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¿Pretérito o Imperfecto?: Advancing Spanish Past Tense Instruction for World Language
Teachers and their L2 Classroom

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in Spanish and Secondary Education

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The addition of a world language to one's education is an exciting and possibly nerve-racking moment (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Shrum & Glisan, 2016). For perhaps the first time, students witness how their classroom ushers in the sound system of a new language, the vivid colors of a previously unexplored culture, and the understanding that they have become global citizens. Such is the case for students whose home/first language (L1) is English and who begin their study of Spanish, the fourth-most spoken language in the world (Berlitz, 2022). With 534 million speakers, this language promises to give learners a deeper understanding of global interactions and lifestyles different than their own (2022). As students begin their Spanish second language (L2) journey, they are met with similarities to English that may ease understanding; however, there are nuances of the Spanish language that students must understand to grow in proficiency. One of these infamous nuances is the contrast between the preterit and imperfect tenses in the indicative mood. Although both are used to discuss the past, these verb forms are not interchangeable and require of L2 Spanish students a change in perspective regarding how they consider and analyze time and past events (Comajoan Colomé, 2018). The preterit-imperfect distinction presents challenges not only in understanding but also in instruction as Spanish teachers strive to make a connection between the material and the students (Kissling & Muthusamy, 2022). To promote a greater understanding of these distinctions, this paper will explore the history of the preterit and imperfect tenses and will also examine these tenses through their linguistic composition and their use in cultural and contextualized contexts. This developed perspective will allow students and teachers alike to enhance their L2 Spanish classroom experience and gain confidence in engaging with this perplexing area of *la lengua española*.

Latin to Spanish Derivation

The beginnings of the Spanish language are rooted in the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Beginning in the 7th century BCE, the Romans turned a collection of settlements into a vast and powerful civilization (Ring, 2022). The might of Rome's political and military prowess resulted in the conquering of the surrounding lands of the Mediterranean Sea and, consequently, the Iberian Peninsula (Ring, 2022). Similarly, the language of the city of Rome, Latin, spread throughout the Italian peninsula and overpowered surrounding dialects (Hualde, Olarrea, Escobar, Travis, & Sanz, 2021). As the Roman Empire expanded, the Latin language encountered a variety of languages already present in the Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula. Hualde et al. (2021) write of this area as it was when the Romans arrived and document the existence of Euskara, Oscan, Umbra, and Etruscan languages. However, few to none of these languages were able to survive the Roman political, military, and linguistic invasion, and these regional languages bowed to Latin (Hualde et al., 2021). Eventually, despite periods of prosperity, the Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century (Thomson de Grummond, 2022). Along with the political decline of Rome came the linguistic decline of Latin. Hualde et al. write that the deterioration of the Roman empire broke the communication between the provinces in the empire, resulting in diverging forms and trajectories for the Latin dialects (2021). These dialects are known today as Romance languages and consist of Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, French, and other smaller-scale languages (Hualde et al., 2021). Although Latin is not widely spoken anymore, its legacy lives on in these modern-day languages and communities.

This language derivation allows historians and linguists to highlight the direct impacts that have occurred over centuries regarding Latin and Spanish verbal paradigms. One of the

primary takeaways exists in verb conjugations: Spanish has three verb forms (-AR verbs, -ER verbs, and -IR verbs), while Latin has four (-āre verbs, -īre verbs, -ēre verbs, and -ĕre verbs) (Mackenzie, 1999). As time progressed, the -ĕre conjugated morphed to join the -ēre conjugation, providing the almost identical derivation that is observed in present-day: āre verbs to -AR verbs, -ĕre and -ēre verbs to -ER verbs, and -īre verbs into -IR verbs (Mackenzie, 1999). In modern Spanish, 90% of verbs belong in the first conjugation (-AR verbs), and as the needs of language use change, this category remains the only verb conjugation that “accepts” new verbs; that is, any new verbal neologisms adopted into the Spanish language take on an -AR verb ending (Hualde et al., 2021). Languages shift and change over time, and the difference in verb endings is a key indicator of this derivation and aid in better understanding the preterit and imperfect tenses.

The conjugations of regular -AR and -ER Spanish verbs in the preterit tense are derived from interactions between vowels in the -āre and -īre verb classes. In Latin, the preterit tense was known as the “perfect tense;” that is, describing past, completed actions (Ohio State University, 2022). In order to conjugate the perfect tense for the -āre verb class, the syllable -vi- was added to the stem, followed by the person identifier (first person, second person, etc.). For example, we see the first-person singular conjugation for the verb *cantāre*: *cantāvī* and for the verb *dormīre*: *dormīvī* (Mackenzie, 1999). As often happens with language, derivational changes over centuries resulted in the loss of the -v-, allowing the -i- to become diphthongized to *cantāī*, and diphthongized once more to *canté*, the *yo* form of -AR Spanish verbs (Mackenzie, 1999; Escobar, 2020). This is also observed with -ER and -IR verbs, with a derivation of *dormīvī* to *dormī* to *dormí* (See Figure 1) (Mackenzie, 1999). Douglass points out that the written acute accent marks were added in the 16th and 17th centuries to distinguish the preterit tense (1988).

The rest of the conjugations for these verbs follow similar patterns regarding diphthongization, highlighting a strong lineage between Spanish and Latin perfect verb forms.

