

Transfer in the Spanish Progressive Constructions in Los Angeles*

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Among the linguistic phenomena that develop in language-contact situations, the transfer of features from one language into another is a common strategy used by bilinguals to cope with the task of using two different linguistic systems (Weinreich 1974; Silva-Corvalán 1986; Thomason and Kaufman 1988). This paper argues that transfer characterizes the use of the Spanish progressive forms in a situation of intense contact with English. Furthermore, the present paper brings evidence from the Spanish spoken in Los Angeles, which shows transfer of certain conditions of use from the English progressive system. In particular, there is an increase in the relative frequency of progressive forms to refer to ongoing activity following English patterns. In this way, transfer leads to convergence of the bilinguals' system of present reference with English.

1. Introduction

Language is not invariable and stable but changes in time and space. Furthermore, linguistic change in progress may be observable in language-contact situations as rapid and constant changes tend to occur in the languages involved (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 2). In a situation of language contact, several changes may occur in one (or more) of the linguistic systems that cohabit. Among the linguistic phenomena which develop in language-contact situations, the transfer of features from one language into another is a common strategy used by bilinguals to cope with the task of using two different linguistic systems (Weinreich 1974; Thomason and Kaufman 1988). This paper explores the possibility of transfer in a situation of societal bilingualism, namely the case of English-Spanish contact in the U.S.

One of the areas in which transfer can be expected to occur in Spanish in contact with English is the system of the progressive constructions (*estar* 'be' + *-ndo* '-ing'). The two languages have progressive forms that are parallel in morphology, in that they are formed with the inflected present of 'be' plus the present participle form ('-ing') of a main verb. However, in both languages the progressive constructions have only partially similar conditions of use, thus creating pragmatic spaces which have been shown to promote transfer (Silva-Corvalán 1998: 241).

This paper argues that transfer characterizes the use of the Spanish progressive forms (*estar* + *-ndo*) in a situation of intense contact with English. Transfer is hypothesized to affect the relative frequency of progressive *estar* + *-ndo* forms and simple present forms to refer to ongoing activity in bilingual and monolingual speakers of Mexican Spanish in Los Angeles. This hypothesis is based on the principle of generality, which predicts that forms with a wider, less restricted, distribution are generalized (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 218-219).

In order to test this hypothesis, data will be presented and analyzed showing bilinguals' and monolinguals' use of simple and progressive present forms. It appears that bilinguals present significantly higher frequency of *estar* + *-ndo* in contexts where English admits only the progressive 'be + -ing' form, but Spanish allows either the periphrastic form (as in example 1) or the simple (as in example 2) in these contexts:

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- (1) Ahora está lloviendo y no podemos salir.
 Now it-is raining and NEG can-we go.out
 ‘Now it’s raining and we can’t go out.’
- (2) Ahora llueve y no podemos salir.
 Now it-rains and NEG can-we go.out
 * ‘Now it rains and we can’t go out.’

The study of transfer in a contact-language situation of this type is very important as it can shed light on the permeability of a grammatical system to influence from a different one. However, the question of whether or to what extent a given grammatical system is permeable to foreign syntactic features is again a controversial issue. Weinreich (1974) supported the view that grammars are resistant to foreign structural elements except in those areas where the recipient language has ‘structural weaknesses’ (Weinreich 1974: 4). By ‘structural weaknesses’, Weinreich refers to incomplete or unbalanced correlations within a system. On the other hand, Thomason and Kaufman (1988) argue that there is evidence to believe that ‘any linguistic feature can be transferred from any language to any other language’ (p. 14). In this paper, I will follow Silva-Corvalán’s work on bilingualism, which indicates that the permeability of a grammar depends on the existence of structures that are parallel in some way in the languages in contact as opposed to Weinreich’s ‘structural weaknesses’ (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 135).

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 offers an overview of the progressive forms and meanings in Spanish and English. In particular, I will consider their conditions of use and the ways in which the progressive system in Spanish differs from the English one. Specifically, the focus of this paper is on the difference in usage between English and Spanish regarding reference to present activity. Section 3 includes a detailed discussion on the research methodology, and section 4 presents the results from the data. A discussion of these results follows. Conclusions are presented in section 6.

2. The progressive forms in English and Spanish: Uses and restrictions.

According to some Spanish grammarians (Butt and Benjamin 1994: 230-237; Bosque and Demonte 1999: 3412), the Spanish progressive forms are apparently more common these days than sixty years ago. Furthermore, they point out that some of their current uses seem to reflect the influence of English. It also seems to be the case that progressive forms are more frequent in Latin American than European Spanish. In order to maintain these claims, a thorough study of the frequency and conditions of use of the progressive forms is necessary. Furthermore, it is crucial to take into account aspects such as the level of education of the speakers, their geographical origin and considerations of register, a type of study that has not been done yet.

The progressive form is made up of an inflected form of the verb ‘be’ (in Spanish *estar*) followed by the gerund ‘-ing’ form (Spanish *-ndo*) of the main verb¹. The progressive aspect is defined as ‘imperfectivity that is not habituality’ (Comrie 1976: 30). The English progressive has, in comparison with other languages, an unusually wide distribution. In English, the progressive and the non-progressive are not normally interchangeable. On the other hand, in Spanish, it is normally possible to replace the progressive with other forms, without implying non-progressive meaning. For example, to refer to John’s singing at the actual moment of speech only ‘John is singing’ is possible in English, while both, *Juan canta* ‘John sings’ / *Juan está cantando* ‘John is singing’ are possible in Spanish.

