

Article

Cross-Linguistic Influence in Spanish in Contact with French in Montreal

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Abstract

This paper, positioned within the study of immigrant language varieties in Canada, examines *mismo si* ('even if'), an understudied grammatical feature of Spanish in contact with French in Montreal. The phenomenon is analyzed cross-linguistically and within the theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology, approaching it from two complementary perspectives: (1) a sociolinguistic analysis of Spanish-French bilinguals in Montreal, and (2) a formal investigation of its structural properties. *Mismo si*, equivalent to Standard Spanish *aunque* and *incluso si* ('even though'), is a lexical transfer from the French conjunction *même si* and conveys a concessive meaning. The evidence shows that this structure constitutes a distinctive linguistic adaptation to the bilingual sociolinguistic environment of Montreal. The article is organized in two sections: the first presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of *mismo si* occurrences in the COLEM corpus (*Corpus Oral de la Lengua Española en Montreal*), while the second offers a formal examination of this contact-induced structure.

Keywords: Spanish; French; linguistic contact; cross-linguistic influence; grammar; *mismo si*

1. Introduction

According to the latest published census ([Statistique Canada, 2021](#)), Spanish is spoken by 1,171,000 people in Canada, making it the most spoken immigrant language in the entire country. In the province of Quebec, where French is the majority language (71.3% speak French, 20.4% speak English only, 6.7% speak both French and English, and 1.6% speak neither French nor English) and Spanish a minority language, Spanish has 196,070 native speakers. 90% are concentrated in Greater Montreal (*Région métropolitaine de Montréal*).

Spanish holds a significant place in Montreal's multicultural landscape, both demographically and culturally. Spanish is the second most common immigrant first language in Montreal, with approximately 177,230 individuals reporting it as their first language. This represents 14% of the population with a first language other than French or English.

Most people of Latin American origin reside in Greater Montreal, with nearly 94% living within the city itself. Notably, Latino communities are concentrated in boroughs such as Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension (where Jean-Talon—the Latin quarter of the city—is located), Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie. Spanish influences are evident in Montreal's cultural scene, including festivals, culinary establishments, and media outlets. The Spanish-speaking community contributes also to Montreal's economy, with proficiency in Spanish being valuable in sectors such as trade, tourism, and international relations. The new mayor of the city (Soraya Martínez Ferrada) is of Chilean origin.



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Beyond these social and economic contributions, these dynamics can also be examined from a linguistic perspective, particularly through the concept of *cross-linguistic influence*, which refers to how the knowledge of one or more languages affects the use or learning of another language. For this paper, cross-linguistic influence is examined from two perspectives: (1) cases in which similarities between languages facilitate the use or learning of a second or non-native language, and (2) cases in which differences between languages lead to “errors”, commonly referred to as interference.

The main objective of this paper is to present a specific case of cross-linguistic influence between French and Spanish that pertains to the locution *mismo si* (‘although’, ‘even if’; ‘even’). This structure stands out in terms of the influence of French on Spanish in Montreal, and it can be taken as direct evidence of the manifestation of Spanish-French bilingualism in Quebec (Pato, 2022).

To illustrate this instance of bilingual speech, this study draws on COLEM (*Corpus Oral de la Lengua Española en Montreal*, ‘Oral Corpus of the Spanish Language in Montreal’), which focuses on the oral Spanish of the Spanish-speaking community in Greater Montreal. The corpus is particularly valuable for examining Spanish in contact with French—and, in some cases, English—within a multilingual urban environment.

COLEM comprises 153 participants from across the Spanish-speaking world (from Mexico to Argentina, and Spain), representing both genders, three age groups (19–34, 35–54, 55–81 years), various lengths of residence in Montreal (5–9, 10–24, 25–51 years), educational backgrounds (primary, secondary, university), L2–L3 knowledge (French; French and English), and types of migration (political, economic, sociocultural, or mixed), facilitating a comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis. Detailed methodological information is provided on the project’s website (see COLEM, n.d.).

The corpus includes spontaneous conversations, such as interviews and dialogs between community members, providing empirical data to examine the use of *mismo si*, and many more phenomena (Pato, 2020), in natural spoken contexts. All examples presented in this paper indicate the informant’s country of origin, gender (W: Woman or M: Man), age, and length of residence in Montreal (years in M). The numbers in the examples (e.g., Bolivia 4) correspond to the interview numbers for each country of origin. All informants are proficient in French and use it in daily lives; however, individual competence varies (determined by all the comments they make during the interview). As the analysis shows, the use of *mismo si* reflects relatively high competence in French.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach and examines *mismo si* from two complementary theoretical perspectives, which is reflected in the organization of the article into two main parts. The first part includes a description of the French *même si* and the Spanish *mismo si* and *incluso si* particles (Section 2.1), a qualitative and quantitative analysis based on occurrences of *mismo si* in the COLEM data (Section 2.2), and a brief theoretical discussion connecting the phenomenon to code switching (Section 2.3), as well as documentation of its use in other geographical contexts (Section 3). The second part presents a formal analysis within the framework of Distributed Morphology (Section 4), and other sociolinguistic considerations (Section 5). The article concludes with a synthesis of the findings in Section 6.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of language change induced by contact and demonstrates that *mismo si* is neither an isolated nor a random instance of code switching or lexical borrowing.

