

# Simplification and innovation in US Spanish

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## *Abstract*

*This article discusses two phenomena of linguistic change that are taking place in the Spanish spoken by the Mexican-American community of the United States. It tries to determine whether changes occurring in descriptive discourse, specifically in the opposition ser/estar, and in conditional discourse, specifically in the apodosis of the conditional sentences with present/future reference, occur as manifestations of simplification processes. It also tries to determine the role played by the contact language in these processes of linguistic changes. The data examined show that the acceleration of the two changes in the bilingual community has been the result of processes of linguistic simplification. This strategy, used by the speakers to reduce the cognitive load, has brought about the development of linguistic systems much simpler than the previous ones. The two resulting linguistic systems represent linguistic innovations because the previous systems only had the conservative forms. The present systems have at least two forms that are competing for the same semantic domain, but the innovative forms are very powerful and their imposition seems to be probable.*

## **1. Introduction**

Bilingual environments can be characterized as situations of language stress because speakers must use two different languages in a variety of contexts. Speakers create strategies to reduce the cognitive load and *simplification* is a phenomenon that appears naturally in situations of language stress as a mechanism to reduce the cognitive load. The process of linguistic simplification can be described in the following terms: '[It] involves the higher frequency in the use of a form X in context Y (i. e., generalization) at the expense of a form Z, usually in competition with and semantically closely related to X, where both X and Z existed in the

language prior to the start of simplification. Thus, X is an expanding form while Z is a *shrinking/contracting* form. If simplification reaches completion, its final outcome is reduction or loss of forms and elimination of alternatives, i. e., a *simplified* system with fewer forms and possibly, though not necessarily, loss of meanings'. (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 3).

In the following pages I will discuss two phenomena of linguistic change that are taking place in the Spanish spoken by the Mexican-American community of the United States. I will try to determine whether changes occurring in descriptive discourse, specifically in the opposition *ser/estar*, and in conditional discourse, specifically in the apodosis of the conditional sentences with present/future reference, occur as manifestations of simplification processes. At the same time, I will discuss the nature of the resultant structure: is the new system an innovation in relation to the previous stage of the language?

## 2. Innovative *estar*

The meaning of the Spanish verbal copula, in the context '+ adjective', consists of relating a quality expressed by the adjective to a subject. In the case of *ser*, this same relationship consists of the attribution of a quality that is shared by a group (*Pedro es grande* 'Pedro is tall'; he belongs to a group whose members share the same quality). With *estar*, on the other hand, the speaker assigns a quality to the subject as an individual (*Pedro está grande* 'Pedro is tall'; refers to Pedro having grown tall).

At present, there are some varieties of Spanish in which a usage of the *estar* form is found that does not fit within any traditional use of *estar*, but instead with the use of *ser*. This situation occurs when, in an '*estar* + adjective' context, the *estar* form expands its semantic domain toward the *ser* semantic domain. In (1):

- (1) G: ...*la que me gustó mucho fue esta ... , la de Rambo.*  
 'The movie I liked the best was that one ..., the Rambo one.'  
 M: ¿*Rambo?*  
 G: *Sí, está muy buena esa película.* (MICH 72/M/E)<sup>1</sup>  
 'Yes, that movie is (*estar*) very good.'

The speaker in this variety of Spanish chose *estar* where speakers of other varieties would choose *ser*, because the speaker is classifying within a category (good movies) a particular case, which is also not liable to change. In this case, therefore, an extension of the semantic domain of *estar* toward the *ser* semantic domain has taken place. The semantic change of *estar* consists of an extension of its meaning: the speaker asso-

ciates a new meaning (quality referring to a class) to the same form (*estar*). This situation shows that there is a linguistic change in progress where both the new and the old form coexist.

The innovative use of *estar* has been studied in communities that are in a linguistic contact situation. The speakers of these communities are of Mexican origin living in the United States. One important study was done by Silva-Corvalán (1986: 587–608). According to her work the innovative use of *estar* is progressive, because by examining the data throughout different generations of bilingual speakers in the city of Los Angeles a significant increase of this use appears. The fact that the new generations of bilingual speakers show the highest percentages of usage of innovative *estar* demonstrates that the innovation process is accelerated by the linguistic contact situation.