Traditionally, it has been held that in Spanish *estar* + *-ndo* is not an obligatory expression of progressive meaning, in contrast to English progressive ‘be’ + ‘-ing’ (e.g. Marchand 1955; Comrie 1976: 33; Solé and Solé 1977: 42). According to Solé and Solé (1977: 42), the distribution and function of the Spanish *estar* + *-ndo* form differ substantially from that of its English equivalent. In

¹ *Estar* ‘to be’ is the most common auxiliary used for the progressive constructions in Spanish, but it is not the only one. However, in this paper only *estar* progressives will be considered, that is, the parallel morphological structure to the English construction: a conjugated form of the verb ‘be’ (Spanish *estar*) plus ‘-ing’ (Spanish *-ndo*).

Spanish, the simple tenses may be used to refer to events that occur at an indefinite time and also to events that are occurring on a definite occasion. Therefore, the simple present can express not only habitual action but also events in progress at the time in question, as in the following examples:

- (3) ¿A quién buscas?
To whom look.for-you (2ND PERS SING PRES)
* ‘Who do you look for?’
- (4) ¿A quién estás buscando?
To whom you-are looking.for
‘Who are you looking for?’
- (5) María lee.
María read-she(3RD PERS SING PRES)
* ‘María reads.’
- (6) María está leyendo.
María is reading
‘María is reading.’

Examples 3 and 5, showing the simple present form, are utterances with reference to present ongoing activity just as 4 and 6, which have the progressive form. The use of the simple form in Spanish to refer to an ongoing action is perfectly acceptable while this form yields ungrammaticality in English. In English, as opposed to Spanish, the simple unexpanded tenses are incompatible with definite time reference. According to Butt and Benjamin (1994: 230), the Spanish progressive form adds a nuance to, but does not substantially alter the meaning of the non-continuous form, so that the two forms, the simple present and the present progressive, are interchangeable. The focus of the present study is on instances such as 3-6 above, in which Spanish has the option of expressing present reference either with the simple present or with the present progressive whereas English must use the progressive form to express ongoing action.

According to Torres Cacoullós (2000), there is a significant diachronic increase in the frequency of *estar* + *-ndo* constructions. This increase in frequency of use has been pointed out to be higher in bilingual varieties in contact with English. It may be the case that in bilingual varieties of Spanish, such as the Spanish spoken in Los Angeles, language contact has the effect of accelerating processes already existing in the language (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 135). Two major questions that this research explores, then, are how different is the bilinguals’ use of the progressive constructions in the system of present reference to that of monolingual speakers of the same variety? In addition, if there is any significant difference, how can we test whether such difference is due to contact with English and not to other extra-linguistic factors such as dialectal variation?

3. The Spanish progressive system as a locus of transfer from English.

3.1 Hypothesis

As discussed in the previous section, the systems of reference to present activity of English and of Spanish constitute potential sources of transfer in situations of contact due to the bilinguals’ tendency to equate the two systems in function as well as in form (Weinreich 1974). The two languages have progressive constructions that are parallel in form and partially similar in function. Both languages coincide in the use of the progressive form to refer to action in progress at the time of speaking (as in 8), while the simple present form indicates more general situations (as illustrated in 7):

- (7) Llueve más en verano que en invierno.
It-rains more in summer than in winter
‘It rains more in summer than in winter.’

- (8) Mira, está lloviendo.
 Look(IMP) it-is raining
 ‘Look, it is raining.’

However, while Spanish can choose between the simple and the progressive form to refer to present activity, English can only use the progressive form in this context, as seen in examples 3 and 5.

The hypothesis of this study is that the progressive construction in Spanish and English will be subject to transfer in bilingual situations, given their morphological similarity and their partial similarity in usage (Klein 1980; Silva-Corvalán 1994). We argue that transfer characterizes the use of the Spanish progressive forms (*estar + -ndo*) in a situation of intense contact with English. This transfer will be manifested in the bilinguals’ significantly higher frequency of *estar + -ndo* in contexts where English admits only the progressive ‘be + -ing’ form, but Spanish allows either the simple or the periphrastic form.

Furthermore, it is assumed that the transfer should be in the direction of English due to the following facts: 1) The identification of the two systems in the direction of English would not give rise to ungrammatical utterances in either language whereas the reverse would result in ungrammaticality in the English system (Klein 1980, 1986). 2) English is the language of power and prestige in most bilingual communities in the U.S.

Accordingly, the expectations are that there will be transfer of pragmatic uses from the English system of present reference to the Spanish one and that this pragmatic transfer will be manifested in the relative higher frequency of Spanish progressive forms and, consequently, a lower frequency of use of the simple present. On the other hand, if in contact situations the Spanish of bilinguals were not influenced by English, it should not exhibit a frequency of use of the simple and progressive forms significantly different from that of monolingual speakers of the same variety.

With these considerations in mind, this research addresses two questions mentioned above, namely whether there is a significant difference in bilinguals’ and monolinguals’ use of progressive constructions with reference to ongoing action and, if there is such a difference, whether contact with English can be recognized as the major factor inducing the transfer.