2. *Mismo si*: A Cross-Linguistic Influence Phenomenon

2.1. *Même si* in French and *Mismo si* in Spanish

The conjunction *même si*—with the verb in the indicative mood—is used in Standard French with a concessive value to indicate that, despite an obstacle being presented, it does

not prevent the action from being carried out (1a–b). [Tessnière \(1961\)](#) considers the form *même si* within the “amplifying conditioners”.

- (1) a. J’ai vu comment on pouvait, *même si on n’avait pas d’argent*, démarrer une entreprise.
‘I saw how one could, even if one did not have any money, start a business.’
(La Presse, Montréal, 09 October 2013)
- b. Le premier ministre, Manuel Valls, s’est félicité du fait que “l’extrême droite, *même si* elle est trop haute, n’est pas la première formation politique de France”.
‘The Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, congratulated himself on the fact that “the far right, even if it is too high, is not the first political party in France”.’
(Le Monde, Paris, 19 August 2019)

The preceding examples of *même si* can be translated into Spanish as *aunque no tuvieras dinero* (‘even if you didn’t have money’ 1a) and *aunque sea demasiado alto* (‘even though it’s too high’ 1b).

The conjunctive phrase *mismo si* does not occur in Standard Spanish ([RAE & ASALE, 2025a](#)), but due to lexical direct transfer from French, Montreal Spanish speakers use this phrase in their speech. In the Spanish COLEM data, the conjunctive phrase *mismo si* is always followed by a verb in the indicative mood (2a *son* ‘they are’, 2b *visito* ‘I visit’, 2c *viajaba* ‘he was traveling’, and 2d *hablaban* ‘they spoke’), which provides unambiguous evidence of morphosyntactic transfer from French.

- (2) a. La vida de mis dos hijos está acá. Entonces, todos sus conocidos son de acá, *mismo si son* de otros países, nacidos acá.
‘My two children’s lives are here. So, all their acquaintances are from here, even if they are from other countries, born here.’
(COLEM, Bolivia 4, W-59, 31 years in M)
- b. Vivir lejos de tu familia. . . Eso es lo más duro, más que el invierno, *mismo si yo visito* a mi hermana y a mi mamá, que son como mi familia más cercana.
‘Living far from your family. . . That is the hardest part, more than winter, even if I visit my sister and my mom, who are like my closest family.’
(COLEM, Guatemala 6, W-41, 17 years in M)
- c. Ahí todo el mundo nos conocía y estábamos seguras, *mismo si* mi papá *viajaba* siempre, porque era comerciante.
‘Everyone knew us there, and we felt safe, even if my dad was always traveling, because he was a merchant.’
(COLEM, Ecuador 3, W-53, 38 years in M)
- d. Eh. . . *mismo si* ellos *hablaban* mi misma lengua, había cosas en las que no nos comprendíamos.
‘Uh. . . even if they spoke my same language, there were things we didn’t understand each other about.’
(COLEM, Honduras 4, M-23, 6 years in M)

The form that is used in Standard Spanish as an intensity marker to emphatically underline an identification is *mismo, misma* ([Alcina Franch & Blecua, 1975](#)). Thus, when this marker appears in a prenominal position, it has an identificatory use (3a). In a postnominal position, on the other hand, its use is intensive (3b).

- (3) a. Salió de la casa por la *misma* puerta por la que había entrado.
'He left the house through the same door through which he had entered.'
- b. Llegó a la puerta *misma* de la casa.
'He arrived at the very door of the house.'

The structure *lo mismo* represents a type of comparative construction in Spanish (RAE & ASALE, 2025b), used in correlation with *que* to express equality, with a meaning equivalent to *igual* ('equal') (4a). This construction is characteristic of high-register, especially in careful written style. Although it is grammatically correct across Spanish varieties and recognized as normative, its stylistic value is relevant when describing speakers outside Peninsular Spanish. In many Latin American contexts, similar meanings are more commonly conveyed through alternative comparative patterns such as *tan... como* or *igual que*, which are stylistically neutral in those varieties. Consequently, the use of *lo mismo... que* in American Spanish should be interpreted not as a default or colloquial option, but rather as a formal or stylistically marked choice that may sound less frequent than in Peninsular usage.

In addition, *lo mismo* can appear in correlation with *que* with a distributive or additive meaning equivalent to *tanto... como...* ('both... and...'), expressing the sum of two notions (4b). This use also belongs to the general grammar of Spanish and is attested in educated written and formal registers throughout the Spanish-speaking world, including Latin America, although regional preferences again favor alternative structures in many American varieties.

