

Pushing the envelope: Looking beyond the variable context in Iberian Spanish futures

Jessi Elana Aaron
University of Florida

For at least 400 years, two constructions commonly associated with future temporal reference in Spanish, the Periphrastic Future (PF), in (1), and the Synthetic Future (SF), in (2), have been in variation (e.g. Fleischman 1982; Sedano 1994; Aaron 2006).

- (1) Yo **voy a confesar** aquí un secreto (COREC, CECON023A)
'I am going to confess (PF) a secret here'
- (2) Luego, sobre las nueve y media estaré en la reunión. (COREC, CPCON006A)
'Later, around nine-thirty I will be (SF) in the meeting'

While both constructions express futurity, the negotiation of their functions in discourse over the past 400 years has been mediated by their respective paths of grammaticization. In diachronic investigations of syntactic variation, it is in such cases of side-by-side yet not parallel paths of syntactic development that the problem of defining the variable context (Sankoff 1988) becomes particularly tricky. Torres Cacoullós (2001) proposes that the common element in a syntactic variable is not exact form-function correspondence, but rather a shared history; this panchronic space may include various related functions (Walker & Torres Cacoullós 2005).

However the variable context is eventually defined, it is standard variationist practice to exclude tokens outside this context from further quantitative analyses, as required for variable rule analysis (Poplack & Turpin 1999:160). In the case of Spanish futures, then, occurrences of the SF in non-future epistemic modal contexts (e.g., Bello (1984[1847]:216; Sedano 1994) as in the answering machine message in (3), which here make up 24% of all occurrences of SF in 20th-century speech, would generally not serve as a source of quantitative information.

- (3) Vale Ritchie, pues - hasta mañana entonces. ¿Dónde estarás golfo? (COREC, CPCON006A)
'Okay, Ritchie, well – until tomorrow then. Where could you be (SF), vagabond?'

While functions that lie outside the shared space of grammaticizing constructions in variation range from highly infrequent occurrences to vast and diverse territories, their role in variationist studies has yet to be adequately explored. I aim to begin a new discussion: do these excluded occurrences matter? What kinds of evidence might demonstrate their importance? How might their role be incorporated into variationist methodology?

While I will not aim to provide definitive answers, I will argue that quantitative analysis of frequently occurring contexts that fall *outside* the envelope of variation may provide valuable explanatory insight regarding diachronic shifts *within* the variable context. While the use of SF in epistemic contexts does not overlap with the PF, GoldVarb analyses of SF and PF variation in a 624,500-word corpus in four data sets (17th, 19th, and 20th-century written, and 20th-century oral), alongside a quantitative analysis of epistemic SF, reveal an intimate relationship. Beyond the relatively transparent parallel rise in frequency of PF and epistemic SF, further evidence for a connection between epistemic SF patterns and SF-PF variation is found in strengthening association of temporal SF with stative verbs, disassociation with first- and second-person

interrogatives, and an unprecedented rise of co-occurring non-specific temporal adverbials, at 20% in 20th-century written and 28% in oral data, compared to 10% in previous centuries.

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