Balestra and Ayres undertook similar studies with data from the Mexican-American community of Houston, and they also found similar results (personal communication). Table 1 displays results from the studies mentioned that deal with data from Spanish–English bilingual communities:

Table 1. *Innovative 'estar' in two U. S. cities (percent)*

Houston	Los Angeles
22	34

Some examples from the studies of Balestra and Ayres are the following:

- (2) *Sí, está bonito, pero nada, quizás porque siempre yo he oído mencionar que California está hermoso para mí no ... o sea, la impresión que tuve de California, sí está bonito pero no una cosa, no sé ... (CLE/M/1)<sup>2</sup>*  
 ‘Yeah, it is beautiful, but ..., perhaps because I have always heard that California is (*estar*) beautiful for me no ... I mean, the impression I had of California, yeah, it is (*estar*) beautiful, but not that, I don’t know ...’
- (3) *Nomás andar por la playa, andando, porque el agua está tan azul. Muy bonito y mirar todo lo que tienen ahí, de flores, esos, palmas con cocos, con todo eso ... (IRM/M/3)*  
 ‘You only have to walk by the beach, because the water is (*estar*) so blue. It is very beautiful and looking at all they have there, flowers, those palm trees with coconuts, with all of that ...’

My goal in this section is to try to determine the role played by the contact language (English) in this change that is taking place in the

Spanish spoken by the Mexican-American community of Houston and Los Angeles. Is this a phenomenon that has originated because of the contact situation or has this situation accelerated a pre-existent phenomenon of change in progress only? I will examine data from a monolingual equivalent community with the purpose of finding an answer to this question.

### 2.1 *Methodology*

The research took place in the Mexican state of Michoacan, specifically in the city of Morelia. The results of this study are based on twenty-six hours of recorded conversations with the same number of speakers.

The following use of *estar* was considered an innovative one:

- (4) M: *¿Cómo crees tú que es los Estados Unidos?! Pues dicen que hay, que hay muchos árboles frutales, que hay muchos vegetales allá y ... no comen grasas, que están muy ..., que están muy altos allá ...* (MICH 73/F/E)

‘What do you think of the U.S.?! It is said that there are, that there are a lot of fruit trees, that there are a lot of vegetables there and ... they do not eat fat, that they are very ..., that they are (*estar*) very tall there ...’

According to the traditional distinction, the *ser* form is related to the class norm, and the *estar* form is related to the individual norm.

Nevertheless, one of the peculiarities of innovative *estar* is its ability to insert the subject of the sentence within a class norm, a role that has traditionally been played by the *ser* form. In (5) there is a context in which the *estar* form expresses class norm:

- (5) *... como el camión era muy grande tenía asiento de sobra, ... no, ... como el carro de mi hijo también está muy grande, ... tiene metro y medio más grande que todos ...* (MICH 61/M/C)

‘... since the bus was (*ser*) very big it had lots of seats ..., ... like my son’s car that is (*estar*) also very big, it has a meter and a half more than the others ...’

In (5), the subject *el carro de mi hijo* ‘my son’s car’ shares the same quality (*grande* ‘big’) with the first car mentioned by the speaker (*era muy grande* ‘it was very big’), and with all cars that have the same characteristic. Therefore, in (5) the speaker uses the *estar* form to express a class norm.

It is important to determine in which proportion the innovative copula has extended its function to signify a class norm, because it indicates the degree of penetration of the innovation into the domain of *ser*.

## 2.2 Results

The evidence that emerges from the linguistic data of Michoacan's Spanish points to the existence of a process of change in progress. This is similar to the process occurring in some varieties of Spanish that are in a contact situation with English, such as Houston and Los Angeles. It is, therefore, possible to hypothesize that in the monolingual community there are factors which favor the process of extension of *estar* (i. e., age), and others that favor the maintenance of the *ser/estar* opposition (i. e., reading practice, and the formal learning process).

