

Exploring Spanish Register among Graduate Students: A Pilot Study of Spanish at a University in Southern California

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Abstract—This article expands the study of registers in conversational and written language with empirical data collected from different situations throughout the daily activities of two bilingual populations at a university in Southern California. It explores the importance of register distinction in the classroom. This is done by studying the use of formal and informal register at the university between two bilingual populations throughout the tasks they perform on a daily basis. Language samples used in a normal day were collected and transcribed for analysis. A qualitative analysis was performed using characteristics previously studied by Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci in 1998: lexical choice, integration versus fragmentation and detachment versus involvement. Results indicated similarities in the use of Spanish register used among the two populations studied. A presence of informal register was found in formal contexts by both bilingual populations. Implications for curriculum and course development including register topics are discussed.

Index Terms—heritage language learner, Spanish, discourse analysis, academic register, bilingual populations, informal register, Spanish register analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the construction of academic language is crucial for those engaged in the communicative practices of a discourse community at the university. A discourse community is defined by Dell Hymes (1974) as, “a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech.” He continues to mention, “Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech and knowledge of its patterns or use” (Hymes, 1974, p. 51). When students arrive in a class, they are expected to understand the rules for the conduct and interpretation of successful communication in the university discourse community. Within this community there are many situations associated with speech and written texts.

The situations that a student must navigate through using appropriate levels of formality include; class discussions, question and answer periods after presentations, office hours with professors etc. In the analysis of language, the term ‘register’ is used to define contextualized language varieties. As described in the dictionary of sociolinguistics (2004) “register is used to refer to variation per the context in which language is used” (Swann et al., 2004, 261). For example, most people speak differently in formal contexts, an academic lecture or a job interview, as opposed to informal contexts, bantering with friends and family. The task of navigating through varying contexts might seem simple for many, but if the language spoken is not your first language, or if you have uncertainties regarding language, the task becomes more complex. Such could be the case for students upon entering the university.

The language used and taught at the university level should reflect an awareness of different registers used among different populations so that students can perform successful communication in multiple contexts where distinct language registers are used. As stated by Biber, (2006) “Most universities do very little to prepare students to acquire this wide range of ‘registers’. In fact, most universities do not even introduce students to the linguistic demands of academic prose” (Biber, 2006, p. 1).

Until recently little attention was placed on academic repertoire used at the university. Presently at the university level there are few courses found that teach or mention specific registers of language. ESL/EFL (English as a second language / English as a foreign language) programs have been innovative in matching language instruction to the actual language tasks required in university courses (Biber, 2006, p. 9). The content of some, but not all of these courses mention higher and lower registers used in appropriate contexts. Spanish departments also have recently offered content specific classes such as, ‘Commercial Spanish’ to be used in the context of the business world. When looking at the course descriptions, they are content based, discussing the appropriate business terms but often failing to mention the notion of registers used in contextualized language varieties. From discussing these courses in both English and Spanish we can see that there is still progress to be made in course content to mention registers of language at the university level. The appropriate levels of formality and ways of speaking should also be addressed.

The purpose of this pilot study is to explore Spanish used in different contexts at the university. In so doing, this study sets out to expose educators and students to the Spanish that is used and taught at the university level. By investigating Spanish used in the university setting by bilinguals, progress will be made regarding what constitutes an

academic register. With a more accurate definition of the discourse used in the 'academic register' a course of action for further language development can be created to better aid students and those involved in the bilingual academic community.

This article presents a pilot study using a sociolinguistic lens to explore 'register' comparing two bilingual populations that differ in language acquisition background. The following research questions will guide this study focusing on the students' use of academic register through a variety of situations occurring in the university setting.

1. What registers do graduate students use while completing their daily tasks as graduate teaching associates at a university in Southern California?
2. How do registers differ among students classified as circumstantial and elective bilinguals?
3. How does the register produced in Spanish and used among graduate students at a university in Southern California reflect the characteristics of 'academic Spanish' or 'conversational Spanish' as defined by previous studies? (Achugar 2003; Biber 2006).

Language samples were collected from two bilingual populations of students enrolled in a Spanish master's program for this analysis. Throughout the context of a normal day, graduate students navigate through situations and conversations with fellow graduate students, professors and full time faculty, undergraduate students and administrative staff. I chose to study language produced between graduate students, with undergraduate students and language used with professors and full time faculty. For each participant, a sample of language was collected from five contexts: oral presentations, teaching events, an interview, a casual conversation and a writing sample.