Finally, in colloquial usage, *lo mismo* can function as a modal adverb meaning *tal vez* or *a lo mejor* ('maybe, perhaps') (4c). This epistemic value is primarily associated with informal Peninsular Spanish and is less frequent and less entrenched in most Latin American varieties, where speakers typically prefer other lexical markers of possibility such as *tal vez*, *quizá(s)*, or *a lo mejor*. As a result, while this usage is generally intelligible in American Spanish, it is more likely to be perceived as informal, regional, or characteristically Peninsular.

- (4) a. Escucha *lo mismo* a los criados *que* a los huéspedes opulentos del hotel.
'He listens to the servants just as he does to the wealthy guests at the hotel.'
- b. La fermentación puede operarse *lo mismo* en caliente *que* en frío.
'Fermentation can occur in both hot and cold conditions.'
- c. Además, si te hablo *lo mismo* me cuelgas.
'Besides, if I speak to you, you'll maybe hang up on me.'

Furthermore, the use of *mismo* with emphatic meanings (5a 'just like', 5b 'even') is already attested in monolingual Spanish varieties, both in Spain and Latin America (Eguren & Sánchez López, 2023; RAE & ASALE, 2025b), independently of contact with other languages. This observation is relevant to debates on code-switching, borrowing, and grammaticalization, as it shows that innovative or non-standard uses of *mismo* need not be attributed exclusively to language contact. Instead, they may arise from internal developments within Spanish, later reinforced or reanalyzed in contact situations.

- (5) a. Con ese vestido parecía *mismo* una modelo.
'In that dress, she looked just like a model.'
- b. *Mismo* los ricos tienen que rendir cuentas a Dios.
'Even the rich people have to answer to God.'

Regarding the conjunctive phrase *incluso si*, considered a concessive-conditional connector, it has been noted that its use in Standard Spanish is "frankly scarce" (Montolío, 1999, p. 3272, my translation). This observation is supported by data from CORPES (n.d.)

(*Corpus del Español del siglo XXI*). A search for the orthographic form *incluso si* in this corpus shows that, although it is relatively frequent in US Spanish (with a normalized frequency of 17.89 occurrences per million words), its use is considerably less common in other countries, such as Spain (6.3) and Chile (5.29). By text type, *incluso si* appears primarily in instruction manuals, leaflets, and brochures. This pattern reflects its oral usage, while CORPES contains a relatively low proportion of spoken language (10%). In the *Corpus del Español: Web/Dialectos* (n.d.), the countries with the most cases are Spain (4130 cases) and the United States (2758). As for the COLEM (6a–b), it is possible to document this expression, but to a lesser extent (8 cases) than *mismo si*.

- (6) a. *Incluso si* yo gané tres premios de marketing a nivel provincial y uno a nivel canadiense, el premio que más me pagó, me pagó tres mil dólares, o sea. . .
 ‘Even if I won three marketing awards at the provincial level and one at the Canadian level, the award that paid me the most paid me three thousand dollars, I mean. . .’
 (COLEM, Costa Rica 1, M-42, 19 years in M).
- b. uno puede aquí vivir sin estar al tanto de las noticias, *incluso si* hay elecciones.
 ‘One can live here without being aware of the news, even if there are elections.’
 (COLEM, Cuba 6, M-39, 7 years in M).

In fact, the data shows that *mismo si* appears in a range of contexts, including concessive conditions (7a), hypothetical clauses (7b), comparative structures (7c), and oppositional contexts (7d).

- (7) a. No tiene las calefacciones, entonces hacía frío, frío, *mismo si* me abrigaba sentía el frío, ya estaba acostumbrada a las calefacciones.
 ‘There was no heating, so it was very cold, even if I bundled up, I still felt the cold. I was already used to heating.’
 (COLEM, Bolivia 4, W-59, 31 years in M)
- b. El joven llega no más a ganarse la plata y ver cómo la gasta, pero acá las personas que ya tienen su familia y sus obligaciones, *mismo si* ya uno no tiene hijos pequeños, son más responsables, ¿no?
 ‘Young people just come to earn money and see how they spend it, but here, people who already have a family and responsibilities, even if they no longer have small children, are more responsible, right?’
 (COLEM, Panamá 4, M-54, 24 years in M)
- c. Me imagino que antes sería mucho peor, ¿no?, al no haber ayuda, no sabes el idioma, vienes a una cultura que *mismo si* es parecida, no, no. . . y tienes que abrirte paso.
 ‘I imagine it must have been much worse before, right? With no help, you don’t know the language, you come to a culture that, even if it is similar, no, no. . . and you must make your way.’
 (COLEM, Uruguay 5, M-58, 28 years in M)
- d. Sabor Latino [tienda de alimentación], *mismo si* es colombiano, venden pupusas y tamales salvadoreños, entonces, hay veces que vamos a parar ahí también.
 ‘Sabor Latino [food store], even if it is Colombian, sells pupusas and Salvadoran tamales, so sometimes we end up going there too.’
 (COLEM, El Salvador 5, M-39, 7 years in M)

