

Article

Intensification Strategies in English–Spanish Bilingual Speech: Examining Lexical and Morphological Markers in Miami Bilinguals’ Discourse

Simon A. Claassen ^{1,*} , Renata Enghels ¹  and M. Carmen Parafita Couto ^{2,3} ¹ Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, 9000 Ghent, Belgium; renata.enghels@ugent.be² Centre for Linguistics, Leiden University, 2311 BE Leiden, The Netherlands; m.parafita.couto@hum.leidenuniv.nl³ Research Institute for Linguistics and Literature, University of Santiago de Compostela, 15782 Santiago de Compostela, Spain; mcarmen.parafita.couto@usc.gal

* Correspondence: simon.claassen@ugent.be

Abstract

This paper investigates the speech variety of the English–Spanish community of Miami, which features a high degree of English–Spanish bilingualism. Specifically, it explores intensification, a site of analytic–synthetic conflict between English and Spanish grammars. English predominantly uses lexical-analytic strategies (e.g., *very beautiful*, *a big house*) for intensification, whereas Spanish employs more morphological-synthetic markers (e.g., *guapísimo* ‘very beautiful’, *un casón* ‘a big house’). Concretely, the current study aims to investigate whether Miami bilinguals have preferences in terms of the language or strategy of choice to express intensification and whether these preferences are influenced by intralinguistic (e.g., semantic-pragmatic function of the intensifier) or extralinguistic factors (e.g., speakers’ proficiency in, acquisition of, and attitudes toward both languages). To this end, an empirical study is conducted on three corpora, one bilingual and two monolingual ones. In this study, a wide variety of both analytic and synthetic intensifiers is found. The qualitative and quantitative findings reveal that Miami bilinguals use more English than Spanish intensifiers and favor analytic intensifiers over synthetic ones. However, among the Spanish intensifiers, the proportion of synthetic forms is significantly higher than among the English intensifiers.

Keywords: intensification; bilingualism; codeswitching; convergence; Miami

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1. Introduction

In an ever-multilingual world, attention within research is shifting more from the investigation of unilingual language varieties toward that of situations of multilingualism and language contact. Depending on various factors, contact situations can result in a variety of linguistic outcomes (Muysken, 2013), such as borrowing (Durkin, 2020), convergence (Heine & Kuteva, 2005), codeswitching (Muysken, 2000), and the formation of mixed languages (Bakker & Papen, 1997) and creoles (Hymes, 1971). Given these diverse possible outcomes of language contact, it is crucial to investigate a wide array of contact situations and multilingual communities to better understand the conditions shaping these phenomena. The current paper investigates the effects of language contact in an English–Spanish bilingual community as concerns the employed strategies of intensification (e.g., *very beautiful*, *guapísimo*).

An important notion to investigate possible outcomes of contact are conflict sites, which are grammatical structures and phenomena with respect to which the grammars of languages in contact differ substantially, prompting the necessity to find resolutions to these conflicts. Previous research identifies and investigates a variety of these English–Spanish conflict sites, such as subject pronoun expression (González-Vilbazo & Koronkiewicz, 2016), word order within both verb (Chan, 2008; Lakshmanan et al., 2016) and noun phrases (Parafita Couto & Gullberg, 2019; Balam & Parafita Couto, 2019; Stadthagen-González et al., 2019) and gender agreement within the noun phrase (Balam, 2016; Valdés Kroff, 2016; Królikowska et al., 2019; Bellamy & Parafita Couto, 2022). Another prominent, but understudied conflict site in English–Spanish bilingual speech concerns the fact that Spanish is a fusional synthetic language (Martínez-García et al., 2021), whereas English is more of an analytic language (Haspelmath & Michaelis, 2017). One relevant construction in this respect that has been studied before in English–Spanish bilingual speech is the diminutive construction (Vanhaverbeke & Enghels, 2021). Intensification, which is the focus of this paper, constitutes another such conflict site.

Intensification is often considered a linguistic universal (Wierzbicka, 1996; Rainer, 2015). One prototypical and ubiquitous instantiation of intensification concerns the scaling of adjectives and adverbs by means of degree adverbs (e.g., *very beautiful*, *very quickly*; Labov, 1984). Depending on one's scope, however, intensification may encompass the scaling of virtually any linguistic element by a wide array of morphosyntactic intensifiers. This scaling can have several different semantic-pragmatic functions. On the one hand, it can amplify the intensity of the dimension, amount or degree expressed by an element, which are all considered quantitative functions (e.g., *a megahouse*). On the other hand, however, intensifiers can also express more qualitative-evaluative notions, both positive and negative (e.g., *a superday*, *this fucking thing*), and interpersonal or illocutionary connotations (e.g., *for fuck's sake*; S. Schneider, 2017; Roels, 2024).

The community under consideration here is in the city of Miami, in southern Florida. This city is characterized by high proportions of Hispanic people in its population, many of them being Cubans. However, Miami's Hispanic population is generally very diverse, including migrants from all over Latin America, including the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina. It is because of this diversity of speakers and Miami's key location at the crossroads of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean, in addition to the availability of ample high-quality corpus data, that Miami can be considered a very adequate setting to investigate the effects of various processes of language contact. As a consequence of its diverse Hispanic population, the city features high degrees of English–Spanish bilingualism (Oller & Eilers, 2002; D. Carter et al., 2011), including contact effects that are also at the center of this study, namely the broader concept of convergence (Lynch, 1999; P. M. Carter et al., 2020) and the more concrete phenomenon of codeswitching (Valdés Kroff, 2016; Blokzijl et al., 2017; Vanhaverbeke & Enghels, 2021).

To begin with, linguistic convergence encompasses different types of changes observed in languages in contact because of which said languages become structurally more similar (Birnbaum, 1985; Matras, 2011; Bouzouita & Enghels, 2021). Linguistic convergence can affect languages on different linguistic levels, including the phonological, morphological, and syntactic ones¹. It is a form of indirect change, which has the ability to influence the structure of a language at a more abstract and profound level. In contact situations where convergence takes place, one of the languages contains a construction that is somewhat analogous to a construction in the other language, prompting bilingual speakers to equate them and, as such, causing them to become more similar to each other in terms of meaning, use, and frequency (Grant, 2020). This conflation of constructions from different languages

is in line with the notion of diaconstructions from Diasystematic Construction Grammar (Höder, 2018), which postulates that bilingual speakers create abstract, language-unspecific constructions in their mental lexicon that encompass analogous structures from both languages. Interestingly, when several constructions alternate in one of the languages and the formation of such a diaconstruction increases the frequency of one of them, the balance between these constructions can shift and the frequency of competing constructions can decrease (Heine & Kuteva, 2005). This notion of convergence through the process of equating analogous structures in the languages in contact is highly relevant to the current study, because English and Spanish, as is explained throughout this paper, partly employ the same strategies and, in some cases, even the same specific items to intensify. This could prompt convergence effects and cause these shared strategies and specific intensifiers to become more frequent.

A second contact-induced phenomenon highly prominent in the speech of the bilingual community of Miami is codeswitching, defined as the alternating use of two or more languages within one conversation or utterance (Muysken, 2000). A distinction can be made between intersentential (1a), intrasentential (1b), and the more marginally attested intraword codeswitching (1c; Deuchar, 2006; Stefanich et al., 2019).

- (1) a. I'm fine. ¿Tú cómo estás?
I'm fine you how be.2SG
'I'm fine. How are you?' (Ghirardini, 2006, p. 17)
- b. This morning *mi hermano* y yo fuimos a
this morning my brother and I go.1PL.PST to
comprar some milk.
buy some milk
'This morning my brother and I went to buy some milk.' (Belazi et al., 1994, p. 222)
- c. Voy a hang-ear con mis amigo-s.
go.1SG to hang-VBZ with my friend-PL
'I'm going to hang with my friends.' (Stefanich et al., 2019, p. 3)

There is now a consensus that codeswitching does not occur arbitrarily but is a rule-governed phenomenon. Over the years, researchers have tested numerous theories and constraints, some of them newly formulated and some of them already existent theories of language, to explain and predict which switches are grammatical and which are not (Poplack, 1980; Mahootian, 1993; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Bhatt & Bolonyai, 2011; Goldrick et al., 2016). Like convergence, this phenomenon is very relevant when investigating intensifying strategies in English–Spanish bilingual speech, as it results as one of the possible outcomes of a conflict site.

