Spanish Preterite and Imperfect in Conversations: The Pragmatic Meanings

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Abstract

Conversations differ from story telling in that inputs come from all interlocutors rather than the author alone. To maintain communication speakers observe the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975). This article accounts for aspectual uses of the structure "(*no*) *querer* 'to (not) want' + infinitive" in conversational contexts. The analyses follow the hypothesis that preterite makes the endpoint of an event visible for pragmatic interpretation while imperfect does not (Bolinger 1963). The study thus infers a spectrum of pragmatic meanings of the aforementioned structure in preterite. By referring to pragmatic meanings and the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975), the study also illustrates why an aspectual choice is suitable or not suitable for a context.

Key Words: Conventions of use**,** conversation, cooperative principles, discourse, pragmatic meaning, semantic meaning, Spanish aspect

1.   Introduction

Grammar rules have shown patterns of aspectual uses. Studies about aspectual usage patterns in story telling have suggested that narrative conventions and speaker's viewpoint play a role in an author's aspectual choice. These insights, however, do not provide Spanish language learners with the conception needed for the evaluation of aspectual features within conversations. Nor do they address what a speaker intends to convey in a conversational circumstance.

"Conversations are excellent examples of the interactive and interpersonal nature of communication" (Brown 1994: 236). They are "cooperative ventures" (Hatch and Long 1980: 4). Different from written or spoken storytelling, they do not involve one-sided discourse, but rather the participants interact and cooperate to communicate efficiently. Therefore, conversations can be used to demonstrate that aspectual choices may not depend solely on the speaker's selection of a viewpoint but rather must take into consideration the discourse and context.

Using dialogues containing phrases consisted of the verb (*no*) *querer* 'to (not) want' followed by an infinitive, the current study examines the uses of preterite and imperfect in conversations. By following the principle that preterite licenses the endpoint of an event visible for pragmatic interpretation while imperfect does not (Bolinger 1963) and by considering discourse, the study identifies various pragmatic meanings that the speakers utilize to communicate. By taking into account the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975) that speakers follow to ensure communication, the study also explains cases in which only one aspectual form is accepted as well as those in which both forms are accepted.

2.   Background

2.1. Grammar rules

Spanish grammar rules have covered many patterns of the uses of Spanish preterite and imperfect (e.g., Dozier and Iguina 1999; Frantzen 1995; Lunn 1985; Westfall and Foerster 1996). For instance, preterite is described to be used to "refer to an action that interrupts another" (Lunn 1985: 51), "present a sequence of events in the past" (Westfall and Foerster 1996: 552), "indicate the repetition of an action when the repetition is understood to be quantitatively bounded" (Westfall and Foerster 1996: 552), and "indicate that an event began and ended over a certain (finite) period of time" (Westfall and Foerster 1996: 552). Imperfect, on the other hand, is described to be used to "describe an action in progress or a condition in force at a given time" (Lunn 1985: 52), "refer to customary or habitual actions" (Lunn 1985: 52), and "tell time" (Lunn 1985: 52).

While the above rules seem reliable and pedagogically useful,[1] they do not explain other aspectual uses. For instance, a proposal was made by Lunn (1985) that examines the perspective achieved by the authors' aspectual choices in literary data, which we will see in the following section.

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[1] Another common grammar rule points out that preterite is used to indicate "the initiation (or coming into being) of a state with verbs such as *saber*, *conocer*, […] or inceptive verbs such as *enfermarse* and *ponerse*" (Westfall and Foerster 1996: 552).

2.2. The link between aspect and the speaker's perspective in narratives

Lunn proposed that the preterite/imperfect contrast in Spanish be analyzed as a linguistic encoding of a speaker's perspective on a verbal situation. She followed the framework of cognitive grammar, which assumes that linguistic thinking is tied to other kinds of thinking. She contended that "aspectual choices reveal where a speaker is, either physically or psychologically, with respect to the situation. The speaker who chooses the preterite is at a point from which he can view a whole situation in focus; the speaker who chooses the imperfect is at a point from which a situation looks incomplete and out of focus" (49).

Lunn cited works from literature to support the hypothesis. She pointed out that "[i]n their aspectual choices, novelists can ignore the objective characteristics of a situation and classify it aspectually according to the point of view they wish the reader to adopt, or according to the point of view they wish to impute to a character" (54). For example, "[i]n modern fiction, disoriented characters often make aspectual choices which correspond to a physical inability to get situations into visual focus" (58). Further, a situation can lack boundaries for the speaker who is too close (as in dreams) or too far away (as in reminiscence), physically or psychologically, to perceive its boundaries. Reyes (1990) shared the same view about the creativity of authors in literary works. She contended, however, that with respect to the creativity of literary works, which often reveal abnormal uses of verbs, as well as non-literary works, the creativity is both sustained and limited by the grammar of the language.

