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Dissertation Abstract

Cross-dialectal Features of the Spanish Present Perfect:
A Typological Analysis of Form and Function

This dissertation presents a typological analysis of the Present Perfect across dialects of Spanish, building from a set of semantic features characteristic of perfect constructions cross-linguistically. It has been long noted that use of the perfect in Spanish varieties spoken in Spain differs qualitatively from its use in Latin American dialects. The principal contributions of this thesis are (i) the description of a set of semantic characteristics exhibited across languages with typologically similar perfect constructions and (ii) the application of this set of features to the categorization of perfects across dialects of Spanish.

The analysis begins with an examination of the set of features used to characterize cross-dialectal variation in the Spanish perfect, arguing that it exhibits many of the features of an archetypal perfect. Next, a partition of dialect groups is proposed, establishing a division between those varieties that favor the perfective past, or *pretérito*, in reference to past events and those that prefer the perfect. Two dialects—Peninsular and Peruvian Spanish—in which increased functional overlap between the perfect and the *pretérito* has been attested are then analyzed in detail. It is argued that Peruvian Spanish is more generally representative of the Latin American *pretérito*-preferring norm, as opposed to Peninsular Spanish, characterized as a dialect that favors the perfect. The arguments developed in the preceding chapters are corroborated by the results of the author's fieldwork conducted in Madrid and Valencia, Spain and Cusco, Peru.

The analysis concludes with a proposal concerning the variable mechanisms of semantic change responsible for the independent development of perfective features observed in the perfect in Peninsular and Peruvian Spanish. While grammaticalization in both cases is motivated by discourse-related factors, the extension of the perfect in Peninsular Spanish is triggered by the erosion of relevance implications associated with the meaning of the perfect. In the case of the Peruvian Spanish perfect, increased perfectivity results from a widening of the notion of relevance. These two dialectal situations therefore represent distinct outcomes of discourse-motivated semantic change.