A Task-Based Road Map to Teaching Business Spanish with Word Combinations

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Abstract: This research-informed pedagogical proposal makes the case for incorporating the teaching of word combinations—specifically, collocations—into a business Spanish course. It addresses how to choose specific lexical bundles for a given language for specific purposes (LSP) context as well as an appropriate methodology for teaching them to maximize student acquisition. The pedagogical proposal presents specific details of task didactic sequences that integrate explicit instruction in word combinations into a course-long business plan project such that it enhances word retention and facilitates production. This pedagogical layout is reinforced by the fact that lexical units that are related to specific topics in the field of business language are gradually introduced, and by the students' need to reuse them in the final task. The current proposal encourages the integration of word combinations and phraseology through task sequences in other language courses for specific purposes, as these combinations reinforce and help students improve their vocabulary development.

Keywords: business Spanish, didactic sequencing, Spanish for specific purposes, task-based approach, word combinations

Introduction: Choosing the Right Words

L2 scholars have long suggested the benefits of incorporating a *lexis* (Lewis, 1993) together with *lexical collocations*[1]—specific combinations of two or more words that co-occur in certain contexts (Firth, 1957)—into an L2 course, rather than just *vocabulary*—or individual words with fixed meanings. The thinking behind teaching word associations and collocations is that learning and word retention seem to be more efficient if certain groups of words are taught with commonly co-occurring elements (Higueras García, 2006, p. 12). It has been demonstrated that teaching collocations, sequences, chunks, and structural patterns facilitate L2 production and processing (Pulido & Dussias, 2020). It is a rather arbitrary phenomenon, determined by linguistic convention (Lewis, 1993) that is unfamiliar to the L2 learner. Word combinations are often statistically significant because of contextual recurrences. By contrast, violating collocations results in awkward creations. The more advanced the language level, the more noticeable this lack of acquaintance with these linguistic conventions, and thus, the greater the tendency for students to transfer combinations from their native language that result in unnatural expressions in the target language. As a result, there is a need to familiarize students with these lexical units in the L2 classroom and to teach lexical collocations that have no direct translation equivalence in them (Bahns, 1993).

Particularly important is the study of collocations in language for specific purposes (LSP) courses. Students need to learn specific phraseology for each profession, to be able to communicate with more ease and precision (Higueras García, 2006, p. 31), because the more familiar they are with such word groupings, the higher their discursive competence. Moreover, if

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[1] The original term *collocation* was used for the first time by Firth in 1957 and it was understood as a combination of words. He presented a long list of collocations to be used within certain contexts.

learners use phrases with chunks of language in certain grammatical structures, it becomes easier for them to acquire grammatical patterns (Lewis, 2000).

In what follows, a thorough literature review will provide a research-informed foundation for the subsequent pedagogical proposal that makes a case for integrating word combinations in an LSP course.

Literature Review: Formulaic Language and Pedagogy

There have been different classifications of lexical units in Spanish since Casares (1950), among them Coseriu (1977), Ruiz Gurillo (1998), Corpas Pastor (1996), Koike (2001), and (Haddouch, 2015). The *Diccionario de uso del español*, by María Moliner (1966–67), lists and structures collocations, named "frequent connections" (*enlaces frecuentes*), "usual connections" (*enlaces usuales*), or "special affinity groups" (*especiales afinidades*) (Zuluaga, 2002, p. 59). Idioms (*locuciones*) can occur as part of collocations; however, idioms combine words that have a meaning which cannot be deduced from the individual words. In contrast, collocations are phraseological units (*unidades fraseológicas*) or stable word groups that often have a clear meaning that can be deduced from the meaning of their components (Corpas Pastor, 1996). A classification of collocations with examples for pedagogical purposes that were used in this pedagogical proposal include (Álvarez & Chacón, 2003, p. 242, similarly in Bastidas García, 2019, p. 201, based on Koike's classification in Koike, 2001, p. 45):

- verb + noun: *correr riesgos, cerrar un negocio, generar confianza*
- noun + adjective: *ambición profesional, producto innovador*
- adjective + noun: *buena presencia*
- noun + preposition + noun: *trabajo en equipo, negocio en línea*
- noun + preposition + verb: *interés por formarse, aptitud para trabajar*
- noun + noun or noun + de + noun: *dotes de mando, igualdad de oportunidades*
- verb + adjective: *resultar rentable*
- adverb + adjective: *técnicamente oportuno*
- verb + adverb: *incorporarse inmediatamente*

Some scholars address the question of choosing the most frequent and appropriate vocabulary for a professional language course through the use of corpora.[2] In English as a foreign language, in particular, a large number of research studies focus on how to use language corpora in the L2 classroom to identify the high frequency of certain word combinations, and more specifically, in English for academic or professional purposes.[3] With the publication of the

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[2] Huang and Yao (2015) described basic concepts of corpus linguistics, and Parodi (2010) analyzed the research options that are available thanks to the Corpus PUCV-2006 of academic and professional Spanish.

