here: "a people having a common origin, tradition, and language and capable of forming or actually constituting a nation-state"

(“nationality”, 2012). Thus, Puerto Rico, though legally a Commonwealth, was classified as a nation based on its distinction from the United States in the textbooks sampled. In a few instances, I could not assign national referents with confidence; they were coded as *unspecified*.

**Time period.** To address the time periods referenced, I made a general chronology of the histories of the nations of the Spanish-speaking world and divided it into eras. Each era served as a code, and on rare occasions, a reference involved multiple time periods and was coded as *multiple*. Given the diversity of pre-Conquest chronologies in the Andes, Mesoamerica, and the Iberian Peninsula, it was necessary to correlate the dates and eras across the regions to establish the codes (see Table 2). A comprehensive periodization of pan-American and pan-Atlantic history is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important that the analytical foundations of the divisions in time be made explicit (Stearns, 1987). The historical and archaeological references for the divisions of the pre-1492 chronology in the Andes, Mesoamerica, and the Iberian Peninsula are Shimada (1999), Balkansky (2006), and Rinehard and Seeley (1988), respectively; the last is also used for Spain after 1492.

Table 2  
*Explanation of Codes Applied in Time Period Category*

Code	Chronology	Area: Andes	Area: Mesoamerica	Area: Iberian Peninsula
Prehistoric	Time period Dates	Initial Period 10,000-1400 BCE	Paleoindian- Archaic 10,000-900 BCE	Pre-Iberian 10,000-2000 BCE
Preclassic	Time period Dates	Early Horizon – Early Intermediate 1400 BCE-550 CE	Formative 900 BCE-300 CE	Pre-Roman – Roman Spain 2000 BCE-484 CE
Classic	Time period Dates	Middle Horizon 550-900 CE	Classic 300-900 CE	Visigothic – Moorish Spain 484-1248 CE
Postclassic	Time period Dates	Late Intermediate – Late Horizon 900-1532 CE	Postclassic 900-1520 CE	Medieval 1248-1492 CE
Colonial	Time period  Dates	Colonial period  c. 1532-c. 1820		Catholic Monarchs – Peninsular War



Independence	Time period	Independent nations	Peninsular War – Spanish-American War
	Dates	c. 1820-c. 1900	
Modern	Time period	Modernity	
	Dates	c. 1900-Present	

I developed this periodization for analytical purposes. For example, I do not intend to comment on the relative developments of medieval Spain and Mesoamerica under the Aztec Empire by placing both in the Postclassic code, nor do I intend to say that modernity began in 1900 by associating the code of that name with that particular date.

**Style of reference.** The style of reference category represents the narration of history in the sampled textbooks. I found that history tended to be referenced in five main ways, which generated five corresponding codes: indeterminate, vague, relative, descriptive, and specific.

Table 3  
*Definitions of Codes Applied in Style of Reference Category*

Code	Definition
Indeterminate	Reference to past without reference to time
Vague	Reference to past with ambiguous time marker
Relative	Reference to past by association with other past element
Descriptive	Reference to past using name of time period
Specific	Reference to past using specific year, decade, or century

*Indeterminate* references were those that alluded to the past with no associated time markers. For example, in a section labeled “Masterworks of history,” the Spanish city of Ávila is described as “a completely walled city” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 464). The implication is that the city had been walled sometime in the past, but without any reference to when. The historical present is also included in this category: “Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín fight against Spain for the independence of the countries of South America” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 33). Given that many South American countries are currently independent, the fight to which the textbook refers must have happened at some unspecified time in the past. *Vague* references were those that did mark time, albeit ambiguously. For example, the murals of the Classic Maya site of Bonampak, Chiapas, are described as “ancient Mayan murals...preserved in an ancient building”

