

Usage of Imperfect and Imperfect Progressive Verb Forms in Spanish as a Majority and Minority Language: Is There an Effect for Language Contact?

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1. Introduction

Tense relates an event to a specific point in time, usually the moment of speech, and includes categories such as past, present, and future (Comrie 1985). Aspect, on the other hand, involves “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (Comrie 1976:3) and includes oppositions such as perfective versus imperfective and progressive versus non-progressive. The perfective/imperfective distinction has been characterized in various ways, including viewing a situation as a unified whole (perfective) versus taking into account its internal structure (imperfective) (Comrie 1976), representing the time interval over which the situation occurs as closed or bounded (perfective) versus open or unbounded (imperfective) (González 1998, Montrul & Slabakova 2002), or highlighting the situation’s termination (perfective) versus its duration (imperfective) (King & Suñer 2008). Comrie (1976) views progressive aspect as a subcategory of imperfective aspect. He first makes the distinction within imperfectivity between habitual and continuous aspect, and then further subdivides continuousness into progressive and non-progressive manifestations, with the latter corresponding to stative verbs (Comrie 1976:25). Thus, within imperfectivity, non-progressive aspect can refer to either continuous states or habitual actions.

As is the case with many languages, Spanish verbal morphology marks both temporal and aspectual distinctions. Of interest to the present paper is how Spanish combines the aspectual distinctions discussed above with past temporal reference, and how this compares with corresponding forms in English. First of all, Spanish has two simple past tenses, the preterite and the imperfect, which encode perfective and imperfective aspect, respectively. In contrast, English has only one simple past tense. An example of the Spanish verb *leer* ‘to read’ in the preterite is given in (1) below, while (2) illustrates the same verb in the imperfect, and (3) demonstrates the simple past of the corresponding English verb.

- (1) Marisol **leyó** el libro *Cien años de soledad*.
- (2) Marisol **leía** el libro *Cien años de soledad*.
- (3) Marisol **read** the book *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The English simple past in (3) is analogous to the Spanish preterite in (1) above, with its default aspectual interpretation being perfective, while the Spanish imperfect in (2) lacks a corresponding

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form in English (Montrul & Slabakova 2002). English uses other means to convey aspectual distinctions in the past tense communicated in Spanish through the preterite/imperfect contrast. For example, one type of imperfectivity, habituality, is communicated lexically in English through the use of *used to* or *would* (Montrul & Slabakova 2002), as illustrated in (4). Another example is the expression of continuous aspect, where English employs the past progressive (Montrul & Slabakova 2002), as shown in (5).

(4) When I was in elementary school, I **used to/would** walk to school every day.

(5) Melissa **was doing** her homework.

In contrast with English, Spanish expresses morphosyntactically the progressive/nonprogressive contrast independently of the perfective/imperfective distinction (Montrul & Slabakova 2002). Thus there are four possible ways to combine marking of (im)perfectivity and (non)progressiveness, as illustrated for the verb *cantar* ‘to sing’ in (6) - (9) below.

(6) perfective, non-progressive (preterite)

Jorge **cantó** una canción tradicional.

‘Jorge **sang** a traditional song.’

(7) imperfective, non-progressive (imperfect)

Jorge **cantaba** una canción tradicional.

‘Jorge **was singing/used to sing/would sing** a traditional song.’

(8) perfective, progressive (preterite progressive)

Jorge **estuvo cantando** una canción tradicional.

‘Jorge **was singing** (perf.) a traditional song.’

(9) imperfective, progressive (imperfect progressive)

Jorge **estaba cantando** una canción tradicional.

‘Jorge **was singing** (imperf.) a traditional song.’

At this point a distinction needs to be made between overt indication of aspect through morphosyntactic marking, and the possible aspectual interpretations of a given form. As can be seen from the fact that the English glosses of (7) and (9) above both contain the past progressive form *was singing*, the Spanish imperfect and imperfect progressive can both be understood as indicating progressive meaning.¹ However, this meaning is only overtly marked in the latter form, while in the case of the imperfect it is one of several possible interpretations (with habituality being the other possibility in (7)). (For other possible interpretations of the Spanish imperfect, see Section 3.3 below, examples (15) and (16).)

This paper focuses on the use in Spanish of the imperfect and the imperfect progressive. While in English “Progressive and non-Progressive are not in general interchangeable” (Comrie 1976:33), in Spanish this exchange is often possible, since, as illustrated in (7) above, non-progressive forms do not necessarily imply non-progressive meaning (Comrie 1976). The difference between the two is that progressive meaning is overtly marked in the progressive forms, while the non-progressive forms are unmarked with respect to this feature (and thus can be interpreted as conveying either progressive or non-progressive meaning depending on the context).