Against this background, it is of particular interest to investigate how intensification manifests under the influence of contact effects. First and foremost, as speakers have the intensifying systems of two languages at their disposal, which both use different strategies to intensify, this prompts some questions as to in which language and with which strategy (i.e., morphological-synthetic or lexical-analytic) bilingual speakers choose to express intensification. These choices are likely not random but can further be influenced by a variety of factors. The choice for one language over the other, for instance, can be influenced by the semantic-pragmatic function of the intensifier. In English–Spanish bilingual speech, English has indeed been shown to be preferred to express quantitative notions, whereas Spanish would be more reserved for qualitative-evaluative notions (Vinagre Laranjeira, 2005; Betti & Enghels, 2018). This is because, for most bilinguals, the language of their country of origin (which tends to be Spanish for English–Spanish bilinguals) is the language

of subjectification, while the language of their country of residence (which tends to be English for English–Spanish bilinguals) is the language of objectification (Ohlson, 2007). This dichotomy strongly correlates with the situations in which speakers tend to use both languages (Blom & Gumperz, 1972), with the language of subjectification usually being spoken in the home and used to talk about the speaker’s culture, emotions, and interpersonal relations, and the language of objectification being spoken at school or work and used to discuss topics related to analytical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. The language of choice can also be influenced by certain constraints and theories of codeswitching that are postulated. Relevant examples of these are the Free Morpheme Constraint (Poplack, 1980), which predicts that, in bilingual discourse, bound morphemes of one language tend not to attach to stems in another language. Moreover, the Uniform Structure Principle (Myers-Scotton, 2002) predicts that certain grammatical structures align with the grammar of the matrix language (ML), which is often defined as the language of the finite verb (Myers-Scotton, 1993). An example of this can be observed in Jordanian Arabic–English codeswitching, where Arabic determiners are found with both English and Arabic nouns when Arabic is the ML (Myers-Scotton, 2002). Furthermore, the choice of one language over another is likely influenced by the sociolinguistic profile of the speaker (D. Carter et al., 2011; Parafita Couto et al., 2014), specifically by their language proficiency, age of acquisition, and attitudes. The first research question, as such, is which intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors influence the configuration of Miami bilinguals’ intensifying constructions. In concrete, the impact is investigated of the semantic-pragmatic function of the intensifier, relevant structural constraints and theories, as well as speakers’ self-reported proficiency in, age of acquisition of, and attitudes toward English and Spanish. These questions and relevant hypotheses are discussed more elaborately in Section 2.2.2.

Secondly, it is also of interest to investigate to what extent the intensifying systems of these two languages, which employ different strategies with different frequencies, display convergence effects, where the favored intensifying strategy or the frequency of certain strategies within these systems changes. To measure the possible convergence effects, this paper investigates to what extent the intensifying strategies used in the bilingual speech variety of Miami are different from those used in monolingual English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities. The second research question, then, is to what extent Miami bilinguals’ intensification displays convergence effects as to the employed strategies and their frequencies when compared to monolingual English and Spanish varieties. Expected outcomes are higher frequencies of intensifying strategies or specific intensifying items that are shared between the two languages. In the case of English and Spanish, as further exemplified below, the shared strategy is analytic intensification. In order to test for convergence effects, conversational corpus data from Miami and from two monolingual corpora, namely the Santa Barbara Corpus and the Havana subcorpus of Ameresco, are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. This is elaborated upon in Section 2.2.3.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the intensifying strategies used in English, Spanish, and bilingual speech. Next, Section 3 explains the methods used to answer the research questions, including the corpora consulted. Then, Section 4 contains the various results of the corpus study and the subsequent analyses and statistical tests performed. Within this section, Section 4.1 gives a descriptive overview of the results, Section 4.2 deals with the results concerning the influence of intralinguistic and extralinguistic variables and, finally, Section 4.3 addresses the results concerning convergence. To conclude, Section 5 relates how these results offer answers to the research questions.

2. Intensification Strategies

Intensification can be defined in many ways to encompass different types of morphophonological, morphosyntactic, pragmatic, and suprasegmental processes observed in discourse (Abdullaeva, 2024). The current study restricts its definition to those overt morphosyntactic elements that can be said to assign an intensifying or augmenting value to another overtly expressed element within the discourse (referred to as ‘bases’ throughout this paper), which both can belong to different word classes (e.g., *a big house*, *me gusta mucho* ‘I like it a lot’)². Below, the ways in which these overt patterns of intensification are expressed are discussed, first in monolingual varieties of both English and Spanish (Section 2.1) and, second, in an English–Spanish bilingual speech variety (Section 2.2).

2.1. Intensification Strategies in English and Spanish Unilingual Modes

2.1.1. Intensification in English

In English, two word classes frequently intensified are adjectives (2a) and adverbs (2b). This is commonly achieved through the use of intensifying adverbs, of which *very* is one of the most prototypical ones. This class of lexical intensifiers, however, is highly susceptible to expansion, in English (Núñez Pertejo & Palacios Martínez, 2014; Aijmer, 2018; Schweinberger, 2021) and in other languages (ten Buuren et al., 2018; Roels & Enghels, 2020), through the addition of neologisms from a wide variety of sources, such as taboo words (2c). Other intensifiers for adjectives and adverbs include lexicalized multiword constructions, which can originate in nominal elements (2d) or prepositional phrases (2e; Emmer, 2020).

- (2) a. She is **very talented**. She’s **very smart**. And she’ll be a force to be reckoned with. (COCA, SPOK, 2019)³
- b. Happily, she did **very well** for us in the ER and was admitted to observation. (COCA, BLOG, 2012)
- c. Here’s the thing about Justin Sherrell: He’s a **fucking great** drummer. (COCA, BLOG, 2012)
- d. Because a thousand dollars here in New York City or San Francisco is **a lot different** than anywhere else. (COCA, SPOK, 2019)
- e. Obstruction of justice in this situation is absurd. I fought **hard as hell** to make sure Mueller could do his job. (COCA, SPOK, 2019)

Other grammatical elements in English that can be intensified, are nouns (3a), verbs, or verb phrases (3b) and, to a more restricted degree, prepositional phrases (3c) and subordinate clauses (3d). In examples (3b–d), the intensifier has a quantitative function and amplifies the degree of the quality expressed by the base. For nominal bases, however, an intensifier in English generally expresses a qualitative-evaluative notion, as in (3a), in which the intensifier provides a negative evaluation.

- (3) a. This is why I don’t like you. You **fucking man whore**. (COCA, WEB, 2012)
- b. In the abstract, Americans **really like** the idea of rich Americans paying more in taxes. (COCA, SPOK, 2019)
- c. So I’m, I’m always **very, very against any sort of squelching of free speech**. (COCA, SPOK, 2017)
- d. And at the same time, it kind of feels **very like it’s short-circuiting your brain** sometimes. (COCA, SPOK, 2015)

Like its diminutive system (K. P. Schneider, 2003; Vanhaverbeke & Enghels, 2021), the intensification system of English relies for the largest part on lexical items. However, it also includes a limited paradigm of intensifying prefixes, such as *super-*, *hyper-*, *mega-*,

and *ultra-*, of which *super-* is the most common (Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo, 2014). These prefixes are used to intensify different types of bases, including adjectives (4a), where they express a high degree, and nouns (4b), where they express a large size or qualitative, generally positive, evaluation. Note that the status of these forms as true prefixes is disputed in many languages, both English (Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo, 2012; Chvátlová, 2021) and others (Foltran & Nóbrega, 2016; Napoli & Ravetto, 2017), with some authors considering them adjectives (when intensifying nouns) and adverbs (when intensifying adjectives or adverbs). In the current study and based on etymological grounds, they are considered prefixes. This further allows for their analysis in contrast to true intensifying adverbs, such as *very* and *really*.

- (4) a. I think the digs record was **supercool** because Kristen Webb was so good. (COCA, NEWS, 2016)
- b. One of you has a **superfan** so super that they have a tattoo devoted to you. (COCA, SPOK, 2014)

As opposed to this paradigm of prefixes, certain varieties of colloquial English also feature two marginal, paradigmatically unrelated intensifying suffixes. The first of these is the suffix *-ass*. Originating in African American Vernacular English, the suffix has since been recognized as an established form in General American English (Cannon, 1979). It can be used on adjectives to quantitatively intensify the degree they express (5a). The suffix can also nominalize adjectives, in which case it describes a person who possesses or is characterized by the quality expressed by the adjective (5b). Especially in this latter sense, the suffix tends to convey a negative evaluation. The second suffix to consider is the marginally occurring form *-zilla*, generally restricted to more informal and slang registers (Morshed, 2018; Zahradníková, 2018). The suffix is used on nouns and has a negative qualitative-evaluative meaning (5c).

