

Past Time Reference and the Present Perfect in Argentinian Spanish

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Abstract. Cross-linguistically, the present perfect (PP) (e.g. *Siempre he vivido en Buenos Aires* ‘I’ve always lived in Buenos Aires’) expresses a number of canonical functions including result, continuity, current relevance and experience. In French, German and Peninsular Spanish, the PP has undergone anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization such that it is now used to encode past perfectivity and hodiernal past, while Latin American varieties are located at different stages of development. The Argentinian PP has been likened to the Mexican PP in its encoding of durative situations extending into the present. In this paper, I analyse 20 hours of casual conversation and socio-linguistic interviews and show that: (1) although low in overall frequency (10% [162/1559]), the Argentinian PP is favoured in experiential and indefinite past contexts (at 55% [89/162]); (2) the Argentinian PP does not continue into the present moment; and (3) the preterit is encroaching on the semantic spaces of the PP. My results also challenge the contention that Latin American Spanishes represent frozen stages of linguistic development akin to those of earlier Peninsular Spanish.

Keywords: present perfect, Spanish, grammaticalization, experience, indefiniteness

1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the use of the present perfect (PP) in contemporary Argentinian River Plate Spanish (ARPS).¹ The general consensus regarding the Argentinian PP has been that it resembles the Mexican PP in its encoding of durative and repetitive past situations including the speech time (e.g. Lope Blanch 1972:138; Harris 1982:50; Fleischman 1983:196; Schwenter 1994:79; Squartini & Bertinetto 2000:413; Howe 2006:115, 211).

I analyse the use of the PP (consisting of the auxiliary *haber* ‘have’ plus past participle form) (example 1) and the preterit (example 2).

(1) *Yo he ido a tu casa montones de veces.*
‘I have been to your place lots of times.’

(2) *Yo fui a tu casa anoche.*
‘I went to your place last night.’

I show that (1) the ARPS PP is favoured in experiential and indefinite past settings, (2) the PP is minimally used in continuative contexts and, when it is, it does not extend into the present moment, and (3) the preterit is encroaching on the semantic spaces of the PP. Moreover, I argue that the anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization process (i.e. the use of the PP to encode perfectivity) motivated by the PP’s use in hodiernal (‘today’) settings (Dahl 1984), and attested for Peninsular Spanish (e.g. Schwenter 1994), is unavailable in ARPS. Instead, the preterit is nearly categorical in hodiernal contexts (as well as in other PP settings, including result and continuity). I also question the widespread view that geographical proximity per se dictates patterns of language variation and change (cf. Muysken 2008). Specifically, I challenge the belief that Latin American Spanish varieties (e.g. ARPS) are located at similar stages of linguistic evolution and that they represent earlier phases of development

¹ Argentinian River Plate Spanish (ARPS) is the prestigious variety of Argentinian Spanish spoken in the coastal regions of the River Plate area in Argentina (cf. Lipski 1994:162).

akin to those of earlier Peninsular Spanish (cf. Kany 1970:199-200; Westmoreland 1988:381; Penny 2000:160).

2. Present perfect types

Cross-linguistically, the PP links some present state to a prior situation and is unique in viewing the situation in question from the perspective of the point of speech, or as relevant to the moment of speech (Comrie 1976:52; Bybee & Dahl 1989:67). The preterit, on the other hand, is canonically used to refer to bounded situations that occurred in the past and bear no temporal relation to the present. However, the relationship between the past situation and the present moment may vary depending on which function the PP is taken to encode. In fact, the PP has been described as performing a variety of cross-linguistic functions, including result, continuity, current relevance, experience, and hot news.² In this study, I focus on three main types; namely the continuative, current relevance and experiential PPs.

The continuative PP refers to a situation that began in the past and continues up until the present time. Continuatives occur in contexts that are aspectually durative or iterative (mostly atelic, or telic with iteration or relation to present made explicit) and mostly behave like a present tense (Brugger 1997:53 ff.). This is why various languages (such as French, German, Polish, Russian and Spanish) use the simple present, rather than the PP, to encode continuity (Klein & Vater 1998:219; Tommola 2000:447). Since continuative PPs establish an explicit relationship with the present moment, temporal adverbials (henceforth TAs) commonly accompany their predication (Winford 1993:147; Iatridou et al. 2001:196; Rothstein 2008:163). Proximate and frequency TAs such as *últimamente* ‘lately’ and *siempre* ‘always’ are common (Brugger 1997:62). A continuative use of the PP with the TA *en los últimos años* ‘in the last couple of years’ appears in (3). The TA has been underscored for illustration purposes.