Lunn (1985) argued that one of the attractive features of the above hypothesis is that it explains why most time spans may be referred to in either preterite or imperfect. In other words, most past-time situations can be described using either aspectual label (King 1992). For example, the two sentences taken from Lunn (1985) refer to the same incident (see example 1). However, it can be referred to in either preterite or imperfect because the author/speaker is the person who imposes aspectual encoding on a situation.

(1)
    a. *Los   moros reinaron   en   Granada   hasta 1492.*
       The   Moors reigned   in   Granada   until 1492

'The Moors reigned Granada until 1492.'

b. *Reinaban   los moros   en Granada cuando   nació   nuestro héroe*.
Reigned   the Moors in Granada when   born   our   heroes
'The Moors reigned Granada when our heroes were born.'

Lunn's proposal ties human language with human cognition and connects the use of preterite and imperfect to the speaker focus (in-focus versus out-of-focus). The speaker's physical or psychological distance from the situation thus governs the selection of these aspectual markers. The proposal provides one possible explanation for the aspectual uses in narratives such as literary texts. However, another proposal also explains the uses of pretereite and imperfect in narratives. We will look at narrative conventions in the next section.

2.3. Narrative conventions

Narrative conventions deal with the roles that *perfective* (preterite) *and imperfective* (imperfect) play in narratives. For instance, it has been documented in many languages that perfectives and imperfectives have different functions in narratives. "Perfectives often function in narrative discourse to move things forward, because the endpoints of events are presented explicitly. […] Advancing the plot is thus the basic use of perfectives in narratives" (Smith 1991: 130; see also Hooper 1979). On the other hand, "the imperfective sentences tend to have a backgrounding functions. They present situations that elaborate on the main events rather than to present the events which move the narrative forward" (Smith 1991: 130; see also Hooper 1979).

Given that grammar rules, narrative conventions, and an author's creativity in choosing perspectives can account for patterns of aspectual uses, the subsequent question to ask is are there other principles that govern these choices. Further, can a speaker refer to any aspectual label and still communicate effectively? These answers are pertinent to language teaching and the understanding of aspectual uses. If there are contexts in which only one aspectual choice is appropriate, we need to identify them. We also need to illustrate the circumstances in which both aspectual choices are appropriate.

Using examples from conversations, the study shows circumstances in which aspectual choices do not depend on the speaker's perspective but rather comply with the conversation conventions assumed by the speakers and the listeners (Grice 1975). It also provides examples in which the choices are subjective, dependent on the speaker's perspective. Before presenting such examples and the corresponding analyses, we will examine the semantic and pragmatic meanings of aspect and the rules of conversation.

2.4. The semantic and pragmatic meanings of Spanish aspect

Bolinger (1963) referred to the semantic meanings associated with linguistic forms "references" and distinguished them from "inferences". He suggested that confinement (plus anteriority) is the continuing, consistent *reference* of the preterite in Spanish. The inception and termination, traditionally considered as being associated with preterite, are, however, the results of *inferences*. "Inference depends on what we know of the structure of people and of things about us" (132). "References are always clues to inferences, else there would be no continuity between utterance--we would have to have verbalizations of everything" (134). An inference may or may not be compelling. In other words, an inference may or may not convey significant information. On the other hand, "in the course of time a repeated inference may become a reference". (134)

In accordance with Bolinger (1963), Smith (1991) and King (1992) also distinguished the semantic meanings of viewpoint aspect from the pragmatic meanings of viewpoint aspect. They suggested stating pragmatic meanings of viewpoint aspect (or inferences in Bolinger's terms) at a separate level from semantic meanings (or references in Bolinger's terms). Smith noted that, "the full range of viewpoint meaning includes invited inferences and notions of emphasis which cannot and should not be explained by semantic meaning alone" (Smith 1991: 92). She explained that

> "[t]he aspectual meanings conveyed by a sentence include focus and information arrived at by inference. These are pragmatic meanings, dependent on context and convention, which complement the semantic meanings associated with linguistic forms. The pragmatic meanings associated with a viewpoint are guided by conventions of use. The conventions depend partly on general cooperative principles

of inference and partly on the pattern of a particular language. They are interpretive and, when stated formally, are distinct from the level of semantic meaning" (124).

Both Smith and King contended that "[s]tating pragmatic meaning at a separate level allows us to maintain the analysis of semantic invariance for aspectual viewpoints" (Smith 1991: 124). However, "each and every pragmatic use should naturally derive from the systematic [/semantic] meanings" (King 1992: 73).

In light of the above, it is conceivable that part of the challenges that Spanish learners face in learning preterite and imperfect is that "a limited number of linguistic forms [preterite and imperfect] and semantic meanings are used by speakers to convey numerous pragmatic meanings" (Smith 1991: 133). Thus, in addition to learning grammar rules and conventions of use, identifying different pragmatic meanings and understanding how they are inferred in a context will not only improve our understanding of the language but also facilitate our explanation of the uses of these forms to learners.