Latin Infinitive Verb	Perfect Tense First Person Conjugation	Diphthongization	Preterit Tense First Person Conjugation
cantāre	cantāvī	cantāi,	canté
dormīre	dormīvī	dormī	dormí

Figure 1: Derivation of Regular Preterit Tense Verbs

The legacy of the preterit tense being a complex verb form to learn comes from changes observed in the -ēre and -ĕre verb classes. Some of these verb forms indeed abide by the diphthongization previously observed in the perfect tense (Escobar, 2020); however, most verbs in these classes were rhizotonic and represent the varied stem changes observed in the preterit tense (Mackenzie, 1999). Rhizotonic or strong verbs are verbs that have an accent in the root/stem instead of the endings, resulting in irregular stress patterns and root irregularities (Hualde et al., 2021; Mackenzie, 1999). Two of the most notable *pretérito grave* (strong preterit) verbs are root vowel /u/ verbs and root vowel /x/ verbs. To begin, root vowel /u/ verbs (*poder – pude, andar – anduve*) had a -u- present just after the stem of Latin verbs in the present, such as *sapūi* – “I knew.” This results in its continued presence in the modern world (despite going through some orthographical changes in the Middle Ages) – “supe” (Mackenzie, 1999). Likewise, root vowel /x/ verbs (*conducir – conduje, traer – traje*) maintained an orthographical -x- in their Latin conjugation predecessors, such as *trahĕre – trāxī*. This orthographical -x- morphed into a -j- and provides the modern preterit endings for irregular verbs (See Figure 2) (Mackenzie, 1999; Escobar, 2020). The stem changes present in the preterit often make it difficult for L2 students to gain proficiency in conjugating and producing these verb forms and, as such, require an in-depth study (Spinelli, 2007). Since the derivations from Latin to Spanish

elucidate the variety in form, an exploration or reasoning as to why the preterit tense “differs” so much could prove to be fruitful regarding students’ understandings.

Latin Infinitive Verb	Latin Perfect Tense First Person Conjugation	Spanish Preterit Tense First Person Conjugation
<i>sapĕre</i>	<i>sapŭi</i>	<i>supe</i>
<i>trahĕre</i>	<i>trāxi</i>	<i>traje</i>

Figure 2: Derivation of Strong Preterit Verbs

Conversely, the simple nature of the imperfect tense is a result of continuity and a small number of irregular verbs. Borrowing the same name, in Latin the imperfect tense referred to past events that were deemed to be ongoing, repeated, or continuous actions (Ohio State University, 2022). In order to form the imperfect tense, speakers would add -ba- in between the stem and the person identifier: for example, the verb *tĭmĕre* would be formed *tĭmĕbās* (Mackenzie, 1999). This was the same for all four classes of verbs, avoiding the distinction as seen in the preterit/perfect tense. In modern-day Spanish, the -ba- distinction only exists for -AR verbs: *caminaba* (Escobar, 2020). For the other three Latin classes that morphed into the Spanish -ER and -IR verbs, the -ba- came into contact with the -e- or -i- of the stem, resulting in the loss of the -b- and keeping the -e-, which evolved into an -i- while in contact with the -a-: *habĕre-habebam – habĕa – habĭa* (See Figure 3) (Escobar, 2020; The Latin Dictionary, 2010). Unlike the diphthongization observed with the perfect tense, the -i- remained a strong vowel and formed a hiatus with the -a- (Hualde et al., 2021). The characteristics of this tense stayed the same for practically all four verb classes, resulting in a straightforward derivation.

Latin Infinitive Verb	Latin Imperfect Tense First Person Singular Conjugation	Loss of the -b-	Spanish Imperfect Tense First Person Singular Conjugation
<i>habĕre</i>	<i>habebam</i>	<i>habĕa</i>	<i>habĭa</i>

Figure 3: Derivation of Regular Imperfect Tense Verbs

However, the three irregular imperfect tense verbs require a closer examination. The Latin to Spanish derivation shows the reasoning behind the different forms of *ser*, *ir*, and *ver*. To begin, the verb *ser* comes from the Latin *ēsse*, with a perfect tense form of *ēram*; As such, this carried over into the Spanish *era* instead of something such as **sia* (Escobar, 2020). Next, the verb *Ir* kept the -ba- ending, resulting in the modern-day *iba* (The Latin Dictionary, 2010). Lastly, the verb *ver* retained the -e- from its Latin stem *Vīdēre*, resulting in *veía* (The Latin Dictionary, 2010). These three irregulars make up the sole differences in the imperfect tense and represent a difference in derivation compared to the rest of the tense (See Figure 4). Nonetheless, the imperfect tense maintains strong ties to its Latin predecessor and continues to carry on the original endings and similar structure.

Latin Infinitive Verb	Latin Imperfect Tense First Person Singular Conjugation	Spanish Imperfect Tense First Person Singular Conjugation
<i>ēsse</i>	<i>ēram</i>	<i>era</i>
<i>īre</i>	<i>ibam</i>	<i>iba</i>
<i>vīdēre</i>	<i>videbam</i>	<i>veía</i>

Figure 4: Derivation of Irregular Imperfect Tense Verbs

As observed with the derivational changes noted between the Latin and Spanish past tenses, the second millennium saw the effort to define this now-separated “dialect” of Latin as its own entity. As Douglass (1988) finds, too much distinction had grown between Latin and this Peninsular language that recognizing and establishing this new form of communication could not be ignored. Work began in the eleventh century with Alfonso X (*Alfonso el Sabio*) establishing a literary form of early Spanish that writers would use and follow instead of writers just using whichever language rules they wanted (Hualde et al., 2021). At this time, the Arab

empire/Umayyad Caliphate (Afsaruddin, 2022) had conquered the Iberian Peninsula. There was a large integration of cultures which resulted in Arabic languages mixing with the emerging Spanish language and other dialects (known as Mozarabic traditions) (Hualde et al., 2021). Eventually, the Catholic royalty removed the Arabs from Spain, ushering in a linguistic unification under *el castellano* (Castilian Spanish) (Hualde et al., 2021). During this Early Modern Period, four grammarians rose to prominence and carried out the task of examining and characterizing Spanish: Nebrija, Villalón, Miranda, and Correas. González Manzano (2006) writes that “[ellos] *son los primeros en describir la lengua romance y enfrentarse al desafío de dejar atrás las categorías y descripciones propias del latín* (...[they] are the first to describe the romance language and confront the challenge of leaving behind the categories and descriptions of Latin) (p.16). As they were to find, the challenge of spelling out this language was a much harder task than previously imagined.