The exact nature of the progressive/non-progressive distinction in Spanish has been the subject of some debate in the literature. Specifically with regard to the past tense, perspectives range from the

¹ The preterite progressive in (8) also indicates progressive meaning, in this case in combination with perfectivity. The seeming contradiction between these two aspectual values is discussed in King and Suñer (1980), and Westfall (2003) also comments helpfully on the use and interpretation of this form in contrast with the preterite. Interested readers are referred to these works as this form is not considered further here.

claim of Butt and Benjamin (2000) (which is very similar to that of Comrie 1976) that if the action referred to is not habitual and is truly past (see Section 3.3 below, example (16) for the imperfect used to indicate future time/intent) the difference is often neutralized, to the contention that the choice of the imperfect progressive is a “productive discursive device which allows for meaning distinctions otherwise unavailable through the non-progressive form” (Gonzales 1995:63). Several authors have commented on these possible meaning distinctions. Silva-Corvalán (1983:762, cited in Gonzales 1995:66) maintains that progressive forms “focus on the duration and/or progression of the event”. In similar fashion, Ozete (1983:75, cited in Gonzales 1995:67) argues that the progressive “serves to bring out and emphasize the evolving act at hand”. King and Suñer have argued that the progressive focuses on the overt, ongoing development of a situation (King & Suñer 1980) or emphasizes its dynamic nature (King & Suñer 2008), whereas non-progressive forms lack this focus. For this reason, when progressive forms are replaced by non-progressives, King and Suñer (1980:227) maintain that “(l)ost is the slow-camera effect, the unraveling of the activity in front of our eyes; lost is precisely what the progressive conveys: the event as overt, on-going activity”.

It may seem from the above descriptions that the progressive is limited to describing an action that takes place concurrent with a specific point in time (the time of speaking for the present progressive, and some point in the past for the imperfect progressive). However, this is not necessarily the case. King and Suñer (1980), in their discussion of the present progressive, provide examples of the use of this form in which the time reference is not limited to the moment of speaking. Quesada (1995) discusses this issue in further detail. He characterizes the progressive as having an actualizing function and maintains that there are three detectable degrees of this actualizing function: (1) actualization, a 1-to-1 correspondence between the verbal action and the reference point, (2) contemporaneity, in which the interval of the action is extended to before and after the reference point, and (3) iterativity/frequentativity, in which the action is extended to an even greater degree before and after the reference point, implying the repeated realization of the action. The examples below, which are shortened versions of ones found in Quesada (1995), demonstrate the three degrees of the actualizing function. Actualization is illustrated in (10) (adapted from Quesada 1995, example (1)), contemporaneity is shown in (11) (adapted from Quesada 1995, example (11)), and iterativity/frequentativity is demonstrated in (12) (adapted from Quesada 1995, example (18)). (The English glosses do not appear in the original.)

(10) ...*como t'estoy diciendo, después tienen que vivir bajo rejas ellos también...*
 ‘...as **I am telling you**, later they have to live behind bars also...’

(11) *Ah, no, esas fincas están... aparentemente las están cultivando...*
 ‘Oh, no, those farms are... apparently **they are cultivating them...**’

(12) ...*tres meses aquí está llegando el...el recibo 'e la basura...*
 ‘three months here **is arriving** the...the trash bill...’

According to Quesada (1995), in the third degree of actualization seen in (12) the progressive construction comes close to expressing habituality. Since in the past tense habituality is the domain of the imperfect, this would imply possible overlap in the use of the two forms in habitual contexts, in addition to contexts where an action is in progress at a specific point in time in the past.

While there is certainly more that could be said about the use of the imperfect and the imperfect progressive in Spanish, the discussion up to this point should provide the reader with a good idea of the issues involved in the interpretation of these forms. It is important to note here that in spite of the existence of different points of view, there is agreement that both forms refer to imperfective aspectual construals of past temporal situations and that both can be used to express similar notions (such as progressiveness and possibly even habituality), while retaining the distinction that the imperfect progressive explicitly marks progressive aspect while the imperfect does not.

As demonstrated in the glosses for (7) and (9) above, English has only one equivalent for both the Spanish imperfect and the imperfect progressive (when the imperfect is used to communicate progressive as opposed to habitual meaning). This is the case because English only has at its disposal

one verb form, the past progressive, that expresses the notion of progressiveness in the past (*was singing* in these examples). This form corresponds roughly in its morphosyntactic structure to the Spanish imperfect progressive illustrated in (9).

