MORPHOLOGICAL CONFUSION AND SYSTEMATIC VARIABILITY IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract: The present is a study of the variability in the use of the Spanish subjunctive mood and other morphological forms by English-speaking adults learning Spanish. The data reveal a great deal of variability in the use of the subjunctive mood and alternative forms, but variability which is systematic and constrained by linguistic features. The findings suggest that at the onset of acquisition of the subjunctive, use is limited to specific linguistic environments and is accompanied by great morphological confusion on the part of the learner. As acquisition progresses, variability diminishes as the learner refines and limits the morphological choices available.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the results of a study of the interlanguage variability of a group of young English-speaking adults studying Spanish as a second language in Mexico. It was found that there is considerable variability in these learners' use of the present subjunctive mood but that this variability is systematic. Analysis of this variability shows that the choices learners make to either mark or not mark for the present subjunctive mood are constrained and caused by an interaction between multiple linguistic features of the target language structure, including syntax, morphology and semantics (Quesada, forthcoming), and universal learning processes (such as L1 transfer, overgeneralization and hypothesis formation). It is suggested that variability in the use of the subjunctive and other verb forms may play an important role in the process of the acquisition of the Spanish subjunctive mood.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES IN INTERLANGUAGE VARIABILITY

Early variability studies in second language acquisition have two characteristics in common: the first is that they use as their models variability studies in adult native language or

sociolinguistic studies. These studies maintain that variability is caused by social contextual factors such as setting, topic, interlocutor, etc. (Tarone, 1985; Crookes, 1989; Dickerson, 1975). The present study adopts the views of Hulstijn (1989) and Preston (1989) that second language learners, especially in the beginning stages, do not have sufficient linguistic competence in the second language to be sensitive to many relevant external social contextual factors. Variability is therefore, due to other factors.

The second characteristic of early studies in variability in second language acquisition was a focus primarily on phonological variation (Ellis, 1988), although recent studies (Young, 1988; 1993) analyzing phonological variation take into account multiple causes (e.g. phonological and syntactic environment, function of the morpheme and of the clause in which the structure is required, and external social factors).

3. THE PRESENT RESEARCH STUDY

The present research is the study of the variability in the use of a structure which is complex syntactically, morphologically and semantically. Wolfram (1989) claims that several levels of language organization need to be examined in order to explain systematic variation in such structures as tense marking. Tarone (1988) mentions that in order to establish constraints on variation at one level, we must analyze the interaction of constraints at other levels.

The present research project is a study of variability in the use of both the subjunctive and alternative forms. A detailed analysis of this variability and the features and strategies that cause it in the use of Spanish by young adult English speakers can give us an increased understanding of this systematicity and offer insights into the acquisition processes of complex structures such as the subjunctive.

The data that are the object of the analysis in this study are two sets of recorded oral interviews of sixteen American university students studying Spanish in an intensive twelve-week language, culture, and arts program in Mexico. To analyze the data, the study adopts the function-form framework of Huebner (1983; 1985), who claims that in the analysis of interlanguage variation it is important to decipher in what ways semantic and discourse-pragmatic functions are encoded and to what extent these relationships are systematic (Huebner, 1985: 155). In addition, like the Huebner study, this study will analyze interlanguage to see not only when learners do not use the target language form but to understand when and why they use the forms which they do use.

Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a tendency for the subjunctive to be used in certain syntactic frames and not in others?

2. Is there a tendency for the subjunctive to be used for certain meanings and functions and not for others?

3. When the subjunctive is not used, which verb forms are used?

4. What is the use of these forms due to?

In order to answer these questions, using the data provided by the thirty-two interviews, several methods of analysis were employed. To ascertain the amount of subjunctive use and non-use, an error analysis of the data was performed. Following the error analysis, the utterances in which the subjunctive is not used were analyzed in order to ascertain the forms which the subjects use instead of the subjunctive. Analysis revealed that there was a total of 223 occasions in which the present subjunctive should or could be used across the two interview sets. For Interview One there were 108 such occasions and for Interview Two there were 115.