2.2. Statistical Analysis of *Mismo si*

The following section presents the statistical analysis of the COLEM variables, including gender, age, educational level, and length of residence in Montreal. There are 72 cases of *mismo si* in 33 informants (out of the 153 in the corpus), which means that 21.6% of the sample uses this construction in the interviews: 12/65 (18.4%) are men and 21/88 (23.9%) are women. The age distribution is as follows: 8/37 (21.6%) are aged 19–34, 19/79 (24.1%) are aged 35–54, and 6/37 (16.2%) are aged 55–81. In terms of educational level, 8/30 (26.7%) have a high school education and 25/121 (20.6%) have a university formation. In terms of the length of time they have been living in Montreal, 8/42 (19%) have been there for 0–9 years, 14/63 (22.2%) for 10–24 years, and 11/48 (41.6%) for 25–51 years. Examples (8a and 8b) illustrate the information for this last variable, showing individuals who have been living in Montreal for 6 and 33 years, respectively.

- (8) a. Todos estos procesos son. . . no. . . no son de ayuda para los trabajadores, ¿me entiendes? *Mismo si* dice “protección a los trabajadores”, pero no, no realmente son de ayuda.
 ‘All these processes are. . . no. . . they are not helpful for workers, you understand me? Even if it says, “protection for workers,” they are not really helpful.’
 (COLEM, Guatemala 4, M-34, 6 years in M)
- b. Y tenían que hacerlo. *Mismo si* no estaban de acuerdo.
 ‘And they had to do it. Even if they didn’t agree.’
 (COLEM, Argentina 9, W-75, 33 years in M).

Although the raw data show some percentage differences between groups (e.g., slightly higher usage among women and among individuals who have lived in Montreal longer), none of these differences reach statistical significance at the 95% confidence level according to the chi-square test. The statistical analysis indicates that there is no significant association between the use of *mismo si* in COLEM data and gender ($\chi^2 = 0.64$, $p > 0.05$), age ($\chi^2 = 1.10$, $p > 0.05$), educational level ($\chi^2 = 0.46$, $p > 0.05$), or length of residence in Montreal ($\chi^2 = 2.03$, $p > 0.05$). In other words, none of the sociolinguistic variables considered in our study condition this use. However, it is interesting to note that *mismo si* was not recorded in interviews with speakers from Spain, a fact that is repeated in studies conducted in France, as we will see later in Section 3. Although some geographical variation is observed, the difference between countries in COLEM data is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7.04$, $p > 0.97$).

If none of these factors help explain this usage, communicative strategies, and the degree of formality account for it. *Mismo si* is employed to reinforce an idea (example 8a), indicate cohesion (example 7c), or clarify information (example 8b) in a specific bilingual social and linguistic context (Spanish-French).

2.3. Code Switching and Other Aspects

The use of *mismo si* (phonologically fully in Spanish) as a replacement for *aunque/incluso si* under the influence of French (*même si*) can be analyzed in terms of code switching and code mixing. Code switching (Poplack, 2001, p. 2062) is understood as the mixing of two or more languages by bilingual or multilingual speakers, with or without a change in interlocutor or topic, at any level of the linguistic structure. There are three types: intra-sentential (the sentence unit is affected), inter-sentential (the unit is not affected, usually appearing before a pause), and tag switching (oral discourse markers). Code mixing includes insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. As Poplack maintains, speakers with greater knowledge of the grammars of the two languages use intra-sentential code mixing, while

those with less proficiency in the host language use permutations of isolated words and tags. The phenomenon under study constitutes *intra-sentential* code switching, as it occurs within the structure of the sentence, replacing a Spanish connector with its French-derived counterpart (Pato, 2022). In terms of code mixing, it can be classified primarily as *insertion* since an element from another language is integrated into the Spanish sentence. There may also be an aspect of *alternation*, as speakers sometimes alternate between *incluso si* and *mismo si* depending on context or interlocutor (Poplack, 2001).

In the case of vocabulary, evidence for widespread simultaneous activation (“pervasive parallel activation”, see Blumenfeld & Marian, 2007) is caused by how people process words with both similar meanings and forms across languages—like the English word *difference*, the French *différence*, and the Spanish *diferencia*. This facilitation appears even when tasks involve only one of the languages (Kroll et al., 2015, p. 380). When it comes to morphosyntax, researchers have explored how two linguistic systems might be mentally connected through cross-language structural priming (Torres Cacoullos & Travis, 2018). This phenomenon occurs when using a particular grammatical structure in one language increases the likelihood of using a similar structure in the other language afterward.

On the other hand, one mechanism through which code switching may lead to grammatical convergence is cross-language structural priming. This process involves speakers reusing a syntactic structure they have recently encountered or used, regardless of the language. According to Backus (2005, p. 334), code switching plays a role in this by “function[ing] to model syntactic patterns which are then subsequently imitated in the base language.” However, it is important to clarify that priming typically occurs between similar structures, rather than simply between lexical items. In the case of *mismo si*, what is observed is the adoption of a new lexical exponent within an already available concessive structure, rather than the wholesale borrowing of a syntactic frame. Without experimental evidence, it is impossible to determine whether structural priming is at play here.