[3] Crawford Camiciottoli (2010) showed how a small, specialized corpus can be beneficial for learners of English business studies. Fuentes and Rokowski (2003) designed tasks for business English students using a corpus of text. Cheng (2010) introduced a new computer-based methodology to facilitate the teaching of phraseology to ESP learners in engineering; and Biber et al. (2004) and Gabrielatos (2005) in native academic writing. Luzón Marco (2010) showed how improvement in corpus-based applications

Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary, the first corpus-based dictionary for English learners, most of the research thus far has focused on creating and analyzing corpora, especially following the recent advances in technology. Studies on teaching materials or case studies based on corpora (Luzón Marco, 2010, p. 79) are scarcer. The use of corpora to teach Spanish collocations has received even less scholarly attention. Benavides (2015) used the *Corpus del Español* in a 300-level Spanish grammar course to look for collocations and tokens (any sequence of words) as an effective learning tool. Abad Castelló and Álvarez Baz (2021) presented a practical application of data-driven learning in Spanish as L2 to enhance the learning of lexical combinations and the development of oral and written fluency. The idea is that actively working with a lexical unit is the only way to facilitate long-term retention. These authors claim that linguistic corpora are an ideal tool for repeat encounters (Castelló & Baz, 2021. p. 89), and thus increase the input, or the "involvement load hypothesis," in Hulstijn and Laufer's words (2001). Corpus use is an excellent way to acquire a basic lexis and can enrich existing teaching methodologies (Gabrielatos, 2005), but it still must be collected and thoroughly analyzed in order to properly apply it to the needs of a course. In the case of business Spanish, the use of corpora in pre-task activities can be very useful for helping students become aware of certain lexical bundles and determine their appropriateness in certain contexts, as well as their frequency and function within a text. However, the process of teaching L2 using corpora in any context is slow, due to the complexity of the data (Ädel, 2012) and is less communicative in nature. Instead of collecting or analyzing a language corpus, the present pedagogical proposal focused on the words and lexical units that students needed to perform the successive assignments and eventually the final task of the course, drawing source material from the established curriculum.

  The lexis chosen in this pedagogical proposal was based on the Instituto Cervantes *Curricular Plan*, which describes the vocabulary and grammar structures that belong to A, B, or C Level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale for languages. The lexical items selected for the course ranged from levels B1 (Intermediate High and Advanced Low, in line with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency scale (ACTFL)) and B2 (Advanced Mid), up to C1.1 Level (Advanced High) or even to C1.2 (Superior) (see "Assigning CEFR"). The word selection mostly corresponded to the vocabulary included in some of the textbooks that were used in this course for various activities to cover different competencies in each task sequence (reading, writing, listening, and speaking): *Éxito Comercial*, *Socios*, *Expertos*, and *Bitácora*.

  Researchers have suggested different methodologies to increase retention of unfamiliar lexical combinations in the teaching of Spanish. For instance, Boers (2013) and Pérez Serrano (2015) stressed the need to understand the meaning of the unit, while Fernández Montoro (2015) integrated lexis and culture. Others, such as Chamorro (2017) and Jensen (2017), proposed contrastive analysis and translating activities. Students often use direct translation from L1 into L2, but this method can pose a problem in the process of learning and retention of collocations. As Pulido and Dussias (2020) and Vasiljevic (2010) pointed out, translation can be an effective tool for learning congruent collocation (those that have a direct translation into L2 (e.g., do business / *hacer negocios*). However, when L2 students deal with incongruent collocations (those that cannot be translated literally from L1 into L2 (e.g., make money / *ganar dinero*), the knowledge of L1 collocations becomes an interference and blocks retrieval of the L2 ones learned in the context of a classroom. Even in very advanced L2 students, this can lead to a

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leads to a combination of grammatical, lexical, and sociocultural features that facilitate learning oral speech.

lexical fossilization. There are other mnemonic techniques that are only sporadically used to explain meanings, such as connecting their abstract idiomatic meaning to a more literal reading, or using alliteration or sound patterning, like in the case of *tener razón* / to be right (Pellicer Sánchez & Boers, 2018, pp. 163–164).

