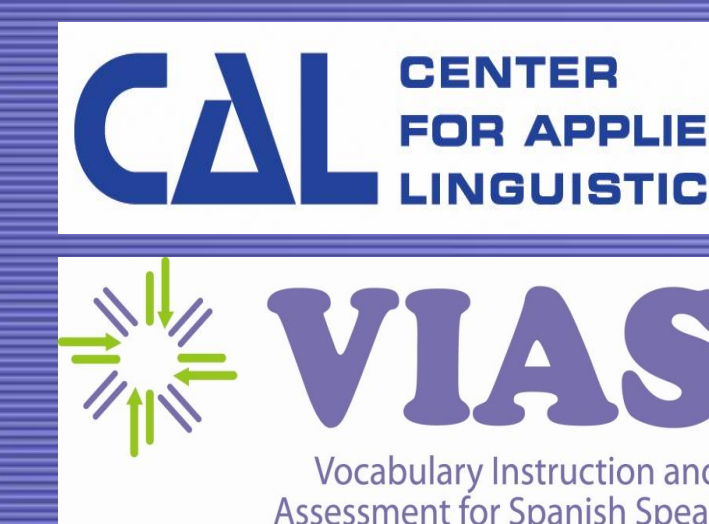# Development of an Assessment of High Frequency English Vocabulary for Young English Language Learners

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VIAS Vocabulary Instruction and Assessment for Spanish Speakers

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Goal

- Develop an item type to assess young English learners' knowledge of different kinds of words. The young English learners (ELs) were in second grade classrooms in U.S. schools.

Background

- Identified three issues with extant vocabulary measures:
  1. Individually administered → cumbersome testing scenario
  2. Lack of nonlinguistic support → harder for lower level ELs
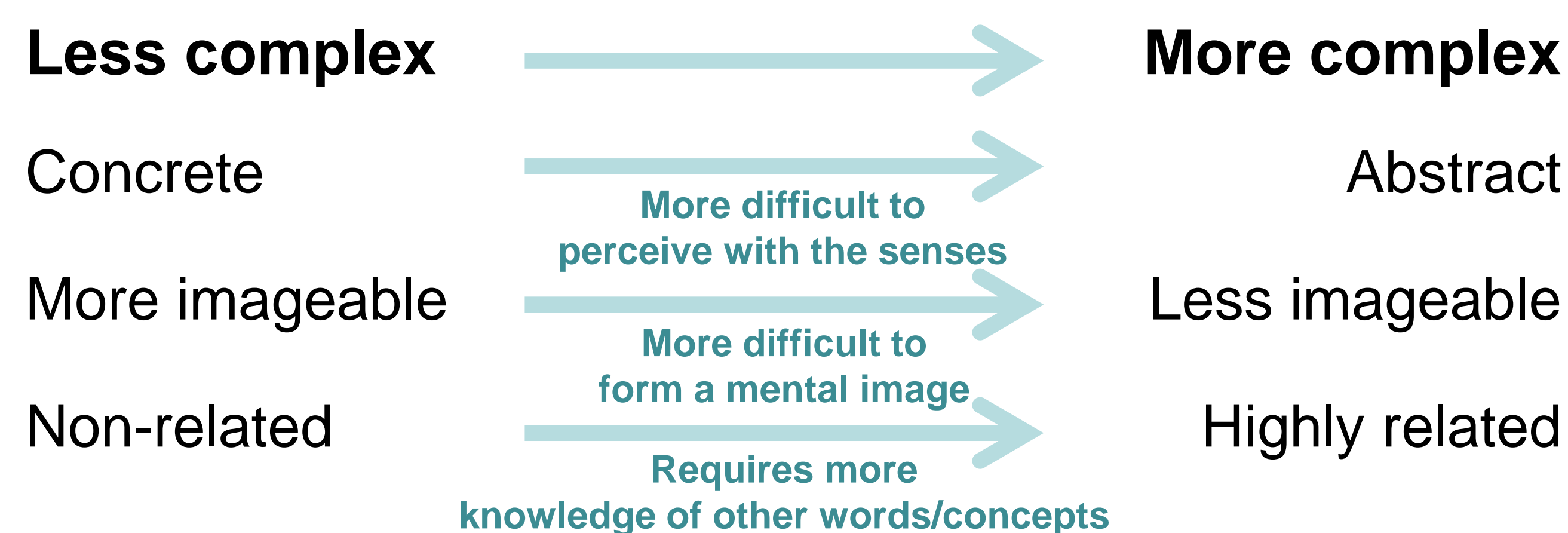 3. Images appear without explanation → difficult to test abstract words