4. RESULTS OF INTERVIEW I

In Interview One there were nine syntactic frames and a total of eight different types of verb forms used in the 108 occasions. Not surprisingly, the preferred form was the present indicative. Other forms included: the infinitive, the future indicative, the past preterit indicative, the present participle (gerund), the present indicative with a wrong person or number used, and invented forms (new forms created by the subjects which don't exist in the language). Table 1 shows the distribution of the total use and percentage of the use of alternative forms for the nine syntactic frames.

Table 1.   Forms Used for Present Subjunctive by Syntactic Frame - Interview One.

Syntactic Frame	No. of Occasions	Present Subj.	Present Indicative	Infinitive	Future Indicative	Preterite Indicative	Present Participle	Present Ind./WF	Invented Form
es posible/ necesario	9	-	7 (78%)	-	2 (22%)	-	-	-	-
cuando	15	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	3 (20%)	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	-	1 (7%)	-
querer	30	6 (20%)	6 (20%)	10 (33%)	-	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	4 (14%)	2 (7%)
no pensar	2	-	2 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
recomendar	5	-	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	-	1 (20%)	-	-	-
esperar	33	-	11 (33%)	18 (55%)	-	1 (3%)	-	2 (6%)	1(3%)
despues/ antes de/ para que	4	-	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	-	-	-	-	-
gustarse	2	-	-	2 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-
lo que/a donde	8	-	8 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	108 (100%)	8 (7%)	43 (40%)	36 (33%)	6 (6%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)	7 (7%)	3 (3%)

Instead of a positive correlation between correct usage of the subjunctive and of a particular

alternative verb form, precisely the opposite was found. In the complement verbs following the syntactic frames for which the subjects tend to use the subjunctive more, a higher percentage of other forms is also seen. In cases where the subjunctive does not appear in complement verbs, or scarcely appears, there is also less variability; a smaller number of other forms are used.

The syntactic frames in which there is a higher percentage in the use of the present subjunctive in their complements are *cuando___* and *querer que___*. For *cuando___*, there is 13% use of the subjunctive and 87% non-use of the subjunctive. The other verb forms which are used following the frame *cuando___* are the present indicative (27%), the infinitive (20%) the future indicative (27%), the preterit indicative (7%) and the present indicative/wrong form (WF). The use of the present subjunctive following this frame is very rare (only two occasions), but the fact that these learners use a variety of forms instead may be important. It may be significant, too, that for complement verbs following *cuando___*, the preferred other form is not only the present indicative, but also the future indicative, both chosen 27% of the time.

The syntactic frame *querer que___* shows a similar pattern. There is some subjunctive marking in its complement, 20%, and a variety of other forms: present indicative 20%, infinitive 33%, preterit indicative 3%, present participle 3%, present indicative/WF 13%, and for invented forms 7%. In fact subjunctive marking is even greater for verbs following *querer que___* than for *cuando___*, and the number of other forms employed is also greater, seven following *querer que___* and six after *cuando___*. The preferred other form used following the frame *querer que___* is the infinitive (33%) and not the present indicative, which is chosen only as often as the subjunctive (20%).

For the frames which are all adverbial clauses, *antes/después de que/para que___*, there was no use of the subjunctive; 75% use of the present indicative and 25% use of the infinitive. The frame, *esperar que___*, oddly enough, is like *cuando___* and *querer que___* in the variety of other verb forms used in its complement clause, but lacks uses of the present subjunctive. Here, as for *querer que___*, the infinitive is the preferred choice (55%), followed by present indicative (33%), the present indicative/WF (6%), the preterit indicative and invented forms (each 3%). The syntactic frame *recomendar que___*, also displays some variability in the choice of other forms; the present indicative and the infinitive forms were again the favored alternative, seen 40% of the time, with the preterit indicative being used 20% of the time.

The remaining syntactic frames studied all showed either little or no variability in the choice of other verb forms in the complement clause. Following the frames *es posible/necesario/lógico que___*, the present indicative was used 78% of the time and the future 22% of the time. The frames *no pensar que___* and *lo que/a donde___* both showed 0% marking of the subjunctive and subjects employed the present indicative 100% of the time in their complement verbs. For the frame *gustarse que___* the infinitive was used 100% of the time in substitution for the present subjunctive.

The variability seen in these subjects' choice of verb forms in the complement clause following certain syntactic frames which require or allow the present subjunctive mood is considerable. In order to ascertain if this variability is systematic and significant, or merely due to chance, present indicative marking and variability in complement subordinate clauses were also analyzed. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. Out of 125 obligatory occasions, these subjects employed the indicative mood 115 times or 92% of the time. They used the present

Table 2. Forms Used for Present Indicative by Syntactic Frame - Interview I.