The traditional classification of language contact phenomena proposed by Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and Thomason (2011) distinguishes between distinct types of borrowing based on their structural impact on the recipient language. Within this framework, the presence of *mismo si* in Spanish can be considered an instance of *slight structural borrowing*. This type of borrowing involves the adoption of linguistic elements that integrate into the recipient language without significantly altering its syntactic structure.

This distinction is particularly relevant for analyses like Distributed Morphology (DM), which separates structure from exponents: DM predicts that structure can exist independently of the lexical items that realize it. The *mismo si* case challenges a simple structural-priming account, because the observed change involves a lexical item filling a concessive slot, rather than a change in the underlying syntactic pattern.

From another perspective, Sakel (2007) introduces the concept of *matter-type borrowing*, which refers to the transfer of lexical or morphological material from one language to another without profound structural change. Elements that fall into this category include connectors, discourse markers, adverbs, and quantifiers—that is, linguistic units that serve organizational or modal functions in discourse. Following this line of analysis, Silva-Corvalán (2011) argues that such borrowings are typically structurally compatible with the recipient language, facilitating their incorporation without generating significant grammatical conflicts. In this sense, *mismo si* in Spanish has adopted a discourse function influenced by language contact, through the influence of French *même si*.

Finally, although *attrition* is commonly regarded as an initial stage in the broader process of language shift and eventual loss within the field of language contact studies, it does not necessarily entail the complete disappearance of a language form from an individual’s repertoire. Rather, linguistic attrition may manifest as a gradual erosion of

linguistic competence, often resulting from limited use and sustained interference from the dominant contact language (French in Montreal). In such cases, the first or heritage language form remains present, albeit in a reduced or restructured form, shaped by the dynamics of bilingualism and sociolinguistic pressure (Seliger, 1996; Yilmaz & Schmid, 2019). In our study the concept of *attrition* relates to the transfer of *mismo si*, as the speakers' grammar has the forms *aunque* (*même si*; *bien que*) and *incluso si* (*même si*) but seems to limit or avoid their use in favor of *mismo si*. The underlying concessive structure—i.e., the syntactic node that licenses concessive clauses—remains intact; speakers continue to have access to *aunque* and *incluso si*. What is observed is primarily the replacement of one lexical exponent with another, which aligns more closely with lexical borrowing or diffusion.

3. *Mismo si* in Other Geographical Contexts

As previously indicated, the phenomenon cannot be considered exclusive to the Spanish spoken in Montreal. We now present some examples of this connector in other geographical contexts where Spanish is in contact with French, such as in French-speaking Switzerland, France, and Belgium.

The following examples from COLESfran (n.d.) (*Corpus oral de la lengua española en la Suiza francófona*, 'Oral corpus of the Spanish language in French-speaking Switzerland', detailed information regarding the methodology is available on their official website) show the same trend that can be observed in Montreal data. *Mismo si* appears in men's and women's speech independent of age (old and young), and with the verb in the indicative mood. The examples include the country of origin, gender, and age of the informant, as well as how long they have been living in the area (FS: French-speaking Switzerland). The exact number of occurrences of *mismo si* in this corpus was not available.

- (9) a. ¿Qué es lo qu-, qué es lo principal de una persona? Intentarlo, *mismo si* no, no lo *logras*, pero intento. . .
'What is it—what is the most important thing about a person? Trying, even if you don't succeed, but I try. . .'
(COLESfran, Chile06, M-71, 35 years in FS)
- b. Es difícil porque todos se ponen a hablar francés, *mismo si* hay una fiesta chilena, escuchas a casi todos hablando francés y no español, eh, *mismo si* estás en una fiesta chilena.
'It's difficult because everyone starts speaking French, even if it's a Chilean party, you hear almost everyone speaking French and not Spanish, uh, even if you are at a Chilean party.'
(COLESfran, Chile01, W-61, 32 years in FS)
- c. *Mismo si* no lo conoce a uno, es muy, es muy espontáneo.
'Even if he doesn't know you, he is very—he is very spontaneous.'
(COLESfran, Colombia19, M-54, 25 years in FS)
- d. Aparte del hecho de que soy muy *junior*, *mismo si* los que *están* conmigo tienen cuarenta años.
'Besides the fact that I'm very junior, even if the ones who are with me are forty years old.'
(COLESfran, Colombia04, W-32, 19 years in FS)

Taking into account the study conducted on this corpus (Bezençon, 2019), it is interesting to note that while first-generation speakers recognize that the use of *mismo si* is a transfer, 1.5-generation speakers—individuals who were either born abroad and moved to a French-speaking country like Switzerland at a youthful age or were born in the new country

to immigrant parents—do not. This distinction highlights a key difference in metalinguistic awareness between the two groups (Scontras et al., 2015). First-generation speakers, who acquired Spanish as a dominant language before learning French, are often consciously aware when French influences certain structures or word usages in their Spanish. In this case, they may notice that using *mismo si* in a way that reflects the French structure is not idiomatic or typical in Standard Spanish.