The data was then transcribed and analyzed using the framework from Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) that focuses on the following categories: (1) lexical choice, (2) integration versus fragmentation and (3) detachment versus involvement. The presence of disfluencies is considered and the characteristics of disfluencies are labeled as, (4) 'real time processing' units. (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998)

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES AND LITERATURE

Bilingualism is often talked about as if it were an attribute of a person and statements are made such as, "he/she is bilingual." When a person grows up in a household or country where a different language is used they are in fact bilingual, per the fact that they have knowledge of two languages. As life circumstances change, the ability to communicate in the second language changes either to be enhanced or diminished. Today defining bilingualism is more complicated than ever before due to many factors; globalization, the ease of traveling and in the US, the influx of people from different countries. In fact, defining bilingualism is not agreed upon among researchers. One thing current research does agree upon as stated by Valdés & Figueroa (1994) is the importance of viewing bilingualism as, "a continuum and bilingual individuals as falling along this continuum at different points relative to each other depending on the varying strengths and cognitive characteristics of their two languages" (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994, p. 8).

This view of bilingualism takes into consideration constantly changing life situations that affect language among bilinguals. As language is constantly changing, the bilingualism of an individual can be placed on a continuum that is modified as the person's environment changes. Due to this nature of language, tasks for bilinguals are always changing, calling for skills to manage technical, academic, and abstract language in differing situations. In this context of change, bilingualism cannot be thought of as something that is attained. Bilingualism must be a process that continuously evolves both for a society and for the individual. The ability to communicate successfully in two languages is one that many people struggle to attain. The mere fact that a child is raised in contact with two languages does not guarantee that they will communicate successfully in both languages. In its broadest terms, we will define bilingualism as previously defined by Valdés & Figueroa (1994), "a human condition in which an individual possesses more than one language competence" (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994, p. 8).

Circumstantial bilingual is a term used by Valdés & Figueroa (1994) defining individuals who because of their life circumstances, find that they must learn another language to survive. They are generally members of a group of individuals who must become bilingual to participate in the society that surrounds them (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994, p. 7). The circumstantial bilingual has also been labeled a 'heritage speaker' or 'Chicano bilingual student' in previous studies (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci 1998; Valdés 2001; Valdés 2005). Elective bilinguals are those who chose to study a foreign language and become bilingual. The elective bilingual has also been termed 'non-native language learner' or 'L2 language learner' (L2 representing the second language of acquisition). For this study, we will adhere to Valdés' (1998) classification of circumstantial and elective bilinguals when referring to bilinguals participating in this research project (Valdés, 1998).

When looking at the acquisition background of each bilingual type, there is a distinction in this process. Elective bilinguals have acquired the foreign language primarily in the classroom setting, which allows for a strong academic vocabulary and formal register yet poses a potential challenge when called upon to converse using more informal registers.

Circumstantial bilinguals use a heritage language in the home setting with family and community members. Yet growing up in the U.S., the language of primary education being English, these bilinguals have not received a formal education in this language. This may pose a greater challenge for the circumstantial bilingual regarding formal academic register use, not receiving as much schooling in Spanish as their counterparts.

The importance of formal schooling for the circumstantial bilingual is echoed in a series of interviews collected by Valdés et al (2003). In her studies, one of the most serious challenges for Latinos was identified as acquiring correct, standard, or academic Spanish because of the profound differences between home and school Spanish (Valdés, 2003, p.19). Because of the different literacy backgrounds each bilingual has a limited repertoire in either colloquial or academic registers of Spanish.

The population of the heritage speaker or circumstantial bilingual has grown significantly over the past decades and scholars are always attempting to further their understanding of this complex situation. The importance of this growing population has been recognized in many articles (García 2005; Valdés 2005). The US Census Bureau (2015) reported that in roughly 15.2% of residents above five years of age speak Spanish at home. “The number of migrants coming to the United States each year, legally and illegally, grew very rapidly starting in the mid-1990s, hit a peak at the end of the decade, and then declined substantially after 2001. There were 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. in 2014, a total unchanged from 2009 and accounting for 3.5% of the nation’s population. The number of unauthorized immigrants peaked in 2007 at 12.2 million, when this group was 4% of the U.S. population (Passel and Suro, 2009).” Even if demographic and socio-economic trends eliminate Spanish used in the home after a few generations, still it is quite possible that Hispanic immigrants will continue in the years to come (Colombi and Roca, 2003, p. 54).

Both bilingual types could expand their language repertoire if they were to have knowledge of formality levels to navigate through a wide array of registers in Spanish. For example, for a student to participate in the classroom and to communicate effectively with those who reside in their community and speak the language, they must understand both the academic register and the more colloquial registers of Spanish. The possibilities for both bilingual types could grow if they acquired a full range of registers in Spanish.

Many different levels of language repertoires are held by each bilingual speaker coming from distinct backgrounds. However, everyone is expected to produce language used in an array of registers at the university level. An awareness of register use among both types of Spanish bilinguals is necessary if the academic register in the university setting is continually demanded.

