

Future-Time Expression and Generational Status in Spanish-English Heritage Bilingual Speakers: An Online Study

Recent research has shed light on the future-time expressions utilized by Spanish heritage bilingual speakers within their linguistic communities. Studies have indicated that the periphrastic future (PF) serves as the default marker of futurity, and Spanish heritage speakers tend to reduce the morphological future (MF) to modal values when speaking Spanish in the United States (Silva-Corvalán, 1994; Gutiérrez, 1995; Orozco, 2005, 2015; Orozco & Thoms, 2014; Zentella, 1997). In a similar vein, the interpretation of the English progressive aspect as a viable construction in Spanish has been observed among L2 Spanish learners and heritage language speakers (Pérez-Cortes, 2012). Moreover, studies have shown that adult Spanish heritage speakers possess strong knowledge of future morphology for expressing temporal futurity, though the epistemic interpretation appears weaker (Pascual y Cabo & Vela, 2020), and that PF and MF are generally rated higher than the present indicative (PI) (De Prada Pérez, et al., 2021).

Building upon these findings, this study aims to investigate whether Spanish-English heritage bilingual speakers overgeneralize the future aspect of the English progressive (EP) when interpreting Spanish sentences online. We also seek to explore whether this overgeneralization is influenced by generational status. To accomplish this, we collected online data from 60 Spanish-English heritage bilingual speakers who participated in a timed Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT). This task measured their acceptability rates and response times (in milliseconds) when evaluating four versions of each of the 20 target sentences. The four versions included PF, MF, PI, and a direct translation from the EP to Spanish. Preliminary results indicate a potential correlation between participants' generational status and the acceptability rate of EP and PI forms. Our study contributes to the understanding of convergent simplification as a construct that impacts heritage language performance. We propose that generational distance plays a pivotal role in determining the degree of overgeneralization of futurity among Spanish-English bilingual speakers when interpreting Spanish sentences online.

Stimuli sample (adapted from De Prada Pérez, et al., 2021)

1. Voy a estudiar mañana 'I am going to study tomorrow' (PF)
2. Estudiaré mañana 'I will study tomorrow' (MF)
3. Estudio mañana 'I study tomorrow' (PI)
4. *Estoy estudiando mañana 'I'm studying tomorrow' (EP)

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