In contrast, 1.5-generation speakers tend to acquire both languages simultaneously, or sequentially, in close succession (Bezençon, 2019). Their Spanish is often less formally developed, and their French is typically dominant. As a result, they may not perceive the influence of French on their Spanish as interference or transfer, but rather as a natural feature of their bilingual repertoire. Consequently, when they use *mismo si* as a calqued expression from French, they may not identify it as non-standard or influenced by their second language, simply because they lack the contrastive linguistic awareness or formal instruction that would allow them to detect such deviations. While it is plausible that formal instruction and contrastive awareness can influence speakers' sensitivity to non-standard forms, this cannot be assumed without direct data. Therefore, any argument linking the use of *mismo si* to a lack of instruction should be framed cautiously, emphasizing it as a hypothetical factor rather than a documented mechanism.

This difference in awareness can serve as a useful indicator of linguistic dominance, bilingual development, and the extent to which each generation maintains or shifts away from monolingual norms in their heritage language. Only future research can show whether these phenomena lead to different trajectories and outcomes in the development of heritage speakers.

The phenomenon is also attested among Spanish speakers in Liège, Belgium, where a corpus is currently being compiled (Vanessa Casanova p.c.):

- (10) *Mismo si* le hablas con algunos errores, ellos hacen el esfuerzo de entenderte.
'Even if you speak with some mistakes, they make an effort to understand you.'
(Colombia, M-48, 9 years in Liege).

In the case of France, as mentioned above, the work of Lagarde (1996) in Roussillon, and López Izquierdo (2025) in Paris, both studies with data on speakers from Spain, do not provide examples of *mismo si*.

On the other hand, sporadically, some examples are recorded in Dominican speakers who have been in contact with Haitian and Quebec French speakers.

- (11) Mi iphone 3=G se conectaba muy bien al wifi de casa, y *mismo si* estaba lejos del router pillaba toda la señal.
'My iPhone 3G connected very well to my home Wi-Fi, and even if I was far away from the router, I still got full signal strength'.
(Corpus del Español: Web/Dialectos)

In other Romance languages such as Portuguese—both European and Brazilian—this Gallicism is also documented in the form *mesmo se* as a conditional phrase with a concessive nuance (De Moura Neves, 2000, p. 847) or concessive with hypothetical value in counterfactual contexts (Mira de Mateus et al., 2003, p. 719). However, unlike what happens in Spanish in contact with French, the tenses with which it is formed are in the subjunctive mood: the future (12a), the imperfect (12b), and the pluperfect (12c).

- (12) a. *Mesmo se* chover, nós sairemos
'Even if it rains, we will go out'.

- b. Ele não veria o espetáculo, *mesmo se* chegasse a tempo
'He wouldn't see the show, even if he arrived on time'.
- c. Ele não teria visto o espetáculo, *mesmo se* tivesse chegado a tempo
'He wouldn't have seen the show, even if he had arrived on time'.

The repeated occurrence of *mismo si* across different geographical contexts, particularly within bilingual communities in contact with French, suggests that the phenomenon is not a random instance of code switching or isolated lexical borrowing. Rather, its recurrence points to a degree of stabilization or conventionalization through usage in specific contact settings. However, recurrence alone is not sufficient to demonstrate incipient grammaticalization, which would require evidence of systematic morphosyntactic integration, semantic bleaching, or functional expansion. To substantiate such a claim, it would be necessary to show that *mismo si* is being integrated into the grammar of the recipient language, for example, by consistently occupying the concessive clause slot, combining productively with different subjects and tense or aspect marking, or displaying reduced competition with established alternatives such as *aunque* or *incluso si*. Thus, while its cross-geographical distribution supports the idea of contact-induced stabilization in bilingual communities, further structural and functional evidence is required to argue for grammaticalization.

As Heine and Kuteva (2005) have argued in their theory of grammaticalization in contact situations, structural borrowings—especially those arising from frequent and systematic bilingual usage—can undergo reanalysis and become integrated into the grammar of the recipient language. This process typically begins with speakers adopting a construction from a source language to express a pragmatic or semantic nuance that is not lexically encoded in the same way in their native tongue. Over time, if the form is consistently used across speakers and communicative contexts, it may become conventionalized, gaining a fixed meaning or function.

Given that such uses have been documented among speakers in contact with French, it is worth investigating whether *mismo si* could become a regionally stabilized feature of certain varieties of Spanish, especially in contexts of intense and prolonged bilingualism or high migratory mobility. Communities with sustained contact between Spanish and French often show patterns of morphosyntactic innovation, and if these innovations fulfill communicative needs or express subtle pragmatic distinctions, they may persist and spread within those groups. It should be recalled that, in the COLEM data, there are 72 instances of *mismo si* produced by 33 informants, indicating that 21.6% of the sample employed this construction during the interviews.