(Humbach, Velasco, Chiquito, Smith, & McMinn, 2008, p. 36). The reference makes note of the fact that the murals are pre-Conquest, but does not reference a particular period. “Ancient” could mean Prehistoric or Classic. *Relative* references are those that establish the timing of the event by alluding to another event. For example, a short description of Cuzco, Peru, notes that “the Spanish transformed the temples and palaces of the Inca into churches and magnificent houses” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 368) when Pizarro arrived and conquered the city. Alone, the cited reference would be indeterminate but the reference to Pizarro establishes a relative time frame for the event. *Descriptive* references are those that name time periods without dates. For instance, a reading on the Zócalo of Mexico City describes the Cathedral and Tabernacle as “religious symbols and important examples of the colonial architecture and art of Mexico” (Gahala et al., 2004, p. 162). The reference is to a certain era—the colonial—rather than some undefined time in the past. *Specific* references are those that named particular centuries, decades, or years. For instance, “Carlos V of Spain first proposed a canal across the Isthmus of Panama in 1524” (Boyles, Met, Sayers, & Wargin, 2011, p. 118).

### Results

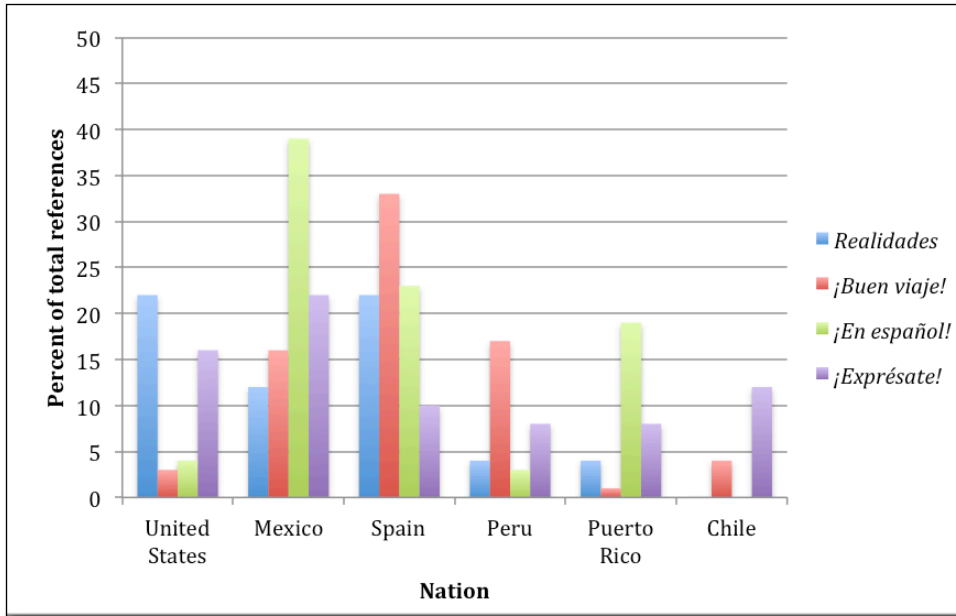
The evaluation of results focused on trends, patterns, and themes, rather than statistical significance or hypothesis testing (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Historical references were sparse across all textbooks sampled; calculating the mean number of historical references per page yielded a fractional result (see Table 4). The paucity of historical references is not surprising; although I argued previously that entry-level secondary school Spanish textbooks are in a unique position to impart historical knowledge, they devote much of their space to reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities.

Table 4  
*Total Pages, Historical References, and Mean Number of Such References by Textbook*