2. Previous research

Various authors have commented on or investigated the use of the imperfect (hereafter IM) and imperfect progressive (hereafter IP) in varieties of U.S. Spanish. Since such varieties are in contact with English, the possibility of majority language influence on the use of these and other verbal forms in the minority varieties has been entertained. Solé (1977) claimed that in Texas Spanish, alternation is observed between present tense non-progressive and progressive forms not only in cases of actions in progress (e.g. *duerme/está durmiendo* ‘he is sleeping’), where it is found in other Spanish varieties, but also in contexts of habitual actions (*Estudia/Está estudiando en la Universidad* ‘He is studying at the University’) and future events (*Dicen que habla/está hablando esta noche* ‘They say he is speaking tonight’). She maintained that the extension of the progressive to the latter contexts was due to the influence of English, which uses progressive forms in these situations. She added that this alternation had been extended to past tense forms as well (e.g. *Cuando estaba viviendo en Laredo...* ‘When I was living in Laredo...’). Solé (1977) described these innovative uses of the progressive as expressing undefined duration rather than the explicit duration usually indicated by this form in Spanish (Silva-Corvalán 1983).

Floyd (1978) surveyed previous literature on verb usage in Southwest U.S. Spanish. Citing a number of studies (Ayer 1971, Marrocco 1972, Phillips 1967, Sánchez 1972, Solé 1977), she commented that the “present progressive has been observed to be used extensively” and that “(s)tudies of Texas Spanish have shown present progressive and past progressive forms to have encroached on the areas of simple present and imperfect forms” (Floyd 1978:82).

Lavandera (1981) analyzed the narrative speech of one Chicano informant. She reported a “skewing toward a higher frequency of occurrence of the imperfect indicative in an auxiliary than in the main verb itself” (Lavandera 1981:64). In other words, the skewing was toward more frequent use of the IP, where imperfective morphology is indicated on the auxiliary verb *estar* ‘to be’ (e.g. *estaba cantando* in (9) above) as opposed to the IM, where it appears on the main verb (e.g. *cantaba* in (7) above). She cited this as evidence that contact with English was accelerating a process of change that had been observed in other Spanish dialects and claimed that bilinguals try to minimize the structural differences between Spanish and English by using Spanish structures with English counterparts, such as the IP.

Chaston (1991) investigated IP usage among Mexican-American bilinguals from Texas. The speakers were at different points along the Spanish/English bilingual continuum and ranged from first to fourth generation in the United States. Chaston (1991) cited three broad categories of claims made in previous literature on the subject: (1) the IP tends to replace the IM in the speech of Southwest speakers (Sánchez 1982, Solé 1977, Lavandera 1981), (2) the IP is used more frequently in Chicano speech than in monolingual Spanish varieties, to the extent of being unnative-like (Sánchez 1982, Solé 1977, Lavandera 1981), and (3) the IP is the form usually used by Southwest speakers to indicate an action in progress at a particular point in time (Sánchez 1974).

Chaston (1991) responded to each of these claims in turn. He refuted the first claim by presenting data indicating that out of 546 uses of imperfect indicative forms (IM + IP), only 33 (6.04%) were examples of the IP. With respect to the second claim, he maintained that it could not be verified quantitatively because usage frequencies for native dialects had never been determined. He also addressed the need to redefine the question: the issue is not overall frequency of IP use but rather whether its use conforms to or deviates from the patterns observed in other dialects. To address the third claim, Chaston (1991) first noted that only 51 of the imperfect indicative uses in his data signaled ongoingness (i.e. an action in progress). The remaining tokens were examples of the other three types of usage associated with the IM as described by Solé and Solé (1977) (continuous/habitual actions, states of being/conditions, and future time/intent). (See (13) – (16) below for examples from the current study of each of Solé & Solé’s (1977) categories.) Of the 51 imperfect indicative forms indicating ongoingness, 33 (64.7%) were IP forms, making them twice as common as IM forms in this

context. Thus the third claim was confirmed in the sense that the IP was indeed used in a majority of cases to indicate an action in progress at a particular point of time, though its use was far from categorical.

When speakers were categorized according to Spanish proficiency (native or near-native ability vs. less than native or near-native ability), Chaston (1991) found that the first group's IP usage conformed by and large to the norms of standard Spanish. By contrast, the second group demonstrated patterns that appeared to be influenced by English, with the IP tending to be used simply to express ongoingness in the past, without the added emphasis on the duration of the event usually signaled by this verb form (Silva-Corvalán 1983).

Mrak (1998) investigated the usage of past-tense verbs in discourse by three generations of Mexican-Americans living in Houston and compared them with Mexican monolinguals. She found that IP usage as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage increased only 4.15% between monolingual Mexican speakers and third generation bilingual Mexican-Americans. Thus she concluded that there was no evidence for the claims made in previous studies of elevated IP usage by bilinguals.