As exemplified by their work, initial attempts to define the language answered some questions about the past tenses and left others unsolved. González Manzano (2006) writes that Nebrija marked the preterit/imperfect distinction with the terms *passado acabado* and *passado no acabado*, respectively. Although credited with defining “[the] second moment of formation in regard to modern literary norms,” Nebrija left a sense of ambiguity regarding how to talk about the past in Spanish, an assertion also supported by González Manzano (2006) (Hualde et al, 2021, p.319). On the other hand, Villalón described the preterit tense (*passado*) and left out the imperfect tense; González Manzano supposes that Villalón believed the imperfect was more productive than the preterit/*passado acabado* (2006). Lastly, Miranda and Correas included both the preterit and imperfect tenses- Miranda named them *passato perfecto* and *passato imperfecto*, and Correas defined them as *perfecto* and *imperfecto*. Although most grammarians understood

the past tenses, González Manzano (2006) highlights the idea that “*los mismos gramáticos tampoco parecían saber qué valor exacto tenía cada forma* (the same grammarians did not seem to know what value each [verb] form had) (p. 25). In terms of the study of preterit and imperfect, it is important to note that their distinctions remained unclear to those trying to define this new language. A separation from Latin signified a need to examine a Latin-influenced yet distinct entity, which remained an ongoing challenge. González Manzano puts it best when describing the Spanish language as “still finding itself evolving and the temporal values of each form still had not been fixed” (p. 17). The Latin to Spanish derivation well documents languages' fluidity and ever-changing nature, and the preterit and imperfect ambiguities support this assertion.

The founding of an institution set the newly minted Spanish language on the road to establishment. In 1713 the Marquis of Villena founded The RAE (*Real Academia Española*, or Spanish Royal Academy) with the goal of “fixing the words and terms of the Castilian language to ensure its utmost propriety, elegance and purity” (España es Cultura, n.d). The founding of the RAE made it so that Spanish “*adquiere una normativa fija y uniforme* (acquired a fixed and uniform regulation) (Hualde et al., 2021, p. 319). In its modern-day role, The RAE monitors and presides over the Spanish spoken and written language. However, due to the ever-changing nature of languages, the RAE alleges that they are sure to stay on top of the linguistic changes to the language conducted by those that speak it (Hualde et al., 2021). The work of Alfonso X, Nebrija and other grammarians, as well as the RAE throughout the second millennium, helped to establish the Spanish language and solidify this romance-derived language in Europe.

European colonization of the Americas resulted in the cross-Atlantic and later global dissemination of the Spanish language. Around the time Nebrija was writing, Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World in 1492 and began a centuries-long process of colonizing,

ethnic genocide, and whitewashing of native traditions (Brockell, 2019). Similarly, the Spanish language began to dominate these regions. Stavans (2017) writes, “Indigenous tongues struggled to survive under the implacable presence of an imperial mandate intent on making all subjects part of the [Spanish] empire” (p. 2). Spanish hegemony in the region and conquistadors’ desire for gold and prowess suppressed the languages of Indigenous societies and caused irreversible cultural and linguistic damage. Nonetheless, a combining of culture occurred between the Spanish language and native languages, and shared words persist into the language of today’s world: Examples include words derived from Nahuatl (the language of the Mexica Empire), Quechua (the language of the Incan Empire), Guaraní, Caribe, and Arahuaico (languages spoken by different Indigenous groups around Latin America and the Caribbean) (Hualde et al., 2021). As time passed, a desire for independence grew in the Americas, inspired by the American Revolution and the French Revolution (Stavans, 2017). An inclination towards linguistic autonomy emerged as well, and Latin-American linguists such as Bellos had a desire to “offer a way for speakers in the Americas to use the [Spanish] language according to their own needs and not in deference to Iberian attitudes” (Stavans, 2017, p.4). With this understanding, societies began to embrace the language of the oppressors as their own, and Spanish was adapted to reflect the regional needs of the now independent speakers of Latin and South America.

Linguistic Composition of the Preterit and Imperfect Tenses

Despite all the nuances and complexities of this global language, the Spanish preterit and imperfect tenses are described shallowly in L2 classrooms. Nonetheless, it is important to set this background knowledge to be able to discuss these tenses more in-depth and analyze their contextual and cultural uses. In her textbook *Taller de Escritores* [Writers’ Workshop], which is intended for L2 Spanish students of intermediate-high to advanced-low proficiency, Cañón

(2021) details the differences between the preterit (*pretérito perfecto simple o pretérito indefinido*) and the imperfect (*pretérito imperfecto*): the preterit is used “to refer to past, completed actions; indicate the beginning or end of a state or action; to refer to a change in state; and to narrate a series of events.” Meanwhile, the imperfect is used “to express habitual actions in the past; to refer to past actions or states that were ongoing, incomplete, or in progress; and, to refer to a future event as seen from a past time” (p. 46). This explanation is also common among other textbooks, as demonstrated by a similar explanation in Spinelli (2006). While these descriptions are well intended, it is written that these “rules of thumb have been criticized as constituting an inaccurate and confusing laundry list of disconnected notions” (Kissling & Muthusamy, 2022, p.371). It is necessary to know these rules; however, a deeper understanding of these tenses may prove beneficial to improving the conversation in the classroom.

