Spanish Tense and Aspect from a Typological Perspective

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Based on cross-linguistic data discussed by Bybee (1985) and Dahl (1985), this paper presents a sketch of the tense and aspect markers of Spanish as they compare to those most commonly found in the languages of the world. Spanish has a very common type of tripartite system in which aspect is superordinate to tense, and past and present are distinguished only in the imperfective aspect. The special uses of preterite with stative predicates, especially the inchoative use, are paralleled in many other languages; in fact, some languages have taken the reinterpretation of their perfectives with statives much further than Spanish has. The other topic treated is the competition between the older synthetic future and the newer *ir a* future, two forms whose behavior can be predicted from a general theory of grammaticization (which studies the development of grammatical morphemes over time) and from the study of the direction which the development of future morphemes takes in other languages.

Some recent studies of tense and aspect have taken a cross-linguistic perspective and sought to compare the content and form of expression of these grammatical categories in unrelated languages (Comrie 1976; Comrie 1985; Bybee 1985; Dahl 1985; Bybee and Dahl 1989). Bybee (1985) and Dahl (1985) assume that the relevant level for comparison across languages is the semantic category itself—that is, the sense expressed by a marker of present, past, perfective, or imperfective—rather than some more abstract componential features which express the contrasts among categories within a specific language system. In fact, cross-linguistic comparison is very difficult, if not impossible, on the level of language-specific componential features. Rather, the search for similarities and differences among languages is more profitably conducted by considering the sense of a category as an atomic unit and studying its content through its distribution in various contexts.

Dahl (1985) reports on just such a study, an analysis of over 200 questionnaire sentences that were translated into sixty-four languages from around the world. By analyzing the distribution of grammatical markers in these sentences, he was able to find the similarities and differences among the uses and, thus, the meanings of these markers in the languages of his sample. Through his analysis he was able to formulate general definitions for certain commonly occurring cross-linguistic types (*gram-types*): perfective, imperfective, past, present (default), future, anterior (perfect), and progressive. (The definitions will be presented below.) After comparing the tense and

aspect meanings expressed in the languages of his sample, he hypothesized a most typical, or basic, inflectional tense/aspect system. I hope to show that the Spanish system fits this model precisely.

In addition, I compare Spanish with the languages included in two studies I have conducted: one, reported in Bybee 1985, studied the inflectional categories for verbs in a fifty-language sample, and the other, the Gramcats Project, studied all grammatical morphology associated with verbs (including auxiliaries, particles, and clitics) in a seventy-six–language sample (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994). In both studies, access to the languages was through reference grammars. Although I have used a different method than Dahl did, our results are very similar; that is, our independent analyses agree on the identity and definition of the most common tense and aspect categories across languages.

The two studies I have conducted also take a diachronic perspective on tense and aspect. In particular, my colleagues and I have been interested in the cross-linguistic similarities in the diachronic development of grammatical categories from lexical words or phrases. For instance, we have found in the study of morphemes expressing the notion of future in many different languages that there are three primary diachronic sources for future morphemes—verbs meaning 'want' or 'desire', verbs or phrases meaning 'be going to', and verbs or phrases signaling obligation, necessity, or predestination (Bybee and Pagliuca 1987). Further, we have hypothesized semantic paths of development for future morphemes which appear to be similar across languages (Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1991).

In this article I apply this cross-linguistic and diachronic perspective to certain facts about the inflectional tense and aspect system of Modern Spanish. Before proceeding to that discussion, however, I offer here a brief statement of the definitions of the tense and aspect categories to be discussed. For the most part, these definitions are standard in the recent literature, derived partly from Comrie's 1976 and 1985 works (and the literature upon which these are based) and partly from Dahl (1985). In the following definitions the word *situation* refers to the state, activity, or event described in the proposition of the clause in question.

>*Present:* The situation is in effect at the moment of speech.
>*Past:* The situation occurred before the moment of speech.
>*Future:* The situation will (or is predicted to) occur after the moment of speech.
>*Anterior:* The situation occurred before the moment of speech, but it is relevant at the moment of speech.
>*Perfective:* The situation is viewed as a bounded whole.
>*Imperfective:* The situation is not viewed as bounded but is rather viewed from an internal perspective, as continuously ongoing or habitually repeated.