Syntactic Frame	No. of Occasions	Present Indicative	Infinitive	Preterite Indicative	Present Ind./WF	Imperfect	Subjunctive
cuando	14	13	1	-	-	-	-
creer/pensar/ oir/decir que	22	20	1	1	-	-	-
(no)saberque/ donde/como/ cual/si	15	15	-	-	-	-	-
(adjectival) que	29	27	-	-	2	-	-
si	8	8	-	-	-	-	-
donde	6	6	-	-	-	-	-
porque	31	26	1	-	2	1	1
Total	125 (100%)	115 (92%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)

indicative/WF 3% of the time, the infinitive 2%, and the preterit indicative, the imperfect indicative and the subjunctive only once each for 1% of the time for each form. Two of the present indicative/WF choices were errors of concordance or number. The results of this analysis conclude that there is considerably less variability in verb form choices for the present indicative than for the present subjunctive, suggesting that the variability seen in the choice of other verb forms for complement clauses is probably not random.

To support this conclusion, a chi-square test was performed on the data, using the software program *Minitab* (formatted for *Windows 3.1*). Because the number of occasions for certain syntactic frames was too low for statistical purposes, it was necessary to combine some of the frames. *Es posible/necesario/etc.* and *recomendar que* were combined. *Gustarse que___* was combined with *querer que___* and *lo que/a donde___* was combined with *antes/después de que/para que___*.

To test the randomness or systematicity of the verb forms used by these subjects according to syntactic frame, only present subjunctive verbs, present indicative verbs, infinitives and other were entered into the program. The other verb forms combined future indicative, preterit indicative, present participle, present indicative/WF and the invented forms because, again, the number of occasions of use individually were too low for statistical purposes.

The results of the chi-square test were significant: x^2= 41.527, with a degree of freedom of twelve (df12), and a probability of error of less than .001 (p<.001). The raw and statistical figures are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Count and Expected Frequency of Chi-Square Test for Subjunctive Marking by Matrix Type (Interview I).

Complement Verb Form	Matrix Types					
	es necesario/ posible/etc. que	cuando	querer/ gustarse que	esperar que	antes/despues de que/para/ lo que/a donde	All
Subj. Use	0 1.06	2 1.13	6 2.42	0 2.49	0 0.91	8 8.00
Non-use of Subj.	14 12.94	13 13.86	26 29.59	33 30.51	12 11.10	61 61.00
All	14 14.00	15 15.00	32 32.00	33 33.00	12 12.00	106 106.00

Chi-Square = 41.527   D.F. = 12 $p < .001$

The results of this test confirm that the choice of verb forms is not random, but that there is a statistically significant amount of variability in the way these subjects choose verb forms according to syntactic frame.

4.1. Discussion

Why did subjects choose certain verb forms above others? Why was there a predominance of present indicative and infinitive forms? A look at the clauses or sentences and the discourse units in which these alternative verb forms appear reveals something about how these subjects are processing the L2 and what strategies they may be using to communicate in it.

In some cases the subjects have transferred the syntactic structure from English almost word for word, as the following example illustrates:

> **Mi parientes no demandan nada de mi; quieren mi estar alegre.*
> 'My parents don't demand anything of me; they want me to be happy.'
> (Well-formed Spanish: *Mis papás no demandan nada de mi; quieren que yo esté alegre.*)

Interference from the L1 in syntactic surface structures is obvious; however, syntactic transfer doesn't always occur. There were examples in the data where if positive syntactic transfer from the L1 had occurred, it would have resulted in the correct usage of the Spanish subjunctive, as in the following:

> **Recomendamos que ella vió un doctor.*
> (lit.)*'We recommend(ed) that she saw a doctor.'

> (Well-formed Spanish: *Recomendamos que ella viera (vea) a un doctor.*)
> 'We recommend that she see (subj.) a doctor.'