3.2 *Research methodology*

This study is based on data obtained from Mexican-American bilinguals in Los Angeles. Since the use of the progressive form instead of the simple form in Spanish would be completely acceptable, any effect of transfer to this respect would only be noticeable in quantitative terms (Klein 1980:71). Therefore, as Klein-Andreu (1986) points out, it is of vital importance to study phenomena such as this –namely, reference to present activity– in a quantitative way, selecting the contexts in which the two languages diverge in order to appreciate any transfer effect.

Klein’s (1980) results were challenged by Pousada and Poplack (1982) in their study of the verbal forms in Puerto Rican Spanish in New York. In this study, the authors concluded that no transfer had occurred between Spanish and English in the use of the progressive constructions. However, it is not surprising that the authors arrived at that conclusion because, among other factors, they were more concerned with qualitative changes over quantitative differences. Pousada and Poplack did not focus specifically on the contexts in which Spanish and English differed and, therefore, no transfer could be expected to be found in the data they analyzed.

3.3 *Selection of speakers*

The study to be presented here is based on data from bilingual and monolingual speakers of Spanish and/or English. The participants of this research are divided into five groups, which are in turn classified as bilingual or monolingual. Let us now turn to a more detailed description of these groups of speakers and the criteria followed in the selection of participants.

The bilingual speakers’ group (LA henceforth) includes men and women, categorized in two groups. The first, labeled Group 1 (LA;G1) includes speakers born in Mexico who immigrated to the U.S. after the age of twelve. The age of twelve was established since numerous researchers have

considered it to be the ‘critical age’ by which the structures of one’s native language are acquired. Thus, the LA;G1 group consists of six speakers –four male and two female– who were born in Mexico, came to this country after the age of twelve and have been living in Los Angeles for over ten years. Group 2, labeled LA;G2, includes second-generation speakers, that is, speakers born in the U.S. but whose parents were born in Mexico. LA;G2 is also made up of eight bilingual speakers, five male and three female. The majority of the bilingual speakers are between 30-45 years old (mean age 35.3).

To determine whether there are transfer effects, comparison with monolingual data is called for to ascertain the level of similarity and difference. In the discussion of bilingual data, we will draw comparisons with monolingual speakers, who are divided into the following three groups:

1) Monolingual Mexican speakers of Spanish (group M): five monolingual speakers were interviewed who were in turn classified as belonging to either of the following subgroups: (a) Speakers who have recently immigrated and have under five years of residence in the U.S. These speakers do not speak English on a daily basis and they do not have more than a basic knowledge of English. They continue to speak Spanish and return to Mexico to visit family and friends every year, at least in Christmas and/or summer. (b) Speakers who were born and live in Mexico and were just visiting the States at the time of the interviews. Group M serves as a non-bilingual control group. The mean age for this group is 37.8, similar, then, to the bilingual speakers’ age.

2) Monolingual speakers of Spanish from Spain (group S): We also gathered data from another monolingual variety of Spanish in order to compare with the M group and ensure the reliability of the data. This second control group is made up of five monolingual Spanish speakers from Spain. As it was pointed out in the previous section, it has been claimed that the progressive forms are more frequent in Latin American than in European Spanish (Solé and Solé 1977; Butt and Benjamin 1994; Bosque and Demonte 1999). If this is the case, we would expect to find significant difference between the Spanish and the Mexican varieties in their use of progressives. If, on the other hand, both varieties show the same behavior as far as the usage of progressive constructions is concerned but still differ substantially from bilinguals’ use, then this can be further evidence to support the hypothesis of contact-induced change in bilingual varieties. This group has mean age of 31.8.

3) Monolingual speakers of American English (group E): Since it is claimed here is that transfer takes place in the direction of English, a comparison with data from native monolingual speakers of English is relevant. Furthermore, a great effort was made in this study not to rely solely on grammar descriptions since idealized notions of the language, such as notions of “standard”, may lead to an unrealistic or distorted representation of the facts (Poplack 1997:306). Consequently, data from four native speakers of American English was also recorded –three male and one female. All the speakers were either born in Los Angeles or have been living in Los Angeles for at least 10 years. As in the previous groups, these speakers are between 30 and 45 years old (mean age 37).

The level of formal instruction and literacy of the speaker may be a crucial factor to account for the high frequency of use of the progressive in bilingual varieties. It could be the case that speakers with less formal instruction will hardly use the simple form to refer to ongoing activity as opposed to more educated speakers who may use both the simple and the progressive form. Therefore, in order to obtain reliable data it is important to ensure that the speakers have a similar educational background so as to allow for homogeneous and comparable sets of data. Accordingly, all the speakers who participated in this study had at least a college degree or equivalent. There are several reasons for this:

First, the higher the level of education the higher the optionality between simple present vs. progressive form in the speakers’ system of present reference. On the other hand, considering only popular or uneducated varieties may be an invalid choice for comparison with English since some speakers might not have the option of using the simple form to express progressive meaning. Second, the more homogeneous the extra-linguistic characteristics of the speakers the more comparable and reliable the data will be. All the Spanish speakers have had formal instruction in Spanish but none of the speakers has a post-graduate degree in Spanish or was teaching Spanish at the time. This is important since a more sophisticated meta-linguistic knowledge of the language may bias the speaker toward some forms and not others.