2.5. Rules of conversation

Grice (1975) noted that our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks. It would not be rational if they did. "They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction." (45). He labeled this the Cooperative Principle, which he believed underlies language use. He argues that there are a number of conversational rules, or maxims, that regulate conversation by enforcing compliance with the cooperative principles. They include four maxims:

 A. Maxims of Quality:
 1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

 B. Maxim of Relation/Relevance.
 1. Be relevant

 C. Maxims of Quantity:

1.	Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2.	Do not make your contribution more informative than in required.

D.	Maxims of Manner:
1.	Avoid obscurity of expression.
2.	Avoid ambiguity.
3.	Be brief.
4.	Be orderly.

The maxims of *quality* refer to saying only what is true. The maxims of *quantity* refer to saying as much as is necessary for understanding the communication and not saying more than is necessary. The maxim of *relevance* refers to saying only what is relevant. This maxim limits random topic shifts and is very important to understanding how we draw conversational inferences. Finally, the maxims of *manner* refer to a number of maxims such as avoiding use of jargons or other terms our listeners cannot be expected to know, avoiding saying things that have two or more meanings, not explaining at length on a topic when a few words will do, and organizing what we say in some intelligible way. Later in this study, we will show how some maxims can be used to explain the appropriateness or inappropriateness of some aspectual choices in conversational contexts.

3. The Study

3.1. Data and methodology

Mexican soap opera clips containing the structure of "(*no*) *querer* 'to (not) want' + infinitive" were collected for the study. Around fourteen native speakers from different Spanish-speaking countries watched the clips and indicated if they would use the same verb forms used in the clips and if the alternative verb forms not used in the clips are acceptable for the contexts. They also provided the meanings of the alternative verb forms and the contexts for their uses.[2] The informants' answers thus form the bases for the study.

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[2] Some stories included in this article were modified from the soap opera clips to facilitate presentation.

The analyses of the Spanish preterite and imperfect follow Bolinger's (1963) proposal that preterite refers to segmentation or confinement and is used when the speaker utilizes a reference, expressly or implicitly, to confine/segment a past event. As a result, the endpoint of the event is visible for pragmatic interpretation. The study assumes that imperfect is produced "when a speaker's attention is fixed on *el transcurso o continuidad de la acción* ['the course or continuity of the action'] (RAE 1973: 462)" (Lunn 1985: 49). That is, imperfect gives no information about endpoints.

By identifying these segmentation references in the cases of confinement and considering discourse, various pragmatic meanings are inferred. The pragmatic meanings and the Cooperative principle (Grice 1975) are used to explain whether an aspectual choice is acceptable for a context. Two cases in conversations are accounted for: (1) the cases in which only one aspectual form is suitable for the context; (2) the cases in which both aspectual choices are acceptable for the context reflecting personal or dialectal preferences.

3.2. Examples of aspectual choices, in which only one viewpoint is appropriate for the contexts

The story 2, the speaker (Diego) is limited with one aspectual choice.

(2)
Diego, Juan, and María agreed to have a study session together the next day in the library in order to prepare for the test. Juan agreed to pick María up in her apartment before the study session. These two conversations took place the next day in the library.

In the library:

DIEGO*:* *Buenos días María. ¡Has llegado temprano! ¿Dónde está Juan? ¿No te recogió?*

MARIA*:* *Ah, decidí venir temprano para acá para estudiar un poco antes de nuestra discusión. Te veré en 20 minutos aproximadamente.*

15 minutes later, at the same location, in the library:

JUAN*:* *Fui al apartamento de María pero ella no estaba allí.*

DIEGO*:* *Ah, ella quiso venir temprano para estudiar antes de nuestra discusión.*

[Translation]
In the library:

DIEGO: Good morning María. You have arrived early! Where is Juan? Didn't he pick you up?'

MARIA: Oh, I decided to come early to study a little bit before our discussion. I will see you later.'

15 minutes later, at the same location, in the library:

JUAN: I went to María's apartment but she was not there.

DIEGO: Oh, she wanted to come [came] early to study before our discussion.

Example 2 shows that the information that Juan was interested in learning was María's whereabouts. Under a normal circumstance (being a cooperative interlocutor), Diego should tell Juan what he knew, that is, María had already arrived at the library. Diego, a native speaker of Spanish, chose the preterite (*quiso venir*) to convey such a message, which native informants judged to be the only appropriate form for the context.

Following Bolinger's (1963) proposal about segmentation references in preterite, we analyze the target sentence as that Diego used María's arrival at the library to confine or carve out her desire of coming early to the library. Subsequently, through inference or pragmatic interpretation, Juan learned that María wanted to come to the library early and, in fact, already did. In other words, using the sentence structure above, the only choice Diego had in order to convey the information properly was preterite. If Diego had used imperfect, he would only have indicated that María had the desire of coming to the library some time in the past, but Juan would not have learned that María had arrived because imperfect does not provide information about the endpoint of an event. Notice that story 2 demonstrates that the structure of '*querer* + infinitive' in preterite does not always mean, "to try" or "to attempt", as grammar textbooks have regularly point out, but rather can indicate the fulfillment of a desire.