Regardless of the methodology deployed, there is increasing consensus that formulaic language should be integrated into language pedagogy (Pellicer-Sánchez & Boers, 2018; Vasiljevic, 2010; Wood, 2012; Wray, 2002). The pedagogical effects of teaching lexical collocations, particularly in Spanish as L2, have been underlined by Álvarez Cavanillas and Chacón Beltrán (2003), as well as in Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) (González Grueso, 2006; Higueras García, 2006). Indeed, different lexical combinations (idioms and collocations) abound in business Spanish, although they are not explicitly practiced through textbooks, and vocabulary is usually not recycled (López-Jiménez, 2010).

In determining the strategy that works best to effectively integrate word combinations into an SSP course, two main concerns have to be addressed. First, salience: for the L2 student, lexical units are often indiscernible, hence the need to make them noticeable and to maximize the number of encounters in a language course (Higueras García, 2006; Lewis, 1993; Nation, 2001). Second, habituation: these collocations are difficult to remember, because they are not an end in themselves, but rather they need to be processed and eventually used by the student for a particular task.

In order to make these word combinations noticeable, it is helpful to employ all types of activities that make them salient for the students (form, meaning, register, use, frequency) in a language course (Nation, 2001, p. 319). Furthermore, teaching word associations and collocations encourages meaning associations, rather than only lexical correspondences from L1 to L2, by helping students link different L2 words that belong to the same semantic field or that together build a new semantic property (Vasiljevic, 2010, p. 201). This conceptual association can lead to more accuracy in production in L2 advanced students.

The five task sequences outlined below will illustrate one way to accomplish the goals of making collocations salient so that students can habitually use them in various activities and finally in their business plan projects.

Discussion: Didactic Sequencing through a Task-Based Learning Approach

Indeed, the difficulty lies in the learning and retention of those formulaic units that must be explicitly taught (they do not derive from grammar or single-word knowledge). For this purpose, this proposal uses didactic sequencing and a task-based methodological approach that will be described in this section. Two scholars, Higueras García (2006) and Haddouch (2015), revealed the effectiveness of teaching word combinations through didactic sequencing, that is, through a set of successive, interconnected, and cyclical learning activities that are intentionally planned. Higueras García bases her teaching assignments on four phases as described by Woodward (2001): exposition to the language; perception of shape and meaning; the boosting of memory (by increasing exposure to the same lexis); use and improvement. This way students can internalize collocations and repetitively practice them.

This didactic sequencing is the approach behind the design of the business curriculum presented in this paper. Novel language is learned in a particular sequence that is related to a

topic and practiced through several activities which are based on readings, videos, highlighted vocabulary on texts, and on other specific graded tasks (a quiz, a composition,). In this sense, consolidating former knowledge repetition is important (Folse, 2004; Laufer, 2010, pp. 24–26; Norbert, 2010; Pavičić Takač, 2008), as is the "need for teachers to follow up task-based practice with 'noticing' activities" (Lynch & McLean, 2000, p. 245). Moreover, as stated above, recurrence is even more crucial when dealing with word combinations (Pellicer Sánchez & Boers, 2018, p. 155; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020).

In sum, the choice of words and formulaic expressions, as well as the didactic sequencing selected for this pedagogical proposal, is appropriate for the SSP course. However, for the specific context of the business Spanish course in question, it is still essential to determine what knowledge, skills, and abilities students already possess, to what tasks they are capable of applying them, and what their goals are for using the lexis they learn in the course.

Determining the skills and abilities of SSP students before designing a course, therefore, turns out to be a necessary step for selecting the type of tasks that will be done. Broadly speaking, the primary consideration should be both the objective and the subjective needs of the group of learners involved (Richterich, 1985), to determine the specific collocations that will be taught using didactic sequencing. Knowing the needs is considered a prerequisite for any design of a purpose-specific language program, and for the selection of methodologies and the production of materials (Brown, 2016; Long, 2015). Therefore, in Long's (2015) words, "a one-size-fits-all approach" has already been discredited (p. 10). Instead, programs for purpose-specific Spanish are increasingly dynamic and adjustable to meet the fluid ad hoc needs of students (Aguirre Beltrán, 2012; Doyle, 2019; García-Romeu, 2006; Gómez de Enterría, 2015; Ruggiero 2022; Tano, 2019). Because courses are typically designed "à la carte" (Gómez de Enterría, 2015), then, it is important to analyze the learners' objective and subjective needs by giving them surveys, observing them in class, assigning learning journals, or gathering data in any other way as a basis for developing a syllabus for the course (Rachmawati, 2020, p. 214). Once the specific needs and expectations for an SSP class are known, then the course and learning objectives become clearer (Brown & Thompson, 2018) and the pedagogic approach becomes more apparent.