Table 2. presents the general results of the use of 'ser and *estar* + adjective'.

Table 2. Percentages of innovative '*estar*'

	<i>ser</i>	<i>estar</i>	Total
Innovative use	—	16 percent/139	16 percent/139
Prescriptive use	84 percent/747	—	84 percent/747
Total	84 percent/747	16 percent/139	100 percent/866

Falk proposed the idea of 'semantic translation' to describe the fact that an adjective with *ser* translates its semantic meaning to another when the speaker uses the same one with *estar* (Falk 1979). Nevertheless, this is not what happens in the situation being discussed. When the *estar* form appears in a context '+ adjective', where the *ser* form is expected, the meaning of the adjective does not change: there is no semantic translation. The alternation between the forms in conflict can clearly be seen when the adjectives that appear with innovative *estar* are assembled in classes. This correlation is also very important when analyzing the tendency that the change process has followed and could follow in the future. Table 3 shows the percentages of innovative *estar* by type of adjective.

It would appear that an element of subjectivity in these adjectives prompts the appearance of *estar*. The meaning of these adjectives is related to the opinions of the speaker regarding persons, animals or things according to parameters that he/she establishes to make the qualification. Syntagms like *persona joven* 'young person,' *niña bonita* 'beautiful

Table 3. Innovative 'estar' by type of adjective in Michoacan, Houston, and L.A. (percent)

	Michoacan	Houston	Los Angeles
Descriptive	44	14	25
Age	43	57	79
Size	34	18	53
Physical App.	33	53	31
Evaluation	12	20	23
Moral	2	33	13
Social status	1	43	5
Perception	—	50	47
Color	—	33	11

girl', *prueba difícil* 'hard test', and *pueblo grande* 'big town' seem to carry a stronger commitment from the speaker, because he/she is establishing the parameters. On the other hand, syntagms like *carro rojo* 'red car', *persona católica* 'catholic person', and *niña huérfana* 'orphan girl' seem to be regulated by more universal parameters, because they are based on observations that have universal validity. Since the election of one or another linguistic form always involves a selection by the speaker from elements that are in opposition, it is possible that the user of the language designates the objectivity of the attributed quality to the subject of the sentence by the use of *ser*, and it is possible that he/she expresses the subjectivity of the quality attributed to the subject by the use of *estar*. The adjectives of physical appearance, size, evaluation, and age (*young*, *old*, etc.) are attributed to the subject of the sentence, taking on the parameters that the speaker establishes to qualify (as opposed to color, class, and quantity adjectives); this is an observation of a subjective nature and could be the reason why the contexts with these kinds of adjectives are a fertile field which favor the generalization of the innovative *estar*, and from there it extends to other contexts with other classes of adjectives.

The following are some examples of innovative *estar* with the different types of adjective:

- (6) M: *Cómo es esa películar ... eh, puros trailer o sea, pues mi papá antes traía un trailer y pues desde ahí me empezó a gustar ... decía ..., yo estaba hiquillo decía era que yo iba a ser trailerero ...* (MICH 72/M/E)

'How is that movie/ ... eh, only trailers I mean, my father used to drive a trailer and since then I started to like it ... I used to say..., I was (*estar*) young and I used to say that I was going to be a trailer driver ...'