² These are labeled “perfect of result”, “perfect of persistent situation”, “perfect of recent past” and “experiential perfect” in Comrie’s (1976:56) typology.

(3) *Porque mi vinculación al tema laboral en los últimos años ha sido con personas extranjeras.*

‘As my work experience in the last couple of years has been with foreigners.’

(SLI07MQ55)

The PP of recent past or current relevance is used where the temporal relevance of a specific situation is very close (e.g. in hodiernal ‘same day’ contexts). Current relevance PPs presuppose a temporal bound, i.e. a link between a recent situation and the moment of speech. In this respect, current relevance PPs resemble a tense, as they do not affect the temporal constituency of the situation. These forms emerge as a result of a generalization of meaning stemming from “current result” to “current relevance” (Bybee 1985:160). This generalization of meaning is found in the evolution of the resultative construction and its spread from telic to atelic verbs (Bybee 1985:160; Lindstedt 2000:368). In this respect, current relevance PPs oppose continuative PPs in that they display no Aktionsart restrictions and can thus occur with predicates of various lexical types. The clearest instances of current relevance PPs occur when the situation being described is temporally close to the moment of speech, since “recentness may be a sufficient condition for current relevance” (Comrie 1976:60).³ The TAs *ahora* ‘now’ and *recién* ‘just now’ usually co-occur with the currently relevant PP, as shown in (4).

(4) *Ahora han puesto blindex.*

‘Now they have put up glass panels.’

(FW08F7)

Current relevance and recency are connected to the so-called hodiernal PP (Dahl 1984) in that a recent situation is likely to take place within the ‘today’ of the interaction in question. Empirical support for the importance of recentness in hesternal (i.e. ‘yesterday’) and hodiernal temporal reference was found by Dahl (1984:112;

³ The notion of current relevance remains highly disputed as it is a subjective category, both for the language analyst and the language user (cf. Fleischman 1983: 200; Binnick 1991: 99; Klein 1992: 531; Squartini & Bertinetto 2000: 414).

2000:800) who showed that the replacement of the TA *yesterday* for *this morning* in his cross-linguistic “Perfect Questionnaire” disfavoured the preterit on behalf of the PP. Similarly, Schwenter (1994:88) indicates that speakers of Alicante Spanish (a Peninsular variety) favour the PP in combination with ‘today’ TAs, while the preterit is found in the presence of ‘pre-today’ TAs.

The experiential PP historically derives from the current relevance meaning (Lindstedt 2000:370) and refers to situations that have held at some indefinite point in time at least once during the time leading up to the present (Comrie 1976:58; Dahl 1985:143). Two features are crucial to this type of PP: indefiniteness and subjectivity. With respect to the former, experiential PPs are said to be predominantly temporal and to resemble past tenses in that linkage with the present tense is not a prerequisite (a feature that sets them apart from resultative, continuative, and current relevance PPs). Specifically, Brugger (1997:62) claims that, just like a past tense, the experiential PP can “refer to momentary states, express inchoative aspect (*Suddenly he knew the answer*) and focus on the internal stages of a situation” (italics in original). Experiential PPs can be formed with predicates of any Aktionsart (Iatridou et al. 2001:191) since they are unspecified for aspectual values (Brugger 1997:61).

In terms of adverbial modification, experiential PPs tend to co-occur with frequency TAs (e.g. ‘never’, ‘ever’, ‘sometimes’). Non-specific temporal modification is also common, since this type of PP resembles an indefinite past (Lindstedt 2000:370; 2006:271). Lindstedt explains that the experiential PP implies that the situation in question has occurred at least once in the period leading up to the present moment, signalling a past situation without mentioning a particular occasion. In the same vein, Dahl (1985:141) suggests that the experiential refers to “generic activity, state etc., rather than an individual or specific one”. In this respect, the experiential PP agrees with the suggestion advanced by Leech (2004:41) that the PP encodes indefinite past; or, in Dahl & Hedin’s (2000) proposal, “type-focusing event reference”. Dahl (1985) further points out that definite TAs (such as ‘yesterday’ and ‘this morning’) disfavour experiential usage.

In terms of subjectivity, because experiential PPs usually involve narration of one’s own or another’s personal (subjective) experience, the agent tends to be animate (Bybee et al. 1994:62). In fact, predicates including the experiential PP can often be

paraphrased as ‘I have had the experience of doing X’ (Iatridou et al. 2001:191). The experiential PP has also been reported as occurring more frequently in interrogative and negative polarity contexts (Dahl 1985:141, 143), as in (5).

