

Incorporating English Verbs in the Spanish of South Texas

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Research on loan-verb accommodation has identified three primary patterns: direct insertion of bare verbs, e.g., push (Pfaff, 1979), morpho-phonological adaptation, e.g., pushear (Wilson & Dumont, 2015), and bilingual compound verbs (BCVs), e.g., hacer push (Balam, 2015). A recent study (Balam et al., 2020) showed that three English-Spanish bilingual communities varied on their verbal accommodation preference raising the question as to why communities with the same language pair differ. Adopting a sociolinguistic variationist approach (Labov, 1966), the current study examined the acceptability and preference between two distinct verbal borrowing strategies—morphological adaptations and BCVs—among 25 Spanish-English bilinguals within the border community of Brownsville, TX and addresses the following research questions: How do bilingual speakers of diverse backgrounds compare to one another in their acceptance and preference of these verbal borrowing strategies; Do Spanish heritage speakers (HS) differ from established Brownsville residents who immigrated from Mexico as adults; What role, if any, do internal factors (e.g. semantic domain) and external factors (e.g. language dominance) play in the acceptance of morphological adaptations and BCVs? To address these research questions, participants completed a modified two-alternative forced-choice acceptability task (2AFC), where they judged 20 almost-identical sentence pairs on a five-point Likert-type scale depending on the likelihood of saying (output) and hearing them (input). Results indicate that the likelihood of using and hearing adaptations were moderately positively correlated, $r(498) = .537, p < .001$. Statistically significant differences were found for language dominance as balanced HS reported significantly higher rates for the likelihood of using adaptations as compared to the other groups of participants at a $p < .05$ level. Additionally, Spanish-dominant HS rated the likelihood of saying adaptations to a slightly lower degree (though not statistically different) than even the immigrant NS, even though they admitted to hearing them in their community/input. These results not only support previous findings of negative dispositions toward adaptations in this community, but they also highlight the heterogeneity among Spanish speakers in the United States. Additional analyses showed that the acceptance rates for adaptations were statistically significantly higher when the loan verb had been attested in Spanish dictionaries ($M=3.13, SD=1.73$) over not attested, $t(498) = 3.042, p < .01$, however, this variable did not produce a significant effect for BCVs. A statistically significant preference was found for adaptations using non-technical verbs ($M=3.31, SD=1.73$) over technical verbs, $t(498) = -5.514, p < .001$, while BCVs were accepted at a significantly higher rate for technical ($M=3.56, SD = 1.53$) over non-technical verbs, $t(498) = 7.296, p < .001$. Lastly, results indicate that males ($M=3.23, SD= 1.73$) accepted adaptations to a greater extent than females, $t(498) = 4.566, p < .001$, but no gender effect was found for BCVs.

References

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