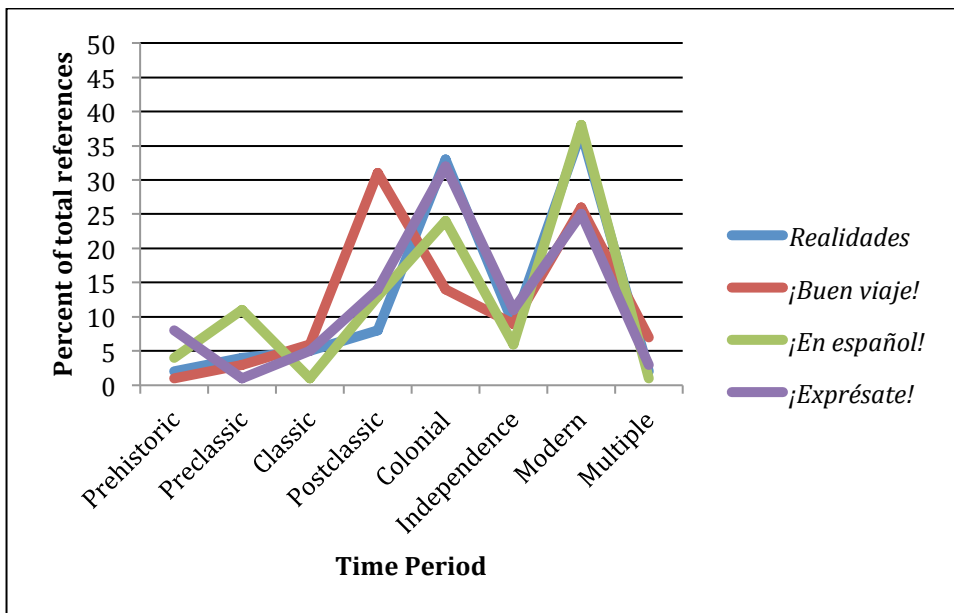
Title	Number of pages	Number of pages with historical references	Mean number of historical references per page
<i>Realidades</i>	471	153	.32
<i>¡Exprésate!</i> *	477	76	.16
<i>¡En español!</i>	465	79	.17
<i>¡Buen viaje!</i>	489	86	.17

\*Excludes bridge chapters

Analysis of code distribution within the national referent category reveals that within each textbook, most historical references focused on a few nations, though the particular nations varied by source (see Figure 1). Historical references focused primarily on Mexico and Spain across all four textbooks. *¡Exprésate!* and *Realidades* featured the United States heavily, while *¡En español!* also referenced Puerto Rico and *¡Buen viaje!*, Peru.



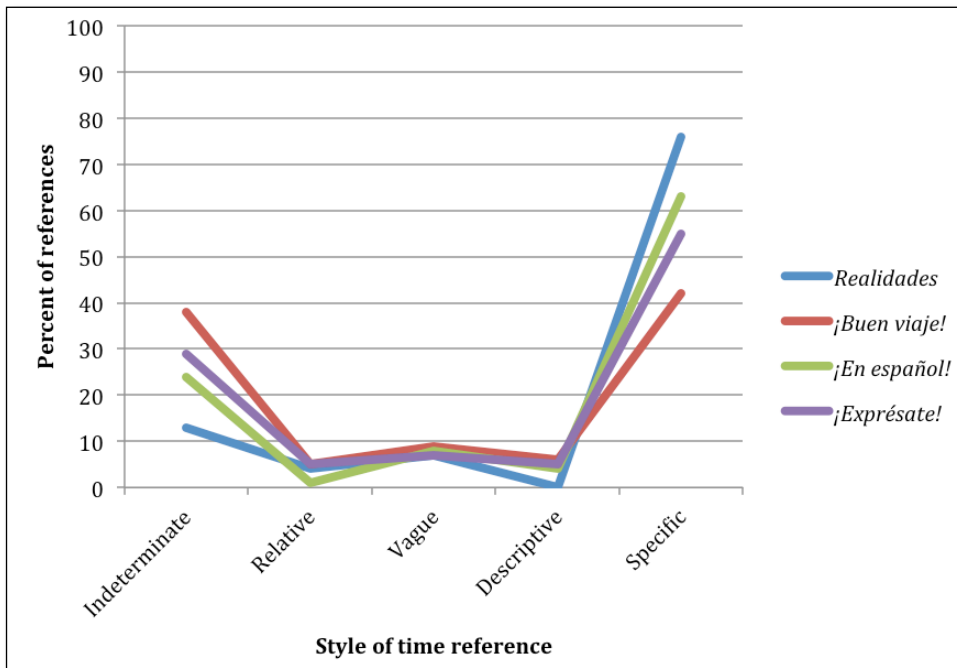
**Figure 1.** Top Three Nations by Percentage of Total References per Textbook (Note that the y-axis maximum is 50%.)