- (7) *Eso es lo que me gusta a mí, que hablen bien, no porque hay uno que se van por otro lado, no, nunca me ha gustado la forma de, aquél tiene 29 años, el 29 y yo 22, me gana por 7 años ..., 7 años dice mi mamá, ¡ay!, está muy grande de edad; pero yo de niña pensé casarme con una gente de edad grande ...* (MICH 69/F/E)  
 ‘That is what I like, that they speak well, because there are some that go in different directions, I have never liked the way of ..., that one is 29 years old, he is 29 and I am 22, he is 7 years older ..., 7 years my mom says, ay!, he is (*estar*) too old; but I always wanted to marry an older person ...’
- (8) *... entonces pues afortunadamente, porque llegó el doctor muy a tiempo y me alcanzó a ..., a salvar, pero el mismo doctor le dijo a mi mamá ... que si 15 minutos más se tardaban en llamarlo no había podido no hacer nada, sí ... es que el niño estaba muy grande, ... casi 5 kilos pesaba...* (MICH 66/F/D)  
 ‘... so fortunately, because the doctor arrived just in time and he could save my life, but he told my mom ... that if she took 15 more minutes in calling him, he could not have done anything, yeah ..., because the baby was (*estar*) too big, ... he weighed almost 5 kilos ...’
- (9) *... y ahora vivimos allí en Prados Verdes en las casas de Infonavit, están chiquitas, pero están bonitas.* (MICH 72/M/E)  
 ‘... and now we live in Prados Verdes in the Infonavit houses, they are (*estar*) small, but they are (*estar*) pretty.’
- (10) *... realmente aquí en Morelia no fue mayor la cosa [el terremoto] ..., en el Distrito Federal sí dicen que estuvo fatal, estuvo fatal ...* (MICH 66/F/D)  
 ‘... actually here in Morelia it was not bad [the earthquake] ..., in the Federal District they said it was (*estar*) devastating, it was devastating ...’

There is a process of change in progress in which the innovative *estar* form has been incorporated in a significant proportion by some groups of the speaking community. The proportion of innovative *estar* is 16 percent, against a still powerful conservative form. It is possible that the diffusion process will continue and that innovative *estar* may conquer new contexts and may make itself stronger in the contexts already conquered. Although innovative *estar* is still disputing with *ser* in several areas, evidence from the Michoacan case points to a very significant movement in favor of innovation. *Estar* is extending its semantic domain to express class norm, the same meaning that *ser* contributes to the

context 'copula + adjective', it is not adding a new meaning to the construction.

Data from the bilingual communities of Houston and Los Angeles give further evidence in favor of the dissemination of the innovation. Innovative *estar* shows higher frequencies in the bilingual communities, which means that situations of language contact accelerate changes that have been originated in monolingual environments. The 16 percent of Michoacan has increased to 22 and 34 in Houston and Los Angeles respectively. And in comparing the types of adjectives that have been touched by innovative *estar*, one can see that in the monolingual community only descriptive, age, size, physical appearance, and evaluative adjectives appear with the innovative form. In the bilingual communities, however, not only do those adjectives appear with innovative *estar*, but also those that refer to moral characteristic, social status, perception, and color. The results indicate that the change is in a more advanced stage in the bilingual communities. The contact situation, therefore, has played an important role in the dissemination of the innovation through the different linguistic contexts.

The new system shows an innovation in relation to the previous stage of this opposition. A new form has appeared and is penetrating a domain previously occupied by the conservative form *ser*. If, in the future, innovative *estar* is the only form in the context 'copula + adjective' to express class norm, it will be the result of a process of linguistic simplification. Only one form will appear in a context that is being disputed by two forms. It is too early, however, to predict the final outcome of this process, which is taking place in a linguistic system that is not simpler than it was at the previous stage. At this moment, there are two forms, *ser* and *estar*, that are disputing a semantic domain, where one form used to appear (*ser*).

### **3. Conditional discourse**

Conditional discourse is found on the highest levels of complexity in the structure of the language. Conditional sentences present situations that have not occurred, although in some instances they might become real in some future time. Speakers need to relate diverse verbal forms to express the various degrees of probability. In Spanish we find the simple/compound conditional, imperfect subjunctive, indicative present, morphological/periphrastic future, indicative imperfect, pluperfect subjunctive, etc. The great variety of forms to select from is one of the problems that Spanish speakers encounter when trying to manifest situations of a real world by means of a subjective impression. Conditional discourse, therefore, will evidence variation among forms, and it will be a good candidate for the development of linguistic changes.

In this section I will discuss a process of linguistic change in progress that is taking place in the conditional sentences with present/future reference in the Spanish spoken in Houston by speakers of Mexican origin.