- (5) a. I would've never worn those **ugly-ass** shoes. (COCA, SPOK, 2015)
- b. Unfortunately, being a **dumbass** does not preclude you from reproducing. (COCA, BLOG, 2012)
- c. I know you call me a **bridezilla**, Nicky, but I am not that crazy. (COCA, SPOK, 2010)

2.1.2. Intensification in Spanish

Spanish also uses analytic lexical forms to intensify a range of elements, but unlike English, Spanish employs synthetic intensification, especially in the form of suffixes, in a more productive way. First, various elements can function as analytic intensifiers in Spanish, such as adverbs (in the examples used with an adjective (6a) and a verb (6b) as bases), nominal elements (6c; here used on a verb), prepositional phrases (6d; here used on an adjective), or adjectives (6e; here used on a noun). In all but the last example, the intensifier quantitatively amplifies the degree expressed by the adjective or verb, while in (6e), the intensifier offers a qualitative evaluation, here negative.

- (6) a. *Ahí donde yo vivo es muy tranquilo pero a*
there where I live.1SG be.3SG very calm but at
la vez es muy aburrido.
the time be.3SG very boring
'There where I live it's very calm, but at the same time, it's very boring.'
(PRESEEA, LHAB_H11_001)⁴

- b. A mí no me gusta mucho el verano, por eso
to me not me please.3SG much the summer for that
me alegre cuando empieza el invierno.
me be.happy.1SG when begin.3SG the winter
'I don't like summer very much, therefore I'm happy when winter begins.'
(PRESEEA, LHAB_M13_079)
- c. De hecho cuando falleció sí me dolió un montón.
in fact when die.3SG.PST yes me hurt.3SG.PST a heap
'In fact, when she died, it hurt me a lot.' (PRESEEA, MEXI_H22_054)
- d. Me decidí e hice una cas-ita allí en,
me decide.1SG.PST and make.1SG.PST a house-DIM there in
en Güines, una cas-ita de lo más bonita.
in Güines a house-DIM of the most beautiful
'I decided to build a little house there in Güines, a very beautiful little house.'
(PRESEEA, LHAB_H32_061)
- e. Les voy a dar a mis hijo-s todo lo que
them go.1SG to give to my child-PL all that which
su puto padre no nos dio, el culo.
their fucking father not us give.3SG.PST the asshole
'I'm going to give my children everything their fucking father didn't give us, the asshole.'
(PRESEEA, PUEB_M21_056)

Next, the Spanish paradigm of intensifying prefixes is similar to that of English, with prefixes like *super-*, *hiper-*, *mega-* and *ultra-*, of which *super-* is again the most frequent. Overall, however, they are all used more frequently than in English (Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo, 2014). The prefixes can be used on various types of bases, such as adjectives (7a) and nouns (7b). The paradigm also contains forms not found in English, namely the prefixes *re-*, *rete-*, *requete-* and *recontra-* (7c; Martín García, 1998; Pharies, 2009).

- (7) a. No es caro, o sea está bien de precio,
not be.3SG expensive or be.3SG.SJV be.3SG well of price
a precio-s regulares, o sea tampoco es mega-barato.
at price-PL regular or be.3SG.SJV nor be.3SG INTS-cheap
'It's not expensive, I mean it's well-priced, at regular prices, I mean it's also not megacheap.'
(PRESEEA, MXLI_M13_029)
- b. El sábado y el domingo en un motel o en el
the Saturday and the Sunday in a motel or in the
único motel que hay en esa parte de Pinar del Río
only motel that be.3SG in that part of Pinar del Río
ponían un poqu-ito de música y todos los muchacho-s
put.3PL.IMPF a little-DIM of music and all the boy-PL
bajaban y esa era la super-discoteca de ahí.
descend.3PL.IMPF and that be.3SG.IMPF the INTS-discotheque of there
'On Saturdays and Sundays in a motel or in the only motel there was around that part of Pinar del Río, they put a little music and all the boys went down and that was the superdisco around there.'
(PRESEEA, LHAB_M11_007)

- c. *Pues yo creo que fue re-bién para mí. Para mi vida me ha ayudado mucho mucho mucho mucho. Yo life me have.3SG helped much much much much I creo que ha sido de las época-s más padres. believe.1SG that have.3SG been of the time-PL most cool*
 ‘So I think it was very good for me. For my life, it’s helped me very, very, very much. I think it’s been one of the coolest times.’ (PRESEEA, MEXI_H22_054)

As was stated before, Spanish also has a wide variety of intensifying suffixes. First, the suffix *-ísimo* is mainly used with adjectives and adverbs as bases and expresses a high degree of said adjective (8a). However, it can marginally be used on other types of bases as well, such as nouns (8b). The part *-is-* of the suffix can be reduplicated to express an even greater degree (8c).

- (8) a. *¿Momento-s importantes de la vida? Eeh los dos nacimiento-s moment-PL important of the life uh the two birth-PL de mis hijo-s, esos son important-ísimos, esos son of my child-PL those be.3SG important-SUP those be.3SG el momento más, los dos momento-s más importantes de mi vida. the moment most the two moment-PL most important of my life*
 ‘Important moments in life? Uh the two births of my children, those are very important, those are the two most important moments of my life.’ (PRESEEA, LHAB_H21_013)
- b. *Entonces como yo, somos siete hermano-s nunca tuve so since I be.1PL seven sibling-PL never have.1SG.PST la gran necesidad de buscar amigo-s, creo que ninguno the big need of find friend-PL believe.1SG that none de mis hermano-s porque los, de los mismos siete yo of my sibling-PL because the of the same seven I no conozco que alguno tenga un gran amigo-ísimo. not know.1SG that any have.3SG.SJV a big friend-SUP*
 ‘So since we’re seven siblings I never felt a great need to look for friends, I think none of my siblings because I don’t think any of the seven has a very great friend.’ (PRESEEA, GUAD_H22_002)
- c. *De repente hace much-is-is-ísima calor y luego se of sudden do.3SG much-RED~RED~SUP heat and later itself va el calor y aaay un fri-azo. go.3SG the heat and ay a coldness-AUG*
 ‘Suddenly there’s very, very, very much heat and later the heat goes away and ay (there’s) a great, intense coldness.’ (PRESEEA, GUAD_M21_062)

Next, Spanish has a rich paradigm of augmentative suffixes. These include the suffixes *-ón*, *-azo*, *-ote*, *-udo*, *-aco*, *-acho*, *-astro*, and *-asco*, of which the first three are the most frequent. As opposed to the superlative, which takes adjectives as its most prototypical base, these suffixes are primarily used on nouns; they can attribute a large size (9a) or a qualitative evaluation, either positive (9b) or negative (9c), to a base. Various of these suffixes can also be used on different types of bases, such as adjectives (9d) and nominalized verb forms (9e). Similar to the superlative, augmentative suffixes can be stacked to further emphasize the magnitude (9f).

- (9) a. *Pues llevamos un **canast-ón** y ahí los echamos todos.*
 so take.1PL a basket-AUG and there them throw.1PL all
 ‘Then we take a big basket and we throw them all in there’ (PRESEEA, GUAD_H11_086)
- b. *Aparte que era **guap-ísimo**, un **cuerp-azo** y el señor*
 except that be.3SG.IMPF beautiful-SUP a body-AUG and the mister
*bajaba en **mallon-es verdes** o **azules** de aquí.*
 descend.3SG.IMPF in pantyhose-PL green or blue from here
 ‘Except he was very handsome, a great, attractive body, and the man would come down from here in green or blue tights.’ (PRESEEA, MEXI_M23_024)
- c. *Pues estaba **nacid-ito** mi niño, yo lo **metí** al*
 so be.3SG.IMPF born-DIM my child I him put.1SG.PST in.the
*carro para que no fuera **tanto ruid-azo** ahí.*
 car for that not be.3SG.IMPF.SJV so.much noise-AUG there
 ‘So my child was newborn, I put him in the car so that there wasn’t so much loud, unpleasant noise there.’ (PRESEEA, GUAD_M31_034)
- d. *Había unos **arbol-ote-s enormes** **grand-otes** y ahí*
 be.3SG.IMPF some tree-AUG-PL enormous big-AUG and there
*había un **montón** de **zopilote-s**.*
 be.3SG.IMPF a heap of vulture-PL
 ‘There were some very huge, enormous trees and there there were a lot of vultures.’ (PRESEEA, MEXI_M31_108)
- e. *Físicamente yo las **encuentro maravillosas**, espiritualmente son un*
 physically I them find.1SG marvelous spiritually be.3PL a
*poco **pele-onas** y eso.*
 little fight-AUG and that
 ‘Physically I find them marvelous, spiritually they’re a little quarrelsome and all that.’ (PRESEEA, LHAB_H22_049)
- f. *Entonces tiene un **cas-on-on-on-ón** y ya están*
 so have.3SG a house-AUG-AUG-AUG-AUG and already be.3PL
*los dos **viej-illo-s solos** con los **sirviente-s**.*
 the two old-DIM-PL alone with the servant-PL
 ‘So he has a very, very, very big house and the two little old ones are there alone with the servants.’ (PRESEEA, MONR_M32_094)

2.1.3. Similarities and Differences Between Intensification in English and Spanish

As can be seen from the above descriptions, the intensifying paradigms of English and Spanish display some similarities and differences. Both languages can intensify a variety of different word classes. The forms used to intensify these elements can be lexical items of various types, but both languages can also employ affixes to this end. It is in these affix systems that the most important differences between both languages are observed. Although both affix systems can be observed to contain similar forms, including prefixes such as *super-* and *mega-*, the Spanish morphological system surpasses the English both in token and type frequency. It is generally observed that, even when considering these shared prefixes, synthetic forms have a higher frequency in Spanish than they do in English (Núñez Pertejo & Palacios Martínez, 2014). Furthermore, among its intensifying prefixes,

Spanish has some forms not found in English, such as *re-*. Finally, in its suffixes, Spanish also has an elaborate paradigm, which is overall lacking in English.

