

In Pousada & Poplack, 1982; Torres, 1997; and Zentella, 1997 the range of Spanish verb tenses was documented in the Spanish of Puerto Ricans in New York City (NYC) and in a suburb of NYC. They suggest that the New York bilinguals approximate the TMA system of the first generation bilinguals and they maintain that the speakers employ the verb tenses appropriately corresponding to their narrative component (Torres, 1997). Torres (1997) and Pousada & Poplack (1982) also reported that speakers favor the present, preterit, and imperfect indicative. In particular, both these studies claim that speakers approximate the standard spoken in Puerto Rico with regard to verb's tense and aspect. While Spanish verb tenses have been documented as such in NY bilingual residents, Schiffrin (1981) has reported on a tendency of speakers to produce a clustering of verb tenses in narrative segments and has also reported on the tendency of the past and historical past tenses to appear more frequently when the previous verb has a similar tense. Silva-Corvalán (1983) has also noted that the use of verb tenses is delimited by the segment of the narrative being recounted.

If such limits do exist on time reference and, if such clusters appear, then it is my hypothesis that a better account of the uses of verb tenses by bilingual speakers can be obtained if long stretches of oral discourse are examined and if narrative segments are cross-referenced with these tenses. If a lower usage of the verb tense is found, it would not be considered attrition or lack of use of a given verb tense. Rather, low frequencies in verb tense usage will be found to correlate to an identifiable segment of the narrative following Labov and Waletzky's (1967) narrative analysis. Furthermore, tense usage will be conditioned by narrative style.

This paper reports on findings with regard to the uses of the Spanish verb tenses and their distribution in narrative segments and foreground and background information. It also presents findings regarding the type of narrative, a conflict narrative style, and its effect on the use of the tenses: present and preterit. The paper presents data on New York City Puerto Ricans (30) who have been exposed to English and it compares findings with those documented by Pousada and Poplack's (1982) seminal study "No case for convergence".

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