The place of origin in Mexico of the speakers in LA;G1 as well as the parents of the speakers in LA;G2 is roughly similar to that of the monolingual speakers (M). Most of the speakers come from these four central-southern states: Zacatecas, Michoacán, D.F., and Puebla.

As said before, the data from Spain (S) are only used as a tangential comparison with the data from Mexico (M) in order to see whether there is indeed a more frequent use of progressive forms in American varieties than in European Spanish. Similarly, the comparison with the monolingual American English speakers will serve as a way of verifying English use rather than just relying on grammars or researchers' intuitions about the use of the progressive and simple forms.

3.4 Methods of elicitation

The data analyzed here were obtained through a picture description task. The speakers were shown some pictures and they were asked to describe what they saw. Most of the pictures illustrated several characters performing different activities at the same time. In general, speakers were asked to describe the pictures with as much detail as possible, especially focusing on what they thought each character was doing and why. For example, if a picture illustrated a party in which some people are dancing, some drinking, some talking, etc., the speakers would then describe these actions in Spanish, thus eliciting the use of the present simple or the progressive –whichever form the speaker chose– to refer to ongoing activity. The formulation of questions by the investigator explicitly employing the simple or the progressive form was avoided in order not to affect the speakers' response.

Approximately 12 hours of audio-recorded picture discussions were collected and transcribed. Of these, 5 hours were recorded from groups LA;G1 and LA;G2; 2.5 hours from non-bilingual Mexican speakers (group M); approximately 2.5 hours from non-bilingual Spanish speakers from Spain (group S); and 2 hours were recorded from non-bilingual American speakers of English (group E).

The description of pictures was aimed at testing whether the speakers would produce the simple present or the progressive form in contexts where both forms are equally possible. Examples 9 and 10, taken from the recorded data, exemplify these contexts:

- (9) Un niño le jala la coleta a una niña y la niña llora. En la otra
 A child to-her pulls-he the ponytail to a girl and the girl cries-she in the other
 habitación el teléfono suena.
 room the phone rings-it
 'A child pulls (*i.e.*, is pulling) the hair of a girl and the girl cries. In the other room, the
 phone rings (*i.e.*, is ringing).'
- (10) El hermano le está estirando del pelo a la niña, se están peleando.
 The brother to-her is-he pulling of the hair to the girl (REFLEX) are-they fighting
 'The brother is pulling the hair of the girl, they're fighting.'

In addition, a language background questionnaire was employed. The speakers were asked to fill up a questionnaire with biographical information as well as information about their educational and language background. This is important since, as it has already been said, factors such as the level of education and the use of English and Spanish in and outside the home need to be taken into account in order to have a homogeneous sample of speakers and data.

4. Results

4.1. Picture Description

For the purpose of this investigation, only those utterances that were produced in Spanish in the simple or progressive form in reference to ongoing activity were considered. These utterances could only be rendered in English in the progressive form as illustrated in 9 and 10. Example 9 was produced by a monolingual speaker and sentence 10 by a bilingual speaker of Group 2 (LA; G2). It is interesting to notice that the monolingual speaker chooses the simple present (*jala* 'he pulls', *llora* 'she cries', *suena* 'it rings') in the same contexts in which the bilingual speaker produces progressive constructions (*está estirando* 'he's pulling', *están peleando* 'they're fighting').

Utterances that could only be produced with the simple present are not included in this study, as with stative verbs such as 'seem', 'look', 'like', 'have', etc., which normally do not admit a dynamic

interpretation. Therefore, examples such as 11 and 12 were not counted as occurrences of simple present vs. progressive because the progressive variant is not an alternative in Spanish or in English:

- (11) [...] Hay una persona que parece (*está pareciendo) estar enojada.
 There-is a person that it-seems it-is seeming to-be angry
 ‘[...] There’s one person who seems to be angry.’
- (12) Hay un chico en esta fiesta que no le gusta (*está gustando) todo el ruido.
 There-is a boy in this party that NEG to-him it-likes it-is liking all the noise
 ‘There’s a boy in this party who doesn’t like the noise.’

The possibility of identifying utterances in which English differs from Spanish in the options available for referring to present activity led us to expect that if the Spanish of the LA bilinguals were not influenced by English, it should not exhibit a frequency of use of the simple and the progressive forms significantly different from that of the M speakers. Furthermore, if the Spanish of the LA group were not influenced by English it should not exhibit a significantly higher use of the progressive, as compared to the M group.

The results show a significant difference between the M and the LA groups in the usage of the simple present to refer to present activity. The results of the recordings are given in table 1 and graphically in Figure 1, which also includes monolingual speakers from Spain (S) for the purpose of comparison with monolinguals from Mexico (M).

| FORM | GROUP | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | M | | LA;G1 | | LA;G2 | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Simple | 96 | 40.3% | 102 | 24.4% | 38 | 9.6% |
| Progressive | 142 | 59.7% | 316 | 75.6% | 358 | 90.4% |

Table 1: Monolingual and bilingual speakers’ use of the simple and the progressive present in utterances with reference to ongoing activity.