In sum, the repeated occurrence of *mismo si* across bilingual contexts supports the idea that structural borrowing can go beyond lexical substitution and lead to syntactic and grammatical innovations. While more empirical research is needed to confirm its frequency, distribution, and interpretation among speakers, the available data point toward an early stage of grammaticalization—a process by which bilingual influence contributes not only to variation but also to language change.

4. A Formal Analysis of *Mismo si*

We will now reflect on this phenomenon from the formal theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology (DM). The goal is to understand how new and non-standard forms are integrated into the grammar of a language, especially in situations of linguistic contact.

DM (Halle & Marantz, 1993, 1994; Mare, 2023) is based on several key principles. First, it separates the lexical component from the syntactic component, so lexical roots are not fully specified until after syntactic derivation. Lexical roots ($\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$) and functional morphemes (such as T, C, Neg, etc.) are inserted into the syntax before acquiring

phonological form. Second, it proposes that morphology is post-syntactic syntax. Functional and lexical morphemes are combined in syntax, and then morphology performs operations such as vocabulary insertion, which occurs post-syntactically in the Phonetic Form (PF), where phonological exponents are inserted according to the morphosyntactic context. The same functional node can receive different phonological exponents depending on the context (competitive insertion). Thirdly, it allows for variability in the insertion of forms depending on the structural or sociolinguistic context, so that structural calques are possible when contact with another language introduces new [form/content] pairs, especially in bilingual contexts.

From the DM, we can understand the appearance of *mismo si* in Spanish in contact with French as a case of contact-adapted vocabulary insertion. The underlying syntactic structure for concessive clauses of the type *aunque X* (although X) remains in the speaker's Spanish. What changes is the morphological form (the realization of the functional nodes), influenced by French. Instead of inserting the form [aunque], the sequence [mismo + si] is inserted, a direct calque of *même si*. This is consistent with the notion that the root and functional morphemes can be realized in diverse ways, depending on the context.

This process can be illustrated through two mechanisms: lexical transfer and categorical reinterpretation. In Standard Spanish, *mismo* functions as an adjective or intensifier (*el mismo coche* 'the same car'; *él mismo* 'himself'). In the calque, *mismo si* is reinterpreted as a concessive element (analogous to *même* in French) and is grammaticalized into a new function. From the perspective of DM, this implies a new insertion of vocabulary, in which the form *mismo si* aligns with a functional position it previously occupied, albeit through a sociolinguistically motivated lexical re-splicing mechanism, used metaphorically here to describe the process by which a new lexical item (*mismo si*) comes to occupy an existing syntactic slot (the concessive clause position) in the speaker's grammar. In other words, the underlying structure (the "functional position") remains the same, but the lexical exponent that realizes it changes. In DM terms, this would be described more formally as a new vocabulary insertion at an existing terminal node: the node for the concessive operator already exists, and now *mismo si* is inserted there instead of *aunque* or *incluso si*. The "re-splicing" metaphor seems intended to capture the sociolinguistically motivated replacement or re-alignment of a lexical item with a structural slot, but it is not a technical term in DM. So, "lexical re-splicing" is essentially a figurative way of describing lexical substitution within a fixed syntactic frame.

There is also plasticity of functional forms. DM allows us to explain how a speaker can adopt structures formed in contact with another language without completely changing the underlying syntax. What changes is the way in which a certain grammatical function (concession) is morphologically realized.

However, the phenomenon can be understood as the reassignment of the phonological exponent of the concessive node ([+CONC]) in the grammar of the bilingual speaker.

The analysis of vocabulary insertion indicates that there is a functional projection on the left periphery, which introduces a [+concessive] operator, which in Standard Spanish is realized as *aunque*. In Spanish in contact with French in Montreal, the bilingual speaker reinterprets that node as *mismo si*, a morphological calque of the French *même si*. Both exponents compete for the same syntactic context, but in a contact situation, the calque wins. The vocabulary insertion would be as follows:

- (13) a. [AspP [CONC]] → Vocabulary Item: Standard Spanish
[CONC] ↔ *aunque*
- b. [AspP [CONC]] → Vocabulary Item: Spanish in Montreal
[CONC] ↔ *mismo si*

In the analysis shown in (13), CONC is treated as a feature of AspP because, in Distributed Morphology, AspP (Aspect Phrase) often serves as the projection where clausal operators such as tense, mood, or polarity interact with the main predicate. Concessive operators like *aunque* are sensitive to aspect and licensing conditions on the embedded clause, which motivates analyzing the concessive feature ([CONC]) as residing in AspP. In other words, the clause-initial concessive marker is inserted at a terminal node within the Aspect Phrase, reflecting its role in modulating the proposition's truth conditions relative to the main clause.