Apart from the cases of first language transfer, the presence of certain other verb forms may indicate that learners understand, although in a very limited sense, some of the meanings or functions of the subjunctive mood in Spanish. For the syntactic frame, *cuando___*, subjects used the future indicative just as often as the present indicative and more often than the infinitive. The following is an example of this:

> *Cuando regresaré a los Estados Unidos, voy a comenzar estudiar una vez mas.*
> (lit.)'*When I will return to the United States, I am going to study one time more.'
> (Well-formed Spanish: *Cuando regrese a los E.U., voy a comenzar a estudiar de nuevo.*) 'When I return (subj.) to the U.S., I am going to begin to study again.'

These types of sentences reflect neither the structure of English nor of Spanish. What they do reflect is that the learner in some way understands that the verb which follows the syntactic frame *cuando___*, expresses some kind of possible future action or event. Perhaps the learners understand in some way that this meaning is expressed in Spanish with a form other than the present indicative.

Another possibility is that learners confuse the first person present subjunctive, *regrese* with the first person future indicative *regresaré.*. The only other syntactic frame in which subjects substituted the future for the present subjunctive in the complement verb was *es lógico/necesario/posible que___*, which also can indicate a possible or necessary future action. That subjects do not transfer the syntax of the present indicative from English with expressions of possible future action, may be due to the fact that there are times when the subjects, unsure of the correct morphological inflection, opt for expressing the meanings of the language in as direct a manner as possible. It seems at this point, in a very limited way, semantics is interacting with syntax and morphology and providing a way for learners to communicate in the L2.

The results of the error analysis verify that these learners have not yet acquired the Spanish subjunctive mood; however, looking at the other verb forms they use in complements following different syntactic frames provides an indicator that they at least understand some of the semantic features of the Spanish subjunctive mood. It also provides evidence of where first language transfer plays a systematic role in second language production.

5. RESULTS OF INTERVIEW TWO

The data from the second interview revealed some similar patterns of use, and some differences as well. A summary of the results of the analysis of the data from this interview are presented in Table Four.

Table 4. Forms Used for Present Subjunctive by Syntactic Frame - Interview Two.

Syntactic Frame	No. of Occasions	Present Subj.	Present Indicative	Infinitive	Future Indicative	Paraphrastic Future	Preterite Indicative	Pres. Ind./WF
es necesario/ posible que	13	3 (23%)	4 (31%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	-	-	3 (23%)
cuando	24	12 (50%)	4 (17%)	-	5 (21%)	-	-	3 (12%)
querer que	20	14 (70%)	4 (20%)	-	-	-	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
no creer que	9	-	9 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-
esperar que	21	8 (38%)	5 (24%)	2 (10%)	3 (14%)	3 (14%)	-	-
hasta/sin/ para que	8	-	8 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-
alegrarse que	7	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	-	-	-	-
ojalá	7	7 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
other	6	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	-	-	-	-	-
Total	115 (100%)	50 (43%)	40 (35%)	4 (3%)	10 (9%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	7 (6%)

The most immediate observation is that subjunctive marking increases dramatically -- from 7% in Interview One to 43% in Interview Two. In addition, these subjects produce more variety of syntactic frames in which the present subjunctive is required or allowed, yet the number of different types of verb form decreases (from eight in Interview One to seven in Interview Two). The present indicative remains the preferred alternative form used and other verb forms include the infinitive, the future indicative, the paraphrastic future (*ir* + infinitive), the preterit indicative and the present indicative/WF. There are no longer invented forms and there are no occasions of the present participle form.

A pattern that is observed in Interview One is not quite the same in Interview Two, i.e. it is not always the case that the greater the percentage of present subjunctive marking, the greater the amount of variability in the use of other forms. In fact, for some frames, it is seen that present

subjunctive marking in the complement clause greatly increases, but the amount of variability in the choice of other verb forms decreases. For complement verbs following the frame *cuando___*, present subjunctive marking increases (from 13% in Interview One) to 50%, while the variability of other forms used decreases (from six in Interview One) to four. In complement verbs of the frame *querer que___* present subjunctive marking increases from 20% to 70% in Interview Two and the number of other verb forms decreases from seven in Interview One to only four in Interview Two.

The other frames, however, do present a similar pattern for use as seen in Interview One. For the syntactic frame *es posible/necesario que___*, whereas in Interview One there is no subjunctive marking and there is little variety of forms (only two), in Interview Two there is now some present subjunctive marking (three out of thirteen or 23%) and more variability in the choice of other forms -- five. The other forms include 31% use of the present indicative, 8% use of the infinitive, 15% use of the future indicative and 23% use of the present indicative/WF. The present indicative continues to be the preferred other form used in complement verbs following this syntactic frame.