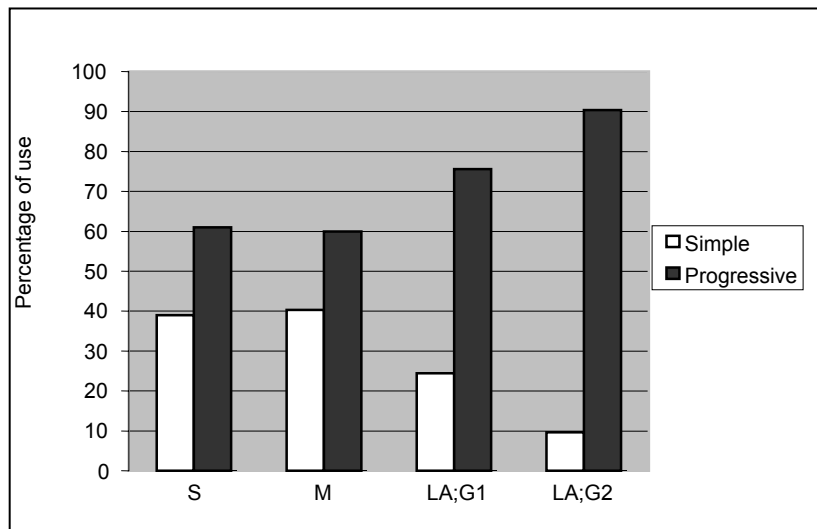


Figure 1: Monolingual (both S and M) and bilingual speakers’ use of the simple and the progressive present in utterances with reference to ongoing activity.

Chi-square analyses were performed to determine whether the difference in usage was statistically significant. In the utterances analyzed, namely, those where English differs from Spanish in not admitting the simple present, the LA speakers differed significantly from their M counterpart in the direction of English usage: $\chi^2 = 82.273$, $p < .001$.

The M group used 96 simple present forms, which amounts to 40.3% use of the simple present. However, there is a considerable drop in percentage of simple present forms by the bilingual groups as can be seen in the decreasing size of the simple present column in figure 1. The bilingual groups, LA;G1 and LA;G2, produced 24.4% and 9.6% of simple present forms respectively. As expected, this decrease in the use of simple present forms occurs in conjunction with a significant increase of frequency in the use of the progressive forms.

It is interesting to notice that the S group (shown in Figure 1) does not differ significantly from the M group. Actually, both groups behave almost identically as far as the use of simple and progressive forms for present reference is concerned. This evidence goes against the claim that the progressive forms are used more frequently in Latin American Spanish, at least, not in my sample of speakers.

Furthermore, since all the speakers have similar levels of education we cannot assume that the higher frequency of use of progressive forms in the bilinguals' speech is due to such questions as uneducated vs. educated variety. Rather, these data seem to support a contact-induced change toward English.

The same procedure was done with native speakers of American English. The comparison of bilinguals' data to monolingual data from English speakers is also pertinent for this study since, as mentioned before, it ensures a realistic picture of the actual use of the progressive forms in the English system of present reference. Furthermore, it is necessary to make certain that the simple present is not used in English for ongoing activity in the same way that it is used in Spanish. According to English grammars (Quirk *et al.* 1985; Huddelston 1998), there are two contexts in which it is actually possible for English to use the simple present form to refer to ongoing activity, namely in the journalistic report of a sport event, as in example 13 and in the telling of jokes or stories, as in example 14:

(13) Smith throws the ball and Johnson intercepts.

(14) Two men walk into a bar and one says to the other...

The results from the picture description task (see figure 2) show that the native speakers of American English did not produce virtually any simple present form to refer to ongoing activity, but only with stative verbs.

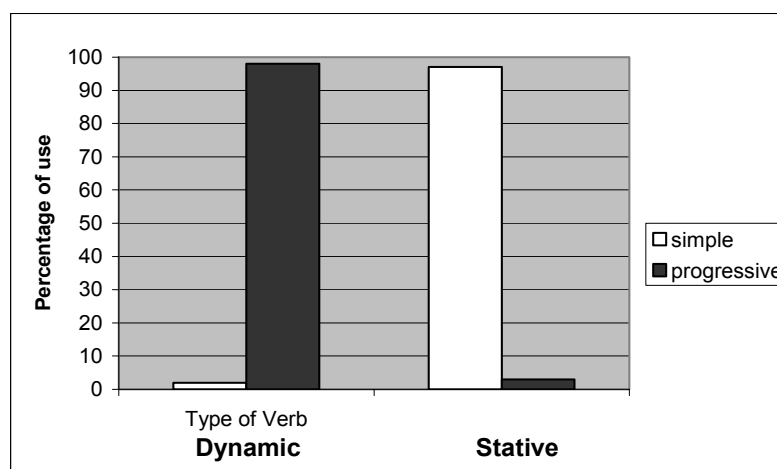


Figure 2: Group E speakers' percentage of use of the simple and the progressive form in utterances with present reference in relation to the type of verb.

Out of a total of 243 tokens of dynamic verbs, 238 appeared in the progressive (98%) and 5 in the simple form (2%). However, these five occurrences of the simple form were produced by a speaker interpreting the situation as a habitual sequence of activities rather than ongoing at the moment of speech. It is therefore not surprising that the speaker chooses the simple form to refer to what he interprets as the habitual, everyday activities of a family:

- (15) [At 7:30 PM][...] Mum comes home and picks out something to wear for dinner; [...] The kids are up now and enjoy playing with the dog [...].

However, the rest of the speakers used the progressive form to refer to this picture. As in example 16:

- (16) [At 7:30 PM] [...] Finally, after a long day, she's taking off her coat, she's throwing her stuff on the bed. The one girl is doing her homework, possibly, or writing something. The kids are playing with the dog again.