Koontz-Garboden (1999) looked at IM and IP usage in interviews of Spanish speakers residing in Goshen, Indiana. His results for the IP as a percentage of total indicative imperfect usage (84/1333 or 5.93%) were strikingly similar to those found by Chaston (1991) (33/546 or 6.04%). Koontz-Garboden (1999) went beyond Chaston (1991) by incorporating the extralinguistic variables of sex, age, number of years in the U.S. and percent of life in the U.S. (PLUS) into his investigation. Although there was a sizeable amount of individual variation among his informants, the variable PLUS was found to be a significant predictor of IP usage. He concluded that transfer from English was occurring as Goshen Spanish speakers tried to minimize the cognitive load of managing their two languages.

3. Method

3.1. Statement of purpose

The purpose of the current study is to expand the scope of previous investigations of IM versus IP usage in U.S. Spanish. Previous quantitative studies (Chaston 1991, Koontz-Garboden 1999, Mrak 1998) have focused on oral data and on Mexican-American varieties. Written data has only been analyzed sporadically, never systematically or quantitatively. In addition, non-Mexican varieties have not been included. The current study looks for evidence of influence of English on Spanish by focusing on a written corpus of U.S. Spanish representing a range of Hispanic-American varieties (Spanish as a minority language) and comparing it with Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish (Spanish as a majority language). These countries were selected because they represent the three principal countries of origin of U.S. Hispanics according to the 2000 Census (71.6% of the total Hispanic population). In this way the variable of dialect is controlled for to some extent and any differences observed are more likely to be due to degree of English contact.

3.2. Research Questions

The current study examines a number of specific research questions in order to determine whether there is evidence of contact-induced language change in the area of past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) in U.S. Spanish. These questions are listed below, and the rest of the section contains an explanation of the motivation for each one:

1. Does U.S. Spanish show a greater relative frequency of IP usage as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) than Spanish from other countries? In other words, is there an effect for language contact?
2. Does U.S. Spanish provide evidence that the IP is encroaching upon areas of traditional IM use (Floyd 1978, Solé 1977)?
3. Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to the frequency of the main verb used in the construction? More specifically, do less frequent verbs show a higher percentage of IP use than more frequent ones?

4. Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to genre (books vs. periodicals)?
5. Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to the decade of publication?

Theoretical background for Research Question (1) is provided by Silva-Corvalán's (1994) concept of indirect transfer, which relates to the existence of corresponding forms in two languages (A and B) involved in a contact situation. When a particular linguistic item in a contact variety of language A occurs more frequently than in non-contact varieties of A, and the corresponding form in language B is either obligatory or preferred, indirect transfer can be said to have occurred. In the current study, language A is of course Spanish and language B is English, with U.S. Spanish corresponding to the contact variety of A and Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish representing non-contact varieties. Based on the results of previous investigations, it is hypothesized that U.S. Spanish will indeed show evidence of indirect transfer, specifically in a greater relative frequency of IP usage as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) than that found in Spanish from other countries. This is expected due to its greater degree of contact with English, and the fact that English has a form corresponding to the IP (the past progressive) but not to the IM.

Research Question (2) addresses claims made in the literature that IP usage is being extended to areas where the IM has traditionally been used (Floyd 1978, Solé 1977). If this is indeed the case, then a greater percentage of IP tokens will be used in contexts other than ongoing events in U.S. Spanish than in majority language varieties.

Research Question (3) addresses the possible role played by verb frequency in processes of linguistic change. Increased IP use in Spanish can be considered an example of analogical change (by analogy from the English past progressive). Analogical change affects less frequent lexical items first (Phillips 1984), and the corollary of that principle is that "frequent items are most resistant to conceptually motivated change" (Hooper 1976:95). If analogical change is in fact occurring in the case of IP usage in U.S. Spanish, then less frequent verbs would be expected to show a higher percentage of IP use than more frequent ones.

Research Question (4) is motivated by the idea that the degree to which speakers extend their use of the IP to non-traditional contexts may vary according to the specific genre involved, in this case books versus periodicals. If such differences are found, they may be due to varying levels of English influence on the different genres and/or different levels of formality that may be represented.

Research Question (5) looks for evidence of linguistic change over time as reflected in the decade of publication of the items containing IM and IP tokens. If contact-induced language change is indeed occurring, then the percentage of IP use should be higher in more recent decades than in less recent ones.

3.3. Procedure

The corpus used for the current study was CREA (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual), the Real Academia Española's online database of present-day Spanish usage. Examples of written Spanish from books, magazines, and newspapers representing all decades from the 1970s to the 2000s were included. An electronic search was conducted during 2006 for tokens of IM and IP forms of common Spanish verbs (e.g. *hablaba* vs. *estaba hablando* 'he/she was speaking').