From the perspective of educators, if a population of Spanish speakers that can navigate effectively in a variety of registers is desired, further attention must be given to language analysis focusing on register. Additional research must be added in the field of applied linguistics in Spanish to expand upon previous research with the purpose of better equipping bilingual speakers to use all registers of language.

In languages other than English, there are few studies that have been carried out with an emphasis on register, and few focus specifically on the characteristics of academic discourse in bilingual contexts in the U.S. Schleppegrell and Colombi presented research on clause combining strategies and nominalizations in written language. Here it was found that bilingual students used the same strategies when writing in English and in Spanish (Colombi and Schleppegrell, 1997). There was a minor difference found when using discursive registers in the grammatical and lexical elements of writings between languages. English and Spanish are two languages that require knowledge of distinct grammatical and lexical rules to properly communicate in each. This research supports the need for further instruction of academic registers to develop a more comprehensive linguistic repertoire for the Spanish bilingual (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 1997, p. 501).

Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci focused on identifying characteristics of language that constitute the academic register in spoken Spanish (1998). This study analyzed the language used by Chicano bilinguals and Mexican students in a university setting. Language was analyzed focusing on features to determine if the individuals used the appropriate academic register in Spanish. They found that although bilingual students’ lexical production appeared to be “less rich” than that of their monolingual counterparts, both sets of students appeared to use an “approximative” academic register that was still clearly in a state of development. These results from Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) suggest that “students will profit from direct attention to the notion of register as well as to classroom activities that expose them to high-level registers that they would be expected to produce in an authentic academic context” (Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998, p. 496). Both studies (Schleppegrell and Colombi 1997; Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci 1998) involved data collected from students taking undergraduate university language courses. Achugar (2003) agrees with the findings that, “These projects advocate for the explicit instruction of academic registers to develop Spanish bilingual’s linguistic repertoire” (Achugar, 2003, p. 217)

Achugar (2003) has expanded upon previous research from Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) to identify linguistic features of oral texts produced among graduate university students that create membership within a discourse community. She focused on specific linguistic and discursive characteristics among university students while presenting in a formal bilingual context. A goal in her study was to identify the discursive characteristics that enable speakers to portray themselves as members of the academic community of their discipline (Achugar 2003).

The current study attempts to shed light on the language produced among bilingual students of different language acquisition backgrounds focusing on the same characteristics of language studied by Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci (1998).

III. METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Two circumstantial bilinguals and two elective bilinguals participated in this pilot study. The language acquisition process for each participant was studied and reported in the pilot study performed.

The four participants for the research study were chosen based upon the following list of criteria: (a) type of bilingualism (b) enrollment in a master's program (c) employment as graduate teaching associates and (d) willingness to participate. To obtain the linguistic history of each participant, a brief interview was conducted.

Table 2 summarizes the topics for the data collected. In the context of informal conversation, daily activities are defined to include topics such as: teaching undergraduate classes, graduate classes being taken, weekend events and health. In an informal interview questions one through five focus on the history of the language repertoire for each participant while question six gathers ideas on how to better prepare students in the university to use a full range of registers.

TABLE 2.
PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXTS

Participants	Tony	Ricardo	Mauricio	José
Contexts				
Formal Presentation	Thesis Presentation of research work	Introducing why we Listen with examples	N/A	Testing Language using Listening Tactics
Informal Conversation	Future doctoral studies	Daily activities	Daily Activities	Daily Activities
Teaching Spanish	Spanish 103	Spanish 102	Spanish 101	Spanish 101
Written work	From Spanish 601 Seminary in Hispanic Literary Theory	From Spanish 581 Spanish & American Dialectology	From Spanish 501 Twentieth Century Spanish Novels Women	From Spanish 611 Spanish English Contrast Analysis

The students involved in this study are classified as circumstantial and elective bilinguals (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci 1998; Valdés 2001; Valdés 2005). Those considered circumstantial bilinguals grew up in a household where Spanish was the primary language yet the principal language of education was English. Elective bilinguals (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994) having grown up in a household where the primary language was English, learned Spanish principally in the educational setting.

A study attempting to classify people does not have clearly drawn lines due to life circumstances. Each participant has a unique experience growing up with both Spanish and English present during childhood and into adulthood. For this study the speakers classified as circumstantial bilinguals were educated in Spanish until reaching middle school. Thus, the education received from kindergarten until sixth grade was in Spanish. This amount of instruction in Spanish is more than the average circumstantial bilingual receives. Those typically known as 'circumstantial bilinguals' receive all primary education in English, while in the home, a minority language is used. When asked to classify themselves as either a native or heritage speaker, both opted to choose the term native to identify themselves. The level of bilingualism that one has is not easily defined or measured due to the constant changing demands of life which is reflected in language.