Finally, out of 32 occurrences of stative verbs, all but one appeared in the simple form (97%). The verb *to want* appears in the progressive on one occasion the data:

- (17) [...] so she's actually wanting to keep them separate from each other.

4.2 Fill-in-the-gap questionnaire

A fill-in-the-gap questionnaire was administered to all speakers with the exception of the speakers from Spain (S group). It has been claimed (e.g. Givón 1990: 63; Torres Cacoullos 2000: 18), that differences between oral and written registers in the frequency of progressive constructions may originate in functional differences between genres. For example, the higher *estar* + *-ndo* frequency might be a feature of informal, oral varieties. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out whether the speakers would produce more simple forms when confronted with a written questionnaire than in the recordings of oral production.

At the end of the recording session with each bilingual (LA;G1 and LA;G2) and monolingual (M) speaker, subjects were asked to complete the sentences in the questionnaire with the form that they considered "better", either the simple or the progressive. Speakers were allowed as much time as necessary to complete the task. In a total of eight small paragraphs corresponding to different situations, there were fourteen gaps. In order to divert the speakers' attention from the progressive vs. simple forms, five of the fourteen gaps concerned different syntactic or lexical questions irrelevant for the present study. The remaining nine gaps were designed to find out the speakers' choice between the simple and the progressive form. In three of these nine gaps, the progressive form would be unacceptable in Spanish but not in English (Solé and Solé 1977: 44; Butt and Benjamin 1994: 234-235; Bosque and Demonte 1999: 3402-3412):

- (18) *Le estamos enviando la aplicación que pidió.
to-you(FORMAL) are-we sending the application that requested-you(FORMAL).
'We are sending you the application form you requested'.
- (19) *Le estoy adjuntando los materiales que Ud. solicitó.
to-you(FORMAL) am-I enclosing the materials that you(FORMAL)requested-you
'I am enclosing the materials you have requested'.
- (20) *Estoy yendo a Chicago la próxima semana.
am-I going to Chicago the next week
'I am going to Chicago next week'.

The rest of the examples were utterances in which both the simple and the progressive forms would be acceptable in Spanish.

The results of this questionnaire are displayed in Table 2. The table shows the number of occurrences of progressive and simple forms for each group of speakers. These occurrences are separated into optional contexts (those in which there is optionality between the simple and the progressive) and obligatory contexts, in which the simple form is obligatory (as in 18-20):

| Form Speaker | OPTIONAL CONTEXTS | | | | *OBLIGATORY CONTEXTS | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------|-----|----------------|----|
| | Simple / Total | | Progres./ Total | | Simple / Total | | Progres./Total | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| M | 16/30 | 53 | 14/30 | 47 | 15/15 | 100 | 0/15 | 0 |
| LA;G1 | 22/36 | 61 | 14/36 | 39 | 17/18 | 94 | 1/18 | 6 |
| LA;G2 | 19/36 | 53 | 17/36 | 47 | 15/18 | 83 | 3/18 | 17 |

Table 2. M and LA speakers' use of the simple present and the progressive present in the fill-in-the-gap questionnaire.

* The use of the progressive form in these contexts resulted in unacceptable utterances in Spanish.

The results in table 2 show less difference between the M group and the LA group than in figure 1 above. This evidence confirms the expectation that the bilingual speakers would produce more simple forms when confronted with the written text than when producing oral utterances spontaneously. It is also interesting to notice in the results displayed in Table 2 that the bilingual groups (both LA;G1 and LA;G2) produced unacceptable utterances in Spanish by using the progressive form in contexts where the simple present was obligatory. It is also the case that the LA;G2 group produced more ungrammaticality than the LA;G1 group.

The progressive *estar + -ndo* was produced by one bilingual speaker from the group LA;G1 (as illustrated in 18). Similarly, the progressive was produced by four LA;G2 speakers: one as in illustrated in 19 and three as in 20. On the other hand, the monolingual speakers did not produce any progressive form in those contexts.

Finally, an English version of the same fill-in-the-gap questionnaire was administered to the monolingual speakers of English (E). Although it may be expected that the E speakers would not readily choose the simple present form, it seemed nevertheless pertinent to do this task in order to compare the results with those obtained from the written questionnaire of bilingual and monolingual speakers. It was furthermore relevant to do this test given that the simple present had been produced by one of the speakers in the description task.

The questionnaire was basically the same that had been used with the bilingual and monolingual speakers of Spanish except that it was given in English. In this case, out of nine small paragraphs there were seven gaps in which the simple present could not alternate with the progressive form to refer to an ongoing activity in the present moment:

(21) Who are you looking for? /*Who do you look for?

(22) What is he doing now? /*What does he do now?

However, the simple form was also possible in those utterances in which a habitual interpretation could be available:

(23) [...] The baby is growing up so fast! He's walking/ He walks already.

(24) I'm attending/ I attend evening classes at the community college.

In examples 23 and 24, the simple present form conveys the meaning of habituality, that is, something that happens everyday or on a regular basis. On the other hand, only the progressive form is grammatical when the context makes clear that the situation is in progress at the time (as in 21 and 22).

In addition, the simple present could not alternate with the present progressive when referring to future situations:

(25) I'm going/ *I go to Chicago next week.