My discussion is divided into two main parts. In the first I examine the interaction of the present and past with the perfective and imperfective, and the interaction of the perfective with stative predicates. In the second I discuss the relation of the periphrastic to the synthetic future.

INFLECTIONAL ASPECT

1. The Tripartite Tense/Aspect System

One of the major points made by Dahl (1985) is that the most common basic tense/aspect system in his sample is a tripartite system which contrasts a present, a past imperfective, and a perfective. Such a system is distinct from the derivational system found in Slavic languages, in which perfective and imperfective, being derivational categories, cross-classify with present and past tense completely, and a present perfective is possible, although with a future interpretation. In the tripartite system, as Dahl points out, the perfective is restricted to past time reference, and naturally so, because a situation that is being viewed as bounded cannot also be in effect at the moment of speech. There is a certain inherent asymmetry in such a system, since present and past tense are distinguished only in the imperfective aspect. Of course, this tripartite system is precisely the one found in Spanish (and in other Romance languages), inherited with only minor changes from Latin. The Spanish system corresponds to this cross-linguistic type in the following way:[1]

universal type:	present	past imperfective	perfective
Spanish:	Present	Imperfect	Preterite

The Gramcats database on seventy-six languages (chosen to be maximally unrelated genetically) does not show this tripartite system to be more common than some other possibilities, but this system is certainly one of the major types of languages with inflectional aspect. The Gramcats sample contains only one Italic language, Classical Latin, with the other instances of the tripartite system found in Africa (Kanakuru), Australia (Alawa, Alyawarra, and Maung), the Caucasus (Abkhaz), and Oceania (Tahitian). We can confidently state that it is widespread geographically.

2. The Hierarchical Organization of Tense and Aspect

It is often said of Spanish and other Romance languages that they distinguish aspect only in the past tense. However, Dahl (1985) argues that aspect is not subordinate to tense as this statement implies, but is superordinate, adding that the asymmetry should be phrased as the perfective being restricted to past tense. Thus the hierarchical organization of the tripartite system according to Dahl can be represented by the following diagram:
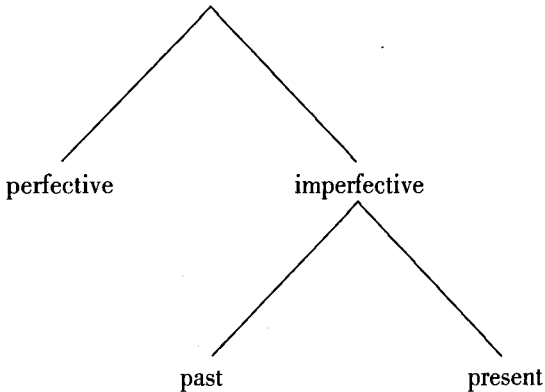
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              /\
             /  \
            /    \
           /      \
      perfective   imperfective
                     /\
                    /  \
                   /    \
                  /      \
               past      present
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Figure 1. The hierarchical relationship between tense and aspect in Spanish

There are two arguments for the hierarchical arrangement in Figure 1. First, it is not so much that aspect is not distinguished in the present (that is, aspect is not neutralized in the present); it is rather that the present is inherently imperfective. The uses to which a present tense can be put are illustrated by the following three examples: progressive—speaking of situations in progress, as in (1); habitual or generic—speaking of situations that are characteristic of an extended time that includes the present, as in (2); and present stative—an ongoing situation described by a stative predicate, as in (3). All of these uses are imperfective because all of them have their past counterpart in the past imperfective (the imperfect in languages such as Spanish).

(1) *El niño llora.*   'The child is crying.'
(2) *Estudio geografía.*   'I study geography.'
(3) *Juan sabe los nombres.* 'John knows the names.'

The major perfective use of the Present, the so-called historical present in narratives, is not a present tense at all (Silva-Corvalán 1983).

The second argument is a formal one. As Dahl points out for other Indo-European languages, there is no common marker for past tense, but there can often be a great formal similarity between the present and the past imperfective, typically because they are formed from the same stem. I would add that this is not a phenomenon restricted to Indo-European languages: other languages around the world, such as Burushaski and Classical Nahuatl, have stem changes corresponding to perfective versus imperfective stems, so that the present and the past imperfective use the same stem.