Consequently, the bilingual speakers involved in this study are native Spanish speakers who became circumstantial bilinguals when they moved to the U.S. To analyze language from students with this level of bilingualism is ideal for the current study. This is because they have received more primary education in Spanish which gives them a more complete ability to communicate in the academic register. This will allow for more language samples with a broader range of examples of the academic register in Spanish. As we learn more about different bilinguals' language use, we can more clearly define registers for Spanish speakers. This definition will provide an awareness of what constitutes a full range of the academic register in Spanish and will serve as a tool to enhance language for bilinguals.

All the oral language production from the participants was recorded and transcribed by the investigator and analyzed for content only. Pauses were not counted and the transcription conventions used apply to content analysis. Four different situations taking place in the university setting and hypothesized to contain a variety of registers were studied. The data analyzed was chosen to focus on characteristics of the language that is produced at the university with the intention of exploring and analyzing 'academic' register.

The language samples collected for this study are analyzed based on the framework of Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) that focuses on the following categories: (1) lexical choice, (2) integration versus fragmentation and (3) detachment versus involvement. The presence of disfluencies was also considered in this study. For this study the characteristics of disfluencies will be explored and labeled as, (4) 'real time processing' units.

These categories were chosen because they will allow us to distinguish characteristics of academic language used in Spanish. Each grouping previously listed above is broken down into sub-categories to be further studied.

Lexical Choice

Lexical Choice is examined more thoroughly in terms of (a) academic vocabulary, (b) the use of transitional phrases, (c) the use of colloquial or casual forms, (d) the use of stigmatized forms, (e) lexical searches and (f) vocabulary range. Academic vocabulary is characterized using words or expressions relevant to the specific area of knowledge or specialization found in the academic setting. An example of a successful academic phrase would be, *evaluar si los estudiantes captaron el vocabulary* [to evaluate if the students gained an understanding of the vocabulary]. In this example José is presenting and uses the verb *captar* [to grasp] rather than the informal *entender* [to understand]. An

example found to represent an unsuccessful use of academic vocabulary is, *nos permite no enseñar los (sic) instrucciones directamente* [it permits us not to teach the instructions directly]. In this example, the speaker is presenting on a formal topic and places the word *no* incorrectly. Transitional phrases are used when transitioning from one idea to the next, some informal examples found are *entonces* [also] and *también* [also]. Casual or colloquial forms are mentioned to contrast the use of academic vocabulary. In the different contexts studied, there were many examples of colloquial language in the data, *no más que* [nothing more than], *orale güey* [hey bro], *vale pues* [alright then]. Stigmatized forms such as reverting from the norm of *el problema* to the stigmatized form of *la problema* were found in the data. In English, there is no differentiation when using the article “the” before a noun. However, nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine and the article placed before the noun must agree with the gender of the noun. Both types of bilingual students produced examples of stigmatized borrowings such as using the word *checar* from the English “to check” and *el tópico* from the English word “the topic.” In many cases students performed lexical searches while they paused for periods of time to search for the appropriate word. Many of these pauses were completed with the correct lexical choice *creo yo es en mi...en una um...una (sic) problema de considerer no? de catalogar*, [I believe it is in my...in a em...a problem of considering you know? of cataloging] while others ended in new word creations such, *as cómo se dice...emercido* [how do you say emersed]. In the first example a lexical search was indicated by the speaker pausing and beginning to use a feminine article pausing again then completing the sentence with the appropriate feminine article. In the second example of a lexical search the speaker asked how to say a word, searched for the word as he paused then completed the sentence using an invented word *emercido*.

When speaking in the academic register a wider range of words is used. This range of words can be seen clearly when looking at verb usage. In Spanish, there are many commonly used verbs in informal language. These verbs can be labeled “high-frequency verbs,” some examples are *ser* and *estar* [to be and to be], *tener* [to have] *decir* [to tell] *poder* [to be able to] *querer* [to want]. To determine the vocabulary, range the total number of verbs used are compared to the number of high-frequency verbs. This range will make clear to us if there is variation in the verbs used among bilingual speakers or if only high frequency verbs are used.

Integration versus fragmentation

Academic language is characterized as having the integration of several idea units into a set of clearly linked segments. Another important feature of integration is that multiple idea units are coherent. Casual conversation on the other hand frequently contains single clause constructions that portray a fragmented structure. A term used by Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) to investigate integration was “grammatically complex segments.” This term is defined as a segment consisting of one or more independent clauses and a varying number of dependent clauses. Dependent clauses are not coherent alone; they require another language construction to bring meaning to the statement. Independent clauses have coherence without another statement. For this study, we will not adhere to the term, “grammatically complex segments” but rather we will use the term “complex phrases” to indicate the integration of several idea units. As defined in the dictionary of linguists, complex clauses contain a main clause with a subordinate clause.

Integration versus Fragmentation will be studied focusing on the following features: (1) single-clause segments and (2) complex segments. Single clause segments are independent statements commonly found in casual conversations and create a fragmented quality. An example found in the data from an elective bilingual in the conversation is bolded in the following example.

