

The Use of the Verbs “*Ver*” (to see) and “*Mirar*” (to look) by Heritage Speakers in Monterey County

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Outline

- Objective of the study
- Definition of heritage speaker
- Focus of study: “ver” (to see) and “mirar” (to look)
- Previous studies
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Objectives of the study

- To analyze the way in which heritage speakers in Monterey County use “ver” (to see) and “mirar” (to look) and to compare them to heritage speakers in other communities.
- This study is part of a comprehensive investigation of the Spanish spoken in the Hispanic community in Monterey County. This community has not been studied.



What is a heritage speaker?

- “A student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken [e.g., Spanish], who speaks or merely understands the heritage language [e.g., Spanish], and who is to some degree bilingual in English, and the heritage language.” (Valdés, 2000, p. 1)



“Ver” (to see) and “mirar” (to look)

- In Spanish, these two verbs are used to express visual perception.
- **Ver (to see):**
 - It can express a voluntary activity: “Estoy viendo la casa.”
 - It can also describe involuntary perception: “Iba caminando y vi un accidente.”
 - In the pronominal form, **verse**, it describes a perceived state/emotion: “Carla se ve enferma.”

(Horno Chéliz, M. C. 2002-2004; Rothstein, 2004)



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“Ver” (to see) and “mirar” (to look)

- **Mirar (to look):**

- It expresses a voluntary activity: “Estoy mirando televisión.”
- In the pronominal form, **mirarse**, it is only a reflexive or reciprocal verb:

“Me estoy mirando en el espejo.” (reflexive verb)

“Carlos y María se miran con amor.” (reciprocal verb)

- Unlike “ver”, “mirar” **cannot** be used to describe involuntary perception: ***Iba caminando y miré un accidente.** Nor can it be used, in the pronominal form, “mirarse”, to describe perceived involuntary states: ***Carla se mira enferma.**”

(Horno Chéliz, M. C. 2002-2004; Rothstein, 2004)



Previous studies

- To the best of my knowledge, there is only one study that has investigated “ver” and “mirar” and heritage speakers, Alfaraz, 2008:
- Participants: 69 heritage speakers in Michigan.
- Instruments: A questionnaire with 60 sentences was used in the study, and participants had to choose between “ver/verse” and “mirar/mirarse” to express voluntary activity, involuntary perception, and involuntary states.
- Results: Preference for “mirar/mirarse” instead of “ver/verse” to express involuntary perception and involuntary states [this goes against the rules of standard Spanish.]



Research questions

1. When do heritage speakers from Monterey County use the verbs “ver/verse” and “mirar/mirarse”?
2. Does their use of the verbs “ver/verse” and “mirar/mirarse” reflect the rules of standard Spanish?
3. Are there any differences between the uses of the verbs “ver/verse” and “mirar/mirarse” in Monterey County and other populations of heritage speakers in the United States?



The present study: Participants

- 22 CSUMB students; average age: 21 years old
- 21 participants born in the United States, and only 1 in Mexico (age of arrival: 2 years old)
- All the participants were exposed to Spanish since birth, both at home and in the community (e.g., all of them reported having Spanish-speaking friends).
- Most of the participants come from monolingual Spanish-speaking households, but all of them received their formal education in English.
- High proficiency in both English and Spanish.



Instruments and data collection

The data for this study was collected with:

- An online (Internet) biographical and linguistic questionnaire;
- Participants told the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* in Spanish guided by 16 colorful and detailed pictures depicting the story.
- The participants' narrations of the story were recorded and later transcribed by a research assistant.



Example of images



Analysis and results

- The transcriptions of the participants' narratives were analyzed by the main researcher and his advisor to ensure reliability.
- The results show participants' preference for “mirar/mirarse” over “ver/verse”, like the participants in Alfaraz's (2008) study, to express involuntary perception and involuntary perceived states.
- What follows is a detailed analysis of the findings in this study.