The task-based language leaching approach (or TBLT, in upper case, as in the sense defined by Long, 2015) answers all these questions, by starting with a needs analysis that is focused on identifying the *target tasks* for a specific group of students. Long (2015) defines *tasks* as the "unit of analysis throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of a TBLT program, including the way student achievement is assessed" (p. 6). Grammar points and vocabulary are only addressed if they are relevant to the "unit of analysis." Torres and Serafini (2016), and Martin and Adrada-Rafael (2017)[4] adopted the TBLT approach in SSP classroom-based studies and analyzed, first, the needs and demands of business professionals so that these can then be aligned with what students will do with their L2 knowledge in the workplace. From the data, the authors derived five major exit tasks for their syllabus design. However, this approach is problematic when students do not know what their professional careers or specific profession will be, as in the program under study here.

Based on the teaching framework described below, the methodology most suitable for designing the syllabus for this course was a task-based language teaching approach (tblt, in

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[4] As a theoretical framework, the TBLT approach has not been widely used for developing business Spanish courses (Doyle, 2010; García-Romeu, 2006; González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015; Martin & Adrada-Rafael, 2017, mentioning Serafini & Torres 2015; Prieto Ramos, 2000).

lowercase, as specifically distinguished by Long, 2015), based on Willis and Willis' (2013) meaning-focused approach. It differs from the TBLT approach (uppercase) in that tblt aims at best matching the syllabus with the teaching context and the students, and not so much with the current demands of professionals.

According to tblt, learners are involved with communication (particularly learners of business language, Martínez Egido, 2009), but also deal with oral and written activities that are focused on language meaning (to improve the way to best express themselves) as well as lexical and grammatical form (to promote accuracy in all competencies). The initial aim of instruction is to present the terminology (including formulaic expressions) that enables students to complete a concrete task and that is specific to a particular topic. Then a series of activities are introduced to help them associate forms with meanings, in order for learners to make more precise use of the lexis in their task. Task-based learning developed from communicative language teaching (CLT), as it promotes students' interest in achieving an outcome and engagement in meaning. Thus, students can benefit from the teaching of formulaic expressions that fulfill a communicative function and can be used to complete the assigned tasks.

Teaching Context

The study materials were prepared and designed for the course using objective and subjective need analysis and followed a task-based approach that included the fourth phases of a didactic sequence, namely, exposition to the language, particularly, to word combinations; perception of their shape and meaning; boosting of memory by increasing exposure to the same lexis; and finally use and acquisition of the target collocations.

The pedagogical proposal presented in this current essay is a course that has been taught for six weeks, for one hour three times a week, and offered every spring for eight years to adult learners at Princeton University (most of them on the third or fourth year of college). The class was open to students who had completed the Spanish language requirement after taking the department-based required courses, through taking the department's placement test, or by obtaining the highest possible score in an AP Spanish test. Students' proficiency level was mid/high intermediate to very advanced.

The students in this course have concentrated in different majors, and do not necessarily possess a vast knowledge of macro or microeconomics, nor of cultural differences across countries and continents. Most of them have simply a general interest in trade and companies, although on occasion the reason for taking this course might be just to embellish their résumés and increase their chances of finding a job with a good company (Brown & Thompson, 2018, p. 104).

Ideally, communicative methodologies are naturally appropriate for the utilitarian purpose of languages for professions like business studies (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, p. 3; Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 153). However, it is hard to communicate when background knowledge about business matters and cultural knowledge (especially when so many different countries are involved, from Latin America to Spain), as well as sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills are needed (Long, 2015, p. 11). Determining whether students possess this knowledge is complex, yet necessary. In order to plan the business course that is presented in this paper, a survey is

given to check students' ability to perform certain tasks in Spanish, which involves filling out an easy questionnaire at the beginning of the semester (Figure 1).

Figure 1 *Check the Corresponding Box According to What You Believe You Can Do in Spanish*

In Spanish I am able to…				
	Well.	I have some difficulties.	I have a lot of difficulties.	I can improve on . . .
. . . talk on the phone.				
. . . write a report.				
. . . read graphs.				
. . . have a job interview.				
. . . write an official letter.				
. . . write a CV.				
. . . discuss in a debate.				
. . . read complex texts.				

While this is not an exhaustive survey of students' needs, it does give an idea of the skills they perceive they have (objective needs) and the ones they believe need improvement and expect to be included in the course (learning targets). Throughout the lessons, and the ongoing pedagogical tasks that will be presented below, students' perceptions are checked against their actual performance in class (which is often much better), to paint a more comprehensive picture of this teaching context and the collocations that prove relevant within it.