10	Ricardo	<i>¿Entonces los los alumnos nuevos aquí todavía</i> Then the the new students here still <i>tienen que escoger?...</i> have to chose?...
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The example above is an independent construction that contains a single idea unit.

Packaging large quantities of information concisely indicates integration. An example of a complex segment found in the presentation given by a circumstantial bilingual is in the following example.

58	<i>La industria genera una cantidad enorme de dinero ya, no sólo en</i> The industry generates an enormous quantity of Money already, not only in producción de videos um sino también de producción de internet y video production um but also in internet production and <i>esto es sólo hablando en contexto de los Estados Unidos. Hay varios</i> this is only speaking in the context of the United States . There are various
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In line 58 the main clause begins in bolded text. The subordinate clause follows the transition *ya* [already], followed by an independent clause, followed by three clearly linked dependent clauses. Articles that indicate a new clause in Spanish used in this example are *no sólo* [not only] *sino también* [but also] *esto es sólo* [this is only]. These articles and phrases indicate a continuous flow of ideas and are often present in complex segments.

Detachment versus Involvement

Detachment versus involvement is examined in relation to the relative involvement of speakers with the audience. The idea of detachment is when the speaker creates distance between the information relayed. This created distance also allows for information to be used when speaking to a larger crowd rather than personalized information that would be

more relevant in a conversation. To convey detachment, some features to be analyzed are the use of *se* passives and agentless passives. In Spanish, the use of *se* in front of conjugated verbs indicates a more general use of the verb and is relevant when speaking to an audience. For example, the common phrase *se habla español* is translated to mean [Spanish is spoken here], not that a specific person speaks Spanish. Agentless passives follow the same meaning of *se* passives in conveying an idea to a general audience but rather than using *se* specifically, no agent is defined. Some examples are “the people” “the students” “the information.” When referring to academic register, the use of *se* passives and agentless passives both indicate detachment.

Features of involvement generally found in casual language include a higher presence of the following: first and second person verbs and pronouns, strategies used to monitor information flow and the use of “fuzzy expressions.” In the study by Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) oral strategies were also analyzed. This feature of language was found in the argumentative texts produced by bilingual speakers. In this study, there were no occurrences of oral strategies due to the nature of the data collected, thus the category was omitted. In casual conversation, the speaker is usually greatly involved in the topic discussed, consequently the presence of first person references and verbs reflect the speaker’s direct involvement. Another feature of the informal register is seeking feedback before continuing the discussion. This is done to assure the speaker that the listener is paying attention. Consequently, information is monitored to determine whether the speakers’ message is being conveyed using phrases such as, *¿vale?* [Right?], or *¿no?* [“you know?”]. In formal academic registers, speakers assume the audience is listening and often continue the lecture by building on previous remarks using phrases such as, “as Thomas stated” or “as mentioned by”. When the speaker has already conveyed the necessary information, repetition of the complete idea is not necessary. In informal registers examples of phrases used are: *todo lo demas* and *y todo eso* [all the rest] and [and all this]. These have been referred to as “fuzzy” expressions by Chafe (1984) and indicate greater involvement with both the other speakers and the topic.

Real time processing units

In the analysis of oral language production, it is important to be aware of the distinctions between oral corpus and a written corpus. Many researchers have studied oral language based on conceptual frameworks used for the analysis of written data. For many areas of analysis this framework does not seem to be a problem, but when looking at the terms disfluencies in written work the definition will vary because of the nature of written versus spoken discourse. Spoken language happens in real time and the participants in the conversation have no time to edit, which is possible in written language. Thus there are many characteristics of language that do not have distinguishing features of written language and have previously been labeled as disfluencies. This study will examine these features of language that happen as real time processing units. Some characteristics to be mentioned are: (1) pauses both filled and un-filled (2) repetitions (3) self-corrections (4) abandoned constructions (5) lexical searches and uses as defined by Silva-Corvalán (1994) that are not part of any Spanish language variety.

Pauses are indicated in the data transcribed by the insertion of three periods in a row (...). For the purposes of this study the length of pauses were not considered. The pauses were either filled or un-filled. A common word used to fill pauses in the academic setting is *entonces* [then]. Also, the expression, um or *pues* [then] were frequently used. Repetitions were commonly made while the speaker was gathering ideas or for emphasis while teaching. Self-corrections occurred when the speaker became aware that they were using an article or a word incorrectly. Some common corrections were made regarding gender and number agreement between articles, adjectives and nouns. In Spanish nouns are either feminine or masculine. Before each noun the article or adjective used must agree with the noun. For example, if the noun used is *fuego* [fire] which is a masculine noun, the article placed before it must also be masculine.