This situation is also present in Spanish where there is no single segmental marker of past tense and where the stem differences help to set apart the Preterite from the Present and Imperfect. In fact, the most radical stem changes found anywhere in the Spanish conjugational system are precisely those that correlate with this major aspectual distinction. As is typical in any language, the particular lexical items that manifest these stem changes are among the most common verbs in the language.

(6)

Infinitive	1s Preterite	
andar	*anduve*	'walk'
caber	*cupe*	'fit'
conducir	*conduje*	'conduct'
dar	*di*	'give'
decir	*dije*	'say', 'tell'
estar	*estuve*	'be'
haber	*hube*	'have'
hacer	*hice*	'make', 'do'
ir	*fui*	'go'
poder	*pude*	'be able'
poner	*puse*	'put', 'place'
querer	*quise*	'want'
saber	*supe*	'know'
ser	*fui*	'be'
tener	*tuve*	'have'
traer	*traje*	'bring'
venir	*vine*	'come'
ver	*vi*	'see'

The Imperfect and the Present forms have the same stem as the infinitive for all verbs except the two suppletive verbs, *ir* 'go' and *ser* 'be', whose Present forms are different. Thus for all but two Spanish verbs, the Present and Imperfect have the same stem, while for a significant handful (i.e., those in Example 4 above) the Preterite has a different stem. It is worth noting that the stem differences in the Preterite arose in a variety of ways and at different times in the history of these forms, and yet they demarcate the aspectual line very consistently.

One way in which Spanish might be said to differ from the more typical tripartite system is that it does have a suprasegmental marker of past tense that is consistent across the Preterite and Imperfect. As pointed out by Hooper (1976) and by Hooper and Terrell (1976), stress on the vowel immediately following the stem of the verb is a consistent indicator of past tense in both aspects and both moods.

(5)

Preterite 3s	*cantó*	cf. Present Indicative	*cánta*
Imperfect 3s	*cantába*	Present Subjunctive	*cánte*
Past Subjunctive 3s	*cantára*	Future	*cantaré*

3. The Semantic Relevance of Tense and Aspect

The superordinate position of aspect over tense indicated in Figure 1 may be predicted from the greater semantic relevance of aspect to the verb as compared to tense. In a previous work I defined *relevance* as the extent to which the semantic content of the grammatical marker affects the meaning of the lexical stem (Bybee 1985). Aspect has

greater relevance to the verb than tense because aspect affects the way the internal temporal contours of the situation are viewed, while tense takes the situation as a whole and places it in relative time without changing the perspective on the nature of the event described by the verb.

The significance of aspectual meaning should in principle always be examined in the context of the larger discourse. In narrative, as Hopper (1982) has argued, the perfective is used to report discrete events in the main story line, while the imperfective is used to give background information. Silva-Corvalán (1983) has demonstrated the validity of this distributional statement for Spanish narratives as well. The discourse functions of backgrounding and foregrounding have consequences for the semantic interpretation of the verb and its arguments in some cases, so that the choice of aspect affects the meaning of the verb stem itself. The following sentences, given out of context, show the types of implications that can be drawn from perfective versus imperfective sentences.

> (6) *Anoche Juan leyó un libro.*   'Last night John read (PRET) a book.'
> (7) *Anoche Juan leía un libro.*   'Last night John was reading (IMPF) a book.'

Since (6), using the perfective, would occur in the narrative portions of a discourse, telling "what happened," the implication is that Juan read a whole book last night. In contrast (7), using the imperfective, would occur in the backgrounded or orientation part of the discourse, so the implication is that Juan was reading a book when something else happened, and he may not necessarily have finished reading it.

Some consequences of the greater semantic relevance of aspect to the verb in various unrelated languages are the following: aspectual distinctions can be derivational but tense cannot be; aspect markers usually occur closer to the verb stem than tense markers when the two are separable; and aspect markers tend to have a greater morphophonemic effect on the stem than tense markers (Bybee 1985). The latter criterion applies to Spanish, as we have seen in (4). A further consequence is that even inflectional aspect can sometimes have a rather dramatic semantic effect on the verb's meaning, as evidenced in Spanish by the interaction of perfective meaning with stative predicates, a phenomenon I discuss in the next section.