Through analysis of the linguistic composition of these tenses, the essence of what is being analyzed when choosing the preterit or imperfect becomes more transparent. At the ending of every verb, the inflectional morpheme (*morfema flexivo*) precisely denotes the grammatical properties of the verb: for example, *corre* is different from *corriamos* which differs from *corrieran* (See Figure 5) (Nordquist, 2020). More than just an orthographic difference, these verbs differ in their TAM. As defined by Hualde et al. (2021), TAM refers to the tense (T) of the verb (past, present, future), the aspect (A) of the verb (perfective or imperfective), and the mood (M) of the verb (indicative, conditional, subjunctive). On a more profound level, the aspect is “a syntactic category conveying semantic information about the temporal development of an eventuality and about the number of occasions that the eventuality has been instantiated” (Domínguez, Arche, & Myles, 2017, p.433). The establishment of tense leads learners to consider when said action occurred in the eyes of the speaker and to distinguish the action’s

perfectiveness or imperfectiveness. To summarize, when students choose between the preterit or imperfect tense, they analyze the aspectual makeup of the action (Delgado Díaz, 2018). Although appearing effortless, this topic can often be a challenge for L2 Spanish speakers: “English speakers must learn to morphologically mark aspectual contrasts in Spanish that are not obligatorily marked in Spanish” (Kissling & Muthusamy, 2022, p. 372). Not only are students learning a new language, but they must also take the time to think about the aspect of the past situation, perhaps more than they had to in their L1. Overall, this essence of the preterit and imperfect tenses is key to engaging with the topic, and an even further analysis reveals what goes into discerning the aspect.

Third Person singular Present Tense Conjugation	First Person Plural Imperfect Tense Conjugation	Third Person Plural Imperfect Subjunctive Conjugation
<i>corre</i>	<i>corríamos</i>	<i>corrieran</i>

Figure 5: **Grammatical Aspect/Inflectional Morpheme** as shown for the Verb *Correr*

The first branch of aspectual analysis is called the grammatical aspect (*el aspecto flexivo*); that is, “the information provided by the inflectional morphology of the verb” (Delgado Díaz, 2018, p. 66). Morphology studies the structure and rules regarding the formation of words, and an inflectional focus analyzes interlinguistic characteristics that are part of the language (Hualde et. al., 2021). In other words, the grammatical aspect is the verb conjugation that denotes whether the verb is in the preterit or imperfect tense (See Figure 5). The role of the grammatical aspect is to give the reader a certain interpretation of the event: *hacía* carries a different interpretation than *hizo* (Delgado Díaz, 2018). The grammatical aspect, while not explicitly named, is often the first understanding garnered by students when engaging with the Spanish past tense (Comajoan Colomé, 2018). The grammatical aspect helps to form the foundation of understanding Spanish for L2 learners and subsequently paves the way for the second branch.

The second branch of aspectual analysis discusses the characteristics of the verb itself and the impact a verb delivers. This branch is called the lexical aspect, otherwise known as *Aktionsart*, and it challenges students to look deeper into a verb and ascertain the meaning that “verbs carry within themselves” (Delgado Díaz & Ortiz López, 2012; Thornbury, 2017). Linguistically, the lexical aspect is crucial in the semantic analysis of the verb (Delgado Díaz & Ortiz López, 2012). Semantics is the examination of the significance of the words and phrases of a language, specifically when it comes to the reference of the words (Hualde et al., 2021). For example, what does the verb *perder* (to lose) refer to? What is intrinsic about this verb, and what does this tell the receiver of the conversation? Through an analysis of semantics, Vendler (1957) analyzed these very questions and produced four classes of verbs that express intrinsic, built-in characteristics: state verbs, activity verbs, accomplishment verbs, and achievement verbs (Comajoan Colomé, 2018; Delgado Diaz, 2018). Overall, the two branches of an aspectual focus work in tandem to define what the verb is expressing and as a result what endings are attributed to that specific expression.

Attributes of the four classes of verbs begin to illustrate the intricacies regarding preterit and imperfect distinctions. Delgado Díaz (2018) writes that each of the four verb classes (state, activity, accomplishment, and achievement) can be analyzed through three different markers: Dynamicity, telicity, and punctuality. Dynamicity refers to an “implied change of situations;” activity, accomplishment, and achievement verbs are dynamic because they detail the happenings of one past action that, either now in the present day or at a new moment in the past, have changed (Vendler, 1957; Delgado Díaz, 2018). Telic and atelic verbs refer to telicity- that is, whether the verb represents an action that is bounded by specific times or, alternatively, is considered unbounded and may still be in progress during this specific moment in the past. State

and Activity verbs are atelic, and accomplishment and achievement verbs are telic (Vendler, 1957; Delgado Díaz, 2018). Lastly, a verb’s punctuality defines whether or not the verbs can last (for an extended amount of time according to the speaker) or are capped at some point – state, activity, and accomplishment verbs are durative (can last), while achievement verbs are punctual (See Figure 6) (Delgado Díaz, 2018; Vendler, 1957). All three of these markers are important when differentiating between the preterit and imperfect tenses because L2 students tend to associate verb classes and factors with a certain tense over the other. For example, students may associate telic verbs with the preterit tense, and atelic verbs with the imperfect tense (Comajoan Colomé, 2018). Consequently, it takes time for the teacher to analyze these connections and agree to or correct the students’ assumptions and show students how the aspect of a verb expresses more about the sentence than just when the event occurred.