**Figure 2.** Percentage of Historical References by Time Period and Textbook (Note that the y-axis maximum is 50%.)

According to the analysis of the time period code, textbooks referenced different time periods with similar frequency (see Figure 2). The modern and colonial time periods were referenced most often, though *¡Buen viaje!* referenced the Postclassic period more frequently than the colonial period.

In the style of reference category, specific historical references were the most prevalent across all textbooks sampled (see Fig. 3). Indeterminate references were also common, though the rates at which they were made differed relative to that of the specific references across textbooks. For example, in *Realidades*, 13% of references were indeterminate, while 76% were specific. By contrast, in *¡Buen viaje!*, 38% of references were indeterminate and 42% were specific. Relative, vague, and descriptive references constituted less than 10% of all references across all textbooks.



**Figure 3.** Proportions of Different Styles of Referencing History by Textbook

### Discussion

#### Exclusion

From these data, two main themes emerge: exclusion and exoticism. Exclusion results in reductionist views of history, while exoticism results in the Othering of modern groups. In this context, exclusion has geographical, temporal, and conceptual dimensions. Geographical exclusion, or more frequent representation of some countries over others, is well-established in the literature on secondary school Spanish textbooks. Ramirez and Hall (1990) report that Mexico and Spain together had more depictions than all the Spanish-speaking countries of South America combined. Herman (2007) reports that her

sample adopts a “kaleidoscope approach” (p. 128), purposely representing countries other than Mexico and Spain (although both are still prominent). Depictions of the past follow this kaleidoscope approach. As Figure 1 indicates, the top three nations referenced varied by textbook. However, Herman’s (2007) critique of the aforementioned method also applies here: “[The kaleidoscope] approach risks trivializing those countries given minimal treatment and may have the unintended consequence of conveying the idea that those countries are primarily of interest for their local color” (p. 128). As a result, the history of the Spanish-speaking world becomes mainly the history of a few different nations, which vary by textbook (see Figure 1): Mexico, Spain, the United States, Chile, Peru, and Puerto Rico.

Excluding certain nations, however, could allow for more in-depth examination of others (Herman, 2007). If geographical exclusion permits a stronger emphasis on a few countries, then we would expect historical components to have the depth necessary to justify such exclusions, assuming the textbooks aim for a balance of historical breadth and depth. For example, we might expect that a textbook that neglects the colonial history of two nations would focus on the entire history of a third nation, from the pre-Hispanic to the modern eras. While assessing textbooks’ historical depth requires a close reading of the texts themselves, evaluating the number of historical references per time period by nation is illustrative: acknowledging that a nation (or geographical region) has history before the present is an initial step towards depth.<sup>2</sup> However, a review of the temporal dimension of exclusion, in which certain time periods are disproportionately referenced, indicates that these textbooks often do not take this initial step.

The example set by *Realidades* (see Fig. 4) proves illustrative. In *Realidades*, which had the largest number of historical references (153) of all textbooks sampled, not all nations are accorded the same historical depth. For example, the history of Guatemala is represented by two references: the Maya are the ancestors of much of Guatemala’s indigenous population, and the Peace Corps has been working on development projects there since 1963 (Boyles et al., 2011).

These processes of geographical and temporal exclusion reveal little about the content of what is being referenced; it is possible that a large number of references, which make nations appear historically grounded, actually present exclusionary views of history. A few examples from the colonial period as described in *¡Exprésate!* are illustrative. That colonialism was detrimental to certain groups is a common conclusion outside of the textbooks; the demographic catastrophe, economic exploitation, and political marginalization that occurred as a result of contact and conquest did not benefit the indigenous populations of the Americas. An example dealing with figures on national currencies vaguely indicates as much: “Lempira, the chief of the Lenca people,” the description of the Honduran currency’s namesake reads, “fought heroically against the Spanish conquerors” (Humbach et al., 2008, p. 158). By implication, the conquerors were bad; Lempira was heroic for having fought them. Other references from *¡Exprésate!* are