4. The Meaning of the Preterite with Stative Predicates

An oft-noted peculiarity of the Spanish Preterite is that with stative predicates it can take on a variety of interpretations, including what appear to be opposite poles—a past terminative sense and a past inchoative sense (Bolinger 1963; Guitart 1978). The latter seems most surprising in light of the general meaning of Preterite. However, Spanish is not alone in allowing an inchoative interpretation of a perfective with statives; indeed, some languages have gone much further than Spanish in conventionalizing such interpretations of perfectives and even anteriors.

Since the perfective represents a situation as a bounded entity and is typically used to narrate past discrete events, the application of perfective meaning to stative predicates is intrinsically problematic. Different languages have arrived at different

solutions to the equation *perfective* + *stative* = ?. In some languages, perfective aspect simply does not apply to stative predicates (for instance, in Tojolabal [Mayan] and Chepang [Tibeto-Burman]). In other languages, the perfective applied to stative predicates gives a distinct inchoative (or inceptive) meaning (as in Spanish), while in still others the sense of the perfective with stative predicates is, surprisingly enough, one of present state. Let us examine the way the last two cases arise.

First, it is necessary to know something about the way in which inflectional perfectives develop diachronically. From languages all around the world we have evidence that perfectives arise from *anteriors* (also known as *perfects*), which are markers indicating a past event with relevance for the present moment. Anteriors themselves are formed from various source constructions, the most common of which are constructions using a verb meaning 'finish' (such as *acabar de*) or a main verb meaning 'come from' (such as French *venir de*) as well as constructions using stative auxiliaries, such as *ser* or *haber*, plus a past participle of the main verb.

Anteriors from verbs meaning 'finish' may be found in Bongu (northeast New Guinea), Lao (Kam-Tai), and Temne (Niger-Congo). An anterior from 'finish' which has developed into a perfective is found in Bantu languages such as Mwera. Anteriors from verbs meaning 'have' or 'be' plus a past participle are familiar from modern European languages, such as English and Spanish, but also occur in Buriat (Altaic) and Tigre (Semitic). Anteriors from this source have become perfectives in French, northern Italian, and Rumanian, and are in the process of becoming perfectives or simple pasts in German and Dutch.

Further evidence that anteriors become perfectives is found in the diachronic development of Spanish from Latin, since the Latin Perfect was used both for perfective and for anterior, but the Modern Spanish descendent of the Latin Perfect, the Preterite, is a perfective and no longer has anterior functions in most dialects.

In our data on the seventy-six languages of the Gramcats Project, we have found several cases where a marker of anterior or perfective, when combined with a stative predicate gives an inchoative reading, or signals 'entering into a state'. In Engenni and Island Carib, for instance, the anterior can give an inchoative reading with stative predicates.

Engenni (Kwa, Niger-Congo)
Inchoative
(8) *o menimeni ni*
     it be-sweet ANT
     'It has become sweet.'
(9) *adhe bhi ni o*
     day be-black ANT in-fact
     'It has got dark, you know.'
Anterior
(10) *o ta na te ni akie*
     he go to reach ANT town
     'He had reached the town.'

                                                      (Thomas 1978)

Island Carib
   Inchoative (the suffix *ha* is the anterior marker)
   (11) *saditina*   'I'm ill.'
        sadihadina   'I've become ill.'
        maraotu   'She is childless.'
        maraoharu   'She has become childless.'
   Anterior
   (12) *colóhadina*   'I have arrived.'

(Taylor 1956: 20,24)

Perfectives can also give inceptive readings with stative predicates in Trukese (Oceanic):

   Inchoative
   (13) *aa semmwen atewe*
        3s-perf sick fellow
        'That fellow has become sick.'

(Goodenough and Sugita 1980:xlix)

   Perfective
   (14) *ja a tëëti nee qqyn*
        3s perf descend to ground
        'She descended to the ground.'

(Dyen 1965:27)

This situation arises in these cases and in Spanish in much the same way, I suspect. Use of the anterior treats the situation described by the verb as a past event with current relevance; use of the perfective treats the situation as a past discrete event or, as Bolinger puts it (1963:133), describes "a segment of anteriority." In both cases the situation has to be viewed as an event, that is, as something that happened. Thus with verbs such as *saber, conocer,* and *tener,* a possible inference is that the subject entered into the state.