This greater productivity of synthetic forms in Spanish compared to the prevalence of lexical and hence analytic intensifiers in English constitutes a potential conflict site in English–Spanish bilingual speech. Additionally, the varying frequencies of the analytic and synthetic strategies between the two languages can lead to convergence effects in this particular contact situation. The possibilities to express intensification in a bilingual setting are explored in more detail in the following subsection.

2.2. Intensification in Bilingual Modes

2.2.1. Previous Accounts

The unilingual paradigms of intensification of English and Spanish make for many ways in which different intensifying strategies can be combined in a bilingual setting. So far, the realization of intensification in a bilingual context is hardly touched upon in the literature. Fiorentini and Sansó (2017) investigate intensifiers in a Ladin–Italian bilingual setting in Trentino–South Tyrol in Italy, but focus more on discourse markers that intensify the speaker’s epistemic stance or the illocutionary force of the discourse, such as Ladin *de segur* ‘definitely’. Through the analysis of various types of intensifiers in terms of their borrowability, the study finds that these types of intersubjective intensifiers are used in bilingual speech the most easily. The current study, however, instead focuses on the intensification of explicit linguistic constituents within the discourse, rather than of the epistemic stance toward the discourse in a more general sense.

Additionally, Fernández Flórez (2022) analyzes the intensifiers *muy* and *bien* in the English–Spanish bilingual community of Tucson in Arizona, but ultimately concentrates on the use of these intensifiers in unilingual Spanish speech. It is found that these two intensifiers display similar behavior as they do in monolingual Spanish communities, both in their frequencies and the contexts in which they are used. Although these two specific lexical items are instances of the types of intensifiers that are within the scope of the current paper, the focus here is broadened to include all different types of lexical and morphological intensifiers, as well as contexts featuring English, Spanish, or a mix of the two.

In this way, the current paper aims to create a more comprehensive image of morphosyntactic intensification across its full breadth and across different contexts of language usage, both unilingual and bilingual, within a bilingual community. Accordingly, the study addresses two central research questions, as outlined in Section 1. Specifically, the first research question examines the influence of various intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors on the configuration of intensifying constructions among Miami bilinguals. The second question explores the extent to which Miami bilinguals’ intensifying strategies exhibit convergence effects.

2.2.2. Hypotheses Regarding Influence of Intralinguistic and Extralinguistic Factors on Intensification

First of all, it is of interest whether bilingual speakers have preferences in terms of the language in which or the strategy with which they express their intensifying constructions. Speakers have both English and Spanish intensifiers at their disposal and can use these on either English or Spanish bases. This leads to two possibilities for unilingual intensifying constructions, namely unilingual English and Spanish constructions, and two possibilities for intensifying constructions with a codeswitch in them, namely one with an English base modified by a Spanish intensifier and vice versa. These four possible configurations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Possible combinations of languages and strategies of intensifiers.

	English Base	Spanish Base
English intensifier	very cheap	very <i>barato</i>
Spanish intensifier	<i>muy</i> cheap	<i>muy barato</i>

The number of possible configurations is furthermore expanded by taking into account the intensifying strategy and the matrix language (ML) of the clause containing the intensifying construction. The inclusion of these factors causes the number of configurations to increase to 16 possible constructions, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Possible combinations of ML, base language, and intensifier language/strategy.

		English ML		Spanish ML	
		Analytic	Synthetic	Analytic	Synthetic
English base	English intensifier	The book is very cheap.	The book is hypercheap.	<i>El libro es</i> very cheap.	<i>El libro es</i> hypercheap.
	Spanish intensifier	The book is <i>muy</i> cheap.	The book is cheapísimo.	<i>El libro es</i> <i>muy</i> cheap.	<i>El libro es</i> cheapísimo.
Spanish base	English intensifier	The book is very <i>barato</i> .	The book is hyperbarato.	<i>El libro es</i> very <i>barato</i> .	<i>El libro es</i> hyperbarato.
	Spanish intensifier	The book is <i>muy barato</i> .	The book is baratísimo.	<i>El libro es</i> <i>muy barato</i> .	<i>El libro es</i> baratísimo.

The current study investigates the distribution of these patterns, including the prevalence of some of these over others, by considering the influence of various factors. A first parameter is the semantic-pragmatic function (i.e., purely quantitative or qualitative-evaluative) of the intensifier. Specifically in an English–Spanish bilingual context like Miami, Spanish is often used to express more affective, subjective notions, whereas English is used for more objective statements (Vinagre Laranjeira, 2005), which is a type of metaphorical codeswitching (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). This prompts the expectation that, if this principle is at play in the bilingual production of an intensifying construction, a quantitative intensifier is more likely to be in English, while a qualitative-evaluative one would rather be in Spanish. Some hypothetical examples of this can be seen in (10a–b), which show two constructions involving English quantitative intensifiers, and (11a–b), which show two constructions involving Spanish qualitative-evaluative intensifiers.

- (10) a. *Corrí* *a* *la* *escuela* **very** **quickly**.
run.1SG.PST to the school very quickly
‘I ran to school very quickly.’
- b. *Esa* *es* *una* **very** **big** *casa*.
that be.3SG a very big house
‘That is a very big house.’
- (11) a. I’m tired because of the *puto* **day** that I’ve had.
I’m tired because of the fucking day that I’ve had
‘I’m tired because of the fucking day that I’ve had.’
- b. *Tengo* *un* *plan-azo* for my birthday tomorrow.
have.1SG a idea-AUG for my birthday tomorrow
‘I have a great idea for my birthday tomorrow.’

The choices that bilingual speakers make in this respect can also be conditioned by structural constraints and theories, such as the Free Morpheme Constraint and the Uniform Structure Principle⁵. It is expected that, if the Free Morpheme Constraint holds true for

the data, intensifying constructions with a codeswitch between base and intensifier are only allowed if the intensifier is a lexical item rather than an affix. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that, if the Uniform Structure Principle is adhered to, synthetic intensifiers tend to occur if the ML is Spanish and are avoided if the ML is English. This would follow from the observation that the analytic strategy is the default within the English system, whereas both the synthetic and analytic strategies are salient within Spanish grammar.

Still, intralinguistic factors alone are expected not to suffice in explaining the attested patterns. In a study of intensifying strategies in youngsters' Madrilénian Spanish, Roels (2024) finds all intralinguistic factors taken into consideration to be subordinate to the considered extralinguistic factors, which seem to be the best predictors of attested patterns. As such, it is investigated to what extent specific sociolinguistic variables⁶, which are shown to be of influence on bilinguals' language use (Perani et al., 2003; Foote, 2010; Luo et al., 2010; Dewi & Setiadi, 2018; Kastenbaum et al., 2019), help to explain the intensifying patterns in the bilingual community under study. These include the language proficiency of the speakers in both English and Spanish, their age of acquisition of these languages, and their attitudes toward them. It is then expected that, if these factors are of influence, bilingual speakers increasingly opt for English or Spanish intensifying strategies if their self-reported proficiency, age of acquisition, and attitudes predominantly favor English or Spanish, respectively.

2.2.3. Hypotheses Regarding Convergence Effects on Intensifying Strategies

It is possible that the intensifying systems of English and Spanish in Miami show convergence effects, considering the effects of convergence on other linguistic phenomena in Miami (Lynch, 1999; P. M. Carter et al., 2020). Specifically, bilingual speakers may resort more frequently to intensifying strategies or even specific intensifiers shared between the two languages. In terms of strategies, it is expected that, if convergence is at play in Miami, analytic intensification is the preferred strategy in the observed bilingual speech as the strategy shared by both languages. Consequently, this means that Miami bilinguals, in case of convergence, are likely to use fewer synthetic intensifiers in their Spanish compared to monolingual speakers of related Spanish varieties.