As pointed out earlier, Grice (1975) contended that certain conversational "maxims" enable the speaker to nominate and maintain a topic of conversation. One of the maxims under *quantity*, make your contribution as informative as is required, explains why Diego used the preterite. If Diego had used the imperfect, he would have not have made his contribution as informative as is required by the context.

The following story also demonstrates that the speaker is limited with one aspectual choice.

(3)

Higinio was seeking help from José Manuel. He went to José Manuel's house. Nevertheless, José Manuel was not home. His servant told Higinio that José Manuel's wife had an accident and he had taken her to the hospital. Higinio asked the servant to which hospital he went. The servant did not give out the information. The following dialogue took place when he came home.

JOSÉ MANUEL:	*¿Qué pasó, Higinio? ¿Hablaste con ese hombre?*
HIGINIO:	*No, José Manuel. No estaba en casa. Su esposa tuvo un accidente. Se la llevó a la clínica.*
JOSÉ MANUEL:	*¿A qué clínica?*
HIGINIO:	*La sirvienta no me quiso decir.*
JOSÉ MANUEL:	*Bueno, ¿qué hacemos, Higinio?*
HIGINIO:	*No sé, no sé.*

[Translation]

JOSÉ MANUEL:	What happened, Higinio? Did you speak with the man?
HIGINIO:	No, José Manuel. He was not home. His wife had an accident. He took her to the hospital.
JOSÉ MANUEL:	Which hospital?
HIGINIO:	The servant would not tell me.
JOSÉ MANUEL:	What do we do now, Higinio?
HIGINIO:	I don't know, I don't know.

What José Manuel was interested in learning was to which hospital the man went. The servant, however, did not give Higinio the information. To convey that message to José Manuel using the sentence structure above, Higinio, a native speaker of Spanish, chose preterite, which native informants judged to be the only appropriate form for the context.

Following the proposal of segmentation references in preterite, we analyze the sentence as that Higinio used the servant's action of not telling as a reference to confine her (negative) desire. Subsequently, through inference or pragmatic interpretation, José Manuel learned that the servant did not want to give Higinio the information and did not do so. This is the refusal meaning of *no querer* in preterite commonly covered in grammar texts. If Higinio had used imperfect (*La sirvienta no me quería decir*), José Manuel would not have learned that the servant did not give out the information because imperfect does not provide information about the

endpoint of an event. Higinio would have violated the maxim *quantity* for not being *informative* enough.

In fact, the target sentence above with imperfect is not complete without preceding another sentence containing an action verb in preterite. It has been suggested that "[i]mperfective sentences often seem incomplete in isolation, although they are not ungrammatical. "[T]he sense of incompleteness that arises with imperfective is due the partial information that they give" (Smith 1991: 128). Consequently, "speakers sometimes reject them when they are presented out of context" (Smith 1991: 128).

The lack of endpoints explains why imperfect is compatible with an assertion, led by the conjunction *y* 'and', marking the final point. For instance, if we change the verb forms in stories 2 and 3 to imperfect, we can maintain the intended messages for the contexts by adding a sentence of assertion that follows each of the modified sentences.

> *Ah, ella quería venir temprano para estudiar antes de nuestra discusión y ya vino/llegó*
> 'Oh, she wanted to come here early to study before our discussion and already arrived'

> *La sirvienta no me quería decir y no me lo dijo.*
> 'The servant did not want to tell me and did not tell me'.

These modified sentences, nevertheless, sound redundant, thus violating the *quantitative* aspect of the conversation rules, which suggests saying only as much as is necessary for understanding the communication. The preterite is therefore a better option for both contexts.

The lack of endpoints of imperfect, on the other hand, explains why imperfect is also compatible with a sentence of negation, led by the conjunction *pero* 'but'.

> *Ah, ella quería venir temprano para estudiar antes de nuestra discusión, pero no vino/llegó.*
> 'Oh, she wanted to come here early to study before our discussion, but did not come.'

> *La sirvienta no me quería decir*, *pero lo hizo finalmente.*

'The servant did not want to tell me, but did at the end.'

These modified sentences indicate that María did not come and the servant gave the information at the end. Both are not the meanings that the speakers intended to convey. Nor do they correspond to what happened in the stories. Obviously, neither is acceptable.

Both Lunn (1985: 53) and Smith (1991: 126) pointed out the factor of mutual knowledge on the decision between perfective and imperfective aspects in conversations. The perfective is a likely choice in which the information has not been mentioned or known to the other speaker. And the imperfect is more likely to be used in talking to someone who already knew about the information. According to Smith (1991), it will be misleading to use the imperfective if the other speaker does not know the outcome of the situation because the choice of the imperfective might lead the listener to think that the situation did not reach its final point. Examples 2 and 3 concur with the above views. They demonstrate that preterite is used to convey information that is not known to the other speaker and imperfect used in the same context will lead the other speaker to think that the situation did not reach its final point. However, examples 2 and 3 also show that the information is given as a response to a question elicited explicitly or implicitly by the other speaker, rather than only because the other speaker did not know the information. In other words, the speaker gives the information while adhering to the Cooperative Principle.