Methods

- Group administered to second grade Spanish-speaking English learners (n=184 in year 1, n=187 in year 2) in a transitional bilingual education program in a large urban district in the Southwest
- Administered as part of a **two-phased vocabulary intervention** study as a pretest and posttest curriculum-based, researcher-developed measure
- Assessed student knowledge of words that are **frequent in grade-level text** (according to *The Educator's Word Frequency Guide* [Zeno, et al., 1995]) but with **above-grade-level meanings**, that aren't well known until sixth grade (according to the *Living Word Vocabulary* [Dale & O'Rourke, 1981])

Test Development

- Developed four sub-tests with a total of **72 items in year 1** and **84 items in year 2**, stratified on attributes associated with acquisition: Spanish-English cognate status and conceptual complexity.

Conceptual Complexity

Less complex	→	More complex
Concrete	More difficult to perceive with the senses	Abstract
More imageable	More difficult to form a mental image	Less imageable
Non-related	Requires more knowledge of other words/concepts	Highly related

Types of Words Tested

More difficult →

More difficult ↓

	Cognate	Non-Cognate
Conceptually simple	18 items (year 1) 21 items (year 2)	18 items (year 1) 21 items (year 2)
	Examples: applied delicate quantity singular	Examples: clung illness opposite weary
Conceptually complex	18 items (year 1) 21 items (year 2)	18 items (year 1) 21 items (year 2)
	Examples: confidence responsibility informed preferred	Examples: actually dreadful judgment quality pride proper

Example Items

Example Item 1: Pride

Paragraph Read Aloud by the Test Administrator

Put your finger on number 15. Number 15.

Inge got a 100 on her test, so she feels good about her work.

When someone <u>feels good about something they did</u>, do we say they feel "rage," "concern," or "pride"?

Listen again and bubble in the word that means when someone <u>feels good about something they did</u>: "rage," "concern," or "pride."

Student Answer Sheet

15

feels good about something they did

O rage   O concern   O pride

Example Item 2: Dreadful

Paragraph Read Aloud by the Test Administrator

Put your finger on number 1. Number 1.

These players feel very bad because they lost their game.

When someone feels <u>very bad</u>, do we say they feel "dreadful," "remarkable," or "enthusiastic"?

Listen again and bubble in the word that means when someone feels <u>very bad</u>: "dreadful," "remarkable," or "enthusiastic."

Student Answer Sheet

1

very bad

O dreadful   O remarkable   O enthusiastic

- Instructions guide young learners to the proper item.
- A simple story-like explanation of the picture provides context for the target word.
- A child-friendly definition is repeated by test administrator and visible for students.
- Distractors are matched to the target word by part of speech, semantics, and length.
- An image provides context for the target word.

Results

Validity Evidence

- Found significant correlations between our researcher-developed assessment and established measures:
  - Year 1: Gates-MacGinitie Word Knowledge test
    - Pre-test r=.49, p <.01; Post-test r=.60, p<.01
  - Year 2: TOLD Oral Vocabulary subtest
    - Pre-test r=.49, p <.01; Post-test r=.66, p<.01
- Would expect higher correlations if word meanings being tested were on grade level rather than above grade level

Reliability

- Computed coefficient alphas to investigate reliability of the assessment:
  - Year 1: Pre-test, α = .63; Post-test, α = .88
  - Year 2: Pre-test, α = .78; Post-test, α = .91
- Would expect reliability to look similar to post-test reliability if words tested were on grade level rather than above grade level

Discussion

- The advantages of this approach are the following:
  1. It is **multimodal**—children hear a story with a definition, see a picture and a definition.
  2. Unlike assessments that use just pictures, this approach allows us to **assess a variety of word types, including abstract, less imageable vocabulary**.
  3. The assessment can be **group administered at lower grade levels** because of the scaffolding provided.

Future Directions

- Develop a measure using this item type for grade-level words