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, projecting modern nation-states onto past cultures can be problematic. While I will not engage with the extensive literature on the politics of the past (e.g., Gathercole & Lowenthal, 1990), in this case the textbooks themselves make the association between modern states’ territories and cultures of the past.

more oblique: “The Taino culture was the dominant culture of Puerto Rico before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493” (Humbach et al., 2008, p. 44). What happened after the landing is left unsaid. The implication is that Spanish culture then became “dominant,” but the implicit comparison of Taino and Spanish dominance in Puerto Rico obscures the epidemic diseases, forced labor, and political repression that the colonial enterprise brought and imposed on the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Even if *¡Exprésate!* acknowledges that conflict occurred, the textbook goes on to indicate that it is no longer an issue. For instance, while an introduction to Chile tells the reader that “Mapuche defenders halted Spanish armies at the Río Bio Bio for over 300 years,” the mention of conflict becomes one of synthesis and integration thereafter: “How can you see the effects of the Mapuche and Spanish cultures on architecture, food, and celebrations in Chile today?” (Humbach et al., 2008, p. 183).

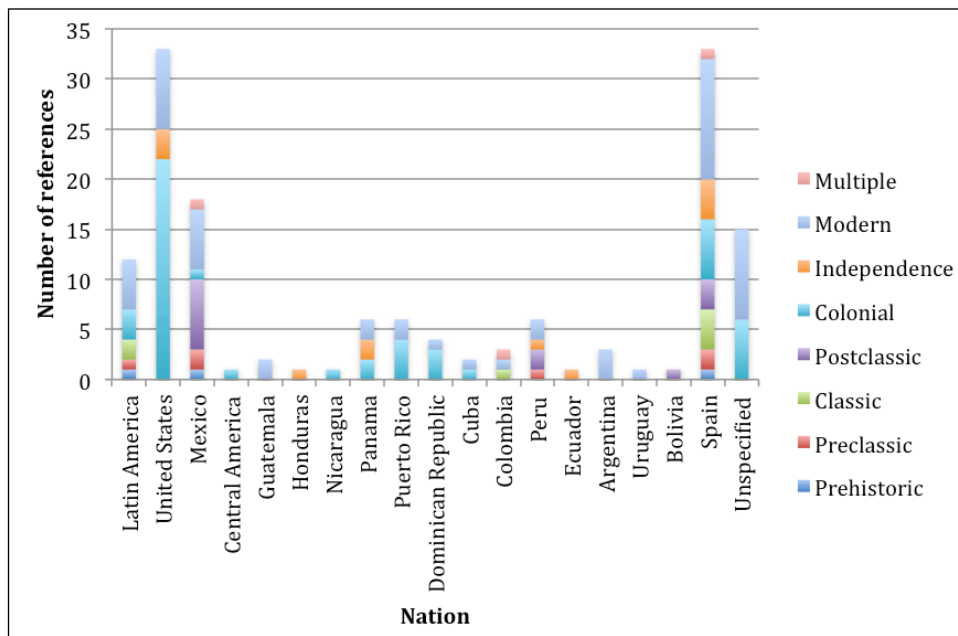


Figure 4. References to the Time Periods of Different Nations in *Realidades*

At any rate, colonialism is more often used to explain cultural expressions like architecture—for example, “the buildings and streets of Old San Juan reflect the Spanish colonial period” (Humbach et al., 2008, p. 45)—than current social situations in Latin America at large. Indeed, it appears that the general avoidance of discussions of conflict and social conditions to which Arce (1945), Ramirez and Hall (1990), Elisondo (2001), and Herman (2007) allude extend to depictions of the past. Fortunately, the improvements that Herman (2007) describes are also reflected in some of these depictions. *Realidades* mentions that “Chile’s Pehuenche suffered defeats in the nineteenth century, but they still struggle to maintain their lands and culture” (Boyles et

al., 2011, p. 167); although this construction omits the aggressors and causes, it is an acknowledgment.