In story 4 the speaker has only one aspectual choice. Another pragmatic interpretation of the affirmative *querer* in the preterite followed by an infinitive is derived.

(4)
Federico accidentally fell off the stairs during a fight with his wife. Relatives in the house heard the noises. They rushed to the scene. Everyone thought that he was dead. The family nurse started to check his pulse:

FAMILY NURSE*:*	*Tiene pulso. No está muerto. Sólo está inconsciente.*
WIFE*:*	*Voy a llamar al servicio.*
RELATIVE*:*	*No, no, no, yo voy a llamar al comandante Muñoz para decirle que tú quisiste matar a Federico.*
WIFE*:*	*Eso no es cierto.*
RELATIVE*:*	*Por supuesto que sí. Nadie te va a creer que fue un accidente*

[Translation]
FAMILY NURSE*:*	He has pulse. He is not dead. He is only unconscious.
WIFE*:*	I am calling the ambulance.
RELATIVE*:*	No, no, no, I am calling the police chief Muñoz to tell him that you tried to kill Federico.
WIFE*:*	That is not true.
RELATIVE*:*	Of course it is. Nobody is going to believe you that it was an accident.

In story 4, when the relative said the target sentence, the accident already happened. The relative's intention was to incriminate Federico's wife with the police chief. The angry relative used the preterite to deliver the message, which the native informants judged to be the only appropriate choice for the context. Following the hypothesis of segmentation references in preterite, we analyze the sentence as the following. The relative used the murder attempt (not the act of killing) to confine the wife's desire of murdering her husband. *Quisiste matar* here means, "you attempted to kill", rather than "you wanted to kill and achieved it" because Federico was still alive.

Through example 4 we can infer that if a desired action is carried out with success, the resultant meaning is as shown in examples 2 and 3. If not, the resultant meaning is an attempt.[3] *Quisiste mater* in this context cannot mean "you wanted to kill" giving only volitive meaning because the incident have happened and the relative would not have a case with the police if her message indicated that there was no attempt, but rather an intention. The relative could not have used the imperfect either as it does not convey attempt at all. It would have violated the maxim under *quantity.*

Imperfect may also be the only aspectual choice in conversations. For example, in 5 below, the imperfect is the only choice that allows Manuel to explain why he waited for Daniel.

(5)
   Manuel waited in Daniel's office for a long time before he decided to leave. He ran into Daniel near the elevator:

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[3] Bolinger (1963) pointed out a semantic accident occurred to the verb *querer*. "Originally it named events more cyclic than noncyclic ('to seek,' prolongable but normally terminated with the act of finding; 'to beg,' 'to aim,' 'to get'); but in Castilian it was extended through "innovación semántica" (Corominas) to mean 'want, desire'." (134).

DANIEL*:*	*Manuel, ¡qué gusto verte!*
MANUEL*:*	*¿Qué tal? Daniel. Traté de hacer tiempo para que llegaras.*
DANIEL*:*	*Ah, ¿sí?*
MANUEL*:*	*Quería darte los datos de unas gentes que quieren dar una feria.*

[Translation]

DANIEL*:*	Manuel, how nice to see you!
MANUEL*:*	How are you? Daniel. I tried to wait longer for you to arrive.
DANIEL*:*	Oh, really?
MANUEL*:*	I wanted to give you the information of some clients who want to give an exhibition.

Unlike examples 2, 3, and 4, in this case one speaker (Daniel) was not eliciting a specific piece of information from the other speaker (Manuel). Although the information that Manuel gave eventually was not previously known to Daniel and some linguists indicated that perfective/preterite is a likely choice when the information has not been known to the other speaker, Manuel used the imperfect (*quería darte los datos*), which native informants judged to be the only choice acceptable for the context.

Imperfect gives a positive emphasis on the ongoing process of Manuel's desire at the time. Since it does not mark endpoint, the implication derived from the context is that his desire is still present. If Manuel had used preterite (*quise darte los datos*), it would have implied that either his desire is no longer valid (see example 7 for the discussion of the negative implication about the present with *querer* in preterite), which contradicts his real intention, or the act of giving already happened, which is not true. Both meanings would have violated the maxim under *quality*, that is, do not say what you believe to be false.

Dialogue 6 also shows that imperfect can be the only appropriate aspectual choice for the context.

(6)

Pilar asked Julio if he wanted to go with her to a dance party for the celebration of *El Cinco de Mayo*. Julio said that he would go for the food and music but he would not dance because he did not like dancing at all. During the party, Pilar tried to talk Julio into dancing with her several times. However, Julio just would not give in. Later, Natalia joined Pilar in persuading him. Finally, Julio was convinced. He

danced with both girls. Three of them had a wonderful time. In the next day a friend asked them how the dance party went, Julio happily replied, "Great! I loved the dancing!" Both Pilar and Natalia laughed and said:

> !Pero no quería bailar!
> 'But he did not want to dance!'