In 25, all the speakers felt that the only possible alternation was between the progressive (i.e. I'm going) and the future tense (i.e. I'll go). However, the simple present was considered ungrammatical in these contexts.

The results of the fill-in-the gap questionnaire are given in table 3. The first column, labeled "optional contexts", includes utterances in which the simple present could be used with a habitual meaning (examples 23 and 24). By the term "obligatory contexts", we refer to those utterances in which the simple present could not be used either because the context requires an ongoing interpretation of the action (such as 21 and 22) or because the action is not in progress yet (such as 25).

| Speaker | Form | OPTIONAL CONTEXTS | | | | OBLIGATORY CONTEXTS | | | |
|---------|------|-------------------|------|-----------------|------|---------------------|---|----------------|-----|
| | | Simple / Total | | Progres./ Total | | Simple / Total | | Progres./Total | |
| | | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| E | | 1/8 | 12.5 | 7/8 | 87.5 | 0/28 | 0 | 28/28 | 100 |

Table 3: E speakers' use of simple and progressive present in the fill-in-the-gap questionnaire.

As expected, E speakers choose the progressive form as the correct option, regarding the simple present as ungrammatical in all instances with reference to action in progress. This evidence further supports the idea that the present progressive is by far the preferred form for English speakers to talk about ongoing action in the present. Furthermore, most speakers also choose the progressive constructions even for those utterances in which a habitual interpretation is possible and only one speaker produced the simple present form in this case:

(26) I attend evening college.

However, the rest of the speakers favored the progressive form even with a habitual interpretation (*i.e.*, I'm attending evening classes).

5. Discussion

The results obtained in this study of the use of the progressive form to refer to present activity suggest a clear trend toward a higher frequency of use of the progressive form at the expense of the simple form by bilingual speakers. The audio recorded data show that there is approximately a 30% increase of use of progressive forms in the LA;G2 (90%) group as compared to the control M group (61%). Chi-square analyses reveal that all contrasts are significant: χ^2 (2, N=1052)= 82.273, $p < .001$. The fill-in-the gap questionnaire shows that it is the LA;G2 bilinguals who are most likely to incur in ungrammaticality in Spanish by using the progressive form following English patterns. This method also shows that the native speakers of English favor the progressive form to denote meanings beyond the reference to ongoing activity, such as habitual or future action. Thus, LA;G2's use of the progressive constructions is the closest in terms of pragmatic functions to that of native English speakers.

The methodology, including the selection of speakers, minimizes the possibility that the differences observed in the results might be due to chance or other external factors such as the level of education, age or place of origin of the speakers. All the speakers have a similar level of high education: they have at least a college degree or equivalent. Furthermore, they belong to the same middle socioeconomic class, a factor that is very much related to the level of education of these speakers. Additionally, they have a similar age, most of them being between 30 and 40 years old. Finally, they have a similar place of origin in Mexico: most of them come from central states and there are no major dialectal differences in their varieties of Spanish.

A series of further tests were conducted in order to examine if the level of education was, as it has been assumed in this study, a major factor contributing to the choice of the simple or progressive present form. It has been claimed, that the frequency of a form may be interpreted as conveying social and stylistic information (Lavandera 1984: 41). Similarly, Torres Cacoullos (2000: 19) pointed out that the higher *estar + -ndo* token frequency might be a feature of more informal, oral varieties. However, the results obtained in the present study seem to point at the level of education as a major factor more than the level of formality. It is important to distinguish between these two factors because even if they are related they are nevertheless distinct. Indeed, a very educated speaker may use an informal register with his or her friends for example, but they may also use a very formal register when giving a conference or talking to their boss. The same situation also applies to less educated or uneducated speakers. Thus, the purpose of this further examination was to test the possibility that even in a very informal register, *estar + -ndo* would be less frequently used in educated varieties than in less educated varieties.

For this purpose, we recorded data from two monolingual speakers of Spanish who had not had any formal schooling beyond 12 years of age. The methodology employed was the same as in the first experiment, that is, description of pictures. Then, this data were compared to the data we had previously collected from two speakers of group M. The results are displayed in Figure 3 and Table 4. The figure shows a significant difference in the use of the simple present form to refer to ongoing activity. Chi-square tests were done to ensure the significance of the differences found in this test. These results were found to be significant at $\chi^2 (2, N=187) = 18.770, p < .001$. As expected, the speakers with lower education tend to use *estar + -ndo* forms much more frequently.

It is important to notice that the situation was very informal in all cases. The researcher knew the speakers personally and met with them individually in a familiar and casual setting. Therefore, the difference in use cannot be accounted for in terms of formal/informal registers, but rather in terms of levels of education.