- (5) *¿Vos has ido (a ese restaurante)?*
 ‘Have you been to that restaurant?’
 (FW08F19)

3. Perfect evolution in Romance

The cross-linguistic functions described above participate in the so-called anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994:§3). Regarding Romance, the different uses and stages of development of the PP in Latin-derived phyla have been described in detail by Harris (1982:49), who proposes four stages, summarized in Table 1.

Stage	Preterit	Present perfect	Current use
1	All past functions	Present states resulting from past situations	Calabrian, Sicilian
2	Most past situations	Durative/repetitive situations extending into the present time	Portuguese, some varieties of Latin American Spanish (e.g. Mexican Spanish)
3	Perfective situation without current relevance	Past situations with current relevance	Catalan, Peninsular Spanish
4	Restricted to formal registers; written language	All past situations	French, Northern Italian

Table 1. Evolution of past systems in Romance

(Adapted from Fleischman 1983:195; Engel & Ritz 2000:125)

The semantic complexity, general instability and “apparent ambiguity” of the PP (Binnick 1991:100) have motivated a number of changes. The most salient develop-

ment involves the gradual (unidirectional) diachronic semantic evolution from resultative (e.g. Latin), to anterior (e.g. Spanish), to perfective (standard spoken French, Northern Italian, standard Romanian).⁴ This process involves a gradual change from a resultative periphrasis to an anterior (Bybee et al. 1994:52). In the final stages of the proposed anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization the current relevance nuance attached to the PP is lost and the focus remains with the past action itself.

4. The Spanish present perfect

In contrast to Peninsular Spanish, most Latin American varieties show a preference for the preterit in contexts where Peninsular Spanish favours the PP (Westmoreland 1988; De Kock 1989; Penny 2000; Howe 2006; Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos 2008), as shown in Table 2. Note that the PP is most widely used in Spain (at 54% [956/1783]), while Mexico and Argentina show a much more modest PP usage at 15% (331/2234) and 10% (162/1559), respectively.

	SPAIN		MEXICO		ARGENTINA	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Preterit	46%	827	85%	1903	90%	1397
PP	54%	956	15%	331	10%	162
Total	100	1783	100	2234	100	1559

Table 2. Overall distribution of preterit/PP in Peninsular, Mexican and Argentinian Spanish⁵

⁴ The terms “perfect” and “anterior” are used synonymously in this paper. An anterior, as defined by Bybee et al. (1994), “signals that the situation occurs prior to the reference time and is relevant to the situation at reference time”. Note, however, that the present perfect is only one of the possible forms encoding anteriority.

⁵ Peninsular Spanish data from Marcos Marín (1992, as counted by Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos 2008), Mexican Spanish data from Lope Blanch (1971; 1976, as counted by Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos 2008) and Argentinian River Plate Spanish data from Rodríguez Louro (2009).

The Mexican PP has been linked to the expression of iteration and repetition typical of continuative contexts. Lope Blanch (1972) notes that in Mexico the PP is crucially not used to express recent past (e.g. *Llegó hace un momento* ‘(she/he/you) arrived a moment ago’) and that the meaning of the PP is not perfective but rather, continuative, in line with mediaeval and pre-Renaissance uses of this form (also see Company 2002). Similarly, Moreno de Alba (1978:57) argues that the main difference between the preterit and the PP in Mexico is essentially aspectual: situations viewed perfectly favour the preterit, while unfinished situations (or those “in progress”) are encoded through the PP. He offers two examples to illustrate these claims. In *Pedro estudió toda su vida* ‘Pedro studied all his life’ the use of the preterit indicates that Pedro has ceased to study and will never take it up again. On the other hand, the PP in *Pedro ha estudiado toda su vida* ‘Pedro has studied all his life’ implies that Pedro is currently studying and will continue to do so in the future.

Regarding Argentinian Spanish, it has generally been observed that the preterit occurs more often than the PP (Vidal de Battini 1966; Donni de Mirande 1967; Burgos 2004). Squartini & Bertinetto (2000:413) argue that in “Buenos Aires Spanish” the PP “denotes durative or iterative situations encompassing the Speech Time”.⁶ Similarly, Kubarth (1992) analyses oral interviews conducted in Buenos Aires and concludes that all finished actions in the past are expressed through the preterit and that the use of the PP is restricted to actions that continue up to the present moment (i.e. continuative uses). Overall, the general consensus among scholars thus far has been that ARPS is comparable to Mexican Spanish, with the PP appearing for the most part in resultative and continuative contexts (Howe 2006:76). However, my results suggest that ARPS PP usage differs substantially from other Latin American varieties, including Mexico.