In discussing the linguistic change in this conditional domain, I will try to demonstrate that the notion of linguistic innovation can refer to linguistic forms that were used in the past in the same context. Although the resultant system in these conditional contexts constitutes a sort of partial reproduction of a system previously used in the development of the Spanish language, it is an innovative system in comparison to the system used by monolingual communities in our days, and also in comparison to a previous stage of the variety studied.

*Linguistic convergence*, a useful notion to explain the processes of growing similarities between two structures from different languages (Silva-Corvalán 1994: 4–5), will allow me to explain a process of growing similarities between two structures belonging to the same language.

### 3.1 Methodology

A preliminary analysis of data pertaining to 4 speakers from Michoacan, Mexico, establishes the verbal forms most used by monolingual speakers in the apodosis, the context under study. Since the simple conditional showed a frequency of 89 percent in the Michoacan group, it was considered the expected form, and the variation showed by the Houston bilingual group was determined in relation to this form.

Houston's data belong to speakers from three generational groups defined according to the number of years that they have been in contact with English.<sup>4</sup> The sample from Houston is composed of 18 speakers: 4 belong to the first generation, 7 to the second, and 7 to the third. With the 4 speakers from the monolingual group the complete sample examined was 22 speakers.

Tape-recorded conversations of one hour were carried out with each of the speakers on diverse subjects that allowed the presence of a variety of discourses. To elicit conditional discourse, the investigator made questions about hypothetical situations, in protasis shape, of the type *¿que harías ... si te sacarás la lotería, si fueras presidente de tu país, si pudieras cambiar algunas cosas de tu país, si tuvieras poderes extraordinarios, etc.?* ('What would you do ... if you won the lottery, if you were the president of your country, if you could change some things in your country, if you had extraordinary powers, etc.?').

### 3.2 Results

The apodosis is the context that shows more variation of forms in the data from the bilingual variety. In the monolingual variety of Michoa-

can, however, only the most frequent forms appeared: simple conditional and imperfect indicative. Table 4 illustrates the great variation found and a tendency that seems to favor an innovative form.

Table 4. *Given forms v/s expected forms percent (Gutiérrez 1996: 571)*

	Mich	Gen 1	Gen 2	Gen 3
Infinit.			9/( 5)	15/( 8)
Imp.Subj.		5/( 2)	28/(15)	50/(26)
Simp. Cond.	89/(32)	93/(37)	54/(29)	23/(12)
Pres. Indic.		2/( 1)		2/( 1)
Mor. Future			2/( 1)	
Per. Future				2/( 1)
Imp. Indic.	11/( 4)		7/( 4)	8/( 4)
Total	(36)	(40)	(54)	(52)

All four groups show simple conditional forms, the expected form, and imperfect indicative forms. Although the imperfect is accepted as an alternative in the oral language (RAE 1989: 468), the conditional is the form used most in the diverse varieties of the Spanish language. But the alternation between these two forms seems to be normal in many varieties of Spanish. Examples (11) and (12) illustrate the use of the imperfect indicative in the apodosis of these conditional sentences (examples 11–19 are taken from Gutiérrez 1996).

- (11) *Yo, si, si me sacara la lotería o algo, le daba algo al templo también.*  
(MICH/AL/M/0)

‘If I get the lottery or something, I would give (*daba*) something to the temple too ...’

- (12) – *Si tuvieras mucho dinero, ¿qué cosas harías?*

– *Un carro bueno ... no ... yo este ... yo metía mucho dinero en o, o, cómo se dice, organizaciones para los hispanos, para ayudarlos, yo metía mucho dinero en eso.* (VI/H/2)

– ‘If you have a lot of money, what would you do?’

– A good car ... no ... eh ... I would give (*metía*) a lot of money to ... Hispanic organizations, to help them, I would give (*metía*) a lot of money to them.’