The frame, *esperar que___*, patterns in a similar way. Whereas in Interview One there is no present subjunctive marking in its complement verbs, in Interview Two the present subjunctive is marked 38% of the time. The number of forms remains the same at five. However, the preferred other form used is no longer the infinitive as in Interview One, but is now the present indicative, which is used 24% of the time, followed by the future and paraphrastic indicative futures, both used 14% each, and the infinitive which is used only 10% of the time.

The use and percentage of forms used with the remaining syntactic frames cannot be compared with those from Interview One because they are not comparable. However, a similar pattern of use is seen overall. Where there are no subjunctive verbs in the complement clause, as in following the syntactic frames, *no creer que___* and *hasta/sin/para que___*, there is also no variability in the use of other verb forms. For the syntactic frames *alegrarse que___* and 'others', there is some present subjunctive marking and some variability. In sum, the amount of subjunctive marking dramatically increases in Interview Two, while the preferred other form chosen continues to be the present indicative. The use of the infinitive drops considerably, the use of the future doubles, preterit indicative remains the same at 1%, which indicates this type of error may be due to incorrect stress placement, and finally, the use of the present indicative/WF doubles. Although any one of these increases could be accidental and therefore insignificant, the pattern of increase is unquestionable. Finally, while the number of syntactic frames requiring or allowing present subjunctive verbs in the complement clause increases, perhaps due to an increase in lexical knowledge on the part of the subjects, the number of variable forms decreases, probably due to an increase in the control of the target language morphology. Although the variability in the choice of verb form is less in Interview II, is it still significant? Is it systematic?

Again the occasions for present indicative marking in subordinate clauses were examined. Table 5 presents the results. The present indicative was marked 98% of the time and there is virtually no variability.

Table 5. Forms Used for Present Indicative by Syntactic Frame - Interview Two.

Syntactic Frame	No.of Occasions	Present Indicative	Present Indicative/WF	Present Subjunctive
cuando	22	19	1	2
creer/pensar que	31	31	-	-
si	9	9	-	-
donde	6	6	-	-
aunque	2	2	-	-
quien	6	6	-	-
parecer	2	2	-	-
como	3	3	-	-
lo que	6	6	-	-
porque	26	25	1	-
(adjectival) que	56	56	-	-
Total	174 (100%)	170 (98%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)

Again a chi-square test was performed on the data from interview two, and again the results were significant. As for the data from Interview One, two of the syntactic frames were combined and two others were eliminated because of such small numbers of occasions. The verb forms tested were the present subjunctive, the present indicative, the infinitive and the other forms were combined. The results of the test appear in Table 6: $X^2 = 50.160$, with a degree of freedom of fifteen ($df15$), and a probability of error of less than .001 ($p<.001$).

Again, as with the data from Interview One, the results of this test support the conclusion that there is a statistically significant difference in the way these subjects choose the different forms based on syntactic frame and that this is done systematically.

Table 6. Count and Expected Frequency of Chi-Square Test for Subjunctive Marking by Matrix Type (Interview II).

Complement Verb Form	Matrix Types						
	es necesario/ posible/etc. que	cuando	querer que	no creer que	esperar que	hasta/sin/para/ lo que	All
Subj. Use	2 4.68	12 9.36	14 7.80	0 3.51	8 8.19	3 5.46	39 39.00
Non-use of Subj.	10 7.32	12 14.64	6 12.20	9 5.49	13 12.81	11 8.54	61 61.00
All	12 12.00	24 24.00	20 20.00	9 9.00	21 21.00	14 14.00	100 100.00

Chi-Square = 50.160   D.F. = 15   p<.001

5.1. Discussion

A pattern emerges from the analysis on the variable use of the subjunctive and other verb forms in these occasions. In the first set of interviews it was seen that the use of the subjunctive, however limited, was also accompanied by a considerable amount of variability in the choices of other verb forms. However, in Interview One, the syntactic frame *esperar que___* also exhibited a considerable amount of variability in the choice of other verb forms in its complement verbs but there was no use of the present subjunctive. In the data from the second interview, for the syntactic frames in which subjunctive marking was the greatest, 50% for *cuando___* and 70% for *querer que___*, variability decreased. It appears that when learners are developing competence in a structure and in its use and form, this developing competence is accompanied by a great deal of variability. The learner is experimenting with different morphological endings. As the learner becomes more competent in the structure, this variability decreases. The learner refines and limits the choices available.