   (15) *Supe lo sucedido.*
        'I learned (came to know) what happened.' (Guitart 1978)
        Conocí a su hermano.
        'I met his brother.'
        Tuvimos miedo y nos echamos a correr.
        'We got scared and started to run.'

(Ricardo Maldonado, personal communication)

As Bolinger (1963) argues, in Spanish the inchoative reading of Preterite with stative verbs is the result of inference; it is not part of the inherent meaning of Preterite. Bolinger, as well as Terrell and Salgués (1979) and Guitart (1978), point out that the Preterite with stative predicates can signal the end of a state rather than the beginning, depending upon the verb and the discourse context. The thorough discussion by Guitart (1978) of the different interpretations of the Preterite with different classes of stative predicates, demonstrates that there is not one conventionalized implication for all Preterites with statives, but rather the interpretation varies by verb and by context. In the following example it is the termination of the state that is of interest, because

the sentence continues by telling us what happened next (Terrell and Salgués 1979:163):

> (16)   *Estuvimos allí tres horas y después fuimos al cine.*
>   'We were there three hours and then we went to the movies.'

Similarly, Bolinger (1963:131) argues that in the following example the first clause with a Preterite stative predicate is limited at its endpoint, not at its beginning:

> (17)   *Primero hizo sol y luego llovió.*
>   'First it was sunny and then it rained.'

Gili y Gaya (1961:158) offers the following as a non-inchoative example of Preterite with a stative predicate:

> (18)   *Supe latín.*
>   'I knew Latin (but I no longer know it).'

One process of change that has been discussed recently in the literature on grammaticization is the *conventionalization of implicature*, that is, the process by which what was originally a frequently available inference becomes part of the meaning of a grammatical form (Dahl 1985; Bybee 1988; Faltz 1989; Traugott and König 1991). While this apparently has not occurred in Spanish with the inchoative inference (which is available at times for stative predicates in the Preterite), it is certainly a possible development and one that has occurred in some languages. For instance, the Island Carib examples above are a case in point, especially in view of the developments that have taken place in the Island Carib Perfective. The Island Carib Perfective seems to have gone through a stage in which this aspect with stative predicates indicated inception, and this inference has become part of the meaning of the Perfective. A further inference is made from this past inchoative meaning, namely, that the subject is still in the state attained. Thus the Perfective of the stative predicates 'be hungry' and 'be red' in Island Carib have the following meanings:

> (19)   *lamaali*   'he is hungry'
>   *funaali*   'it has turned red' or 'it is ripe'
>   cf. *funatu* 'it is red'

This situation, in which the Perfective with a stative predicate actually indicates present state, is not uncommon among the languages of the world. It occurs in Slave (Athapaskan), Kanuri (Nilo-Saharan), Mwera (Bantu), Tahitian (Polynesian), and Nakanai (northeast New Guinea), to name a few examples from the random sample of Gramcats languages. Better known examples in Indo-European are the Perfect forms of the verb meaning 'to know', which have a present-tense interpretation in the Greek οἶδα, Sanskrit *véda*, and Gothic *wait* (Buck 1933:239), and the Germanic Preterite-Present verbs, such as Old English *witan* 'to know', *agan* 'to own', *cunnan* 'to know', *magan* 'to be able', *sculan* 'to be obliged', and so on.

It would appear, then, that the Spanish Preterite is not unusual for a perfective, and what appears to be a rather special set of uses of the Preterite is actually paralleled elsewhere in the world. However, Spanish has not gone as far as some languages in the incorporation of the inferential meanings into the basic meaning of the grammatical category.

■ THE TWO FUTURES OF SPANISH

The history of the Spanish synthetic future is well known, for it often serves as a text-book example of the process of grammaticization: lexical morphemes or phrases develop into grammatical morphemes and, in this case, actually give rise to new inflectional affixes. The development of a construction signaling destiny or obligation (as the Latin source construction did [Benveniste 1968]) is also attested in the languages of the world, although it is not as common as some other sources. Examples occur in English (*shall*) and other Germanic languages. Examples of auxiliaries of possession (such as *haber*), which probably had a sense of destiny or obligation, becoming futures occur in the eastern Kru languages and Ukrainian.