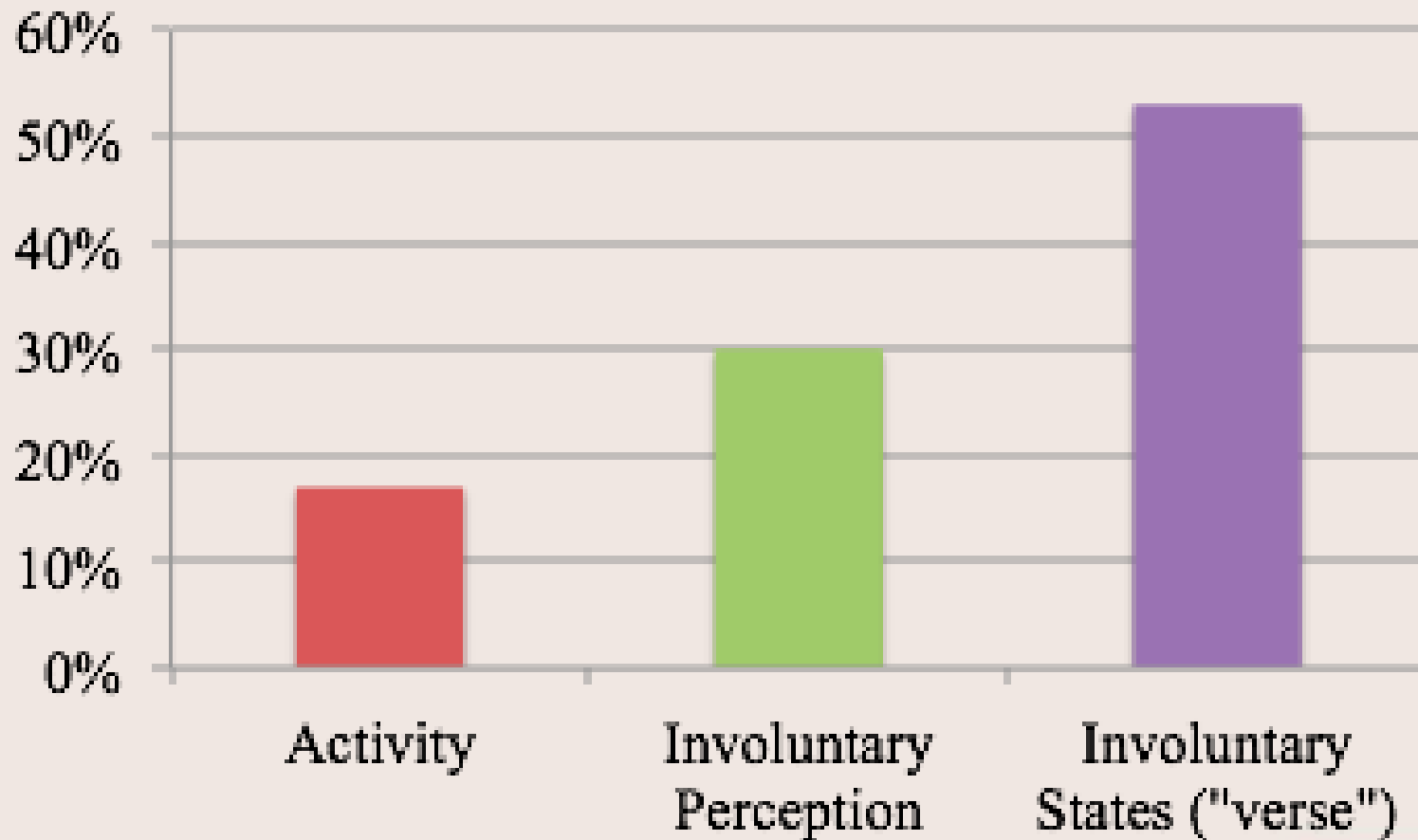


Results: “Ver/Verse”

- 47 instances; all of them reflected the rules of standard Spanish (i.e., they were all correct):
 - 8 instances to express activity (17%)
 - 14 instances to express involuntary perception (30%)
 - 25 instances to express perceived involuntary perceived states (53%)



Results: “Ver/Verse”



Results: “mirar/mirarse”

70 instances of “mirar/mirarse”: **14% correct; 86% incorrect**

- 10 correct instances of “mirar” to express activity.