In Interview One, subjects are developing competence in subjunctive marking in the complement verbs for the syntactic frames *cuando___* and *querer que___*. In Interview Two, as competence in subjunctive marking for these two environments improves, variability decreases. The syntactic frame, *esperar que___*, exhibits a different pattern. In Interview I, there is considerable variability in the verb forms in its complement verbs, although there are no present subjunctive verbs. It appears that subjects are developing competence in subjunctive marking for this frame. Indeed, in Interview Two, they employ the present subjunctive 38% of the time in complement verbs of this frame. For other frames where there are no present subjunctives in *no creer que___* and *hasta/sin/para que___* neither is there variability.

Another frame where there is no variability is *ojalá___*. This is one of the few cases in which the subjunctive mood in Spanish is found in an independent clause. In addition, unlike many

of the other syntactic frames, the subjunctive mood is always required here. The fact that these subjects mark the verbs 100% for the subjunctive indicates that they control the morphology of the present subjunctivel, a finding reinforced by the fact that there are no longer any invented, 'subjunctive-like' forms as in Interview One.

In addition, *ojalá*___, shares certain features in common with the syntactic frame *querer que*___. Both of these invariably require the subjunctive in their complements -- there is no choice according to speaker attitude or context, and both share the semantic features of futurity and desire. It is probably no coincidence that these two frames both cause a high percentage of subjunctive-marking in Interview Two. The variability still seen in the choice of verb forms in complements following *querer que*___ could be due to the fact that *querer que*___ occurs in complex sentences. In addition, *querer* may be followed by an infinitive (when there is no *que* and the subject of *querer* and the complement is the same).

Another interesting phenomenon that is exhibited in the data is the change in sentence patterns from the first interview situation to the second. In the Interview I there was a great deal of evidence of negative transfer from the L1 in the sentence patterns and a high percentage of infinitives in complement clauses; in the second interview, the sentence patterns more closely resemble Spanish.

The limited use of the present subjunctive seen in Interview I has spread to more environments in Interview II. Although subjects continue to evidence a great deal of variability in their choice of verb forms in the complement clauses, the variety of verb forms apparently available to them has diminished slightly. The preferred alternative verb form continues to be the present indicative; however, the use of the infinitive (with no marking for mood, tense, person or number) has greatly diminished. Use of the future indicative has increased to 12% of the time. This may be due to the fact that when these future indicatives appear, they are in complement clauses following syntactic frames whose semantic meaning conveys possible futurity. Finally, the invented forms, although limited in the data from Interview One (only 3% of the time), do not appear at all in the indicative data and have disappeared as alternatives in the subjunctive data in Interview II. Besides the increased subjunctive marking, subjects are stabilizing the verb morphology for the present subjunctive. The differences that are observed from the data and the analyses carried out on the data from the two interview situations clearly show a shift in language learning strategies from transfer of L1 syntax and morphology in Interview I to a construction process that uses multiple linguistic features or levels to construct and use the L2 in Interview II.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results show that these subjects used the present subjunctive in very limited linguistic environments in Interview One (two environments) and in more environments in Interview Two (seven). For both interviews, it was seen that the variable use of the present subjunctive was systematically variable according to syntactic frame and that the variability was statistically significant.

In the first interview, subjunctive marking was accompanied by a great deal of variety in the use of alternate forms. Where there was variety of alternate forms in the first interviews but no subjunctive marking, in the second interview subjunctive marking was seen. Also, as acquisition increased, variability was seen to decrease. Onset of acquisition of a form is

accompanied by variability as the learner tries out new forms. As acquisition develops and stabilizes, variability decreases. These results suggest that what at first, appears to be a great deal of morphological confusion on the part of the learner, is actually systematic variability in the choice of verb forms for the complement clauses. This systematic variability is a necessary process learners must go through in order for acquisition to take place, especially for syntactically and semantically complex structures such as the Spanish subjunctive.

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