But the most interesting result displayed by Table 4 is the decrease in the expected form through the generational continuum. The control group shows the normal variation mentioned between the conditional and the imperfect indicative. In the first generation in Houston the preference for

the conditional form is marked, although some signs appear regarding a new form that will compete with the traditional forms. In Gen 2 and Gen 3 the dispute has intensified with the growing frequency of the imperfect subjunctive and with the presence of the infinitive. The latter form shows an important frequency, because the infinitive is an acceptable and grammatical answer to a question in protasis shape. But it is a simpler form, and because of that, it is selected by speakers of Gen 2 and Gen 3, but not by monolinguals and Gen 1 speakers. Example (13) illustrates the use of the infinitive as an answer to a question posed by the investigator.

- (13) – *¿Qué pasaría si te sacarás la lotería?*  
 – *umm ... ¿La de Texas o cuál? La lotería umm I do not know, nunca lo he pensado, nunca he jugado o algo así probablemente, probably seguir con los estudios es lo que quiero hacer ahorita ... umm maybe viajar con el dinero, pero este ummm no, seguir con los estudios, guardar el dinero para lo que se necesite...* (AU/F/2)  
 ‘– What would happen if you would get the lottery?  
 – umm ... The Texas lottery? The lottery umm, I do not know, I have never thought about it, I have never gambled or anything like that, probably, I probably would continue (*seguir*) with my studies which is what I want to do that now ... umm maybe I would travel (*viajar*) with the money, but ... no, I would continue (*continuar*) with my studies, I would save (*guardar*) the money for whatever is needed...’

The most important phenomenon evidenced by Table 4 is, however, the great frequency that the imperfect subjunctive form is acquiring. It only reaches 5 percent in Gen 1, but it rises to 28 percent in Gen 2, while the conditional decreases from 93 percent to 54 percent. In Gen 3 the imperfect subjunctive rises even more to 50 percent while the conditional decreases to 23 percent. Examples (14)–(19) illustrate the penetration of the imperfect subjunctive in the apodosis of conditional sentences.

- (14) – *Y si ahora estuviera difícil la situación aquí, ¿qué harías tú?*  
 – *... yo me fuera pa’ México ...* (VI/H/2)  
 – ‘If the situation were now difficult here, what would you do?  
 – I would go (*fuera*) to Mexico ...’
- (15) – *¿Qué harías tú si tuvieras mucho dinero?*  
 – *... ¿si tuviera yo mucho dinero qué hiciera con el dinero o qué fuera mi decisión? ... umm, pos creo yo que ... ya ahora estoy más cerca de la iglesia, creo que yo ... umm ... usara mi tiempo para*

*ayudarle a la gente ... a la gente que necesitara, creo que yo me ofreciera de voluntaria en distintos lugares ... (EL/M/2)*

– ‘What would you do if you had a lot of money?’

– ... If I had a lot of money money what would I do (*hiciera*) with the money or what would be (*fuera*) my decision? ... umm, I think that ... now I am closer to the church, I think ... umm ... I would use (*usara*) my time to help the people ... to help the people in need, I think I would offer (*ofreciera*) myself as a volunteer in different places ...’

- (16) – *¿Qué harías si si algún día te encuentras un montón de dinero?*

– ... *Ni puedo comenzar a decir lo que haría ... se me hace que viajar ... un sueño que siempre ha tenido ...*

– *¿Y por donde viajarías?*

– ... *No sé si comenzara con las islas o con países grandes ... pues Europa ... Se me hace que comprara una casa para mi mamá y un barco grandísimo y una casa en México a mi papá ... (LY/M/2)*

– ‘What would you do if someday you find a lot of money

– ... I am not even able to start saying what I would do ... I think I would travel ... a dream that I have always had.

– And where would you travel?

– ... I don’t know if I would start (*comenzara*) with the islands or with the big countries ... well Europe ... I think I would buy (*comprara*) a house for my mother and a big ship [yacht] and a house in Mexico for my father ...’

- (17) ... *ah, la llevo [la hija] y como asisto a la escuela un día a la semana de su escuela de ellos, se me hace que si tuviera más que una no pudiera yo hacer todo eso como lo hago con ella ... (VIR/M/3)*

‘...ah, I take my daughter and because I attend the school one day a week, the school of theirs, I think that if I had more than one daughter I wouldn’t be (*no pudiera*) able to do all that the same way I do it with her ...’