⁶ Note that it is the River Plate variety that displays widespread use of the Preterit, while north-western Argentina employs the PP much more frequently and in line with other Andean varieties (Donni de Mirande 1992:655–670; De Granda 2003:203; Kempas 2008:255–268).

5. Data

PP and preterit tokens were extracted from approximately 20 hours of recorded and observed oral interaction in Argentina. All data were collected by the author between 2005 and 2008 in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas. The age range of participants was 17 to 80. Participants were randomly selected from middle-class areas in Buenos Aires and Mar del Plata (a coastal city south of Buenos Aires). A total of 30 speakers (13 men and 17 women aged 22 to 68) were recorded in casual conversation. The speakers were provided with a digital voice recorder and instructed to record their interaction for 10 to 20 minutes; no topics were provided in advance. Average conversation length was 14 minutes and 23 seconds.

In addition to the recorded conversations, relevant PP and preterit tokens were taken down as participant observation notes during my second fieldwork trip to Argentina in August-September 2008 (see Macaulay 2002:288 on participant observation). The observational data tokens were extracted from casual conversation amongst family and friends, from interactions close to the researcher and from TV programs, such as soccer games, prime time dance shows, soap operas and informal interviews. The sociolinguistic interview was carried out with 38 speakers (19 men and 19 women aged 23 to 77). The interview consisted of two sections: in the first section, participants were encouraged to talk about their family, place of residence, and educational background and were then asked to re-tell any experience they may have had living overseas or with foreigners visiting Argentina. The second section of the interview asked opinion-based questions on language use in Argentina. Some participants (N=22) were also asked to describe their day on the day of the interview (in line with Schwenter 1994; Howe 2006). To control for possible priming effects (cf. Szmrecsanyi 2006), all interviewer questions were carefully phrased not to include any PP or preterit forms.

6. The Argentinian present perfect

I analysed 162 PP and 1397 preterit tokens (N=1559). The PP represents 10% (162/1559) of the data, while the preterit appears in 90% of the occurrences (1397/1559). In what follows, I introduce a qualitative analysis of PP usage and exemplify with instances extracted from my corpus of spoken data.

6.1. *Experience and indefinite past*

Notwithstanding the prevalence of the preterit in the ARPS corpus, the PP is more frequent than the preterit in experiential contexts (at 55% [89/162]) – a finding contrary to previous claims that the ARPS PP is almost nonexistent in informal styles (e.g. Donni de Mirande 1977:46-49; Squartini & Bertinetto 2000:413). Two types of experiential PPs are evident in the corpora: those that indicate indefinite past and generic situation, and those encoding iterative and repetitive past.

Indefinite past and generic meanings are expressed through the experiential PP in a variety of contexts. Experiential PPs collocate readily with predicates such as *ver* ‘to see’ and *pasar* ‘to happen/to occur’, plural or indefinite direct objects and mass nouns like *gente* ‘people’, and quantifiers such as *tanto* ‘so much’, *mucho* ‘much’, *poco* ‘little’, *un montón* ‘a lot’, as shown in (6) through (10).

(6) Absence of definite past adverbials

a. *Carla lo ha visto al perro en el subte.*

‘Carla has seen the dog on the train.’

(FW08F36)

b. *Me he quedado en lo de Graciela.*

‘I have stayed at Graciela’s.’

(FW08F29)

(7) Presence of plural objects

a. *Yo he visto situaciones en las prácticas.*

‘I have seen situations in the hands-on tutorials.’

(FW08F80)

b. *Yo he tenido alumnos conocidos.*

‘I have had students that I knew from before.’

(FW08F112)

(8) Indefinite mass nouns (e.g. *gente* ‘people’)

a. *He conocido gente interesante.*

‘I have met interesting people.’

(FW08F112)

b. *He atendido personas que han venido del extranjero.*

‘I have seen customers who have come from overseas.’

(SLI07MO53)

(9) Quantifiers (e.g. *mucho* ‘a lot’).

a. *He viajado mucho pero en viajes de turismo.*

‘I have travelled much but as a tourist.’

(SLI08MP66)

b. *He llorado un montón.*

‘I have cried a lot.’

(FW08F117)

(10) First person subjects and experiencers

a. *He estado [mal] alguna vez.*

‘I have been [depressed] sometime.’

(CC07FC16)

b. *No he vivido en el exterior nunca.*

‘I have never lived overseas.’

(SLI07MJ51)

c. *Me ha ocurrido que no funciona la máquina.*

‘The credit card machine not working has happened to me.’