Like example 5, in this case one speaker (friend) was not expecting a specific piece of information from the other speakers (Pilar and Natalia). Pilar and Natalia used the imperfect, which native informants judged to be the only form acceptable for the context. Pilar and Natalia were referring to Julio's intention before agreeing to dance. They could not have used the preterite because it marks endpoints. With the preterite they would have indicated that Julio did not dance at the party, that is, his desire of not dancing was fulfilled, which not only is not what they intended to say but also is not true. This choice violates the maxim *quality* (say only what is true).

3.3. Examples of aspectual choices dependent on the speaker's viewpoint, in which both viewpoints are appropriate for the context

In conversations, aspectual choices may also depend on the speaker's perspective. In other words, the context may allow either aspectual choices. Consider the example in 7.

(7)
José agreed to go to the movies with his friend this weekend. But his professor just assigned a big project. As a result, he now needs the entire weekend to work on that project. He tells his friend that he cannot go to the movies anymore.

JOSÉ*:*   *Quise ir a la película contigo, pero ahora tengo que trabajar*
                     en un proyecto muy grande.
                     'I wanted to go to the movies with you, but now I have to
                     work on a big project.'

Like examples 5 and 6, in this case one speaker (the friend) was not expecting a specific piece of information from the other speaker (José). Going to the movies was already known to the friend before the conversation took place. Recall that some linguists have indicated that the imperfect is more likely to be used in talking to someone who already knew about the information.

Nevertheless, both the preterite and imperfect (*quise ir a la película*, *quería ir a la película*) were judged to be acceptable by native informants.

With the preterite, the analysis is that José used his change of mind as a reference to carve out his desire of going to the movies with his friend. For some speakers, the use of preterite in such a context indicates that the chance of convincing José to go to the movies is slim because his mind has already been set. The preterite here thus conveys a terminative meaning, a negative implication about the present, that is, 'I don't want to go anymore'.[4] On the other hand, in accordance with the fact that imperfects do not indicate endpoints, some native informants consider that the imperfect indicates that José's desire of going to the movies is still present. However, the external force - the assigned project - prevents him from going to the movies.

Several linguists have pointed out the negative implication about the present with preterite in Spanish. For instance, Gili Gaya (1967:158, cited in Studerus 1989) noted that examples like the following could contain a negative implication about the present: *Supe Latín*. 'I knew Latin [but not anymore]'. Guitar (1978) indicated that in the sentence *Pedro fue comunista*, *fue* tells that "Pedro was a communist in the past and that now he is not" (143). Mello (1989) also pointed out that "*supo* might refer to the existence of knowledge over a period of time and the subsequent non-existence of knowledge" (126), as in *Ella supo eso una vez, pero después lo olvidó* 'She knew that once, but later she forgot about it'.

Given that the perfective marks endpoints but "gives no information about resultant states" (Smith 1991: 126), how does this negative implication about the present come about? Our analysis is that the negative meaning about the present is the result of inference, which augments the information conveyed by the semantic meaning. This suggestion is in line with Bolinger's observations that while some verbal situations in preterite imply continuation (open

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[4] These examples also show that *querer* in preterite conveys a negative meaning about the present:

> *Quise acercarme a ti, pero fuiste tú quien no lo permitió.*
> 'I wanted to get close to you, but it was you who did not allow it.'

> *Quise utilizarte para vengarme, pero descubrí que eres una más de sus víctimas.*
> 'I wanted to use you to get my revenge, but I discovered that you were another one of his victims.'

interpretation), others do not provide information about the resultant state. For example, *Supe la verdad* 'I learned the truth' probably implies *Sé la verdad* 'I know the truth'. However, "a situation like *Jugué no sé cuántas veces, y por fin gané* ['I played, I don't know how many times, and finally I won'] is different. Here we are not so prone to pass off *gané* 'I won' as anything more than the first win or the first winning occasion" (Bolinger 1963: 132). The difference between the above two cases thus lies in the inference (pragmatic interpretation), rather than the reference (semantic interpretation). Notice that *gané* does not imply continuation; nor does it imply termination. On the contrary, the example in 7 implies termination. What is intriguing is that this negative inference about the present seems more compelling than a positive inference about the present, such as in *Supe la verdad* 'I knew the truth'.

Smith (1991) pointed out that in French the perfective viewpoint is available for all situation types with a consistent closed interpretation while English stative sentences allow either an open or closed interpretation. The Spanish perfective view, on the other hand, seems to invite three possibilities: the final or resulting situation continues, no inference about the resultant state at all, or the final or resulting situation stops. However, which inference it derives from preterite sentences seems to depend on the situation type and the context.