- (18) ... *el miedo es que si fuera maestra de un nivel de grado más grande me dieran miedo, cómo son los jóvenes de hoy, you know, no les da miedo nada. (AU/M/3)*

‘... the fear is that if I were a teacher of a higher grade, they would (*dieran*) scare me, you know how young people in our days are, you know, they are not afraid of anything.’

- (19) – *Si te sacarás la lotería, ¿qué te gustaría hacer con el dinero?*

– *bueno ... con el dinero ... si es mucho, mucho dinero entonces me gustara a comprar otra casa muy grande ... (ES/M/3)*

- ‘– If you won the lottery, what would you like to do with the money?  
– Well ... with the money ... if it is a lot of money, then I would like (*gustara*) to buy another house, a very big house ...’

Although conditional forms have been used with regularity in the apodosis of conditional sentences almost from the twelfth to the thirteenth century on in the diverse varieties of the Spanish language (Lapesa 1981: 403), in the variety studied, characterized by its contact situation with English, the situation is completely different. These results give evidence, therefore, that situations of linguistic contact may reactivate and accelerate potential changes that appear unsystematically in monolingual varieties (Silva-Corvalán 1986; Gutiérrez 1992).

The presence of the imperfect subjunctive in the apodosis is not something new; classic writers alternated this form and the conditional in this context. (RAE 1989: 473)

RAE also recognizes its existence in Modern Spanish and says that there are no reasons to reject it. But RAE also says that it is not a natural form (‘it is an affected form’), that it is an archaic form, that it is only kept in colloquial Mexico Spanish and other varieties in Hispanic America: ‘... en la mayoría de los países hispánicos parecería hoy arcaico decir: *Si tuviera o tuviese diner, comprara una casa*: lo usual es *compraría*’ (RAE 1989: 473).<sup>4</sup>

The presence of this form has been noted in the Santander mountains, the Canary Islands and Puerto Rico. Alvarez Nazario (1972: 93) points out the following:

En Gran Canaria subsisten en el lenguaje popular y familiar, como en la Montaña santanderina, en la apódosis de las oraciones condicionales, restos del antiguo empleo de la forma de pretérito del subjuntivo en *-ra* en lugar de la de futuro hipotético en *-ría* usual en el español normativo del presente.<sup>5</sup>

Then he adds:

Igual uso se da con vigor en Puerto Rico entre personas de los diversos estratos de cultura lingüística y edad cronológica, por territorios del oeste y suroeste (Mayagüez, Las Marías, Cabo Rojo) y así mismo, por la zona sur, en Ponce.<sup>6</sup>

Serrano documents 6 (1.73 percent) imperfect subjunctive cases opposed to 339 of conditionals (98.26 percent) in the apodosis of the conditional sentences in the Spanish spoken in La Laguna, Tenerife (Serrano 1993).

DeMello documents the presence of the imperfect subjunctive instead of simple conditional in several varieties of Modern Spanish: Mexico City, Caracas, Havana, and Seville. However, the frequency of the form mentioned is very low (a total of 7 cases) in educated speakers. DeMello suggests the possibility that a study of data from speakers with less education in Mexico City will find a higher frequency, because in this data the simple conditional appears with a low frequency (DeMello 1993). Lope Blanch also points out that the simple conditional is competing with other forms, with the imperfect subjunctive among others, especially if the apodosis precedes the protasis (Lope Blanch 1991: 152). Herrera Lima, on the other hand, does not document a single case in which the imperfect subjunctive appears, and in a total of 99 documented apodosis only seven have a verb in the subjunctive mood (Herrera Lima 1998: 94–96).