The verbs that were included in the study were chosen according to the following procedure. First the most frequent imperfect verb forms in Spanish were identified using Alameda & Cuetos' (1995) *Diccionario de frecuencias de las unidades lingüísticas del castellano*. The study was then limited to the ten most frequent verbs from this list which appeared in both the IM and the IP in all four countries examined. The inclusion of highly frequent verbs rather than verbs of medium or low frequency was deemed necessary in order to have a sufficient number of tokens to allow tests of statistical significance to be conducted. Having made this decision, the study was then limited to a subset of highly frequent verbs due to the very large number of tokens obtained for these verbs and the need to make the coding and analysis of the data manageable. Finally, the requirement that the verbs appear in both the IM and the IP in all four countries was motivated by the desire to avoid cases of categorical use of one of the two variants in any of the countries. The verbs included in the study, in order of

frequency, were *hacer* ‘to do/make’, *decir* ‘to say/tell’, *dar* ‘to give’, *ver* ‘to see’, *hablar* ‘to speak/talk’, *tratar* ‘to treat/try’, *esperar* ‘to wait/hope’, *pasar* ‘to pass/happen/spend’, *pensar* ‘to think’, and *poner* ‘to put’. Although all of these verbs are highly frequent in Spanish, for the coding and analysis of the data the first five were grouped together into the category of more frequent verbs, and the last five made up the category of less frequent verbs.

Tokens were coded for the dependent variable as either imperfect (IM) or imperfect progressive (IP). Independent linguistic variables examined were frequency (more or less frequent) of the main verb included in the construction (e.g. *hablar* for *estaba hablando* and *hablaba*), and the type of imperfect usage referred to by the verb (ongoing events, continuous/habitual actions, states of being/conditions, and future time/intent) (Solé & Solé 1977). Tokens were rated by the researcher based on an examination of the surrounding discourse context, and a 10% sub-sample of the total was also rated by another researcher. Where there was disagreement, consensus was reached through discussion and a final interrater reliability of greater than 90% was achieved. An example of each of the categories from the corpus is given in (13)-(16) below, along with an indication in parentheses when appropriate of how Solé & Solé’s (1977) categories relate to some of the terminology presented in the introduction:

Ongoing event (Comrie’s (1976) progressive aspect, Quesada’s (1995) actualization)

(13) *Pensaba en que había llegado a quererte como a un hijo.*

‘I **was thinking** that I had come to love you as a son.’

Continuous/habitual action (Comrie’s (1976) habitual aspect, Quesada’s (1995) contemporaneity and iterativity/frequentativity)

(14) *Cada vez más sabemos que el gobierno **estaba viendo** en su información el deterioro de las reservas.*

‘More and more we know that the government **was seeing** in its information the deterioration of the reserves.’

State of being/condition

(15) *La llamamos para decirle que su depósito de \$200 **estaba esperando** por usted.*

‘We called you to tell you that your deposit of \$200 **was waiting** for you.’

Future time/intent

(16) *Entonces los hombres y mujeres de maíz hicieron su asamblea para ver cómo **hacían** con este gran mal que les pasaba ...’*

So the corn men and women held their assembly to see what they **would do** about this great evil that was happening to them ...

Independent extralinguistic variables included in the study were country (USA, Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico), genre (books and periodicals (magazines and newspapers)), and decade of publication (1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s). An example of the coding procedure (from the Miami-based newspaper *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/1/2000) is given in (17):

(17) *Confiada, le pedí a mi amiga el día libre, explicándole francamente el motivo. Cuál no sería mi sorpresa cuando ella rotundamente me dijo que no, que eso era un abuso de confianza, pues lo **estaba haciendo** en nombre de la amistad que nos une. Que la amistad no se mezcla con el negocio.*

‘Confident, I asked my friend for the day off, openly explaining to her the reason. Imagine my surprise when she flatly told me no, that that was an abuse of confidence, since I **was doing** it in the name of the friendship that unites us. That you don’t mix friendship with business.’

This token was coded as follows: IP, more frequent, ongoing event, USA, periodical, 2000s. After the coding was completed, the data were subjected to statistical analyses using chi-square tests of

independence. For each of the analyses reported below, a two-way chi-square was conducted, with the column cells of the tables representing A and the rows B. The chi-square test allows one to determine whether it is likely that two variables are only related by chance (i.e. they are independent of one another), or whether there is likely to be a non-chance relationship between the two. The tests are used here to examine the relationship between the dependent variable (IM vs. IP) and each of the independent linguistic and extralinguistic variables included in the study (with the exception of the analysis of type of imperfect usage in IP tokens, whose relationship to country is examined).

4. Results and Discussion

Results are presented in this section in terms of each of the research questions, repeated here for the convenience of the reader.