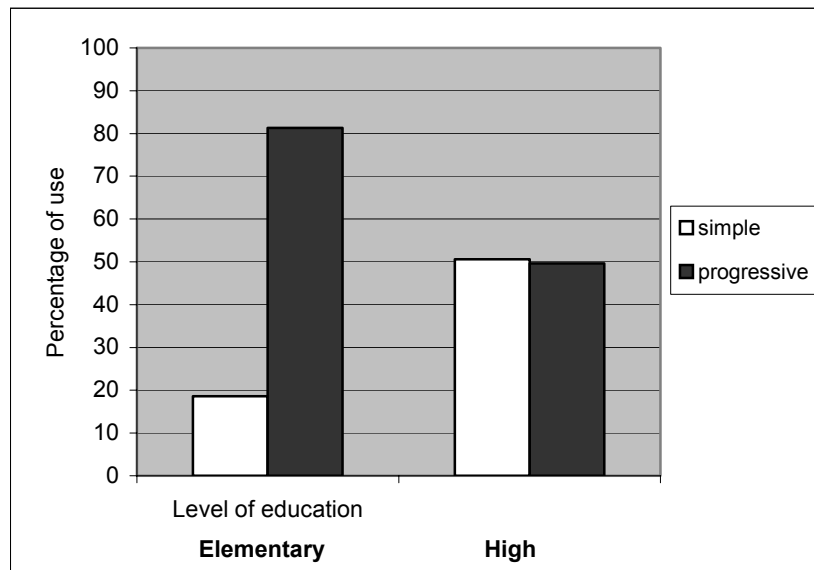


Figure 3: Simple and progressive forms by level of education of monolingual speakers of Mexican Spanish.

| Non-bilingual Mexican Speakers | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| Level of Education | Simple | | Progressive | |
| | No./ Total | % | No. / Total | % |
| Basic (elementary) | 13/70 | 18.6 | 57/70 | 81.4 |
| High (College degree) | 59/117 | 50.43 | 58/117 | 49.57 |

Table 4: Raw numbers and percentages of the use of simple and progressive forms by level of education of monolingual speakers.

These results support the notion that education and frequency of use of the progressive constructions are closely related. Furthermore, these results also justify the choice of speakers for the present paper since it proves the importance of having comparable sets of data. The results of this study would not be valid had we not taken into consideration the level of the education of the speakers so as to ensure a homogeneous sample.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have examined a linguistic change in progress in the system of the progressive constructions in Spanish. The hypothesis investigated is that in language-contact situations transfer may be expected to occur in constructions with a parallel morphology and similar –but not equal– conditions of use.

Some scholars consider that transfer may have occurred whenever the data show evidence of the extension or reduction of function of a form and/or the higher frequency of use of a form in a language A, in contexts where a partially corresponding form in language B is used either categorically or preferentially (Klein-Andreu 1986; Silva-Corvalán 1986). This paper provides evidence of these two phenomena in data from bilingual speakers of Los Angeles in their use of the progressive constructions.

The description of pictures aimed at examining the preference of use between the progressive form and the simple present in cases in which both forms could be possible in Spanish. However, the use of the simple present in these contexts is not possible in English, as the data from native English speakers shows (Figure 2). The results suggest that there is an increase of the progressive form to refer to ongoing activity in detriment of the simple present form (Figure 1 and Table 1). This evidence supports the hypothesis of simplification (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 6) and the idea of contact-induced convergence with English (Klein 1980).

The fill-in-the gap questionnaire shows that there is also an extension of meaning of a form, the progressive form in Spanish by the incorporation of some of the meanings of this form in English (see Tables 2 and 3). The fill-in-the gap questionnaire included both “optional” contexts, that is, contexts in which there is the possibility of using either the simple or the progressive form, and “obligatory” contexts or contexts in which the use of the progressive form is not allowed in Spanish. By using the progressive form to refer to future action, the bilingual speakers showed transfer by extension of meaning in the direction of English.

The results obtained in this paper agree with Klein (1980) in that both studies support the theory of transfer in the direction of English usage. However, the present paper differs substantially from Klein’s in various ways. First, unlike Klein, the claim of this paper is that there is transfer of pragmatic uses from English onto the Spanish system of present reference. The structure itself exists in both languages, therefore there is no incorporation of new syntactic structures. Furthermore, the conditions of use are similar in both languages. However, the research presented here indicates that there is a transfer of pragmatic functions leading to the two phenomena mentioned above: (a) an increase in the frequency of use of the progressive form to the detriment of the simple one; and (b) an extension of the semantic-pragmatic functions in Spanish according to the model of the functions of the progressive constructions in English. Second, this study differs also from Klein’s (1980) study and others (Torres Cacoullós 2000) as far as the research methodology and the selection of speakers are concerned. Rather than recording spontaneous conversations, this study carefully planned the elicitation methods in order to control the stimulus presented and obtain a set of comparable data. However, we also tried

to keep a relaxed, informal situation to obtain as close to natural data as possible. Furthermore, speakers were selected taking into consideration factors such as the level of education, the age group and the place of origin, which could have an effect on the use of the progressive construction. By controlling these extra-linguistic factors, we can be relatively certain that the differences found among the speaker groups are the consequence of different degrees of contact with English.

To conclude, it must be pointed out that although the number of speakers and data collected in this paper may be insufficient to establish wide generalizations, the results obtained from both the audio-recorded data and the written questionnaires suggest a clear trend toward a higher frequency of use of the progressive constructions at the expense of the simple form, thus supporting the theory of contact-induced transfer and the idea of gradual convergence of the two languages as far as the system of present reference is concerned. Nevertheless, the question of the permeability of a grammar to foreign influence is still a controversial issue and much more research remains to be done before arriving at any definite conclusion on the nature and the processes involved in the transfer of features between two or more languages in contact. The different linguistic disciplines concerned with the study of transfer and other similar linguistic phenomena can profit from more studies such as this, since the phenomena that arise in language-contact situations can shed light on the ways in which a human language is able to change and evolve in time and space.

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