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Dissertation Abstract

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First and Second-Language Patterns of Variation: Acquisition and Use of Simple Present and Present Progressive Forms in Spanish and English

This dissertation addresses the acquisition of the present progressive, and the variation of this form with the simple present, by English-speaking learners of Spanish in the US. Empirical research on the variation of these forms by native speakers (NS) of English and Spanish, and, in particular the acquisition of the present progressive by nonnative speakers (NNS) of Spanish is scarce. While seeking to fill this void in the literature, a second major contribution of this project is the extension of the analysis to the progressive constructions: *seguir*, *venir*, *ir*, and *andar* + V-ndo, which have received considerably less attention than the more frequent *estar* + V-ndo form, especially in the second-language (L2) variationist literature.

Relatively little is known about how English-speaking learners of Spanish deal with the differences between the uses of the simple present and present progressive forms in these two languages. At what level of proficiency do they begin to employ both forms, in similar contexts as NS of Spanish? Do they acquire the full range of progressive constructions, and sensitivity to the same linguistic predictors of use, found in NS grammars? The current study will empirically answer these questions through the use of film narrations, written contextualized questionnaires, and surveys of language-learning experiences, from 120 participants.

The current project aims to: (a) provide a detailed analysis of the distribution and use of simple present forms, and a range of progressive constructions, for NS and NNS of Spanish; (b) document task variation for the forms under investigation through multiple methods of data collection; (c) provide valuable data on L2 acquisition of the tense-aspect system in Spanish, which will have implications for theories of language learning; and lastly (d) inform sociolinguistic and syntactic theory through detailed empirical documentation of patterns of use of present progressive and simple present verb forms in both Spanish and English.