Taking into account studies based on observations and quantitative studies, it can be said that the imperfect subjunctive replaces the simple conditional in several varieties of Spanish. It is clear, however, that this phenomenon has a very low frequency. There is no monolingual community that is experimenting with a tendency toward the imposition of the imperfect subjunctive over the simple conditional. The situation in the bilingual community is completely different. The tendency of the change seems very clear on observing the results from Table 4. It is probable, therefore, that the imperfect subjunctive, the innovative form, will continue to occupy spaces previously occupied by the simple conditional in the Mexican-American community of Houston, and that it will become the form *par excellence* to express the intention in conditional sentences. It is also probable that the infinitive will continue to appear in this context because of its simplicity, but it seems that the imperfect subjunctive is showing a strength that in the end will consolidate it in the apodosis of the conditional sentence.

The simplification process that is taking place in the opposition conditional/imperfect subjunctive seems to lead to a convergence between two structures that form part of the same superior structure, and the result seems to be the identity between the forms of protasis and apodosis. The presence of the imperfect subjunctive in the first component of the conditional sentence might help to impose the imperfect subjunctive in the second component. In this way a symmetry will be obtained: the same verbal ending *-ra*, a form that is not only part of the protasis of conditionals with present/future reference, but also part of the protasis and apodosis of the conditionals with past reference, due to the presence of the pluperfect subjunctive.

Since this is a phenomenon that occurs to some degree in several varieties of Spanish, especially among the less educated speakers of Mexico City, it can be said that its origin is not found in the variety of Spanish spoken in the United States. It probably came to this country with the different waves of immigrants. The data examined evidences the great vitality that this process has acquired at the point when the innovative form is about to impose itself. Therefore, the situation of linguistic contact has contributed to the development of the process: the linguistic change has been accelerated by the contact between the two languages.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Linguistic data examined from Spanish–English bilingual communities of Mexican origin in the United States and from the Spanish monolingual community of Michoacan have given evidence in favor of the existence of two processes of linguistic change in progress.

Innovative *estar* is penetrating domains previously occupied by the copula *ser*, a change that originated in the monolingual community but that is advancing at a faster rate in the bilingual communities. The imperfect subjunctive form is appearing in the apodosis of conditional sentences with present/future reference, a context in which only the simple conditional used to appear. That is another change originating in the monolingual environment, but which has accelerated in the variety that is in a contact situation with English.

The two resulting linguistic systems represent linguistic innovations because the previous systems only had the conservative forms. The present systems have at least two forms that are competing for the same semantic domain, but the innovative forms are very powerful and their imposition seems to be probable.

The acceleration of the two changes has been the result of processes of linguistic simplification. This strategy to reduce the cognitive load has brought about the development of linguistic systems much simpler than the previous ones. But only the course of time will provide us with the necessary information to determine the triumph of the innovative system. At the present stage of the dispute, in the two observed areas of Spanish grammar, both of the linguistic systems that are being used show great complexity.

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#### **Notes**

1. The information given at the end of the examples from Michoacan is related to the identification of the speakers according to the following order: tape number, sex, and age group. Examples from Michoacan are taken from Gutiérrez (1992).

2. The information given at the end of the examples from Houston is related to the identification of the speakers according to the following order: speaker, sex, and generation.
3. The first generation is composed by speakers born in Mexico who came to the U.S. after eleven years of age. Speakers who belong to the second generation were born in the U.S. or came to this country before six years of age; at least one of their parents belongs to the first generation. Third generation speakers were born in the U.S., their parents are of Mexican origin, and, by definition, they are part of the second generation.
4. '... in most Hispanic countries it would seem archaic to say: *If I had [tuviera] money, I would buy [comprara] a house: the usual is I would buy [compraria].*'
5. 'In the Gran Canaria, in popular and familiar language, and in the mountains of Santander, remains of the old form of the preterit subjunctive in *-ra* instead of the hypothetical future in *-ría*, usual in prescriptive modern Spanish, subsist in the apodosis of conditional sentences.'
6. 'The same usage appears with energy in Puerto Rico among persons of diverse strata of linguistic culture and age, in west and southwest territories (Mayagüez, Las Marías, Cabo Rojo), and in the south, in Ponce.'

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