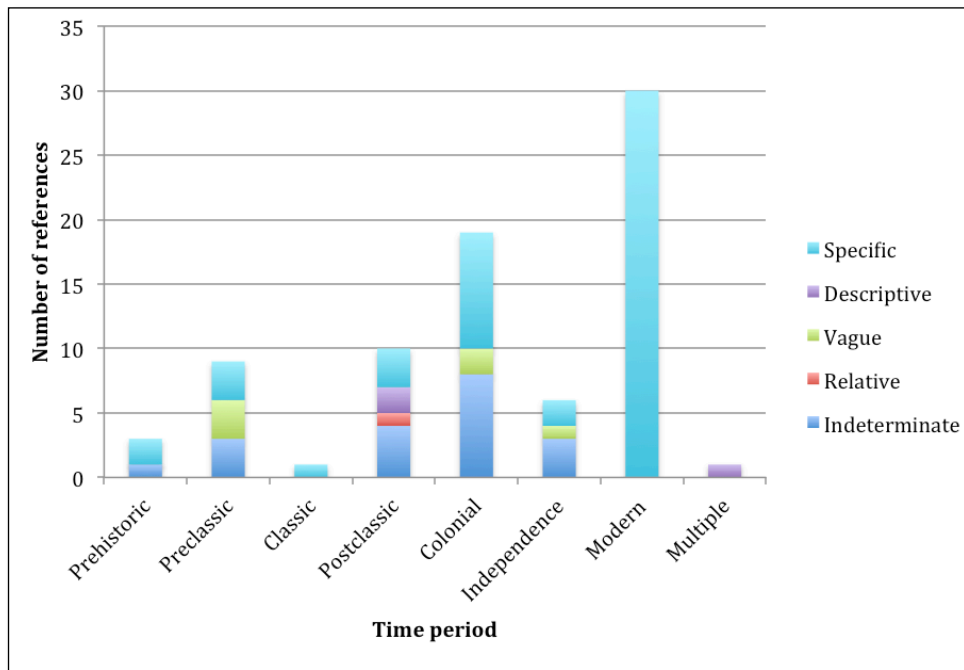
Exclusionary trends result in reductionist views of history. Depictions of Mexican pre-Hispanic antiquity in *¡Buen viaje!* are indicative. In a brief introduction to the country, Mexico is described as a “magnificent nation of Aztec, Mayan and Spanish heritage” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. xxiv). The archaeological sites mentioned are Teotihuacan and Chichen Itza, introduced with totalizing rhetoric: “There are mysteries about two ruined cities, declared World Heritage sites by UNESCO” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 136), as though there were no other ruined cities or UNESCO World Heritage sites in Mexico. The cities themselves are reduced to sets of material facts: Teotihuacan’s Pyramid of the Sun is 66 meters high, has a base of 225 meters, and is made of about two million bricks; while the city’s original name is unknown, the name Teotihuacan comes from the Aztecs and means City of the Gods. The emphasis on individual monuments is similarly reductionist. The first description of Chichen Itza discusses the Castillo and captions a picture “the Maya pyramid Castillo” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 136). The next mention of the site captions it “Chichen Itza, Mexico” (Schmitt & Woodford, 2008, p. 224). Through this movement—from specific monument to archaeological site to nation—individual buildings are made to stand for the entire pre-Hispanic antiquity of Mexico.

### **Exoticism**

In addition to exclusion, an exoticizing trend marks many of the histories presented in the sampled textbooks. As van Dijk explains the term, exoticism is present when “the ‘positive’ side of the emphasis on difference is the enhancement of the exotic, strange, or otherwise distant nature of the Others” (2004, p. 6). This process begins with the de-chronologizing of history. Ways of referring to history vary by time period, though differently in each textbook. *¡En español!* serves as an example (see Figure 5). As Figure 3 illustrates, specific historical references are most common. However, the distribution of the less-common styles of reference is worth examining. In the case of *¡En español!*, alternative styles of reference are employed with respect to pre 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, though in unpredictable ways. The use of indeterminate and vague styles of reference creates a de-chronologizing effect, distancing the pasts of Spanish-speaking nations. As I explain below, non-specific references, when combined with an emphasis on the unknown, create an exoticising effect.