Example: “**Y la niña se sienta y está mirando una mariposa en las flores.**”

- 60 instances of “mirar/mirarse” that do not reflect the rules of standard Spanish (incorrect).

- 46 instances of “mirarse” to express involuntary perceived states (77%)

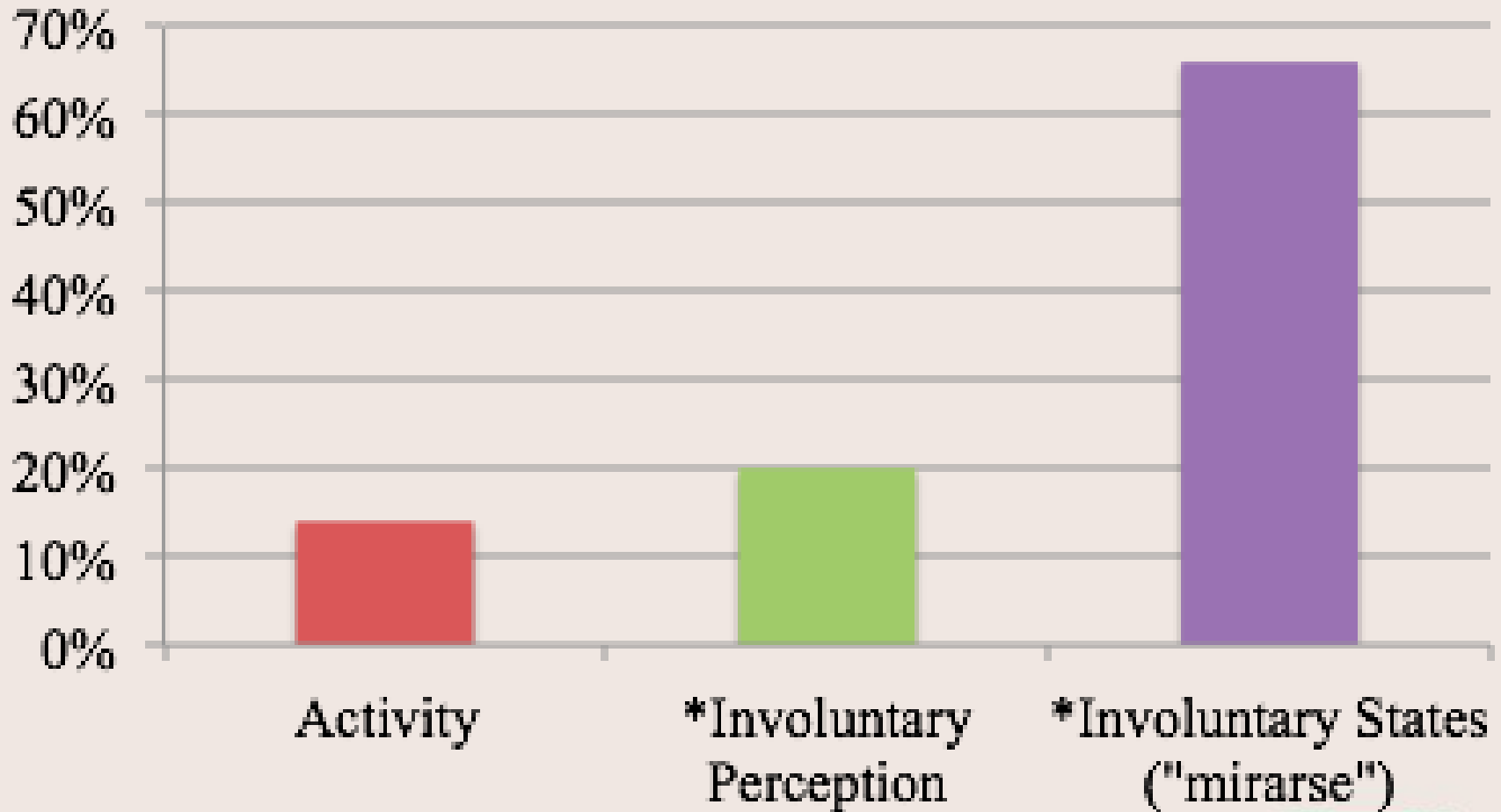
Example: “**Caperucita *se mira [correct: se ve] un poco preocupada porque cambió... *se mira [correct: se ve] más oscuro...**”