Verb Category	Example	Dynamicity	Telicity	Punctuality
State	<i>Estar</i> [To be]	No	No; Atelic	No
Activity	<i>Caminar</i> [To run]	Yes	No; Atelic	No
Accomplishment	<i>Hacer</i> [To do]	Yes	Yes, Telic	No
Achievement	<i>Ganar</i> [To earn]	Yes	Yes, Telic	Yes

Figure 6: Four Classes of Verbs (Vendler, 1957) and Lexical Aspect Markers

The tendency to associate verb classes with lexical aspect forms a fundamental foundation of how learners first engage with the preterit and imperfect nuance. In their seminal essay, Anderson and Shirai (1994) detail the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH): “The aspect hypothesis states that first and second-language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs” (p.133). In other words, assuming that there is an intrinsic understanding of the four classes of verbs proposed by Vendler (1957) (whether

expressed in the class or not), students will correspond certain verbs with lexical aspect markers and eventually associate a certain past tense with said verb (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). When it comes to the preterit tense, learners first usually identify achievement and accomplishment verbs as key verbs, followed by activity and state verbs; alternatively, students first associate the imperfect tense with state verbs, then activities, then accomplishments and achievements (Comajoan Colomé, 2018). Likewise, per the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis, L2 students associate the preterit tense with telic and punctual verbs and associate the imperfect tense with atelic and durative verbs (Delgado Diaz, 2018). The final finding regarding the LAH is that perfective (preterit) forms are acquired before imperfective (imperfect) forms due to the fact that imperfect uses are based more on pragmatics [context of the situation of the past action] (Delgado Diaz, 2018; Hualde et al., 2021). Regarding classroom connection, the LAH provides the framework regarding the way in which students acquire tempo-aspectual morphology (Comajoan Colomé, 2018). Knowledge of this theory may help instructors to teach to the students' strengths and better understand the reasoning behind why certain errors are made or the context behind the connections students are making between content and practice. Moreover, the LAH provides great insight as to the choices that students make regarding the preterit and imperfect tenses and why they are more likely to, in the beginning, choose one tense over another for certain situations and conversations about past events, occurrences, or emotions.

Contextualized Use and Cultural Impacts

In corroboration with the LAH, the decision of which tense to choose also rests on a variety of other semantic, contextual, and cultural factors (Comajoan Colomé, 2018; Delgado Diaz, 2018; Delgado Diaz & Ortiz López, 2012). An exploration of these factors will be explored through three studies, beginning with an analysis of the preterit vs imperfect distinction in terms

of native speakers in two different Latin American countries. Delgado Diaz carried out an analysis of two corpora, one from Puerto Rico and one from Buenos Aires, Argentina, in order to determine if the past tense structures are “subject to dialectal variation” (2018, p.73). Within these corpora, transcripts of conversations between an interviewer and an adult native speaker participant of a higher socioeconomic class revealed distinctions made between the preterit and imperfect. Delgado Diaz worked to ascribe these decisions to one of six “factors”: lexical semantics, discourse grounding, temporal reference, temporal adverbs, specificity of an event, and the plurality of the direct object. His results highlight two key findings: first, different factors were ranked as more or less important in Puerto Rico as opposed to Buenos Aires (Delgado Diaz, 2018). The corpus from Puerto Rico found the specificity of the event, temporal frame of reference, and semantics important, while *los bonaerenses* [people from Buenos Aires] highlighted specificity, semantics, type of information, and plurality as determining factors to use the preterit or imperfect. However, as can be observed by the factors, Delgado Diaz’s second finding highlights that lexical semantics were a key factor considered in selecting preterit versus imperfect for both countries (2018). Not only do these results support the Lexical Aspect hypothesis, but they also indicate that dialectal variation between nations is a significant factor and that choosing one tense over the other is not as simple as outlined to be in an L2 classroom (Delgado Diaz, 2018). Native speakers follow a unique process of first language acquisition that may or may not entail direct classroom instruction, yet through their speech, the importance of culture and lexical aspect ring through, highlighting the importance of this topic in their discourse. The countries that make up the Spanish-speaking world all adapt the language to fit their needs and preferences, and this is demonstrated in the difference between Puerto Rico and Buenos Aires and their selection of the past tense.

The decision of whether to use the preterit or imperfect tense in a conversation about past events also is variable between speakers in the same nation. Hwu (2005) analyzed the conversations between characters held in various Spanish *telenovelas*, specifically focusing on the preterit and imperfect distinctions when it comes to the verb *querer* [to want]. He played these scenes for various adult native Spanish speakers in Mexico and solicited their input on the verb form chosen and, based on the speaker's own tendency between selection of a tense in the same context, asked whether a) the tense fit the context, b) the tense did not fit the context or c) either verb tense would be appropriate (Hwu, 2005). Additionally, he kept Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) in mind, which says that conversation (and the words and phrases that the conversation is composed of) must be truthful, substantiated, relevant, informative, and brief (as cited in Hwu, 2005). His findings compile a list of contexts that participants in the study deemed to belong to either the preterit or imperfect tenses. Such examples of the preterit tense include speaking about information that has not yet been mentioned to another, the emergence of a desire, viewing a whole situation in focus, and the "slicing off" of an event. On the other hand, scenarios in which native speakers are inclined to use the imperfect tense include talking about a past event with someone who already knows the information, emphasizing intention, and discussing events at a point from which looks incomplete or out of focus (See Figure 7) (Hwu, 2005). These characteristics develop the nuances highlighted in the difference between the preterit tense and the imperfect tense and which contexts/understanding of past events call for which tense; however, once again, these distinctions are not present in the L2 Spanish classroom. Hwu writes of the importance of "identifying different pragmatic meanings and understanding how they are inferred in a context [in order to] not only improve our understanding of the language but also facilitate our explanation of these uses of these forms to learners" (2005,

p.188). The connection between culture and language sometimes falters in the classroom; however, it is paramount to connect these concepts as the way one speaker uses the language based on their cultural norms may differ from another even though they live in the same nation.