The following example shows that dialectal preference may govern the speaker's choice between preterite and imperfect:

(8)
   Isabel was teaching the English comparative structure to her students. She used them in her examples. In one example, she said, Sandra is as intelligent as Sara. Both students' faces turned red immediately. Isabel quickly apologized.

   Ah, no quise avergonzarlas.
   'Oh, I did not want to embarrass you.'

As in examples 5, 6, and 7, in this example one speaker (the students) did not expect a specific piece of information from the other (Isabel). The students were aware of the incident of embarrassment before the target sentence was said. Although some linguists have indicated that the imperfect is more likely to be used in talking to someone who already knew about the

information, again both the preterite and imperfect (*No quise avergonzarlas; No quería avergonzarlas*) were judged to be acceptable by native informants.

With the preterite, Isabel used the incident of embarrassment to confine her no intention of embarrassing the students. In other words, she used the incident to confine her (negative) desire. With the imperfect, Isabel emphasized her intention in the past. Namely, she did not intend to embarrass these students when she used them in her examples while implying that she recognized that she had caused the embarrassment (*No quería, pero lo hice* 'I did not want to, but I did').

The imperfect seems to be preferred by informants from Peninsula while the preterite seems to be preferred by Latin American speakers. For peninsular speakers the use of preterite sounds a bit odd, as it seems to deny that the students had been embarrassed (refer to the refusal meaning of *no querer* in story 3). The aspectual choice in this case thus seems to lie in the viewpoint that the speaker of a dialect is accustomed to take.

Our preliminary observation indicates that perfective viewpoint seems to be a preferred choice by Latin American speakers when apologizing or rectifying a mistake. For instance, *No tuve* [pret] *la intención de ofenderte* 'I did not have the intention to offend you' would be preferred to *No tenía* [imp] *la intención de ofenderte* 'I did not have the intention to offend you'. *No quise* [pret] *decirlo* 'I did no want to say it' would be chosen over *No quería* [imp] *decirlo* 'I did no want to say it'. On the contrary, peninsular speakers in the same contexts would prefer imperfect. The variation of aspectual choices in story 8 seems to show that the system of the language has two forms capable of reporting (pragmatically) past occurrences in such a context. But the variation occurs at the level of language use, not at the level of systematic semantics. Without disturbing the semantic system, each dialect gravitates toward the pragmatic use of one form over the other (King 1992).

The following story also shows that both preterite and imperfect can be used in the same context.

(9)
Carolina came to Diego's house to tell him that his dog was in the neighborhood chasing squirrels again. She told him where the dog was. Diego thanked her. She added:

Quise avisarte para que hagas algo. Esas pobres ardillas estaban muy asustadas.
'I wanted to inform you so that you do something. These poor squirrels were frightened.'

In accordance with examples 5, 6, 7, and 8, in this example one speaker (Diego) did not expect a specific piece of information from the other speaker (Carolina). The incident of informing was known to Diego before the utterance was said and Carolina's intention was clear to Diego because her action had already spoken for itself. Both preterite and imperfect (*Quise avisarte; Quería avisarte*) were judged to be acceptable by native informants. Carolina could either use preterite to reiterate or emphasize the fact of having done what she had already done, that is, informing Diego of the problem, using the act of informing as a reference point to confine her desire, or she could use imperfect emphasizing her intention before speaking to him.

Example 10 also allows both forms in the same context.

(10)
WIFE*:*   *Noté que pasaste la noche en el cuarto del huésped.*
HUSBAND*:*   *Cuando llegué, tu luz estaba apagada y no quise molestarte.*

[Translation]
WIFE*:*   I noticed that you spent the night in the guest room.
HUSBAND*:*   When I arrived, your light was off and I did not want to disturb you.

Both speakers were aware of what happened last night. The wife appeared to want an explanation about why the husband slept in the guestroom. Native informants consider both forms acceptable for the context. The husband can use the imperfect to provide the reason, referring to his feeling last night when he arrived home or the preterite referring to his desire of not wanting to bother his wife, which is confined by last night or the arrival at home.

3.4. Segmentation references that confine past situations

As shown in the previous sections, in accordance with discourse or a speaker's preferred viewpoint, different segmentation references can be used to confine situations consisted of '*(no) querer* + infinitive', resulting in different pragmatic interpretations. For instance, speakers may use the following references to segment a desire: the fulfillment of a desire, as in examples 2 and 3, the attempt of a desire, as in example 4, and the termination/ending of a desire, as in example 7.

In addition to the segmentation references shown above, a segmentation reference can be a specified duration, resulting in a sentence with no implication about the resultant state. For example, a person who thought about touching a life-like statue in a museum may say: *Por un momento quise tocarlo* 'For a moment I wanted to touch it'. Further, "the coming into being" can be a reference used to segment a desire. In example 11, *quise* refers to the moment when Eduardo's desire of buying the red scarf arose.