If grammatical morphemes can be viewed as having life cycles, the Spanish synthetic future must be regarded as an "old" future morpheme. It is well known that the periphrastic *ir a* future is replacing the synthetic future in spoken Spanish, especially among the less educated (Grimes 1967-68). Futures from verbs indicating movement toward a goal are quite frequent throughout the world. Besides English and French, in the following Gramcats-sample languages we find futures derived from a verb meaning 'go': Margi (Chadic), Cocama (Equatorial), Maung (Australian), Atchin (Oceanic), Abipon (Ge-Pano-Carib), Mano (Niger-Congo), Zuni (Penutian), and Nung (Tibeto-Burman). In addition to these eight, nine languages use a verb glossed as 'come' (Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1991).

It is also common for a language to have more than one future morpheme. Given that the grammaticization process is ongoing at all times, it is not surprising that new grammatical morphemes develop while older ones are still in use. In the Gramcats sample, thirty-one of the fifty-five languages that have future morphemes have more than one.

The various uses of future morphemes correlate to a large extent with the degree of grammaticization that they have undergone (Bybee and Pagliuca 1987; Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1991). Thus certain uses, such as the expression of intention, are characteristic of future morphemes in early stages of development, while others, such as the expression of epistemic meanings, are characteristic of futures that have undergone a long period of development. In this regard it is interesting to note the distribution of the Spanish synthetic future as the periphrastic one grows more frequent. While in many dialects the two futures still serve many of the same functions (Moreno de Alba 1977), such as the expression of intention and prediction, reports from all over the Spanish-speaking world indicate that the synthetic future is more and more associated with what might be termed *modal* functions. Consider the following examples from Moreno de Alba (1977) for Mexican Spanish (Examples 20, 24, 26, and 29) and from Silva-Corvalán and Terrell (1989) for Caribbean and Chilean Spanish (Example 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, and 28) as illustrative of the uses of futures:

> Intention
>
> (20)   *Tú cena y acuéstate; yo **hablaré** con él.*
>   'You eat and go to bed; I'll speak with him.'

(21) *Les voy a decir ahora que estoy aquí.*
'I'm going to tell them now that I'm here.'

Prediction

(22) *... y por eso queda y quedará siempre una profecía que no se realizará.*
'... and therefore it is and will remain always a prophecy that will never be fulfilled.'

(23) *La realidad es que todo el problema de urbanismo de Caracas parece que va a ser gravísimo.*
'The reality is that the whole problem of urbanism in Caracas is going to become very grave.'

General truth

(24) *La pedagogía, como ciencia de la educación, tendrá varias ramas.*
'Pedagogy, as the science of education, has various branches.'

(25) *Después que usted tenga el muchacho ocupado en el deporte, el muchacho no se le va a ir para otra cosa.*
'After you get a boy involved in sports, he's not going to go for other things.'

Supposition

(26) *Ya tú comprenderás cómo nos reímos.*
'Now you might understand how we laughed.'

(27) *Hará un año y medio pues.*
'It must be about a year and a half.'

(28) *No sé si será que ellos eran tímidos.*
'I don't know if it might be that they were shy.'

Concessive

(29) *Con palabras se podrán decir cosas muy hermosas ... pero muchas veces se tiene que llegar a la acción.*
'With words you might be able to say pretty things ... but many times one has to take some action.'

By comparing the uses of future forms from many different languages, each of these uses can be shown to occur in a relative sequence in the semantic development of future morphemes. We have presented evidence that the intention use of future morphemes is associated with the diachronically early stages of development of future morphemes (Bybee and Pagliuca 1987; Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1991). In particular, *go*-futures and futures from modal sources (desire and obligation) are used to express first-person intentions even before any of their more temporal uses develop. It appears that the more prototypical use of future, that of prediction about future time, develops from the intention use when that use is applied to a third person. That is, if we change Examples 20 and 21 so that they have third-person subjects for the future verb, then we find that from the statement of the third person's intention we can infer a prediction about his future action:

(30) *Tú cena y acuéstate; él hablará con ellos.*
(31) *Les va a decir ahora que estoy aquí.*

When this sense of prediction becomes conventionalized as part of the meaning of the construction, it can be used without any intention sense, as in Examples 24 and 25, where abstract nouns serve as the subjects of the future verb.