Research Question (1): Does U.S. Spanish show a greater relative frequency of IP usage as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) than Spanish from other countries? In other words, is there an effect for language contact?

The overall distribution of IM and IP tokens in the CREA corpus for each country included in the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: IM vs. IP distribution by country

Country	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
USA	1,318	95.2	66	4.8	1,384	100
Puerto Rico	1,340	95.8	59	4.2	1,399	100
Cuba	5,958	96.8	194	3.2	6,152	100
Mexico	13,967	97.3	392	2.7	14,359	100
Total	22,583	96.9	711	3.1	23,294	100

There is a statistically significant relationship between country and percentage of IP use in this corpus, $\chi^2(3, N = 23,294) = 25.45, p = 0.000$, Cramer's V = .033. However, the Cramer's V value, which measures the strength of association between two variables, indicates little if any association between the two. This means that the statistically significant result is most likely due to the extremely large sample size rather than to an actual relationship between country and percentage of IP use, since even relatively small differences can produce significant results when the sample size is large enough. Despite this fact, it is worth noting that the direction of the results is consistent with Silva-Corvalán's (1994) concept of indirect transfer, which predicts greater frequency of the IP in a variety of Spanish in contact with English (e.g., U.S. Spanish) than in non-contact varieties (e.g. Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish). The answer to Research Question (1) is yes, U.S. Spanish does show a greater relative frequency of IP usage compared with Spanish from the other countries examined. However, due to the low value of Cramer's V reported above, these results cannot be interpreted as evidence of a relationship between country and percentage of IP use, and therefore do not support an effect for language contact in the use of the IM and the IP.

The results of the current study closely mirror those obtained in other recent studies of U.S. Spanish, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of recent studies of U.S. Spanish

Study	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
Lamanna (2008)	1318	95.2	66	4.8	1384	100
Koontz-Garboden (1999)	1333	94.1	84	5.9	1417	100
Chaston (1991)	513	94.0	33	6.0	546	100

The current study found slightly less frequent IP use in U.S. Spanish than Koontz-Garboden (1999) and Chaston (1991), although this difference is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 3347) = 2.24, p = 0.326$.

Research Question (2): Does U.S. Spanish provide evidence that the IP is encroaching upon areas of traditional IM use (Floyd 1978, Solé 1977)?

The results of the current study support the notion that the IP is being extended to areas of imperfect use other than ongoing situations, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Type of imperfect usage in U.S. Spanish IP tokens

Type of imperfect usage	Number of tokens	%
Ongoing events	30	45.5
Continuous/habitual actions	30	45.5
States of being/conditions	6	9
Future time/intent	0	0
Total	66	100

A total of 45.5% of U.S. Spanish IP tokens in this corpus express continuous/habitual actions (the same percentage as ongoing events), while 9% express states of being or conditions. These were two areas in which Solé (1977) claimed that extension of the IP into IM territory was taking place. No evidence was found, however, to support her claim that the IP was being extended into future contexts.

Chaston (1991) argued that studies of U.S. Spanish need to look not only at frequency of IP use but also at whether its use is similar to or different from that observed in other countries. Table 4 shows the distribution of type of imperfect usage in IP tokens for the four countries included in the current study. It is worth noting that not a single example was found in any of the four countries of the IP being used to refer to future time or intent.

Table 4: Type of imperfect usage in IP tokens by country

Type of imperfect	USA		Puerto Rico		Cuba		Mexico	
Ongoing event	30	45.5%	38	64.4%	128	66%	239	61%
Cont./repeated action	30	45.5%	19	32.2%	52	26.8%	117	29.8%
State/condition	6	9%	2	3.4%	14	7.2%	36	9.2%
Future time/intent	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	66	100%	59	100%	194	100%	392	100%

The distribution of type of imperfect usage in IP tokens by country is not significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 711) = 11.72, p = 0.069$. Although the results are not statistically significant, a definite trend is observed toward more frequent use of the IP in U.S. Spanish to express continuous or repeated actions than in the other varieties. This indicates that the results may very well have turned out to be significant if a greater number of IP tokens had been included in the study.

The answer to Research Question (2) is yes, U.S. Spanish does provide some evidence that the IP is encroaching upon areas traditionally associated with the IM, although this tendency is also observed in the other countries, and the difference between contact and non-contact varieties is not significant. The results therefore do not lend support to a language contact hypothesis, although they do suggest that an effect for language contact may be found in future investigations based on a larger number of IP tokens.

Research Question (3): Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to the frequency of the main verb used in the construction? More specifically, do less frequent verbs show a higher percentage of IP use than more frequent ones?