In the last category of real time processing units, lexical searches and words not part of any Spanish language variety contains varieties that are used by bilinguals when rules of language are oversimplified and generalized. An example would be the creation of the word *hacido* [regularized past participle of the verb “to do or to make”] as opposed to *hecho* [standard form of the past participle]. Here the student is applying the standard rule to a verb that is irregular and does not follow the general rules. Another real-time processing phenomenon, abandoned constructions, was found in the context of the interview as the student explained the answer. Leaps were made from one train of thought to the next. These abandoned constructions indicate a real-time processing unit that is unique to spoken discourse.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis presented in this chapter focuses on the language produced by graduate students in contexts they encountered daily. The specific language characteristics analyzed help us explore the vocabulary and expressions of the Spanish academic register used by each participant. The following criteria (Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci 1998) guide this analysis: (1) lexical choice, (2) integration versus fragmentation (i.e., presentation of large amounts of information in a single idea unit), (3) detachment versus involvement, and (4) the presence of real time processing units. Each criterion mentioned is further analyzed and supported by data in the following paragraphs.

These features will be analyzed using data collected from the following contexts: (1) a teaching event (2) a formal presentation (3) an informal interview (4) an informal conversation and (5) a writing sample. Concluding each section of criteria analysis mentioned, a Table charting a random sample of data is presented. This Table uses the abbreviations CB for circumstantial bilingual and EB for elective bilingual. The data used in the Table was selected randomly using

twenty lines or turns of language produced from each participant. To collect the data for the table, a random section from each context was chosen from all participants to maintain a sample that represents the whole. During the introduction and concluding section of a teaching event or presentation the speaker uses language to warm up to the audience or to wrap up the lesson presented. Thus, the middle section of language production from each context was chosen to avoid the introduction and conclusion.

Question 1

1. What registers do graduate students use while completing their daily tasks as graduate teaching associates at a university in Southern California?

The language used by graduate students contained many characteristics of the informal academic register in Spanish as they completed their daily tasks. Throughout the different contexts analyzed, language varied having a formal academic register and an informal register filled with colloquialisms. Language used in contexts where formal registers would be expected such as in written work and in formal presentations contained a high presence of informal language features alongside formal characteristics. The distinction of register was weak in each context where Spanish was analyzed. There were minimal consistent occurrences of formal academic vocabulary used by the participants. The formal presentations also demonstrated a weak presence of academic register. This was due to the few complex segments that were used by both bilingual populations. To explain ideas, extensive complex segments are more appropriate to strengthen an argument or presentation of ideas.

The use of informal language characteristics in formal academic settings both in writing samples and presentations raises a few concerns. While searching for an explanation of language production, we will consider the previously researched heterogeneity of the bilingual populations studied. A few reasons could be (1) perhaps the participants do not possess knowledge of the academic register in their language repertoire, or (2) it could be that they are not aware of language characteristics that constitute a formal academic register or lastly (3) they deem it unnecessary to use a formal academic register at the university level.

In research previously mentioned Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) also concluded that academic language produced among the bilingual populations could benefit from more attention to the specific notion of register. The results and discussion from this study found that there were more complications with the language from circumstantial bilinguals, classified as heritage speakers, due to their complex acquisition process and life circumstances. Comparing our analysis to that of the previous, among circumstantial bilinguals our results coincide. Conclusions for elective bilinguals cannot be compared due to different population of native speakers used in the previous study.

Question 2

2. How do registers differ among students classified as circumstantial and elective bilinguals?

The differences found in the language produced by elective and circumstantial bilinguals were: (1) a greater use of colloquialisms by circumstantial bilinguals (2) fewer transitional statements made by circumstantial bilinguals (3) more features of detachment were found in the language produced by circumstantial bilinguals in oral language while elective bilinguals produced more features of detachment in written work (4). Overall there was a higher presence of features representing formal language from elective bilinguals found present in both the formal and informal contexts.

When comparing writing samples there were distinctions made: (1) there were numerous examples of stigmatized forms and borrowings from elective bilinguals (2) elective bilinguals used more academic vocabulary (3) also circumstantial bilinguals used fewer academic transitional phrases and a greater amount of informal transitions.

Some similarities found in the language produced by both types of bilinguals were a high usage of single clause segments and a rare occurrence of complex segments. In the contexts of language studied there was more distinction of register demonstrated by the elective bilinguals when compared to their counterpart. Circumstantial bilinguals produced similar language through the contexts studied while elective bilinguals used different registers as they went about their daily tasks. Elective bilinguals appeared to use both formal and informal styles of language demonstrating a more complete language repertoire. This finding supports the education of both bilingual types regarding language formalities.