However, if convergence effects apply, in their English, Miami bilinguals may actually use slightly more synthetic intensification than monolingual American English speakers. It is likely that this can, above all, be seen in a greater use of *super-* and the other intensifying prefixes in the English spoken by Miami bilinguals, as these specific items are shared between both languages. To test these convergence effects, the bilingual English and Spanish speech of Miami is compared to monolingual English and Spanish varieties.

3. Corpus and Methods

3.1. Data

In order to investigate the speech of Miami bilinguals, this study analyzes conversations from the Miami Corpus of BangorTalk (Deuchar et al., 2014)⁷. This corpus consists of 56 naturalistic spoken conversations between 83 Miami bilinguals, totaling approximately 35 hours of speech recorded in 2008 and 264,579 words, of which 166,665 (62.99%) are English, 90,844 (34.34%) are Spanish, and 7,070 (2.67%) cannot be classified as either English or Spanish.

For comparative purposes with respect to the research question regarding convergence, monolingual English and Spanish corpora are also required in order to compare the use of analytic and synthetic intensifiers in the speech variety of Miami to their use in monolingual English and Spanish varieties. Concretely, an analysis is run of data from the Santa Barbara Corpus (Du Bois et al., 2005)⁸, specifically a sample of 100,074 words consisting of

all conversations with speakers identified as non-Hispanic from all southern U.S. states represented in the corpus, which are Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and California. Furthermore, the Havana subcorpus of Ameresco is analyzed, which represents Cuban Spanish and consists of 102,890 words (Albelda Marco & Estellés Arguedas, 2016)⁹.

These corpora are chosen because they are closely comparable to the Miami Corpus in terms of type of speech, as all three contain naturalistic spontaneous conversations. Furthermore, the two monolingual corpora represent relevant varieties, American English and Cuban Spanish, respectively, to which to compare the variety of Miami, as these are likely closest to the English and Spanish spoken in Miami.

3.2. Parameters

To begin with, through a front-to-back reading of the transcripts from the three corpora, all constructions in the datasets containing an overt intensifier modifying a base of any word class are extracted for annotation. Additionally, constructions containing certain modifying adjectives are also included, namely those adjectives expressing a great size or a positive or negative evaluation (e.g., *a big house, a good friend, a bad mood*). These constructions, albeit arguably not intensifying constructions, are included because they form structural alternatives to the various intensifying affixes under study (e.g., *a megahouse* vs. *a big house, a superfriend* vs. *a good friend, a moodzilla* vs. *a bad mood*). Consequently, the proportion of synthetic forms uttered by speakers can only be properly investigated if these alternative formulations are included in the analysis. Therefore, in the analyses regarding the analytic–synthetic dichotomy where this proportion of synthetic forms is under consideration, these adjectival constructions are additionally included.

In a second phase, the extracted tokens are annotated¹⁰ for the intralinguistic and extralinguistic variables mentioned above, the latter of which are mostly derived from the sociolinguistic survey data included in the corpora. These variables, organized by the research questions that they are relevant to, are the following:

- Descriptive and identifying variables:
 - Conversation and line in which construction is found;
 - Code, gender, and age of speaker uttering construction;
 - Code, gender, and age of hearer construction is uttered to.
- Variables relevant to the research question regarding influence of intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors on intensifying configuration:
 - Intralinguistic variables:
 - Language of base (English vs. Spanish);
 - Language of intensifier (English vs. Spanish);
 - Semantic-pragmatic function of intensifier (quantitative vs. qualitative-evaluative);
 - Strategy of intensifier (analytic vs. synthetic);
 - Matrix language (English vs. Spanish).
 - Extralinguistic variables:
 - Self-reported language proficiency¹¹ (categorical, ranging from 0 ‘very low’ to 4 ‘very high’; of both English and Spanish, as well as the difference between both values);
 - Age of acquisition (categorical, ranging from 1 ‘from birth’ to 5 ‘after adulthood’; of both English and Spanish, as well as the difference between both values);

- Language attitudes (continuous¹², ranging from 1 ‘very negative’ to 5 ‘very positive’; of both English and Spanish, as well as the difference between both values).
- Variables relevant to the research question regarding convergence effects on intensifying strategies:
 - Corpus in which construction is found (Miami, Santa Barbara, Havana);
 - Strategy of intensifier (analytic vs. synthetic).

The attested intensifying constructions and their extralinguistic and intralinguistic properties are analyzed both qualitatively, in that the intensifying paradigm of the community is described by discussing the various attested intensifying patterns, and quantitatively, in that the frequencies of certain patterns over others and the relationship of these frequencies to relevant variables are tested statistically. A relevant test, namely either a chi-square or Fisher’s exact test, is performed for every variable separately. The results of the analyses are found in the following section.

4. Results

In the following section, the results are described and analyzed statistically. First, a descriptive overview of the attested constructions is given, followed by more detailed results, as well as appropriate statistical analyses, in order to answer the respective research questions.

4.1. Formal Analysis of Intensification Strategies

First of all, a general description is provided of the grammar of intensification as found in Miami. From the entire Miami Corpus, a total of 1,737 constructions are extracted. Of these, 1,282 are true intensifying constructions, while the rest constitute the aforementioned adjectival constructions (e.g., *a big house*, *a good friend*, *a bad mood*). Table 3 shows the division of the found constructions according to these categories and the language in which they appear.

Table 3. Frequencies of true intensifying and adjectival constructions in both languages.

Language	True Intensifying		Adjectival		Total	
	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%
unilingual English	902	70.36%	324	71.21%	1,226	70.58%
unilingual Spanish	369	28.78%	126	27.69%	495	28.50%
bilingual	11	0.86%	5	1.10%	16	0.92%
total	1,282		455		1,737	

Immediately striking is the very low frequency of bilingual intensifying constructions (freq_{abs} = 11, 0.86%), where an English base is modified by a Spanish intensifier or vice versa. This is apparently a dispreferred pattern in the English–Spanish speech of Miami. The 11 constructions are discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.1. The data further show that there are many more English than Spanish intensifying constructions. At first sight, this can be explained by the fact that English is much more dominant in the corpus than Spanish.

Table 4, however, gives more insight into this. Here, the division is shown of all unilingual true intensifying constructions by the word class of the base, as defined in Section 2.1.1, with normalized frequencies per 10,000 English or Spanish words between brackets. The total normalized frequencies show that, even when controlling for the overall presence of English and Spanish in the corpus, there are relatively more English (freq_{norm} = 54.12) than Spanish (freq_{norm} = 40.62) intensifiers in the corpus.

Table 4. Frequencies of unilingual intensifying constructions by word class of base.

Word Class	Unilingual English		Unilingual Spanish	
	freq _{abs}	freq _{norm}	freq _{abs}	freq _{norm}
adjective	624	37.44	226	24.88
verb	97	5.82	31	3.41
adverb	69	4.14	57	6.27
noun	45	2.70	47	5.17
pronoun	32	1.92	5	0.55
determiner	22	1.32	0	0.00
prepositional phrase	10	0.60	3	0.33
subordinate clause	3	0.18	0	0.00
total	902	54.12	369	40.62

The overall greater productivity of English intensifiers extends across all possible types of bases, with the exception of adverbial and nominal bases, which are intensified relatively more often in Spanish (6.27 and 5.17 per 10,000 words, respectively) than in English (4.14 and 2.70 per 10,000 words, respectively). For the nominal bases, this can be explained by the fact that the Spanish number also includes instances of the augmentative suffixes, which English generally lacks; indeed, 37 of the intensified Spanish nouns (78.72%) constitute instances of one of these suffixes (e.g., *un molote* ‘a big riot’).

Below, some examples of unilingual intensifying constructions found in the corpus are shown. First, examples are given of English intensifying constructions involving an English adjective (12a), an adverb (12b), a noun (12c), and a verb (12d), followed by examples of Spanish analytic intensifiers used on a Spanish adjective (13a), an adverb (13b), a noun (13c), and a verb (13d) and, finally, examples of Spanish synthetic intensifiers used on and adjective (14a), an adverb (14b), and a noun (14c).