For better or for worse (e.g. Wheeler, 2007), chronology is an integral part of the teaching of history. The National Center for History in the Schools recommends that standards for teaching history at the kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade levels “be founded in chronology, an organizing approach that fosters appreciation of pattern and causation in history” (1996, para. 6). Yet with indeterminate references, there can be no quick association with a chronology. Vague references have similar effects. For example, “Ancient Rome” could refer to the Roman Kingdom, the Roman Republic, or the Roman Empire. The result of indeterminacy is a difficulty relating information to the content of other courses, specifically traditional, chronology-based history courses. The format of much historical information in the textbooks sampled reinforces de-chronologizing tendencies. Historical references are more prevalent in the introductory pages of a

chapter, with only occasional references in boxed and separate “cultural notes” or student activities throughout the chapter. Such formatting conveys the message that history (and culture, to some extent) is bounded, encapsulated, and separate. While formatting and indeterminacy de-chronologize history, the ways in which these references are made exoticize it.



**Figure 5.** Style of Reference by Time Period in *¡En español!*

This trend is notable in the presentation of the pre-Hispanic past in Latin America. Textbooks sampled accentuate what is not known about the pre-Hispanic past, in particular. For instance, *¡En español!*, in discussing Monte Albán, emphasizes its unknown character: “Near Oaxaca *mysterious* ruins hold the *secrets* of ancient people” (Gahala et al., 2004, p. 247, emphasis added). Even a section that gives dates for the settlement and abandonment of Monte Albán is subtitled “mysterious ruins” (Gahala et al., 2004, p. 311). The description acknowledges the hypotheses generated about certain mysteries by way of a question: “[Archaeologists do not know] what the *Danzantes* [engraved figures associated with Monte Albán] represent. Are they figures of dancing men or are they prisoners?” (Gahala et al., 2004, p. 311). Ironically, the mysterious aspects of an archaeological site well known enough to warrant inclusion in an entry-level, secondary school Spanish textbook are emphasized. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Monte Albán has long been explored, excavated, and explained, and the textbook includes results of these projects: that the city “was built by the Zapotecs around 600 B.C. high upon a hill,” (Gahala et al., 2004, p. 245) that its famous Tomb 7 was discovered in 1932 and contained Mixtec artifacts, and that it was abandoned between



700 and 800 CE and reoccupied by the Mixtecs. The specificity of this information indicates that the representation of Monte Albán did not inevitably have to be framed in terms of the exotic and unknown.

Of course, emphasizing the exotic past is not necessarily detrimental to student learning. As Wineburg (1999) argues, “the sustained encounter with this less familiar past teaches us the limitations of our brief sojourn on the planet and allows us to take membership in the entire human race” (p. 84). On a practical level, such mysteries may pique student interest in the topic; Monte Albán draws legions of tourists annually as a result of such interest.

Yet the emphasis of the exotic past has consequences for understandings of modern peoples. For example, according to Schmitt and Woodford, “in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, there are many descendants of the Inca. In Mexico and Guatemala there are many descendants of the Maya” (2008, p. 67), while Boyles and colleagues note that, for indigenous groups in the state of Oaxaca, “the *Guelaguetza* was first celebrated more than 3,000 years ago with music, dance, and food products. Today the festivities last two weeks and celebrate regional dances, music, costumes, and food” (2011, p. 362). This view of Latin America is an improvement over the blatant stereotypes—modern Latin Americans as passive, animals, violent, lawless, and lustful—Cruz (1994) described almost 20 years ago in secondary school history textbooks. However, if modern indigenous peoples, in particular, are described as the descendants of past cultures and that past is distant and exotic, then the distancing effect carries over to the present. Exoticizing the past makes certain contemporary groups Others, particularly indigenous ones.

Previous studies have described related Othering trends: visual depictions give ethnic groups an ornamental function (Elisondo, 2001) while the texts and visuals trivialize them (Hermann, 2007). I would argue that the exoticism Vinall (2012) details in a depiction of a stereotyped and essentialized indigenous woman in a textbook activity is also illustrative of the way that textbooks treat history and would add that exoticism in the present is also a result of depictions of the past. These historical depictions have consequences for student learning. If entry-level secondary school Spanish textbooks are as salient as sources of historical knowledge as I have argued, then resultant student understandings are likely to be incomplete, flawed, and possibly biased.