Target Final Task and Pedagogical Task Sequences

As mentioned above, the current pedagogical proposal presents a way to teach collocations following a didactic sequencing through a task-based learning approach. The aim in this course is a final communicative target task that fuses content and language. At the end of the course, students present an original business plan with an innovative product or service that can be launched and succeed in a community where Spanish is spoken in the United States or internationally.

In the present case the business plan informs the instructor on what terminology, texts, assignments, and register will be included in the course (as a backward design strategy).[5] Five broad topics are extracted from the sections that students will include in the exit task, and from these, five task sequences are elaborated. Therefore, the process starts by focusing on meaning rather than form. In each task sequence there are assignments that include the fourth phases of a didactic sequence to encourage students to practice certain collocations. First, exposition to the language by reading an opening text (oral or written) or doing an activity introduces them to a thematic set of collocations related to the topic in question (Folse, 2004; Gardner, 2013). After such preliminary contact with terminology, students do a series of exercises with word combinations to help them perceive shape and meaning and thus foster precision in form and

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[5] Backward design, as developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), refers to curriculum design with three stages: 1) identifying the expected outcomes; 2) determining acceptable assessment, to show evidence students have achieved the learning outcomes of a unit through, e.g., following rubrics, or taking quizzes; and, 3) planning and scaffolding instruction with the end goals in mind.

grammar. Some of these exercises come from textbooks integrated into the course (a strategy aimed at time efficiency, López-Jiménez, 2010, p. 156; Willis & Willis, 2013, p. 142). The third or the boosting of memory phase is carried out through the task or tasks students accomplish, or sometimes this is followed by more activities to encourage repetition and consolidation. And as the fourth and final phase of didactic sequencing—use and improvement—students prepare and carry out their exit task: the presentation of their business plan with terminology that students revise and recycle. As Norbert (2010) pointed out, "vocabulary programs need to build recycling into the curriculum" (p. 34). Figure 2 describes the task didactic sequences.

Figure 2 *Task Didactic Sequences*

Task Sequences	Texts (oral or written)	Tasks	Vocabulary
Human Resources	Job ads A CV and a cover letter A job interview: video	Write a job ad Elaborate a CV and a cover letter Discussion in class Job mock interview	Translating the word "business" Word combinations: employees' skills
Risk management	Articles describing start-ups	Study of risk factors	Collocation activities related to opening a business, market study, and the word "money"
Marketing	Text on marketing and segmentation	Comparing ads Brainstorming about marketing plan for their own company	Activities on word combinations related to segmentation and advertising
Finances	Text on financial news and on banks: loans and mortgages Video on the stock market	Interpreting the news: Activities on collocations and on indirect speech Quiz Composition	Expressions and word combinations related to banking practices and to the stock market
Future prospects	Text on the upcoming business challenges: respect for the environment and social responsibility	Brainstorming: how to describe the green and social policies of their own business projects	Nouns matching the verb "to promote"

The first classes on the syllabus are introductory. Students learn about cultural differences in the Spanish world and their importance when dealing with international customers. After they are exposed to specific vocabulary on economy and international trade, graphics, and tables, they start with the task-based didactic sequences described in detail below. This offers students a chance to use language in "a meaningful content context" (Norris, 2016, p. 241) in each task sequence, while facilitating the planning of their final business plans.

Teaching Sequence in Detail

First Task Didactic Sequence: Human Resources

> *Reading, texts:* A job ad, a CV, and a cover letter.
> *Video*: A job interview.
> *Tasks:* Elaborate a job ad, a CV, write a cover letter, job interview in a fictitious role-play scenario.
> *Vocabulary:* Word combinations on employees' skills. Translation of "business."

An attention-grabbing way to expose students to novel vocabulary about companies is to read job advertisements. After reading some examples, students receive a list of adjectives and word combinations on the qualities that an employee must have, for example *tener dotes de mando* (have leadership skills), *interés por formarse* (interest in training), *buen dominio del inglés* (good command of English). Once this first phase is over, the next task, which they do in pairs, is to create a job ad of what they envision as a dream job—noticing shape and meaning of the word combinations they read before.

They then look at a résumé from Spain and contrast the differences with those in the United States. Based on this résumé they read a cover letter to apply for a job. Students do a fill-in-the-blank activity to review the phraseological units that have been presented, which conforms to the second phase of the didactic sequencing. Individually, as homework and as task for this sequence, they write a cover letter applying for the dream job they advertised with a peer colleague, using the collocations they have been working on.