Context For Use of Preterit Tense	Context For Use of Imperfect Tense
Speaking about information that has not yet been mentioned to another	Talking about a past event with someone who already knows the information
The emergence of a desire	Emphasizing intention
Viewing a whole situation in focus	Discussing events at a point from which looks incomplete or out of focus
The “slicing off” of an event	Discussing the past when the receiver of the conversation is not expecting information

Figure 7: Contexts in Spanish *Telenovelas* Where Speakers Chose the Preterit or Imperfect Tense, as seen in Hwu (2005)

Lastly, the study of Spanish use by native and non-native speakers highlights the importance of aspect and contextualization. Whatley (2013) studied high school aged non-native Spanish speakers (NSS) of unknown L1 backgrounds as they traveled to Spain for a study abroad program. These students were asked about their study of Spanish and self-identified their proficiency level (ranging from novice to advanced). Upon arrival in Valencia, Spain, the students stayed with host families who were all native speakers (NS). All participants completed pre- and post-tests on the trip, where they were asked questions on a cloze paragraph that required them to deem whether the preterit, imperfect or present perfect (*he completado* – I have completed) is most appropriate (2013). Whatley hypothesized that verbal aspect and selection of a tense would vary between L1 Spanish native speakers and L2 Spanish non-native speakers. Her results indicate two main takeaways: Principally, support for the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis was clear. As proficiency increased, learners tended to “select verbs more categorically as far as inherent aspect is concerned” (p.198). That is, learners looked at the verb's semantics and lexical

aspect markers (telicity, dynamicity, punctuality) to determine if the verb should be in the preterit or imperfect tense. Secondly, it was found that students who identified themselves as high-proficiency non-native speakers differed in acquisition compared to native and lower-level proficiency non-native speakers. It is hypothesized that “previous exposure to other dialects of Spanish...may also account for why students in the high-proficiency group were not as open to adjusting their interlanguage” (Whatley, 2013 p.200). Contextualization and cultural influences impact one’s understanding and production of the Spanish language; as such, language is ever evolving, and different learners at various stages may gravitate towards one dialect or cultural characteristics over another. In this regard, it remains paramount to expose students to these factors, to allow them to explore the Spanish-speaking world, and to see how different societies adapt the language to their needs (including when it comes to the preterit and imperfect tenses), in order to demonstrate how cultural awareness improves their global understanding.

In the face of a clear need to emphasize and embrace cultural differences and diversities regarding Spanish, subtle attempts to make the language monocentric still exist in today’s world. The work of the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) continues to subtly push the idea that Iberian Spanish is the correct way to speak the language. This outlook discussing how the language “should be” and attempting to measure how far other dialects (i.e., the Latin-American world) have strayed from the mother tongue is known as prescriptivism (Hualde et al., 2021). Two main ways that the RAE has attempted to subjugate the Spanish of other nations include publishing a dictionary that consistently leaves out Latin American neologisms and cultural phrases and withholding access to linguistic tools that help define a dialect’s distinctions (Infoling, 2022; Stavans, 2017). Recently, the RAE’s new efforts have resulted in defining a “*español común*” (common Spanish) that describes characteristics found in all dialects, and then highlighting

which features belong to which dialect. According to Infoling, “*el español común de la RAE se erige como el nuevo fundamento ideológico del nuevo neocolonialismo lingüístico con respecto a la América hispanohablante, el cual se escuda ahora en la retórica del panhispanismo*” (The “common Spanish” of the RAE emerges as the new ideological foundation of the new linguistic neocolonialism with respect to Latin America, which is hid behind now in the rhetoric of Pan-hispanism) (2022). This new list allows the RAE to dictate what is “common” and what is found in dialects, clearing the path to distinguish the Iberian dialect as correct and any other one as “subordinate.” Similarly, the RAE’s effort to form “brother institutions” in all other Spanish-speaking countries has resulted in the deliberate exclusion of insights from these institutions and a growing disconnection between Latin American speakers and the institutions that govern their language (Infoling, 2022; Stavans, 2017). Despite this, speakers of Spanish have begun to form *el español internacional* (international Spanish) that is used daily to connect with others and conduct the daily routines of life. These efforts start to suggest the futility of a language governing body that will not even consider the language as it is spoken worldwide and in everyday life (Infoling, 2022; Stavans, 2017). As such, it once again remains crucial that all learners in a Spanish classroom feel that they are heard, represented, and have the right to share their culture and how it is responsible for their language's makeup and linguistic features (Shrum & Glisan, 2016).

Connection to the L2 Spanish Classroom

After analyzing the linguistic makeup and the cultural and contextual differences between the Spanish preterit and imperfect tense, the discussion then turns to how world language educators can enhance their L2 Spanish classroom for their students. The answer lies in the connection between these topics discussed above and how learners acquire a new language.