- 14 instances of “mirar” to express involuntary perception (23%)

Example: “**Y es cuando la Caperucita Roja se le quitó la sábana, la cobija, y *miró [vio] que era el lobo**”.



Results: “Mirar/Mirarse”



Discussion of results

Use of the reflexive/reciprocal form “**mirarse**” in place of “**verse**” (expected in standard Spanish) to express involuntary perceived states/emotions (e.g., ***“Caperucita se mira espantada”**):

- This can be explained as a case of language transfer from the majority language (English) to the minority language (Spanish), as it has been reported in previous studies (e.g., Montrul & Ionin, 2010).
- Why does this happen? There is a semantic similarity between “**mirar**” and “**look**” (the meanings of these verbs are similar), and this similarity would transfer directly and would extend to the reflexive form “**mirarse**” in sentences such as “**She looks sad**”, which would then be translated as the incorrect ***“Se mira triste”** instead of the standard form “**Se ve triste.**”



Discussion of results (Cont.)

The replacement of “**verse**” by “**mirarse**” to express states is an example of what Silva Corvalán (1994) calls linguistic *simplification*, defined as follows:

“Simplification involves the higher frequency of use of a form X [**in this case, “mirar” / “mirarse”**] in context Y [**in this case to refer to involuntary perceived states/emotions**] at the expense of a form Z [**in this case, “ver” / “verse”**], usually in competition with and semantically related to X, where both X and Z existed in the language prior to the initiation of simplification. Thus X [**“mirar/mirarse”**] is an *expanding* form, while Z [**“ver/verse”**] is a *shrinking* or *contracting* form.” (Silva-Corvalán, pg. 3)



Discussion of results (cont.)

Use of “**mirar**” in place of the standard “**ver**” to express involuntary perception (e.g., : “**Y es cuando la Caperucita Roja se le quitó la sábana, la cobija, y *miró [vio] que era el lobo.**”)

- This cannot be explained as a case of transfer from the majority language (English) to the minority language (Spanish) since, in English, involuntary perception is expressed through the verb “see”, which is translated as “ver”. For example, the standard translation for a sentence such as “**Yesterday I saw an accident when I was going to work**” would be “**Ayer vi [verb “ver”] un accidente cuando iba al trabajo**”.



Discussion of results (cont.)

- This means we can then interpret the use of “mirar” to express involuntary perception as an extension of the semantic field (the meaning) of “mirar,” and as another case of simplification (Silva-Corvalán, 1994), in which “mirar” replaces the verb “ver”, and it expands (while “ver” shrinks) to refer to involuntary perception. This results in a higher frequency of use for “mirar” in contexts in which “ver” would be expected (according to the rules of Standard Spanish), as it can be seen in the results of this study.



Conclusion: Will “ver/verse” disappear?

- The results of the study, with the participants’ preference for “**mirar/mirarse**” in contexts where “**ver/verse**” is expected, could provide evidence that the variety of Spanish spoken in this area is becoming more “simple”. Only one verb “**mirar/mirarse**” is used in contexts where both “**ver/verse**” and “**mirar**” are needed in Standard Spanish.
- Does this mean that “ver/verse” will disappear in the future?



Suggestions for future studies

- Investigate the Spanish spoken by children and adults in other age groups.
- Interdisciplinary studies (e.g., sociology and anthropology) to examine the social factors that influence the use of Spanish in Monterey county and can result in the change and/or maintenance of Spanish in the area.
- Focus on other perception verbs such as “oír” (to hear) y “escuchar” (to listen to) to see if semantic extension (and simplification) also affects the use of these verbs.



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Acknowledgments

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Questions?



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