- (12) a. Yeah no but you know it’s funny, but Hawaii, Hawaii is beautiful, **very beautiful**. (Miami, zeledon2)
 b. This is the one I got in **quick as fuck**, but at the end I didn’t care that much. (Miami, sastre2)
 c. The invitations so far as I have imagined them are in English, but then I was thinking everyone in the **fucking family** speaks Spanish. (Miami, herring9)
 d. She hasn’t given me back my grade on the presentation and it **really bothers** me that Peter got a, the same thing that I got. (Miami, herring6)

- (13) a. *Están museo de las ciencia-s, museo de la luz*
 be.3PL museum of the science-PL museum of the light
y otros dos, debe ser un complejo muy grande.
 and other two must.3SG be a complex very big
 ‘There’s the science museum, the museum of light and two more, it must be a very big complex.’ (Miami, herring5)

- b. *Sale desde bien temprano y llega bien tarde.*
 leave.3SG from very early and arrive.3SG very late
 ‘He goes very early and returns very late.’ (Miami, herring11)

- c. *Tengo una hambre de mil diablo-s, te cuento.*
 have.1SG a hunger of thousand devil-PL you tell.1SG
 ‘I tell you, I’m hungry like a thousand devils.’ (Miami, herring16)

- d. *Siempre me gustaba mucho la odontología, siempre*
 always me please.3SG.IMPF much the dentistry always
estaba muy involucrada en la odontología.
 be.1SG.IMPF very involved in the dentistry
 ‘I always really liked the dentist’s, I was always very involved in dentistry.’
 (Miami, zeledon1)
- (14) a. *Te cagás de la risa, divertid-ísimo buen-ísimo es él.*
 you shit.2SG of the laugh funny-SUP good-SUP be.3SG he
 ‘You’ll laugh your ass off, he’s really funny.’ (Miami, herring2)
- b. *Qué cagada, creo que queda lej-ísimos esa verga,*
 what crap believe.1SG that stay.3SG far-SUP that dick
me queda super-lejos.
 me stay.3SG INTS-far
 ‘What crap, I think that shit is too far, it’s too far for me.’ (Miami, herring12)
- c. *¿También no hubo una, una, un mol-ote por el precio*
 also not be.3SG.PST a a a mass-AUG for the price
de las tortilla-s?
 of the tortilla-PL
 ‘Also wasn’t there a big riot about the price of tortillas?’ (Miami, herring5)

Next, Table 5 takes a broader perspective and shows the division of unilingual constructions in both languages across the two strategies, analytic and synthetic. Note that the data shown here include only those constructions with adjectives, adverbs, and nouns as bases, because these three word classes most clearly show the alternation between analytic and synthetic forms in the intensifiers they take (e.g., *very cheap* vs. *cheapass*, *very quickly* vs. *superquickly*, *a big house* vs. *a megahouse*). It can be seen that synthetic forms make up a much larger proportion of the Spanish intensifiers (21.27%) compared to the English ones (4.33%).

Table 5. Frequencies of unilingual intensifying constructions by strategy of choice.

Strategy	Unilingual English		Unilingual Spanish		Total	
	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%
analytic	1,016	95.67%	359	78.73%	1,375	90.58%
synthetic	46	4.33%	97	21.27%	143	9.42%
total	1,062		456		1,518	

These are the results that are to be compared to those of the monolingual communities in Section 4.3. First, however, the next subsection discusses in some more detail the codeswitched intensifying constructions observed in the corpus.

4.2. Quantitative Analysis of Intensification Strategies in Bilingual Contexts

4.2.1. Analysis of Impact of Intralinguistic Parameters on Intensification Strategies

This subsection investigates the effects that various intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors have on speakers’ intensifying strategies. First, the attention is turned to intensifying constructions in bilingual contexts, so any intensifying construction situated in a clause in which codeswitching occurs. One should note that, in the Miami Corpus, very few intensifying constructions are attested in bilingual contexts, namely 109 or 8.50% of the overall tokens of intensification. In these bilingual contexts, the question arises whether, when both Spanish and English are activated, bilinguals tend to relate the use of intensifiers in one or the other language to semantically specialized meanings (Blom & Gumperz, 1972;

Aaron, 2004). Specifically, previous research suggests that English–Spanish bilinguals may prefer English to discuss objective notions and Spanish to express more affective statements (Vinagre Laranjeira, 2005; Betti & Enghels, 2018). If this observation also holds true for intensification, Miami bilinguals should favor English for quantitative and Spanish for qualitative-evaluative intensification.

Table 6 shows the frequencies of English and Spanish intensifiers in bilingual contexts expressing quantitative and qualitative-evaluative values. One can see here that the quantitative function is overall much more frequent than the qualitative-evaluative function. When testing the relationship between the function and language of the intensifier, it is found that there is no statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($p = .705$)¹³.

Table 6. Frequencies of intensifiers in bilingual contexts by semantic-pragmatic function.

Function	English Intensifiers	Spanish Intensifiers
quantitative	62	40
qualitative-evaluative	5	2
total	67	42

These findings imply that the semantic-pragmatic function of an intensifier does not have an effect on speakers' choices to express this intensifier in either English or Spanish. Indeed, the data show many cases of quantitative and qualitative-evaluative intensifiers in both English and Spanish. Below, (15a) shows an example of an English construction with a quantitative function, while (15b) shows a Spanish one. Next, (16a) shows an English construction and (16b) a Spanish construction, both with a qualitative-evaluative function. Note that all examples below constitute instances of adjectival constructions rather than true intensifying constructions, as true intensifiers, such as the intensifying affixes, are somewhat rare in bilingual contexts.

- (15) a. That, that real, real pig, *los, los, los* with a **big** **belly?**
 that that real real pig the the the with a big belly
 'A real pig, with a big belly?' (Miami, sastre1)
- b. You know *el, el* bad guy, the bad guy in part two, *el que*
 you know the the bad guy the bad guy in part two the who
 tiene, *el, el cubano que tiene pelo largo?*
 have.3SG the the Cuban who have.3SG hair long
 'You know the bad guy in part two, the one who has, the Cuban who has long
 hair?' (Miami, herring7)
- (16) a. *Así que si escuchas de algún good deal,* because *en*
 like.this that if listen.2SG of any good deal because in
 el dealer donde él está hay carro-s.
 the dealer where he be.3SG be.3SG car-PL
 'So if you hear of any good deal, because at the dealer where he is there are
 cars.' (Miami, zeledon5)
- b. *Él puede trabajar en la biblioteca también, sería*
 he can.3SG work in the library also be.3SG.COND
 un buen trabajo then.
 a good work then
 'He can work at the library too, it could be a good work then.' (Miami, sastre9)

Furthermore, the influence of certain structural constraints is to be considered. The first of these to consider is the Free Morpheme Constraint, which postulates that a codeswitch should not occur between a stem and a morpheme bound to this stem. In order to investigate this, the focus is narrowed down to only the bilingual constructions. As explained above, only 11 bilingual intensifying constructions, with either an English base intensified by a Spanish intensifier or vice versa, are found in the data. Below, Table 7 shows the attested patterns observed for these constructions in terms of the word class of the base and the language in which base and intensifier occur. Below that, the eleven constructions in question are shown, first the seven English bases with Spanish intensifiers (17a–f), followed by the four Spanish bases with English intensifiers (18a–d). The data show that, despite the low frequency of bilingual constructions, the attested patterns are moderately diverse, although there are more with English than Spanish bases and most contain an adjective as base. The majority of these adjectives are intensified by adverbs, all of which are among the most prototypical intensifying adverbs, while two are instead intensified by the prepositional phrase *de lo más* ‘very’.

Table 7. Frequencies of bilingual intensifying constructions by word class of base.

Word Class	English BASE + Spanish INTS	Spanish BASE + English INTS
adjective	7	2
noun	0	1
determiner	0	1
total	7	4

- (17) a. Yeah *está muy modern y nuevo.*
 yeah be.3SG very modern and new
 ‘Yeah it’s very modern and new.’ (Miami, sastre8)
- b. *Él estaba muy busy.*
 he be.3SG.IMPF very busy
 ‘He was very busy.’ (Miami, sastre11)
- c. *¿Paul es muy, muy hotheaded?*
 Paul be.3SG very very hotheaded
 ‘Is Paul very hotheaded?’ (Miami, herring6)
- d. *Pero después cuando llueve se pone muy slippery.*
 but after when rain.3SG itself put.3SG very slippery
 ‘But after that it gets very slippery.’ (Miami, herring14)
- e. *Es así tan rude con mis amigo-s, dios mío.*
 be.3SG like.this so rude with my friend-PL god my
 ‘She is so rude with my friends anyway, good god.’ (Miami, herring16)
- f. *¿Tú viste? Está de lo más clean, está de lo más clean.*
 you see.2SG.PST be.3SG of the most clean be.3SG of the most clean
 ‘Did you see it? It’s very clean, it’s very clean.’ (Miami, maria16)

- (18) a. We were together for four years and he was **very** *machista*.
 we were together for four years and he was very male.chauvinistic
 ‘We were together for four years and he was very male chauvinistic.’ (Miami, zeledon2)
- b. You know the president of the club, *no tú sabes*, he’s **real**
 you know the president of the club no you know.2SG he’s real
político.
 political
 ‘You know the president of the club, no you know, he’s really political.’
 (Miami, sastre6)
- c. So I throw out while we go in and it’s a **freaking** *botánica*.
 so I throw out while we go in and it’s a freaking garden
 ‘So I throw out while we go in and it’s a freaking garden.’ (Miami, sastre7)
- d. Ah that whole area you would not catch me dead, it could be **fucking**
 ah that whole area you would not catch me dead it could be fucking
ahí todo el mundo.
 there all the world
 ‘Ah that whole area you would not catch me dead, it could be fucking
 everyone there.’ (Miami, sastre4)

It should be noted that all of these constructions are instances of insertion (Muysken, 1997), where a base in a particular language is inserted into a context otherwise predominantly featuring the other language. In all cases, the language of the intensifier additionally aligns with the ML. One can also observe that all of these constructions feature analytic intensifiers. Based on this, the Free Morpheme Constraint appears to be adhered to in the data, as no synthetic intensifying constructions are attested in which a codeswitch occurs.