We argue in the two works cited above that the prototypical meaning of future is not simply reference to a time after the moment of speech, but rather "prediction"— the speaker's assertion that the situation will come to pass. The evidence for this is the fact that typical futures across languages fail to occur in certain adverbial clauses despite clear future-time reference. The following clause types, for example, take the future in neither Spanish nor English:

(32) *Pasará mucho tiempo antes de que puedas (*podrás) medir la importancia de esas fuerzas.*
      'It will take a long time before you can (?will be able to) judge the importance of these forces.'

(33) *Si llegas (*llegarás) a la verdad absoluta, será por pura casualidad.*
      'If you (*will) arrive at the absolute truth, it will be by pure chance.'

Here the content of the adverbial clause is not being predicted, that is, asserted to be true in the future.

We further argue that the general truth and the supposition sense derive from the prediction use: assertions of general truth are predictions that are not restricted to the future but are good for all time; suppositions are predictions about what will turn out to be true if more were known. For instance, if the phone rings, one can say *Será María* knowing that the prediction will be confirmed when the phone is answered. Since these are predictions about the present rather than the future, the resulting sense is one of probability: the speaker is asserting that the proposition is probably true. From here the future of supposition can move into questions and embedded questions that indicate uncertainty or supposition.

Gili Gaya (1961) argues that the concessive sense (as illustrated in Example 29) derives directly from the supposition sense in interactional contexts in which the speaker wants to concede to the opinion of the interlocutor while at the same time asserting something that might appear contrary, as in the following (Gili Gaya 1961:166):

(34) —*Fulano es un sabio.*
      —*Lo será; sin embargo, se ha equivocado algunas veces.*
      'Fulano is a wise man.'
      'He may be; nevertheless, he has been mistaken at times.'

While the supposition use indicates reservations about the truth of the proposition, the concessive use expresses reservations about unconditionally accepting the consequences of the truth of the proposition in view of the possibly contradictory assertion in the next clause. This hypothesized diachronic progression from supposition, which has a single clause in its scope, to concessive, which expresses a relation among clauses, is an example of the commonly occurring progression in grammaticization toward the expression of functions at the discourse or textual level and the expressive or speaker-attitude level (Traugott 1982).

Combining findings for other languages with the specific facts about Spanish, we find that the path of development for futures includes at least the stages indicated in Figure 2. This diagram also shows how the two futures of Spanish map onto the stages on this path. The solid line underscores the uses for which the synthetic or periphrastic future is the main exponent, and the dotted line underscores the uses for which the future in question is a possible, but not frequent, choice.
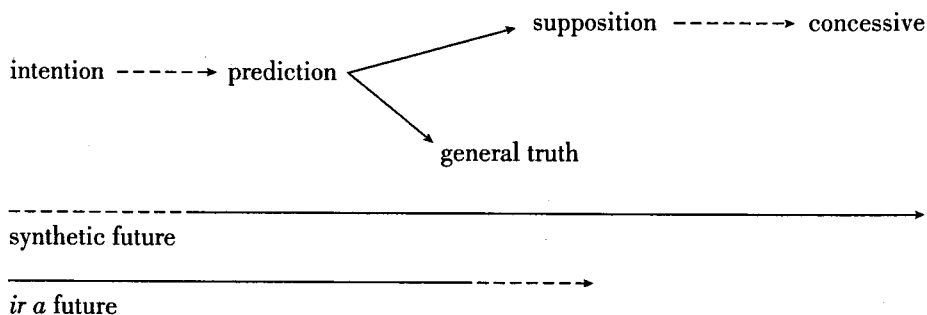

Figure 2. Progression of the synthetic future and the *ir a* future along the universal path of development for futures

The quantitative data that Figure 2 reflects is presented by Moreno de Alba (1977) for Mexican Spanish and Silva-Corvalán and Terrell (1989) for Caribbean and Chilean Spanish. In their data, intention and prediction uses (which are not distinguished) have the periphrastic future in 80% or more of the examples.[2] The general truth use in Moreno de Alba's data is more often expressed by the synthetic future (in twenty-three cases out of thirty), while similar counts for Silva-Corvalán and Terrell are not available. For supposition, the *ir a* periphrasis is simply not an option: Silva-Corvalán and Terrell report 100% synthetic futures in these uses, and Moreno de Alba reports twenty-five cases of the synthetic future and six cases of the *haber de +* infinitive periphrasis.