As part of the third phase—to enhance their memory—students, before coming to class, watch a short movie that shows a job interview and write a brief opinion statement for a partner to comment on in class. The partner's comment evaluation must be about the content, organization, and connection between ideas and style, as well as about vocabulary. Most interesting is the use of some of the word combinations presented in class: *habilidad para hablar idiomas* (ability to speak languages), *posición de liderazgo* (leadership position), *licenciada en económicas* (BA in economics), *mantener la compostura* (not falter), *jornada laboral* (workday), *brecha de poder* (power gap), *no le prestó mucha atención* (he didn't pay much attention), *un candidato con los* dotes y la experiencia necesaria* (a candidate with the necessary skills and experience). In class, there is a discussion about their different opinions that were expressed in writing on the discussion board. After having listened to each other and written about a job interview, students feel more comfortable with the vocabulary and can easily speak up on this topic. As a final task, they prepare for a "job interview" and perform in class in a role-play exercise (both as a candidate and as someone doing the interviewing).

At this point, students have seen, used, and recycled a great deal of novel vocabulary for different purposes (the job ad, the CV, the cover letter, the job interview), in such a way that they have internalized important collocations for the relevant business contexts and completed all four phases of didactic sequencing.

Second Task Didactic Sequence: Risk Management

> *Reading, texts:* Articles describing start-ups.
> *Tasks:* Study of risk factors. Vocabulary activities.
> *Vocabulary:* Collocation activities related to opening a business, market study, and the word "money."

The first and most important aspect to understand and to further develop a business is the concept of "risk management." In class, "business risk" is defined as all those elements that can generate uncertainty or instability in a company. Students then read several examples describing start-ups and analyze the types of risks that every entrepreneur faces. The task that follows is to describe in their own words the company to their peers. This phase conforms to the first phase of exposure to certain collocations within the topic.

Some activities follow the previous task, and they all relate to the market-driven aspects that influence the decision to set up a company. These are designed to foster perception of shape and meaning of word combinations. First, to generate their own collocations, students first brainstorm about what verbs are best suited to be associated with the word *dinero* (money). Some of the students are familiar with the most frequent ones, such as *ganar* (earn), *perder* (lose), but other verbs are completely new to them, such as *invertir* (invest), *gastar* (spend), *ahorrar* (save), *desembolsar* (pay out), *conservar* (save), *apostar* (bet), *derrochar* (waste). Therefore, students take a common word from basic Spanish -*dinero*- and build collocations by identifying less common verbs and then pairing them with *dinero*. Similarly, students create further collocations related to setting up a business by pairing verbs and nouns, such as *salir* (leave)/*distribuir* (distribute)/*obtener* (get); *los permisos* or *poner* (put)/*realizar* (perform)/*exponer* (exhibit); *visitas* (visits).

Finally, as part of the third and fourth phase of didactic sequencing, students complete a fill-in-the-blank exercise with word combinations such as *establecerse por cuenta propia/ajena* (set up on your own/as an employee), *mercados poco abastecidos* (poorly supplied markets). These collocations will be later recycled and reused in the final task when they present their business projects.

Third Task Didactic Sequence: Marketing

> *Reading, texts:* Text on marketing and segmentation. Examples of advertising.
> *Tasks:* Comparing ads. Marketing plan for their own business.
> *Vocabulary:* Activities on word combinations related to segmentation and advertising.

The first phase of exposure to vocabulary starts with the reading of a text that describes what "marketing" is, and everything that marketing includes, accompanied by various word activities to match collocations. Students start this sequence by learning about "segmentation," which is the division of prospective buyers into groups that have common needs and might respond similarly to a marketing strategy and to a brand.

In class, students follow to the second phase of perceiving shape and meaning by doing more activities to work on the terminology (single words and collocations) related to the qualities of a brand, the segmentation of the market, and advertising. After these lexis exercises, they

explore in small groups some ads geared to the Hispanic population. The next task consists of analyzing the ads, looking for word combinations that they have already seen, and orally presenting the most compelling ad to their peers. Finally, students do some brainstorming about their target task. They have to come up with a "marketing" plan that includes the objectives, the commercial strategy, the distribution, and the promotion of the product or service. By reading, highlighting collocations and using them in their oral brief presentations, students increase the chances of memorizing them.

Fourth Task Didactic Sequence: Finances and the Banks

> *Reading, texts:* Text on financial news and banking (loans and mortgages). Video on news and the stock market.
> *Tasks:* Activities on collocations related to banking and financial news. Practice of indirect speech. Quiz. Composition.
> *Vocabulary:* Word combinations related to banking practices and the stock market.