Known as Second Language Acquisition (SLA), this branch of study analyzes the theories of how students approach a new language. SLA provides the foundation of world language classrooms and provides teachers with various strategies and procedures that have been proven to aid instruction and improve students' understanding (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). SLA is also rooted in cognitive and sociocultural contexts. What happens in the brain upon interacting with a new language and the importance of how the language is deployed have both been studied and proven to be critical in the acquisition process (Shrum & Glisan). However, the current instruction of the preterit and imperfect tenses has been noted as not being as thoroughly engaged with the latest in SLA as it could be. Kissling and Muthusamy (2022) find that the standard "rules" that indicate whether to use the preterit or imperfect "are, in fact, easily contradicted when they are compared with natural language" (p.372). The failure to situate these differences in context leaves out certain nuances between the two tenses, thereby not providing a wholly developed picture of the preterit and imperfect (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Likewise, grammar drills that supposedly emphasize language instruction may be doing the opposite. Shrum and Glisan (2016) write, "The usefulness of rote practice for the language learner has been called into question, particularly in light of the essential role that meaning-making and social-interaction play in language acquisition" (p.57). Once again, there is a need to shift focus when it comes to this challenging topic due to the latest in SLA research and the need for students to be able to interact fully and entirely with all the intricacies of the preterit and imperfect tenses.

One strategy to enhance understanding allows students to become active members in their learning and to extract and demonstrate their comprehension and meaning. Known as Concept-Based Instruction (CBI), this approach is grounded in sociocultural theory and helps students

engage with a concept and then analyze how it is connected to their learning (Kissling & Muthusamy, 2022). A CBI-based approach involves three stages: An orientation phase, where the students first interact with a broad concept; a materialization phase, where the student sees how the concept is related to their classroom content; and lastly, a verbalization phase, where the student produces examples of understanding that either demonstrate proficiency or require the teacher to refocus the lesson (Kissling & Muthusamy). The goal of CBI is to help students evaluate big concepts instead of just focusing on rote memorization, thereby instilling skills of critical thinking that will help them to successfully engage with their world (Bennett, 2021). In their study of college students with varying home languages in a novice college Spanish course, Kissling and Muthusamy (2022) set out to see if teaching the concept of boundedness (telicity of a verb) and exploring how it related to the preterit and imperfect tenses would improve comprehension. First, the students completed a pre-test about the preterit and imperfect tenses. Then, the CBI model had students read about boundedness as a concept (Orientation). Later, they watched videos that contextualized boundedness, connected boundedness to the preterit and imperfect distinction, and discussed any questions they had with peers and the teacher (Materialization). Lastly, the students carried out activities that demonstrated knowledge (recording themselves using the tenses, writing examples, verbalizing why the tenses differ regarding boundedness, etc.). These samples were analyzed for aspectual accuracy (successful deployment of the tenses), and it was found that accuracy had increased in both the written and oral narratives. As a result, boundedness is a successful concept for CBI-based instruction that increased awareness of aspectual differences in using these tenses (Kissling & Muthusamy). Likewise, Kissling and Muthusamy (2022) concluded, based on a perceived comprehension measure throughout the unit, that students found the CBI model to be comprehensible. Overall,

this method is a way to connect theory to practice and have students engage with large conceptual ideas applied to specific topics instead of memorizing rote facts that diminish the nuances of an important distinction in Spanish.

Likewise, the premises of the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH) and guideline-infused instruction allow teachers to craft their lesson plans and conduct classroom activities in a more informed manner. Comajoan Colomé (2018) writes that the acquisition of aspect for L2 Spanish learners is systematic; that is, the way learners acquire and express their understanding of the gradations between the preterit and imperfect tenses usually follows a guided trajectory and is made up of similar benchmarks. As the LAH details the intricacies of telicity, dynamicity, punctuality, and their relations to students' proficiency in the correct use of the Spanish past tenses, teachers can "implement learning activities that provide input according to the learners' developmental readiness" (Blyth, 2005 as cited in Comajoan Colomé, 2018, p.246). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2012) published Proficiency Guidelines that aid teachers in determining students' proficiency and also provided context for each level of proficiency (Distinguished, Superior, Advanced High/Mid/Low, Intermediate H/M/L, and Novice H/M/L) and what students at each level should be able to do concerning their journey of second language acquisition (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). In conjunction with these guidelines, researchers have identified where students may struggle regarding the preterit and imperfect tenses. For example, Salaberry (2002), as cited in Whatley (2013), finds that lexical aspect is an important predictor of past tense choice for advanced students and that intermediate learners tend to choose the preterit as a default (due to the "non-prototypical uses" of the imperfect tense) (Comajoan Colomé, 2018, p.237). The ACTFL Proficiency guidelines, along with the LAH, aid teachers in understanding where their students are in terms of their language

learning and identify the common aspectual-related challenges that a student may face. As a result, this knowledge strengthens the pedagogy and classroom conduct of the world language educator with reference to the preterit and imperfect tenses.