(FW08F124)

Note that the absence of specific TAs (e.g. *ayer* ‘yesterday’, *el 5 de octubre de 1992* ‘October 5th 1992’), the use of plural or indefinite direct objects and mass nouns like *gente* ‘people’, and quantifiers such as *tanto* ‘so much’, *mucho* ‘much’, *poco* ‘little’,

un montón ‘a lot’ all contribute to the indefinite character of the situation expressed via the PP. In this respect, the use of the ARPS experiential PP supports Leech’s (2004:41) characterization of this form as an encoder of indefinite past. This use also relates closely to Dahl & Hedin’s (2000:388) distinction between “token-focusing” reference (typical of the preterit) and “type-focusing” reference (applicable to the PP). According to these authors, while the preterit refers specifically to the number of events involved, the PP signals one or more occurrences of the event during a certain time period. The ARPS experiential PP encodes indefinite past and is essentially “type-focusing” in its reference to situations prior to the speech time, as it centres on the situation(s) having occurred at an indeterminate point in the past, rather than on identifying a specific token of occurrence. This type of reference also relates to Langacker’s (1991:56-57) observation that an instance (e.g. the cat) but not a type (e.g. a cat) “is thought of as having a particular location in the domain of instantiation”, and his view of type specification “as floating about unattached through the domain of instantiation, with the potential to be manifested anywhere within it”. Once this potential is realized, “an instance conception is obtained, when the specification is anchored at a particular spot”. The ARPS PP is preferred in experiential contexts to express indefinite and generic past. Langacker’s image of type specification as “floating around unattached”, with the potential to be instantiated at any time, supports the tendency for the ARPS PP to occur in contexts where temporal reference is unspecified – whereas a particular instantiation of the situation in question is encoded through the preterit, as exemplified in (11).

(11) *Yo te he atendido a vos. Te atendí.*

‘I have served you. I served you.’

(FW08F15)

In (11) the speaker starts off by saying *te he atendido* ‘I have served you’, where the PP’s type-focusing reference emphasizes the indefinite character of the ‘serving’ (and perhaps the speaker’s uncertainty as to when). The speaker then rephrases her utterance using the token-focusing referring form *te atendí* ‘I served you’, where the preterit expresses her assurance that she did in fact serve her interlocutor before. Type-focusing reference is also available through the use of frequency TAs such as *nunca* ‘never’ and *alguna vez* ‘sometime’ (example 10 a/b), which offer unspecific

information about the temporal location of the situation in question. Further type-focusing reference is possible via iterative phrases such as *un par de veces* ‘a couple of times’, *montones de veces* ‘lots of times’, *un montón* ‘a lot’ in combination with the PP, where the focus is not with the occurrence of a situation at a definite point in time or with the situation’s extension into the present, but rather with its many instantiations at temporally indeterminate points in the past (cf. Hernández 2004).

6.2. *The link-to-present problem*

As noted in section 4 above, the Argentinian PP has been described as occurring in continuative contexts where the PP “denotes durative or iterative situations encompassing the Speech Time” (Kubarth 1992; Squartini & Bertinetto 2000:413). Notwithstanding these observations, my data show that the preterit – rather than the PP – is pervasive in continuative contexts. Recall that, canonically, continuatives refer to a situation that began in the past and extends up until the present time. Proximate and frequency TAs such as *últimamente* ‘lately’ and *siempre* ‘always’ are common (Brugger 1997:62). However, continuative contexts feature a preponderance of preterit forms. For example, the preterit appears in 80% (28/35) of occurrences in the presence of the TA *siempre* ‘always’, as shown in examples (12) through (14). The TA *siempre* has been underscored to illustrate.

(12) *Yo me incliné siempre por decir castellano.*

‘I always had an inclination towards saying Castilian.’

(SLI07MJ51)

(13) *Siempre viví en Buenos Aires, desde que nací.*

‘I always lived in Buenos Aires, since I was born.’

(SLI07FG45)

(14) *Siempre fue un quilombo acá.*

‘It always was a mess here.’

(CC08MM29)

An important question concerning the ARPS PP is the degree to which the past situation is related to speech time. The following examples illustrate the lack of connec-

tion between the present moment and the past situation. Note the use of the simple present to establish the link between the past situation (encoded through the PP) and the present moment.

(15) *No lo ve [al padre] ahora, pero lo ha visto.*

‘She doesn’t see her father now, but she has seen him.’

(FW08F121)

(16) *¿Te ha costado crecer?*

Sí, y me sigue costando.