In the business world, the issue of financing is key to starting a business. Students are prepared with various activities prior to reading a text that describes the best strategies for investing and how to forecast incomes and expenses, and thereby minimize risks. This section includes a great number of novel phraseological sequences related to the stock market that are particularly difficult because students do not always know the counterpart in English. This first phase of exposing students to the word combinations is key. To start, a semi-incidental approach is taken by helping students notice some of the word combinations that appear in the text, such as: *ganar rentabilidad* (to improve profitability); *diversificar la cartera* (diversify the portfolio); *el inversor agresivo* (the aggressive investor); *el porcentaje ronda el 50%* (the percentage is around 50%); *seguros de ahorro* (life savings insurances); *tener liquidez* (to have liquidity). Verbs are highlighted in one color and nouns in another, so that students see the difference and infer the possible combinations and their meanings. This conforms to the second phase of didactic sequencing when students are aware of the shape and meaning of collocations. This is further reinforced when students practice this vocabulary in a crossword and in another matching exercise with definitions of stock market players.

At this point word collocations related to bank movements, loans, and mortgages are introduced. Several activities are planned (following the didactic sequencing phases), such as matching verbs with nouns, nouns with definitions, and placing given words in a text to better understand the context. Another activity is the mapping of ideas related to actions that go with the word *cuenta* (account), such as *cuenta corriente* (debit account), *cuenta de ahorros* (savings account), *abrir/cerrar una cuenta* (open/close an account), *hacer una transferencia a una cuenta* (transfer to an account) to promote internalization of these new word combinations. Students perform a final task in pairs or small groups to practice these phrases and words. In a fictional scenario, one student plays the role of a bank employee and another that of an entrepreneur who intends to start a business and needs financing and to open an account. Recycling the phraseological units orally enhances their retention.

Once the most frequent vocabulary on the topic of banking and investment has been presented, students work on expressions that often appear in financial news. They are given fictitious statements about investments or other pieces of economic news that certain financial

role players have made, to work subsequently on indirect speech in the past. Students keep playing with the same word combinations, which reinforces their internalization. An example would be:

- *El director de la Bolsa en Madrid: "Las carteras de inversión se están diversificando"* (The director of the Madrid stock market: "Investment portfolios are diversifying")
- *El director de la Bolsa en Madrid dijo que las carteras de inversión se estaban diversificando* (The director of the Madrid stock market said that the portfolios were diversifying)

Before they finish watching a short video that contains news on the stock market, students read vocabulary they will hear and highlight verbs in red in a series of word combinations: *Bajar/subir intereses, se está moviendo entorno a los . . . puntos, caer la bolsa, recuperar los puntos, a la alza (subiendo el valor), a la baja (descendiendo el valor).*

Students take a brief quiz (single words but mainly word combinations) and then write a composition as homework. The composition is a report written as if the students were investment agents recommending to clients the best places to invest, or presenting a financial report of a country. The composition is assessed according to original content and to language structure, but most importantly to carefully chosen, varied, and innovative vocabulary with an effort to use new word combinations learned in class. With the combination of these tasks, students start to internalize and use these collocations in real-world business contexts that they otherwise would not be aware of, instead of treating each lexical item as its own discrete unit.

Fifth Task Didactic Sequence: Future Prospects

> *Reading, texts:* Text on the upcoming business challenges: respect for the environment and social responsibility.
> *Tasks*: Describe the green and social policies of their own business projects.
> *Vocabulary:* Nouns related to the verb *promote* (green and social policies).

A final aspect to be considered before launching a business is how respectful of the environment this company will be. Students read a text at home about the needs and expectations of managers and CEOs in the future and get exposed to new collocations for this last task didactic sequence. In class, they discuss what are the main political, social, and economic challenges that companies face and the ones that they will encounter in the future. With a brief text and an audio, students are presented with novel word combinations that deal with current topics related to corporate social responsibility as well as ethical investments, and students contrast them with some corporate greenwashing tactics. After the second phase with tasks to perceive shape and meaning of collocations (such as highlighting verbs in another color to make them more noticeable), students gather to think about how their business plan will include environmental practices by using word combinations. This is their chance to prove that they can use and internalize some of these collocations, such as: *favorecer el ahorro energético* (boost energy saving), *promover el uso racional del transporte* (promote the rational use of transportation), *promocionar las energías renovables* (promote renewable energies), *fomentar el desarrollo sostenible de . . .* (encourage the sustainable development of . . .), *impulsar medidas*

para ... (promote measures to …), *garantizar el respeto ...* (ensure respect). In fact, among these words there are five synonyms of the verb *to promote*, which they are encouraged to use in their final business plan. The goal is that students make a precise use of verbs together with collocations that are most frequently used and thus, improve their fluency.