> (11)
> EDUARDO*:*   *Pues, vi muchas cosas bonitas en la tienda...*
> ADRIANA*:*   *¿Pero qué compraste? Enséñame el regalo que me muero de curiosidad.*
> EDUARDO*:*   *Espera, te cuento. Llegué a la tienda sin saber qué quería comprar, hasta que encontré una bufanda roja. En cuanto la vi, quise comprarla.*
>
> [Translation]
> EDUARDO*:*   Well, I saw many beautiful things in the store...
> ADRIANA*:*   But what did you buy? Show me the gift because I am dying of curiosity.
> EDUARDO*:*   Wait, I will tell you. I arrived at the store without knowing what I wanted to buy until I found a red scarf. As soon as I saw it, I wanted to buy it.

This meaning of emergence of a desire is not exclusive with *querer*. It has been pointed out that preterite can indicate the initiation (or coming into being) of a state with verbs such as *saber* 'to know, to be capable of', *conocer* 'to know', *ser* 'to be', *parecer* 'to seem', *creer* 'to believe', and *sentirse* 'to feel' or inceptive verbs such as *enfermarse* 'to get ill' and *ponerse* 'to become'

(Westfall and Foerster 1996). Adverbial clues may trigger this interpretation (Westfall and Foerster 1996). Following Bolinger's proposal (1963), we interpret the inception of preterite as the result of inference. This inception, in fact, refers to the "end of a beginning" (Bolinger 1963: 130). The inceptive meaning of these verbs is due to that the "coming into being" seems instantaneous and a continuing resultant state is usually implied. In other words, the instantaneous meaning is attributed to that the duration between the moment when the process starts and the moment when it comes fully into effect is so short that it seems simultaneous. In light of this, we suggest that "the coming into being" be a segmentation reference. The termination of a desire and the coming into being of a desire as segmentation references are represented conceptually in graphic 1 and 2 respectively.

Termination of a desire
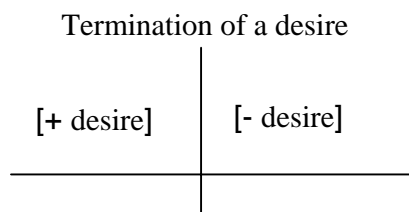
[+ desire]   [- desire]

Graphic 1. Termination of a desire as a segmentation reference

Emergence of a desire
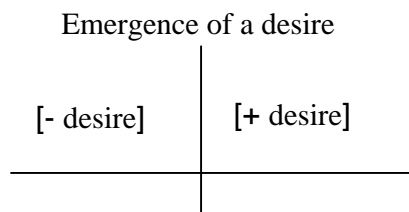
[- desire]   [+ desire]

Graphic 2. Emergence of a desire as a segmentation reference

The concept of segmentation references functions not only with the structure of '(*no*) *querer* + infinitive', but also with other verbs. Moreover, other segmentation references can be used to slice off an event. They may be concrete incidents such as the winning of an award: *Siempre supe* [pret] *que él iba a ganar el premio* 'I always knew that he was going to win the award', the discontinuation of a capacity or status as mentioned previously: S*upe* [pret] *Latín* 'I knew Latin' and *Fue* [pret] *comunista* 'He was communist', or even the death: *Mi abuelo fue* [pret] *abogado* (up until he passed away) 'My grandfather was a lawyer'.

4. Summaries and Conclusions

This study has shown conversational circumstances in which aspectual choices are governed by discourse as well as are dependent on the speaker's perspective. In some contexts one aspectual label is required in order to convey the message that the speaker is compelled to give. In other contexts, any aspectual label can be used depending upon what the speaker opts to express, which in turn can be the result of a personal or dialectal preference.

The study has followed the hypothesis that in perfective sentences the speaker utilizes a segmentation reference to carve out the span of a past situation that interests him. The endpoint of the situation is therefore available for pragmatic interpretations. The meaning is arrived at by inference. The article has shown a variety of segmentation references as well as inferred pragmatic meanings. On the other hand, the absence of the endpoint in an imperfective sentence explains why such a sentence is compatible with another sentence indicating the reaching or non-reaching of the endpoint.

Although the article has focused on the conventions of use in conversations, we would like to point out that conventions can be flouted. For instance, Smith (1991) pointed out that "[c]onventions of narrative, like other conventions, can be flouted. In a narrative the imperfective can be used to move events forward through inference. Although it does not present the endpoints of a situation, the imperfective entails that the event in question began. This is marked use that occurs with some frequency" (31). Furthermore, Reyes (1990) pointed out that imperfect might be found at the end of a sequence of actions in preterite to detain the succession immobilizing the story through an image that closes the sequence, a rather unconventional use of imperfect in narratives.

Regarding conversations, Grice (1975) indicated that speakers in conversations have two options. They can choose to cooperate in accordance with the Cooperative Principle or they can choose deliberately to flout it. For this reason, in addition to more studies of the current nature, studies showing that conventions are flouted in conversational circumstance are needed in the future in order to cover a full range of the uses of Spanish aspect in conversations.

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