Next, interaction with texts that students can use to continue developing their understanding regarding the preterit and imperfect tenses remains a crucial piece of the successful acquisition of a second language. Blyth's research (2005) on strategies to improve classroom discussion regarding this past tense distinction highlights that the "use of aspectual markers is influenced by tasks and textual genre" (as cited in Comajoan Colomé, 2018, p.246). That is, the deployment of the preterit and imperfect tenses depends on the type of reading and the associated task. As such, effective texts and activities must be selected to provide students with genuine and authentic examples of how this difficult nuance of Spanish is realized in everyday life. Shrum and Glisan (2016) discuss a strategy that may enhance this need: PACE. An acronym standing for Presentation, Attention, Co-Constructing, and Extension, PACE is an approach to teaching grammar that situates learning within authentic literary realia and requires students to articulate their meaning. They write that "[PACE] requires teachers to mediate students' understanding of how grammar provides them with tools for making meaningful choices about what they wish to express" (p.214). To begin, teachers present (P) students with an original piece of literature from the target language, and they read it together. Then, teachers call attention (A) to a specific grammatical topic and how its use affects the story being told. Next, both students and the teacher co-construct (C) the meaning of this new topic through conversations, asking provoking questions and vocalizing various hypotheses about the possible role of this new concept. Finally, students further their understanding of this topic through extension (E) of the material by means of activities such as communicative tasks or

conversations with partners (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). This process is cyclical, as extension activities about one topic may result in the presentation of another. In an example about the French *passé composé* (past tense conjugation), Dykun (n.d.) details a PACE lesson plan that allows students to create meaning from examples of literature about travel and paying attention to what happens in the story whenever this tense appears. Likewise, Dykun includes a variety of extension activities which range from explicit to open-ended, an end goal that is espoused by Shrum and Glisan (2016). Although this lesson plan lacks examples of authentic texts made by native speakers for native speakers, it demonstrates an effective way of selecting input (texts) that, as a result, encourages students to think critically and ascertain their own knowledge. Teachers can use the PACE model to work with the preterit and imperfect and encourage students to identify the role of these tenses (i.e., how their aspectual characteristics affect the story being told) and to speculate and interact with their L2 hypotheses in various extension activities that advance their knowledge.

In addition to providing quality opportunities for authentic student interactions with the linguistic features of the preterit and imperfect tenses, it remains imperative to offer students ways to embrace the various cultures that make up the Spanish-speaking world. The multi-faceted and complex societies that use Spanish daily have their own characteristics and attributes that merit infusion into the L2 classroom. Dema and Kramer Moeller (2012) write that “Since language emerges from societal interaction, L2 learners cannot truly learn the language without acquiring knowledge about its culture and native speakers” (p.78). Through interactions with each society's perspectives, products, and practices, students can begin to grasp the complex relationships that make up one nation's culture and its interactions with other cultures (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Likewise, interactions with culture should be student-centered through “inquiry

projects and activities, placing the learner at the center of the learning process” (Dema & Kramer Moeller, 2012). Students cannot see the world through the eyes of the teacher and, as such, should be able to discover the intricacies of the Spanish-speaking world (both the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America) for themselves.

One of the most efficient ways to aid students in discovering the world is through technology. The advent of technology use in the classroom is revolutionizing the learning and instructional possibilities available to students. As such, twenty-first-century teachers must be ready to deploy these devices in their classrooms (Dema & Kramer Moeller, 2012). One of the most significant benefits of technology in the classroom is that it erases borders. Traveling and visiting faraway places and locations is now as easy as clicking a button. Teachers can use these technologies to enhance lessons and allow students to grow their cross-cultural skills (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Likewise, it is through technology that students can stay up to date with what is happening in their communities and abroad. Dema & Kramer Moeller (2012) write that “While textbooks often depict culture as static, the digital media, authentic products, and texts provide a more dynamic environment through direct access to [the] most current practices, perspectives, and products” (p. 81). The world is constantly changing, and access to technology allows teachers to bring the news and discussions to their classrooms. Finally, access to technology will enable students to dive deeper into the preterit versus imperfect tense distinctions. The impact of Computer-Mediated Communication combines all three modes of communication present in the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages: Interpretive communication, Interpersonal communication, and Presentational communication (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015). CMC gives students the ability to have authentic experiences with the language and its intricacies (Shrum & Glisan, 2012). Goertler (2009) writes

that interactions with CMC allow students to hear and read authentic pieces of the target language, including the dialectal and societal differences between groups and their use of these tenses. Language learning does not occur in a vacuum, and as such, students must be able to see that what they are studying does not just exist solely in their classroom but rather all over the world – thereby emphasizing the importance of a sociocultural approach to second language acquisition (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Likewise, in a day and age where cultural competence is vital, CMC and technology allow a seamless virtual connection between the countries of the world, giving students the ability to connect with someone their age (synchronously or asynchronously). With this connection, students can ascertain how native speakers use the preterit and imperfect tenses through natural conversation, and report back to the class what they have learned (Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Technology has catapulted language learning into a world of possibility, and the ability to combine technology with theories of SLA and strategies for teaching the preterit and imperfect tenses is sure to result in improved comprehension and understanding.

The difference between the Spanish preterit and imperfect tenses remains a challenging topic for L2 Spanish learners to acquire and an intricate topic for the world language teacher to instruct. An exploration of these tenses' derivation from Latin, their linguistic composition and the essence of what is being analyzed, their use and deployment in various communities of the Spanish-Speaking world, and an examination of L2 classroom strategies helps to not only better understand the nuances that enshroud these tenses, but also works to fully engage students in a quite difficult area of study. Through this analysis, the importance of culture shines through, demonstrating that although there are attempts to decrease these cultural enrichments of the language, teachers must work hard to make sure culture and cultural competency has a

permanent place in the classroom. Likewise, the development of these ideas reiterates the importance of giving students the tools they need to use these skills in real, sociocultural, and dynamic contexts. This now in-depth understanding of the preterit and imperfect tenses not only elucidates the topic for students; in addition, this understanding encourages teachers to share their knowledge with their students, activate excitement for a certain topic within their students, and, most importantly, help to develop their students' skills of communication, empathy, cultural awareness, and motivation, all crucial in order to succeed in the twenty-first century.

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