The combining of academic vocabulary alongside informal language seems to be a common occurrence for the circumstantial bilingual throughout all the contexts addressed. Elective bilinguals portrayed qualities of academic vocabulary in the following contexts: presentations, written work and teaching events. Along with their counterpart, elective bilinguals frequently inserted characteristics of informal language use. Both elective and circumstantial bilinguals used informal conversational Spanish in the contexts of: conversation, the interview and presentations. In the context of conversation an informal register of language was reflected using involvement as well as through lexical choices made.

Although the differences mentioned seem minute, considering that merely four participants supply the data for this study, the complexity of language, life and people can be seen through the depth of analysis for each participant and their language. Once again the idea of heterogeneity among bilinguals must be considered in this study as was also mentioned in previous research. Valdés also recognized the complexity in the field of bilingualism in the U.S. among other researchers and advocates for continuous research in this area. This study also supports further research among bilinguals.

Question 3

3. How does the register produced in Spanish and used among graduate students at a university in Southern California reflect the characteristics of 'academic Spanish' or 'conversational Spanish' as defined by previous studies? (Achugar 2003; Biber 2006).

In the language analyzed, characteristics of academic Spanish were reflected by both bilinguals. Circumstantial bilinguals used academic vocabulary prevalently in the contexts of written work and presentations. Academic language was demonstrated using detachment, lexical choices and complex segments used. In these contexts, the students also included characteristics of informal language using colloquialisms, features of involvement and single clause segments.

Circumstantial bilinguals commonly used *se* passives to create detachment more frequently than their counterpart. This was the greatest indicator of formal register used by circumstantial bilinguals. Elective bilinguals did not implement this construction as often in formal settings. A possible reason for this could be due to lacking of a similar verb construction in English. While speaking in a foreign language it could be that elective bilinguals' thoughts were in English, with no equivalent in English, this could explain the lack of *se* passives.

In the data, a lack of transitional phrases demonstrated less formal academic language. Both populations presented very few transitional phrases in the contexts studied. Rather, ideas were connected with pauses both filled and unfilled. Some possible reasons for this could be (1) that the student is processing thoughts and not sure of the next statement they are going to make (2) students may not possess transitional phrases in their repertoire (3) or it could be that they do not feel that using transitional phrases was necessary to convey their ideas.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) conducted research among circumstantial bilinguals and native Spanish speakers. The data collected was from planned events, the participants were aware that language register was being studied. This study differs from that study; the participants were elective and circumstantial Spanish bilinguals. Another key difference regarding the participants in this study was that they were not aware that language register was being studied. The data was collected randomly from TA's throughout contexts encountered daily. In Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) the results reflected awareness of register. According to Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci, (1998), the participants "were aware of register differences in the sense that they attempted to produce suitable academic speech for the activity involved". Thus, there were more occurrences of successful as well as unsuccessful academic language produced when compared to the current research (Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci 1998, p. 82).

When comparing the results in the data of, the most obvious distinction was in academic vocabulary used unsuccessfully. In this study, participants rarely used academic vocabulary unsuccessfully while in Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci attempts to use academic vocabulary were often made with varying degrees of success. This disparity in the results could also be because the participants in Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci were aware of the topic being studied and thus attempted more often to demonstrate knowledge of academic vocabulary and phrases. Participants in the current study were unaware that register use was the topic of analysis. It can be suggested that students may not have felt a need to use academic language exclusively even in formal university contexts. For the different situations analyzed, participants freely used formal and informal language to express their thoughts and ideas. Due to the random collection of data and since participants were not challenged and assessed in their production of formal academic language, it is not possible to conclude that students did not have the repertoire to use formal registers. What can be noted is that there was a low level of expectancy and demand among the bilingual populations to use formal academic language in many circumstances at the university studied.

Previous research from Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) has suggested that students would profit from direct attention to the notion of register as well as to classroom activities that expose them to high-level registers. The findings in this study support this idea as well. Language produced in the academic environment observed was found to contain a formal register appropriate in university situations in certain instances (Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998, p. 496).

Creating a level of awareness regarding features of language that constitute formal and informal registers could assist in developing a new approach to course curriculum for bilingual students at the university. Both bilingual types would aid from courses focused on levels of formality used in appropriate contexts. The informed instructor could adapt lessons that strengthen both the elective and the circumstantial bilingual utilizing strengths from both acquisition backgrounds.

As stated by Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), "students will profit from distinct attention to the notion of register as well as to classroom activities that expose them to the high-level registers that they would be expected to produce in an authentic academic context" (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998, p. 496). A curriculum focusing on appropriate formality levels of Spanish would expand the repertoire for both bilingual types. The apparent limitations circumstantial and elective bilinguals demonstrated could have been due to a limited exposure to academic Spanish.

Currently there are many programs that have implemented courses specific for bilingual speakers. A model university program places emphasis on the language used in classes specifically created for heritage speakers who desire to use Spanish in academic contexts in the future. Such courses are essential due to the language backgrounds of many bilingual speakers living in the United States. This study specifically addresses the university where the data collection takes place and argues the need for courses and programs applicable to the needs of the bilingual types

analyzed in this study. Both bilingual types demonstrated areas to be improved regarding the production of formal academic Spanish.