At this point in the analysis, it is of interest to investigate the influence of the Uniform Structure Principle, which predicts that particular grammatical features in a bilingual context align with the grammar of the ML. If this applies to the data discussed here, an English ML is expected to show a dispreference for synthetic intensification. Table 8 shows the division of intensifying strategies in bilingual contexts. As can be seen here, only one synthetic intensifying constructions occurs in an English-ML context. Conversely, there are some more synthetic constructions to be found in a Spanish-ML context, which is expected to be more lenient in terms of possible intensifying strategies, due to both strategies being more productive within the Spanish system. When statistically testing this relationship, it is found that the ML and strategy of choice are significantly related to each other, additionally displaying a moderately strong effect size ($\chi^2 = 11.22$, $p < .001$, $V = .29$).

Table 8. Frequencies of intensifiers in English-ML and Spanish-ML bilingual contexts by strategy of choice.

Strategy	English ML	Spanish ML
analytic	74	52
synthetic	1	11
total	75	63

From the results presented in this subsection, it can be seen that bilinguals’ intensifying strategies are not significantly related to the semantic-pragmatic function of the intensifiers, but that bilinguals’ choices in this regard appear to be constrained by the Free Morpheme

Constraint and the Uniform Structure Principle, as the data show a dispreference toward synthetic intensifying constructions with a switch between the intensifier and either the base or the ML.

4.2.2. Analysis of Impact of Extralinguistic Parameters on Intensification Strategies

The attention is next shifted to extralinguistic variables in explaining bilingual speakers' intensifying strategies. Some factors identified in previous research that are likely influential in this respect are various of the sociolinguistic characteristics of the speakers, most importantly their language proficiency, age of acquisition, and language attitudes (Foote, 2010; Parafita Couto et al., 2014; Dewi & Setiadi, 2018). More precisely, if an individual's proficiency, language acquisition, or attitudes of English and Spanish differ significantly, this variation is expected to influence their use of intensifiers in bilingual contexts. Specifically, speakers are likely to employ more English or Spanish intensifiers depending which language they demonstrate higher proficiency in, earlier acquisition of, or more positive attitudes toward. Consequently, the study examines to which extent speakers use more English intensifiers when they report to have greater proficiency in English than in Spanish, acquire English earlier than Spanish or hold a more positive overall attitude toward English. Conversely, it analyzes to what degree speakers employ more Spanish intensifiers when they report higher proficiency in Spanish, acquire it earlier than English or have a more favorable attitude toward Spanish.

First of all, the influence of the difference between speakers' self-reported English and Spanish language proficiency is tested. Table 9 shows the division of participants from the Miami Corpus by the difference between their proficiency scores in English and Spanish and the number of uttered English and Spanish intensifiers in bilingual contexts divided across these groups¹⁴. As can be seen here, most participants, namely 61 out of 83, report equal proficiency in both languages. When testing the influence of difference in proficiency on the language of choice of the intensifying construction using a Fisher's exact test, no statistically significant relationship is found ($p = .581$), which means that bilinguals appear not to use more intensifiers in the language that they have a higher proficiency in. Note that one possible explanation of these results concerns the fact that self-reported proficiency is used in the analysis instead of a more objective measure of proficiency (see Note 11).

Table 9. Number of participants and intensifiers per difference score between self-reported language proficiency values.

Difference in Proficiency	Participants	English Intensifiers	Spanish Intensifiers
English 2 > Spanish	7	8	8
English 1 > Spanish	7	0	0
English = Spanish	61	56	33
English < 1 Spanish	7	3	1
English < 2 Spanish	1	0	0
total	83	67	42

Second, speakers' age of acquisition is considered as a factor. Table 10 shows the number of speakers from the corpus for each difference value between individual speakers' age-of-acquisition scores and the number of intensifiers uttered in bilingual contexts divided by the speakers' age-of-acquisition differences (see Note 14). Note that the age-of-acquisition scores are measured on a five-point scale, with each of these five categories representing a different age range, ranging from acquisition from birth to acquisition into adulthood. It can be seen that the majority of speakers have acquired Spanish earlier than English, with only a few acquiring English before Spanish. When testing whether a

difference in age of acquisition stands in relation to a different usage of English and Spanish intensifiers with a Fisher's exact test, it is found that there is no statistically significant relationship between the two ($p = .937$). This suggests that speakers do not prefer to intensify in the language that they acquire first.

Table 10. Number of participants and intensifiers per difference score between age-of-acquisition values.

Difference in AoA	Participants	English Intensifiers	Spanish Intensifiers
English 4 > Spanish	11	5	3
English 3 > Spanish	8	4	1
English 2 > Spanish	26	31	19
English 1 > Spanish	12	3	2
English = Spanish	22	21	17
English < 1 Spanish	2	1	0
English < 2 Spanish	2	0	0
total	83	67	42

Finally, speakers' language attitudes are considered. Table 11 shows the number of participants from the corpus sorted by the difference between their attitudes toward English and Spanish and the division of intensifiers uttered in bilingual contexts across these different groups (see Note 14). Note that the difference values are a little different than for proficiency and age of acquisition, as the language attitude values behave more like continuous variables. When using a Fisher's exact test to test the relationship between speakers' differences in attitudes and the language in which they express their intensifiers, a statistically significant effect is found ($p = .017$), with speakers using more English intensifiers if they evaluate English more positively than Spanish and vice versa. Additional testing reveals a moderately strong effect size ($V = .34$).

Table 11. Number of participants and intensifiers per difference score between language attitude values.

Difference in Attitude	Participants	English Intensifiers	Spanish Intensifiers
English 2+ > Spanish	1	1	0
English 1–2 > Spanish	5	1	3
English 0–1 > Spanish	18	20	7
English = Spanish	19	23	10
English < 0–1 Spanish	34	18	22
English < 1–2 Spanish	6	4	0
total	83	67	42

As can be seen from the analyses above, two of the three variables under consideration do not display a statistically significant relationship with language of choice. Of the three, only language attitudes appear to be an indicator of the language in which bilinguals prefer to express their intensifiers in a bilingual context.

4.3. Quantitative Analyses of Convergence Effects on Intensification Strategies

Building on the previous observations, this subsection examines the hypotheses related to convergence and, more concretely, the proportion of synthetic or analytic intensifiers in Miami compared to monolingual communities. First up, Miami is compared to data from the Santa Barbara Corpus so as to make a comparison between Miami English and American English in general. It is expected that, in case of convergence with the Spanish intensifying paradigm, more synthetic intensifiers are used in the Miami Corpus than in the Santa Barbara Corpus. In Table 12, a comparison is shown between the proportion of

synthetic intensifiers in the Miami Corpus and the Santa Barbara Corpus. It can be seen here that, indeed, more synthetic intensifiers are used in Miami English compared to American English in general. This difference is statistically significant, but has a rather weak effect size ($\chi^2 = 29.97$, $p < .001$, $V = .13$). As such, even though there is no strong relationship to be found, the attestation of a significant effect may hint at some slight convergence effects.

Table 12. Frequencies of English intensifying constructions in Miami and Santa Barbara Corpus by strategy of choice.

Strategy	Miami		Santa Barbara	
	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%
analytic	1,016	95.67%	791	99.75%
synthetic	46	4.33%	2	0.25%
total	1,062		793	

Secondly, Table 13 compares the proportions of synthetic intensifiers as found in Miami and Havana. One can clearly see here that far fewer synthetic forms are used in Miami than in Havana. This difference is statistically significant, although it has a weak effect size ($\chi^2 = 16.99$, $p < .001$, $V = .14$). These findings may thus hint at some beginning, albeit slight, convergence effects in Miami Spanish, with speakers using fewer synthetic intensifiers in favor of analytic ones, which is more in accordance with English.