‘Has it been difficult growing up?’

Yes, it has and it still is.’

(CC07MS15/FC16)

(17) *Yo me he enamorado de tipos; me enamoro de tipos.*

‘I have fallen in love with guys; I do fall in love with guys.’

(CC07MS15)

As outlined in section 2, a hallmark of the continuative PP is its extension into the present to include the speech time. However, some uses of the PP in continuative contexts show a clear disconnection with the present moment, challenging previous descriptions of the PP as a relational form inclusive of speech time (Brugger 1997).

(18) *Este mes ha sido – y sigue siendo – agitado.*

‘This month has been – and still is – hectic.’

(FW08F105)

(19) *Lo he vivido y lo sigo viviendo a diario.*

‘I have lived it and I continue to live it daily.’

(FW09F125)

The use of the simple present periphrases (*sigue siendo* ‘and still is’ and *sigo viviendo* ‘I continue to live’) in examples (18) and (19) signals that the PP is exclusive of the present moment. That is, the simple present – introduced by the connector *y* ‘and’ – contributes the expected extension into present time. Note that, in (18), the

TA *este mes* ‘this month’ should ideally imply that the being difficult is a property of the month still ongoing at the time of speaking (see Dahl 1984:112). However, the speaker’s use of the simple present to establish the link-to-present indicates that this is not the case (see footnote 11). Similarly, in (19), the speaker’s contention that they have lived through a particular life situation should continue into the present insofar as the speaker is alive. However, the use of the periphrasis *sigo viviendo* ‘(I) continue to live’ shows that because the ARPS PP is a past-referring form, the connection to the present moment needs to be made explicit via the use of the simple present.⁷

The exclusion of the speech time in the continuative PP is a crucial difference between ARPS, Mexican and Peruvian Spanish (see Jara Yupanqui & Rodríguez Louro 2009).⁸ While the Mexican PP is a present-referring form, the ARPS PP is crucially

⁷ It has been suggested to me that the use of the simple present periphrases with *seguir* ‘to continue’ may be a pragmatic device used by ARPS speakers to emphasize – rather than establish – the connection of the past situation with the present moment. However, native speaker intuitions indicate otherwise. The view that the ARPS PP expresses past is supported by the following comments by ARPS speakers as a reaction to the naturalistic example *Este mes ha sido – y sigue siendo – complicado* ‘This month has been – and still is – hectic’. The example was posted on Facebook with a note prompting the author’s networks to comment on whether they would say such a thing (Rodríguez Louro in prep.). Examples (a) and (b) represent two sample views.

(a) *El pretérito perfecto (ha sido) se utiliza cuando la acción o cualquier otra cosa ya terminó, por consiguiente no puede seguir siendo.*

‘The PP is used when the action or any other thing [encoded by the verb] has finished, and as such cannot continue being.’ (Male, 33)

(b) *De movida síno suena mal. Si lo pienso, no. Si el mes ha sido complicado, el mes ya terminó. No sigue siendo nada.*

‘At first glance it doesn’t sound wrong. If I think about it, no [I wouldn’t say it]. If the month has been hectic, it has already finished. It doesn’t continue being anything.’ (Female, 40)

⁸ The following native speaker intuitions extracted from a discussion blog on English-Spanish translation (<http://www.english-spanishtranslator.org>) closely relate to claims about the continuity of the PP in Spanish. The explanations below were offered by a Peruvian (excerpt c) and an Argentinian (excerpt d) speaker to an English-speaking learner of Spanish grappling with the

past-referring. Moreover, whereas iteration and connection to the present moment are a crucial nuance of the continuative PP cross-linguistically, the ARPS continuative PP is losing its connection to the present. In fact, the erosion of the present connection required in canonical continuatives may explain why the preterit is a felicitous encoder of continuative functions in ARPS (see examples 12 to 14).

6.3. *The preterit in hodiernal contexts*

The anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization process (i.e. the use of the PP to encode perfectivity) motivated by the PP's use in hodiernal ('today') settings, and attested for Peninsular Spanish (e.g. Schwenter 1994), is unavailable in ARPS. Whereas Peninsular Spanish displays widespread use of the PP in past hodiernal settings (example 20), ARPS prefers the preterit in such contexts (example 21). Examples (20) and (21) show hodiernal accounts in response to the inquiry *Cuéntame tu día hoy* 'Tell me about your day today'.⁹

Spanish imperfect (although the comments excerpted focus on the preterit and the PP). These are offered in (c) and (d) below (the original spelling has been kept). Note that the Peruvian person's comment supports Jara Yupanqui's (2006:210) observation that TAs with present relevance favor the PP in Peruvian Spanish.