Furthermore, the association of exotic pasts with modern groups has consequences for students who may identify with depicted groups. For example, given that some aspects of indigenous identity figure strongly in Mexican nationalism and many Mexican identities (Morris, 1999), making such groups Others runs the risk of alienating students (Cruz, 1994). On another level, students may adopt such perspectives to their own detriment. Evaluating Spanish dialects and depictions of immigration in Spanish Heritage Language textbooks, Ducar reports that “students have begun to internalize this discourse and reproduce it themselves, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of immigrant and linguistic prejudice” (2006, p. 239-240). Textbook depictions of history as exotic may provoke student interest, but may also have consequences for student perceptions of modern ethnic groups.

### **Conclusion**

Using content analysis, I have focused on the past as depicted in first-year secondary school Spanish textbooks. Further research could investigate broad trends in the depiction of history over time. For example, a comparison of different editions of the textbooks I have sampled or other widely-used Spanish textbooks from the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be instrumental in exploring general trends in the depiction of the past. On a methodological level, further research could also address the drawbacks of content analysis in this study, namely that it does not account for the production or reception of textbooks (Rose, 2001). Previous studies have examined such factors. For instance, on the production side, Kramsch (1988) contacted publishers to understand the “implicit censorship” (p. 68) they impose on their textbooks’ content as a result of social and economic factors. On the reception side, Young and Oxford (1993) surveyed first-year, secondary school Spanish students to determine their opinions of their textbooks. Such research is critical in explaining why certain nations, time periods, and concepts are absent and the ways in which textbook content influences students’ views of Latin American history. Interviews with textbook authors and publishers regarding representations of history would be particularly enlightening, as would surveys of student learning focusing on the same.

I have argued that the relative absence of Latin American histories from world history textbooks, combined with increasing enrollments in Spanish courses and inconsistent continuation of Spanish at advanced and collegiate levels, make introductory secondary school Spanish textbooks particularly salient places for teaching histories of the Spanish-speaking world. Focusing on depictions of the past, specifically, I described how different nations, time periods, and concepts are excluded from historical representation, resulting in reductionist histories. Depictions of the past are also marked by an exoticising trend that distances the history of modern groups and makes them Others. My intent has been neither to substantively separate culture from history nor to assess textbook authors’ reasons for presenting the past as it appears in their works. Rather, I emphasize that, although entry-level foreign language textbooks are uniquely tasked with portraying elements typically presented as discrete subjects—language, culture, history, and geography, among others—they still present historical information that has a bearing on students’ perceptions of the present. On a fundamental level, I hope this research indicates the importance of consciously studying the presence and presentation of history in language textbooks, whether writing, reviewing, or teaching with them.

Ostensible purposes of language textbooks aside, the histories they present and the style of their presentation matter. Textbooks are responsible for large portions of course content and are understood as authoritative; exclusionary and exoticizing depictions of history form unstable foundations for further study of the subject. Furthermore, depictions in textbooks exist in a web of other representations. In the case of Mexico, Greenfield and Cortés (1991) have described how feature films and social studies textbooks create “the hegemony of mutually reinforcing negative images” (1991, p. 285). If history in Spanish-language textbooks is marked by exclusionary and exoticizing trends, such hegemony may well be present in representations of the past outside of textbooks: see, for instance, critiques of Mel Gibson’s depictions of the pre-Hispanic Maya in *Apocalypto* from Aimers and Graham (2007). However, Greenfield and Cortés

(1991) call attention to the fact that other possibilities exist; mutually reinforcing, accurate, and balanced images from textbooks and the media are possible. With stronger presence in world history textbooks and a more comprehensive, accurate presence in Spanish textbooks, the depicted histories of the Spanish-speaking world can be both faithful to the past and inclusive in the present.

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