



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

Spanish & Portuguese

31ST ANNUAL GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HISPANIC AND LUSO-BRAZILIAN LITERATURE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Assessing simplification in language contact through bilinguals' parallel structures: Variable Spanish subjunctive and English complementizer

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What is simplification, when may it occur in language contact, and does it especially affect discourse-pragmatic aspects? To tackle these questions, we assess parallel but differently variable structures across the languages in contact. Spanish and English main-and-complement clauses are analogous, but the locus of variation differs by language: choice of subjunctive over indicative in Spanish (variable subjunctive selection) vs. choice of complementizer presence over absence in English (variable complementizer presence).

Overall rate may be an equivocal measure of contact-induced change (here, contradicted by measures of subjunctive productivity). Instead, comparisons to assess simplification can rely on the linguistic conditioning of the variation, by including operationalizations of discourse-pragmatic factors (such as grammatical polarity for subjunctive selection and grammatical person for complementizer presence).

In a bilingual speech corpus from northern New Mexico, main-and-complement clauses—in bilinguals' Spanish and in the same bilinguals' English—independently align with their respective monolingual speech benchmarks. While it may characterize situations of transitory language contact, simplification need not arise in ongoing contact situations with active bilinguals who regularly use both languages. For candidate changes in progress, examined synchronically, the linguistic outcomes of contact are determined by *bilingual community practices*.

Keywords: variation, simplification, bilingual speech, Spanish subjunctive, English complementizer.