The distribution of the two futures, then, can be understood in terms of how far each one has progressed on this grammaticization path. The older synthetic future has undergone semantic developments that have allowed it to extend into uses that are no longer considered temporal, while the newer periphrastic future is taking over the early sections of the path, particularly those uses that are more associated with "future" meaning cross-linguistically.

My argument, then, is that the distribution of the two Spanish futures (and, indeed, any two coexisting futures) is in large measure predictable given their relative age and the universal path of development for future morphemes.

However, there is another possible explanation for part of the distributional picture, an explanation which is also compatible with all that is known about grammaticization. The supposition sense was hypothesized to have developed from the prediction sense, since this seems to occur in other languages with futures of various sources. For example, in English this sense may be obtained from either the *will*

future or the *go* future, as in *That'll be Mary now* or *That's gonna be Mary now*. But because the Spanish synthetic future comes from a construction originally used for obligation, it is possible that the supposition use developed even earlier, since obligation can give rise to a sense of supposition even in the absence of the prediction use. Thus *haber de* + infinitive can be used for supposition, just as *should* and *must* can in English (e.g., *John should be home by now*). I do not have information about when this use developed for the synthetic future. Even if this is the source of the supposition sense, it is still true that the reason the periphrastic future cannot be used in the supposition or concessive senses is because it has not progressed far enough in its semantic development.

We can predict the continued attrition of the synthetic future in the intention and prediction uses as the periphrastic future becomes more frequent. The resulting distribution of the synthetic future then is of considerable interest. Its most prominent use (in terms of text frequency) is in the epistemic sense of probability or supposition. It is also used in certain kinds of subordinate clauses, notably concessives, and increasingly in the complement to *no sé* (see Example 28). If the synthetic future survives at all, and if we were to look at its distribution with an objective eye, we might be inclined to call it a type of subjunctive or at least a kind of mood marker (Bybee 1985: Chapters 8&9). And we might watch its development for an increased use in subordinate clauses which are not asserted, but rather whose truth value is somewhat in doubt. In other words, the current and future distribution of the synthetic future in Spanish may give us some indication of the path along which subjunctives develop.

■ CONCLUSION

In this short discussion I hope to have shed some light on the core tense and aspect system of Spanish by comparing it with recent findings in cross-linguistic research. The major claims that I have made are that the perfective/imperfective distinction is hierarchically superordinate to the present/past distinction in Spanish; that the inceptive use of the Preterite with stative predicates is paralleled in other languages, although Spanish has not gone so far as some languages in conventionalizing the implications of this combination of meanings; and that the distribution of the uses of the two futures in Spanish is in part predictable from the cross-linguistically established diachronic path of development of future morphemes.

Notes

1. In the text I will follow Comrie's 1976 convention of writing universal meaning labels in all lower-case letters (perfective) and language-specific names of grammatical categories with an initial capital letter (Spanish Preterite).
2. If intention and prediction were distinguished in these counts, some differences in usage might emerge. In particular, on the basis of developments in other languages, we can predict a higher percentage of use of the periphrastic future for intention over prediction.

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The Future of the Future in Spanish Foreign Language Textbooks

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Prior to the advent of communicative language teaching for Spanish as a foreign language, beginning textbooks, in general, treated the periphrastic future (*ir* + *a* + infinitive) as a note. It has received second-class treatment even though there is sufficient evidence from language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and historical linguistics to suggest it is a natural form in conversation for expressing the future. With the shift toward communicative teaching, textbooks are beginning to organize language around the communicative needs of students and around functions and are introducing more natural language. An example is the elevation of the periphrastic future to greater importance.

INTRODUCTION

Before the spread of communicative language teaching in foreign languages in the United States, beginning students somehow discovered, despite the textbook focus on the inflected future tense, that the easiest way to talk about the future was to use *ir* + *a* + infinitive—the *periphrastic future.* It is convenient to speculate that students might have been influenced by their first languages, especially if the languages have a similar construction (such as *going to* + verb in English). However, when we examine this usage in more depth, evidence suggests that this form is also "natural" in conversation for even native speakers of Spanish. Some textbook writers, shifting toward more communicative teaching, have focused on the actual communication needs of the learner, organizing content around functions of the language rather than around structures. This shift has introduced the language that is needed for specific