(c) I speak Peruvian Spanish. The sentence *este invierno hizo mucho frío* ['this winter it was very cold'] is not grammatically correct in my view. Firstly, *este* ['this'] denotes that we are at the tailend of winter, that we're still in it. Then *hizo* ['was', lit. "made"] is in the past simple [Preterit]. In my view, *hizo* ['was'] is the wrong tense, it should be *ha hecho* ['has been'], meaning we are still in winter, in the tailend of it, denoted by the word *este*, ['this'] and the action is coming from the past into the present. (Peruvian post 2007)

(d) I'm Argentinian, and (...) I would say *Este invierno hizo mucho frío* ['This winter was very cold'], if we're still in winter, as well as if we're not in winter anymore. (Argentinian post 2007)

⁹ Examples (20) and (21) were excerpted from an informal interview carried out with four Peninsular Spanish and one Argentinian Spanish speaker in Barcelona in 2008 (see Rodríguez Louro 2009).

- (20) *Pues me he levantado, me he despertado a las 9 menos cuarto. Me he levantado finalmente a las 9, he decidido levantarme. Me he metido en la ducha, he salido de la ducha, me he vestido. He desayunado un bowl de Kellogg's y 5, 6 uvas más o menos. Me he hecho un café, me he secado el pelo, me he tomado el café. [...] Bueno he cogido mis cosas, me he preparado la bolsa, he salido de casa, he cogido la bici antes de salir de casa. Y nada he bajado [...]. Y... [he] cogido la bici y he llegado a la clase. He llegado tarde, como siempre. Y nada, he disfrutado una apasionante clase sin descanso y aquí estoy tomando una cerveza.*

‘Well I have woken up, I have got up at quarter to 9. I have finally got up at 9, I have decided to get up. I have put myself into the shower, I have got dressed. I have had a bowl of Kellogg’s and about 5 or 6 grapes for breakfast. I have made myself a coffee, I have blow-dried my hair, I have had my coffee. [...] Well, I have picked up my stuff, I have prepared my bag, I have left the house, I have picked up the bike before leaving home. And not much, I have come downstairs [...]. And picked the bike and I have made it to class. I have got to class late, as usual. And I have enjoyed an inspiring class without a break and here I am, sipping a beer.’ (BCN08MR)

- (21) *Bueno, habíamos puesto el despertador a las 8 porque queríamos hacer la homework, nunca nos levantamos. La tuve que despertar a ella porque es peor que yo, “levantate, levántate, levántate” como 5 veces, así que... yo tipo 9 salí de la cama, nada, me lavé los dientes, me lavé la cara, me desperté fácil [...], desayunamos, vinimos para acá, y nada, y eso y empezamos la clase. Hoy no tuvimos corte pero a mí se me pasó más rápido porque hubo como más actividad. Y después te esperé a vos y acá estamos.*

‘Well, we had set the alarm at 8 because we wanted to do our homework but we did not make it. I had to wake her up because she is worse than me, “get up, get up, get up” like 5 times, so...at 9ish I got up, nothing, I brushed my teeth, I washed my face, I woke up easily [...], we had breakfast, we came here and yeah we started the class. Today we didn’t have a break but it went much faster for me because it’s like there was more activity. And then I waited for you and here we are.’ (BCN08FJ)

The ARPS preterit is nearly categorical (95% [21/22]) in the presence of the TA *hoy* ‘today’, as shown in (22) through (26).

(22) *Vinieron hoy.*

‘(They) came today.’

(CC06FG6)

(23) *¿Te comiste las tortitas hoy o estaban feas?*

‘Did you eat the pastries today or were they ugly?’

(FW08F39)

(24) *La vi cansada a María hoy.*

‘María seemed tired today.’

(FW08F70)

(25) *¿Qué hiciste hoy cuando saliste de acá?*

‘What did you do today when you left here?’

(CC07FC17)

(26) *Hoy me levanté tipo 10 de la mañana.*

‘Today I got up at 10 in the morning.’

(SLI08MC60)

The widespread use of the preterit in hodiernal settings shows that the ARPS PP is not following the anterior-to-perfective grammaticalization route via hodiernal contexts proposed for Peninsular Spanish (Schwenter 1994). In fact, the high overall frequency of the preterit in these settings indicates that the preterit is the preferred form to refer to same day past situations.