Performance Outcome of the Business Plan and Assessment

Using the tasks described above and engaging in a scaffolded project description with a detailed grading rubric, students develop business plans as a final task on wide-ranging topics: from innovative food trucks or delivery services to a cover for hard ground soccer cleats. The assessment notes the incorporation of the novel terminology that we have studied in class (particularly the use of word combinations). The business plans are presented orally with a slide presentation.

The redeployment of these business projects in their final presentations illustrates the effectiveness of using the described task didactic sequences. The exposure, identification, and reuse of collocations that were previously unknown to students, help them effectively adopt the new lexis. The fact that students use them actively in different tasks and eventually in this presentation reinforces the acquisition of word combinations. The students widely deploy the target vocabulary, and particularly the selected collocations, to a significant degree. Some of the students even highlight in bold the expressions learned during the course on their slides. Some of the word combinations that are worth mentioning are the following:

- verb + noun: *cubrir riesgos, generar energía, generar rentabilidad, lanzar una campaña, ofrecer incentivos, determinar el valor del préstamo, prestar atención*
- noun + adjective: *empresa rentable/sostenible, producto innovador, precio razonable/asequible, conciencia social y medioambiental, tiendas franquiciadas, jornada laboral*
- adjective + noun: *buena presencia*
- noun + preposition + noun: *negocio en linea, producción en masa, cotizar en bolsa, empresa sin fines de lucro*
- noun + preposition + verb: *aptitud para trabajar en equipo*
- noun + de+ noun: *segmentación de mercado, igualdad de oportunidades, nicho de mercado, tasa de desempleo, brecha de desigualdad (*inequality gap*)*
- verb + adjective: *resultar rentable*

All in all, students make use of abundant word combinations, particularly the ones that are verb + noun, noun + adjective, and noun + de + noun.

However, the role of direct translations of single words and incongruent collocations from L1 are also present. Among the various final target tasks, some isolated instances are also found, such as: *nuestro demográfico* (our demographic), *tomamos responsabilidad* (we take responsibility), *capacidad para performar** (performance capability), *listar* en bolsa* (listed on a stock market). Those errors, though, do not interfere with communication. After all, language learning is a lifelong endeavor and learners succeed by continuously adding communicative strategies. What we have asserted here is that identifications and deployment of collocations is a

tool students can add to an array of strategies they may already use such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, or directly adapting English words to Spanish (like *performar**). All in all, however, teaching word combinations in limited content contexts and practicing them in specific tasks have been shown to make a difference in the results.

Conclusion

This paper provides insight into how to integrate word combinations through task sequences in a business Spanish course. The increasing importance of including collocations when teaching an LSP course has been highlighted in the first section of this essay. The existing scholarship points out the need to notice collocations through several varied activities in class, and to give abundant input to students to enhance lexical memorization. More activities based on corpora could be included in further pedagogical projects, particularly to help students notice lexical combinations that are derived from everyday language that is truly and widely used in any specialized field.

A didactic sequencing through tasks is the pedagogical approach that is used in this research-based pedagogical proposal to consolidate lexical knowledge. By the end of the course, students present a final assignment or target task that consists of a business plan for an innovative product or service that can be successful among the Hispanic population of the United States or in an international country where Spanish is spoken. Each task didactic sequence in the course revolves around a specific semantic field, a precise context for the vocabulary, in which students are exposed to readings, videos, audios, and texts with highlighted target vocabulary, and actively work on linguistic activities and specific tasks. The fact that lexical units are recycled for the final presentations, increasing the word encounters, boosts their motivation and involvement, and, eventually, promotes acquisition.

The repetition of word encounters in different types of texts (oral or written) and repetition of practice of lexical units in various formats (role-play scenarios, composition, matching exercises) help students remember and make use of the learned word combinations in the final task. In further research, increased attention should be given to the difference between congruent and incongruent collocations and the need to avoid direct translations for the latter. By highlighting the existence of incongruent collocations, and showing students which lexical bundles are more often used, students' vocabulary development can be reinforced and improved. Likewise, instruction on how best to combine words could be more widely noticed, included, and treated in textbooks and syllabuses of SSP.

A more exhaustive study would provide a more comprehensive picture and would be more suitable to better evaluating the improvement of learning and usage of word combinations. Ideally, additional future cases could shed light on the emphasis on teaching lexical units in any LSP course (including among others medical, legal, academic, tourist, and diplomatic contexts). This article presented a small-scale example of the adequacy of teaching lexical units in task sequences that end in a final task that encompasses varied semantic fields.

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