Educating future and current teachers on the topic of appropriate register for specific contexts could contribute to expanding students understanding of components that constitute a broader language repertoire. This study has highlighted a few cases of bilingual students who have demonstrated a vague knowledge of register distinction. Awareness of register could become strikingly clear in the future with the help of educators addressing suitable contexts for formal and informal language as well as components of Spanish that constitute each register.

Suggestions for teachers are to implement courses focusing on the use of academic register appropriate at the university and to provide opportunities for students to practice this register. For this to occur, first students should be educated on the structure of register formalities in the classroom setting. Once made aware of Spanish characteristics appropriate in a formal context, they should also be given opportunities to practice oral and written formal academic register in class. Lastly feedback should be given from professors as students use academic register in their writings and class discussions.

Considering the two bilingual populations in this study, and observing the distinct acquisition backgrounds from everyone, educators also must take into consideration differing repertoires held by everyone. Creating classes specific for bilingual types has already been implemented in many universities and through out all levels of education. For teachers, awareness of the distinct acquisition backgrounds of bilingual populations present in class is becoming more crucial at the university as demands to produce successful academic language grow.

Understanding a foreign language presents difficulties for all language learners. When teachers become aware of learners needs and understand the heterogeneity of bilingual populations present at the university, steps to meet these needs should be taken. Identifying components of language appropriate in various formal contexts could aide students as they pursue a degree in Spanish. Developing classes that present fundamentals of language structure including register distinction can strengthen students' repertoire.

Once teachers are educated in the fundamentals of language, they could benefit their students by teaching distinct formalities through video instruction. This could be done by watching academic presentations from peers and other researchers in their field of study. To continue the lesson, teachers could instruct students to work in groups to analyze components of language, focusing on different language characteristics. Teachers could then lead a class discussion on language components that create formal dialogue.

Students must first become aware of their language repertoire and then seek out opportunities to broaden their exposure to different registers. Implications for students are first in education. Secondly contact with professionals and educators exercising formal academic language could motivate students to pursue further development of registers. Once educated and motivated, students must then be presented with opportunities to maintain and challenge their own language skills.

A limitation of the current study is the number of participants involved which affects the validity of the conclusions being drawn. Consequently, it is important to mention that the conclusions drawn from this pilot study may merely set directions for further research regarding formal registers in Spanish. Due to this being a pilot study with only four participants, the conclusions are purely suggestions and observations from the specific university and population studied.

A suggestion for future studies would be to encourage situations that challenge participants to use formal academic register during data collection. An idea would be to conduct structured interviews containing questions in a more academic register. If participants are challenged to use formal language, data containing successful and unsuccessful attempts of academic vocabulary would be provided. Including this aspect of language in future studies would widen the scope of analysis to better understand each participant's level of bilingualism.

Further research needs to be done on the language used by professors of Spanish in academic institutions at the graduate level to gain a better understanding first how professors use academic language in class, secondly how they instruct their students to use academic language and lastly how expectations around register are constructed. Focusing on student to teacher interactions would allow for a broader angle of analysis. An analysis of formal academic language used by professors from different countries and used to teach different areas of language, literature and translation would also allow for further exploration of formal academic language. Different contexts to be analyzed could include conversations during office hours, lectures given, formal presentations at conferences, written work and conversations among professors. Using the same framework implemented for this study, comparisons could be made between bilingual students and professors.

As stated earlier, the notion of register regards situationally defined varieties of language. Researchers need to agree on defining register, then perhaps educators could develop more of an understanding regarding academic register. Though work continues to be done in educating bilingual populations on the importance of language formalities, with the general acceptance of informal language and colloquialisms in formal institutions, developing complete Spanish repertoires are hindered. In the future, more research will be done to shed light on the importance of teaching and maintaining a Spanish academic register. It is my hope that once more studies are made in this field, students will be able to benefit from being taught by educators that understand Spanish academic registers, who know how to teach them, and who can transmit the importance of broadening their Spanish repertoire.

This article has analyzed language produced from students through out varying contexts of daily situations at the university. It has considered previous studies focusing on register and bilingualism. The characteristics of language researched by Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) were used as a guide for the analysis. This chapter concludes and discusses results found through this case study. Implications for course and curriculum development were mentioned along with suggestions for future research. This study contributes to the fields of bilingualism and register studies with the hope of encouraging others to implement future research on the topics presented. Additionally, this research hopes to encourage Spanish speakers on all levels to broaden their language repertoire to include formal and informal registers. Furthermore, this study advocates the need for more opportunities where bilinguals could exercise and broaden their Spanish academic language.

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