Table 13. Frequencies of Spanish intensifying constructions in Miami and Havana by strategy of choice.

Strategy	Miami		Havana	
	freq _{abs}	%	freq _{abs}	%
analytic	359	78.73%	316	66.67%
synthetic	97	21.27%	158	33.33%
total	456		474	

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper examined the phenomenon of intensification in the speech of the bilingual community of Miami, a city characterized by widespread English–Spanish bilingualism. In this context, contact effects such as codeswitching and convergence can be observed. A central question addressed in this study is how intensification manifests in this bilingual environment. Notably, intensification forms a conflict site between the grammars of English and Spanish, with Spanish having a much richer paradigm of intensifying affixes, especially because of its suffixes, while English relies for a larger part on lexical items to intensify. Additionally, intensification is a phenomenon that can convey a variety of both objective and affective notions. It is of interest to explore how bilingual speakers express these different notions when they have such a rich variety of options at their disposal to intensify, being able to derive from the intensifying systems of two different languages.

This study examined the patterns underlying speakers' choices among the various available intensifying strategies, guided by two research questions. First, it investigated to what extent the configuration of Miami bilinguals' intensifying constructions is influenced by the semantic-pragmatic function of the intensifier and relevant structural constraints and theories, as well as speakers' self-reported proficiency, age of acquisition, and attitudes of English and Spanish. Second, it examined to what extent Miami bilinguals' intensifying paradigm displays convergence effects as to the employed strategies and their frequencies when compared to monolingual English and Spanish varieties. To address these questions, corpus data from three sources were analyzed, specifically the bilingual Miami Corpus and

two monolingual corpora, namely the Santa Barbara Corpus for English and the Havana subcorpus of Ameresco for Spanish.

Regarding the results, the data revealed a wide range of intensifying constructions in both English and Spanish, with a notable preference for English intensifiers over Spanish ones. However, the majority of these constructions are unilingual, while bilingual constructions, where a codeswitch occurs between the base and the intensifier, are exceedingly rare. This suggests that such bilingual patterns are dispreferred in the English–Spanish speech of Miami.

Among the few bilingual constructions observed, no synthetic intensifiers were found, aligning with the predictions of the Free Morpheme Constraint. Expanding the analysis to include both unilingual and bilingual intensifying constructions in bilingual contexts, the findings indicate an overall scarcity of synthetic intensifiers in these contexts, particularly when English serves as the matrix language. This pattern is consistent with the Uniform Structure Principle. Also in these bilingual contexts, no statistically significant relationship was found between the semantic-pragmatic function of an intensifier and the language in which it is expressed. Consequently, the analysis shifted from intralinguistic to extralinguistic factors to account for the observed patterns. Among the extralinguistic variables examined (self-reported language proficiency, age of acquisition, and language attitudes toward English and Spanish) only language attitudes were found to significantly influence the language choice for intensifiers in bilingual contexts.

The absence of a relationship between semantic-pragmatic function and language choice is not necessarily unexpected. It is possible that intensification, as a linguistic phenomenon, does not conform to the dichotomy often observed in bilingual speech, where English is associated with objective expressions and Spanish with subjective ones (Vinagre Laranjeira, 2005). More broadly, previous research already demonstrates that extralinguistic factors tend to be stronger predictors of speakers' intensifying strategies than intralinguistic factors (Roels, 2024). When considering these extralinguistic factors, it is interesting to observe that two of the three included variables show no significant relationship with language of choice, while these variables do show significant effects on bilingual speech in previous research. The apparent greater importance of language attitudes over proficiency and age of acquisition, as observed in this study, warrants further exploration. This finding suggests that bilingual speakers' language attitudes may exert a more substantial influence than previously assumed, at least within specific contexts such as the one examined here.

As for the second research question, the findings suggest that Miami bilinguals use significantly more synthetic intensifiers in their English compared to monolingual English speakers, while employing fewer synthetic intensifiers in their Spanish than monolingual Spanish speakers. These patterns may indicate the presence of convergence effects in Miami, although these effects appear to be minimal or in an early stage of development.

By investigating intensification within the bilingual community of Miami, the current study offers additional insights to existing research on bilingualism and language contact. However, some of the findings are based on a limited number of observations, meaning that not all conclusions can be drawn with equal certainty. Future research could reinforce these findings by analyzing a larger set of bilingual data. Additionally, further studies could explore the same phenomenon in other English–Spanish bilingual communities or in bilingual communities with different language pairings. In conclusion, this study offers a valuable and innovative contribution to research on expressive linguistic phenomena, such as intensification, within bilingual contexts like the one of Miami.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
AUG	augmentative
COND	conditional mood
DIM	diminutive
IMPF	imperfect tense
INTS	intensifier
PL	plural number
PST	past tense
RED	reduplication
SG	singular number
SJV	subjunctive mood
SUP	superlative
VBZ	verbalizer

Notes

- ¹ The process is often contrasted with the related phenomenon of borrowing, where borrowing is a form of direct language change that additionally affects specific lexical items or constructions (e.g., the noun *coffee*, a loanword originating in Arabic *qahwa*; Resyadi & Sultan, 2024). Although it is possible for the intensifying systems of languages to contain certain individual borrowed elements (Estrella-Santos, 2015), the current study does not focus on this phenomenon, but rather on the impact of convergence on the grammar of the intensifying system as a whole.
- ² Instances of intensification that are excluded from this definition include lexical substitution (e.g., intensifying the word *good* by replacing it with the word *fantastic*), illocutionary intensification (e.g., *for fuck's sake*) and suprasegmental intensification (e.g., changes in pitch, volume, or intonation).
- ³ All examples in this subsection are from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; Davies, 2020).
- ⁴ All examples in this subsection are from the Cuba and Mexico subcorpora of the corpus PRESEEA (Moreno Fernández, 2014).
- ⁵ These constraints are chosen because they can be most directly related to intensification as an analytic–synthetic conflict site, as the Free Morpheme Constraint makes predictions about synthetic forms in bilingual contexts and the Uniform Structure Principle posits the ML as an influential factor in the resolution of conflict sites. Additionally, future research is to consider a broader range of theories.
- ⁶ Other sociolinguistic variables not included in the current study are age, gender, speaker–hearer relation, and conversational setting. Unlike the variables included in this study, which are expected to influence the intensifying strategy and language, these variables are rather expected to influence the token frequency, type frequency, or the specific intensifying types used.
- ⁷ This corpus is available online at: <https://bangortalk.org.uk/speakers.php?c=miami> (accessed on 2 January 2024).
- ⁸ This corpus is available online at: <https://linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/santa-barbara-corpus-spoken-american-english> (accessed on 2 January 2024).
- ⁹ This corpus is available online at: <https://corpusameresco.org/coloquial/web/archivos> (accessed on 2 January 2024).

- ¹⁰ The annotation has been carried out by the first author. In the initial stages of the coding process, in deliberation with the coauthors, the codebook has been assessed for its adequacy to capture all attestations found in the corpus and has been adapted accordingly. Furthermore, the coauthors have reviewed and agree with the final versions of the datasets.
- ¹¹ The use of self-reported measures instead of measures obtained using more scientifically objective methods can pose challenges in the sense that the former are essentially subjective and can therefore lead to inconsistencies or inaccuracies in the results of analyses. Due to unavailability of any other measure of proficiency in the sociolinguistic survey data of the Miami Corpus, however, self-reported proficiency is cautiously included in the current analysis nevertheless. Note that several previous studies that use self-reported proficiency as a measure of language proficiency do find a significant effect of this measure (Luo et al., 2010; Kastenbaum et al., 2019).
- ¹² Language attitudes are not measured on a single scale but are calculated as the average of six separate attitude scales, meaning that they behave more like continuous variables.
- ¹³ For all statistical analyses in Section 4.2, a Fisher's exact test is performed due to assumption violations, except when testing the Uniform Structure Principle, where a chi-square test is used.
- ¹⁴ In these tables, the first column indicates the difference between a speakers' scores for English and Spanish. For instance, a proficiency of 'English 2 > Spanish' means that a speaker's English proficiency is two points higher than their Spanish proficiency. The second column then indicates the number of participants for whom each difference score is measured. Then, the third and fourth columns give the total numbers of intensifiers uttered by each of these groups of participants. This explains why some values are rather high and others are lower or even 0; the latter tend to be uttered by groups of only a few participants each.

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