Table 5 shows the distribution of IM and IP tokens in U.S. Spanish according to the frequency of the main verb used in the construction.

Table 5: IM vs. IP distribution by verb frequency in U.S. Spanish

verb frequency	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
more frequent verbs	769	96.1	31	3.9	800	100
less frequent verbs	549	94.0	35	6.0	584	100
Total	1318	95.2	66	4.8	1384	100

The distribution of the IM and IP by verb frequency in U.S. Spanish is not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 1384) = 3.36, p = 0.068$. The answer to Research Question (3) is therefore no, frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish does not vary according to the frequency of the main verb used in the construction.

While the findings for verb frequency are not statistically significant, it is again worth noting that the direction of the results is as expected, since less frequent verbs show a higher percentage of IP use than more frequent ones, and the difference may have been statistically significant with the inclusion of a larger number of tokens. This difference suggests that change by analogy from the English past progressive to the Spanish IP may very well be occurring to some extent in U.S. Spanish, although this suggestion is tentative pending confirmation from future investigations that include more tokens of the IP.

For comparative purposes, Table 6 presents the IM vs. IP distribution by verb frequency for the non-contact varieties of Spanish investigated in the current study. Tokens from all three countries are grouped together.

Table 6: IM vs. IP distribution by verb frequency in Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish

verb frequency	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
more frequent verbs	15,016	97.6	368	2.4	15,384	100
less frequent verbs	6,249	95.8	277	4.2	6,526	100
Total	21,265	97.1	645	2.9	21,910	100

The distribution of the IM and the IP by verb frequency in Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 21,910) = 55.03, p = 0.000$, Cramer's $V = .050$. However, as in the case of the overall distribution of the two verb forms by country, the low Cramer's V value indicates little if any association between the two variables. Thus, once again, the statistically significant result is probably due to the large sample size.

Research Question (4): Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to genre (books vs. periodicals)?

The distribution of IM and IP use by genre in U.S. Spanish is displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: IM vs. IP distribution by genre in U.S. Spanish

Genre	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
periodicals	871	93.8	58	6.2	929	100
books	447	98.2	8	1.8	455	100
Total	1318	95.2	66	4.8	1384	100

These results show that there is a statistically significant relationship between genre and percentage of IP use in the corpus of U.S. Spanish examined here, $\chi^2(1, N = 1384) = 13.53, p = 0.000$, Cramer's $V = .099$. The value of Cramer's V confirms that there is an association between the two variables, albeit a weak one. The answer to Research Question (4) is yes, because the IP is used more frequently in periodicals (magazines and newspapers) than in books (6.2% vs. 1.8% respectively). One possible explanation for this differences is that less formal discourse (e.g. quotes) may be used in the periodicals than in the books composing this corpus, and that indirect transfer from the English past

progressive to the Spanish IP may be more advanced in less formal contexts. At least one other study has shown a linguistic change to be further advanced in less formal than in more formal genres (Torres Cacoullos 1999). She found differences between two written genres in Mexican Spanish in the frequency of clitic climbing (CC), in which an unstressed object pronoun moves from postverbal to preverbal position. Specifically, she found that CC occurred more often in novels (89% for *estar* ‘to be’, 86% for *ir* ‘to go’) than in essays (68% for *estar*, 45% for *ir*). The percentages for novels were very similar to those found in the corpora of less formal oral data she examined (89% for *estar*, 93% for *ir*). Further research is necessary to determine whether differences in formality play a role in the results reported here for the CREA corpus. The statistically significant results for U.S. Spanish may also be due to the translation of quotes or even entire articles directly from English into Spanish in U.S. Spanish periodicals. This explanation must also remain tentative pending a detailed qualitative analysis of the corpus to determine if this is the case.

For comparative purposes, Table 8 shows the distribution of IM and IP tokens by genre for the non-contact varieties of Spanish, again with all three countries grouped together.

Table 8: IM vs. IP distribution by genre in Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish

Genre	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
periodicals	2,231	96.5	82	3.5	2,313	100
books	19,034	97.1	563	2.9	19,597	100
Total	21,265	97.1	645	2.9	21,910	100

The distribution of the two verb forms by genre in Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish is not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 21,910) = 3.27, p = 0.070$. This finding, which stands in contrast to the statistically significant results reported in Table 7, provides further evidence of an effect for language contact in U.S. Spanish which is absent in the non-contact varieties.

Research Question (5): Does the frequency of IP usage in U.S. Spanish as a percentage of all past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) vary according to the decade of publication?