7. Discussion and conclusions

My results support Howe’s (2006) characterization of Argentinian Spanish as a “*pretérito*-favoring” dialect. In fact, the preterit is pervasive not only in expressing past perfectivity but also in contexts previously ascribed to the PP. A crucial exception to this trend is found in experiential contexts, where the PP features more readily. Two types of experiential PPs are identified: those that indicate indefinite past or

generic situation (as seen in a lack of specific temporal modification by TAs, un-specificity of temporal anchoring, and presence of plural and indefinite objects) (in line with Henderson 2008) and iterative and repetitive past situations (cf. Hernández 2004). The ARPS PP is mostly used in experiential contexts that refer to situations which may be repeated and are general in character. That is, it expresses “type-focusing” reference and, as such, tends to occur in the absence of TAs (in line with Dahl & Hedin 2000:388). Iteration and repetition in the experiential PP are available through the use of iterative phrases such as *un par de veces* ‘a couple of times’, *montones de veces* ‘lots of times’, *un montón* ‘a lot’, where the focus is not on the occurrence of a situation at a definite point in time or on the situation’s extension into the present but rather on its many instantiations at temporally indeterminate points in the past.

My results also indicate that the ARPS continuative PP is not inclusive of speech time since the simple present features in the PP’s vicinity to make the connection to speech time explicit. The inference that the continuative PP does not include the present moment is further confirmed in Henderson’s (2008:3-5) study of Chilean, Paraguayan and Uruguayan Spanish. Henderson claims that the PP does not include the present moment in these dialects, since relation to the here and now appears as external to the PP form itself (through the simple present).¹⁰ It thus seems reasonable to suggest that, while iteration and repetition remain central to the continuative PP in ARPS, this form’s canonical link to the present moment has been lost or is on its way to eventual extinction.¹¹ The erosion of the present connection required in canonical

¹⁰ Henderson (2008:3) offers the following examples (my translations): (i) *es algo que toda la vida me ha llamado la atención; y lo he hecho y lo hago y me encanta hacerlo* (CI, entrevista a Blanca) ‘it’s something that has caught my attention all my life; and I have done it and I do it and I love doing it’; (ii) *en el sistema educativo no existe actualmente y no ha existido desde que yo estoy en el colegio, una formación que le permita al joven simplemente decir no* (Py, entrevista a Julio) ‘in the educational system there doesn’t exist at present and there hasn’t existed since I am at school, a training that allows youngsters to simply say no’.

¹¹ Howe (2006:130) suggests that these may not be true continuatives but rather instances in which iteration of the past situation comes to the fore, while extension into present time is left out.

continuatives has the potential to explain why the preterit fits in the encoding of continuative meaning in ARPS. It is also interesting to note that, contrary to Dahl's (1984:112) findings for various languages – including Bengali (Indo-European), Kikuyu (Bantu), Quechua (Andean), Zulu (Bantu) and, most remarkably, Spanish – the presence of TAs such as *este mes* 'this month' does not motivate PP usage in ARPS. Conversely, the preterit is pervasive in a variety of canonical PP contexts, with the exclusion of experiential settings – as described above.

My findings provide evidence contrary to the near-mythical contention that Latin American Spanish is somewhat frozen in time, performing functions akin to those found in early Peninsular Spanish (cf. Kany 1970:199-200; Westmoreland 1988:381; Penny 2000:160). Instead, I have shown that both the PP and the preterit participate in dynamic processes of evolution and change. Specifically, I have argued that the ARPS PP encodes experience and indefinite/generic past while the preterit is encroaching on the semantic spaces previously dominated by the PP. Contrary to Peninsular Spanish, the development of past nuances in the ARPS PP stems from its use in indefinite past contexts (rather than in hodiernal settings), which strengthens its value as a past-referring form.

Finally, I have shown that geographical proximity per se does not determine patterns of language variation and change (cf. Muysken 2008). I have established that the ARPS PP is used differently to, e.g., Mexican and Peruvian Spanish, a position contrary to the claim that Latin American Spanish varieties are located at similar stages of linguistic evolution, representing earlier phases of development akin to those of earlier Peninsular Spanish (cf. Kany 1970:199-200; Westmoreland 1988:381; Penny 2000:160). Neither does geographical proximity account for linguistic variation within Argentina, since – as noted above – the River Plate variety displays widespread use of the preterit, while in north-western Argentina the PP is used much more frequently and in line with other Andean varieties, including Peruvian Spanish (Donni de Mirande 1992:655-670; De Granda 2003:203; Kempas 2008:255-268). The findings in this study confirm Rodríguez Louro & Howe's (2009) contention that it is by studying specific varieties of a language that dialectal differentiation and patterns of variation and change may best be understood.

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