The results for distribution of the IM and IP by decade are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: IM vs. IP distribution by decade in U.S. Spanish

Decade	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
2000s	223	95.3	11	4.7	234	100
1990s	687	93.5	48	6.5	735	100
1980s	95	99	1	1	96	100
1970s	313	98.1	6	1.9	319	100
Total	1,318	95.2	66	4.8	1,384	100

These results show that the apparent answer to Research Question (5) is yes, since there is a statistically significant relationship between decade and percentage of IP use in the corpus of U.S. Spanish included in the current study, $\chi^2(3, N = 1384) = 13.82, p = 0.003$, Cramer’s $V = .100$, with the value for Cramer’s V indicating a weak relationship. The IP is more frequent in more recent decades (1990s and 2000s) than in less recent ones (1970s and 1980s). As it turns out, there is a ready explanation for this in a peculiarity of the CREA database, namely that the electronic searches conducted of U.S. periodicals only yielded tokens of the relevant verb forms from the 1990s and 2000s. So there is an interaction between decade and genre in this corpus, with the apparent increase in IP use over time actually reflecting the more frequent use of the IP in periodicals than in books.

Once again, in Table 10, results are provided for all three non-contact varieties together for purposes of comparison.

Table 10: IM vs. IP distribution by decade in Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish

Decade	Total IM	%	Total IP	%	Total IM + IP	%
2000s	2,776	97	87	3	2,863	100
1990s	7,926	96.8	262	3.2	8,188	100
1980s	8,423	97.4	227	2.6	8,650	100
1970s	2,140	96.9	69	3.1	2,209	100
Total	21,265	97.1	645	2.9	21,910	100

The distribution of the IM and IP by decade for the non-contact varieties is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 21,910) = 5.31, p = 0.151$. Thus these results fail to provide evidence of increased IP usage over time for Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish.

5. Conclusion

The current study has presented an analysis of one portion of the temporal and aspectual distinctions marked by Spanish verb forms, specifically focusing on the use of the imperfect (IM) and the imperfective progressive (IP), both of which can communicate progressive meaning in past temporal contexts. A comparison has been made between Spanish and English, noting that English only has in its repertoire one verb form, the past progressive, that communicates progressive meaning in the past, and that this form corresponds in its morphosyntactic structure to the Spanish IP. Due to these facts regarding the marking of tense and aspect in the two languages, this study looked for evidence of contact-induced language change in the area of past-reference indicative imperfect usage (IM + IP) in U.S. Spanish, comparing it to the non-contact varieties of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican Spanish.

The results of the current study, although mixed, provide some evidence suggesting contact-induced language change may be occurring in U.S. Spanish in the area of IM and IP usage. First of all, IP use is more common in U.S. Spanish than in non-contact varieties, a result consistent with Silva-Corvalán's (1994) concept of indirect transfer, in this case transfer from the English past progressive to the Spanish IP. It must be noted, however, that the value for Cramer's V indicated little to no association between country and percentage of IP use, so this finding cannot be considered evidence of an effect for language contact on U.S. Spanish. There is some evidence that the IP is being extended in U.S. Spanish into domains traditionally associated with the IM (especially continuous/repeated actions), although the same tendency was noted in the non-contact varieties, and the difference was not statistically significant. A frequency effect was found for non-contact varieties only on the percentage of IP use in different verbs, with less frequent verbs showing a higher percentage of IP use than more frequent ones, although the Cramer's V value again indicated little to no relationship between the two variables. In the case of U.S. Spanish, the direction of the results was the same, and although the difference was not statistically significant, it may have been if a larger number of IP tokens had been included in the study. The difference suggests that change by analogy from the English past progressive to the Spanish IP may be occurring to some extent in U.S. Spanish, since analytical change affects less frequent lexical items first (Phillips 1984), but this suggestion is tentative pending further empirical investigation. IP use was found to be more common in U.S. Spanish in periodicals (newspapers and magazines) than in books, and it was suggested that this may be due to periodicals being a less formal genre and/or containing some English translations. The difference between the genres was not significant for the non-contact varieties, providing evidence of an effect for language contact on U.S. Spanish. Finally, no evidence free of interaction effects was found of a significant change in IP use over the past four decades, evidence that would have strengthened the case for a change in progress.

A number of areas remain open for future research, in addition to the more detailed qualitative examination already mentioned of the corpus used in the current study. First of all, a greater number and variety of verbs should be investigated. The current study was based on only ten verbs, and most of them belong to the lexical aspectual class of activities. In addition, while they were divided into more and less frequent categories, all of the verbs included in the current study are highly frequent in

Spanish. Verbs of medium and low frequency should be looked at as well. An additional way to expand upon the current investigation would be to include data from a greater number of countries than the four examined here. Finally, oral data that is more representative of the diversity of U.S. Spanish varieties (as opposed to being limited to Mexican-American Spanish) should be examined. The results reported here remain tentative pending the findings of future investigations such as those suggested above.

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