Regarding the fact that *aunque* historically includes a Comp-like element (*que*) this does not fundamentally alter the analysis. *Aunque* can appear with or without *que* depending on whether it is introducing a finite or non-finite clause, but its concessive semantics is projected in AspP. For example: *Aunque sea verdad, él no lo cree* ('Even if it's true, he doesn't believe it') is a finite clause with mood marked in the embedded clause. *Aun siendo verdad, él no lo cree* ('Even if it's true, he doesn't believe it') is a non-finite concessive clause. Both instantiate a concessive feature; the presence or absence of *que* is compatible with AspP hosting [CONC].

For the bilingual form *mismo si* (13b), the structure is similar: the concessive operator (*mismo*) plus the complementizer (*si*) jointly realize the [CONC] feature in AspP. Since constructions like *Mismo llegando temprano, no encuentras sitio* ('Even if you arrive early, you won't find a seat') are possible in the Montreal contact variety this suggests that both the monolingual (*aunque*) and bilingual (*mismo si*) options show compositionality: the AspP [CONC] feature is realized through different vocabulary items that may include additional functional material (like *si*) without altering the underlying syntactic position. In other words, AspP is the licensing site for concessive operators ([CONC]) because it interacts with aspect and clause semantics.

The exponent *mismo si* is inserted in the position of the node [+concessive] because bilingualism has introduced a new form-meaning pairing through calquing. The simplified syntactic structure of a sentence such as *Mismo si llueve, vamos a salir* ('Even if it rains, we're going out'): [CP [CONC] [TP rains]], where [CONC] is a functional node with no phonological exponent until PF. In the speaker's grammar, there are two possible VIs (vocabulary items): VI1: [CONC] ↔ *aunque* and VI2: [CONC] ↔ *mismo si*. In Standard Spanish, VI1 is inserted. In Spanish in Montreal, VI2 is inserted by a reconfiguration of the VI inventory due to the high frequency of *même si* in the input, structural transfer and semantic pressure, and the categorical reinterpretation of *mismo*.

Mismo is a grammaticalized concessive element, forming a unit with *si*: [*mismo* + *si*] ↔ [CONC]. That is, from the DM, *mismo* is no longer a root with individual value ($\sqrt{\text{MISMO}}$) but part of a complex phonological exponent.

Let us examine how the phonological exponent *mismo si* is inserted in Spanish in Montreal, instead of *aunque/incluso si* in Standard Spanish. Before vocabulary insertion, the structure of *Mismo si llueve, vamos a salir* is the following:

- (14) [ForceP [CP [CONC° [+conc]] [TP llueve]] [TP vamos a salir] ← main clause]

At the vocabulary insertion stage, morphosyntactic nodes are paired with phonological exponents. As we already see, for the node [CONC° [+concessive]] there are two vocabulary items. In Standard Spanish [CONC° [+concessive]] ↔ *aunque*. And in Spanish in Montreal (calque from French): [CONC° [+concessive]] ↔ *mismo si*. So, Montreal Spanish speakers select: [CP [CONC° *mismo si*] [TP llueve]]. The syntactic structure does not change. Only the phonological realization of the functional node [+concessive] varies.

The cross-linguistic *mismo si* form behaves as a complex lexical unit that replaces *aunque/incluso si*, directly imitating the French model *même si*. This phenomenon can be

classified as competitive insertion conditioned by contact: two forms available for the same node, one chosen by sociolinguistic influence. In formal terms, it could be represented as:

- (15) Vocabulary Insertion Rule (contact dialect): [+concessive] $\rightarrow$ *mismo si* / [TP] $\Leftarrow$
Influence of French *même si*.

Finally, there are several theoretical implications in what we have just presented:

Variable insertion by dialect/bilingual competence: DM allows different exponents for the same functional node depending on dialect or bilingual competence, without requiring a profound change in syntax.

Contact as a source of new vocabulary items: Contact with French allows a new form-meaning pair to be directly incorporated into the speaker's morphological lexicon.

Structural transparency: The calque respects the original syntactic structure of Spanish (subordinate concessive construction), which favors its acceptance and stability.

5. Some Sociolinguistic Considerations

Having described the phenomenon and presented its formal structure, the discussion now shifts to broader sociolinguistic considerations. As several sociolinguistic studies have demonstrated, changes in the configuration of a migrant group—such as shifts in generational makeup, socio-economic integration, or language contact intensity—often manifest themselves in the linguistic practices of that community. Language, far from being a static system, reflects the evolving social realities of its speakers. In this context, the emergence of innovative forms like *mismo si* among bilingual Hispanic speakers in contact with French represents more than a mere structural borrowing; it reflects a deeper sociolinguistic adaptation to a new communicative environment.

Specifically, as already mentioned, the construction *mismo si* does not have a precedent in monolingual varieties of Spanish and appears to have developed uniquely in bilingual environments where French exerts structural influence (cf. *même si*). This suggests that the phrase is not just a grammatical calque but part of a broader reorganization of linguistic resources in response to the communicative pressures of a migrant context.

As Moreno Fernández (2005, p. 178) has observed, language in migrant communities often functions as a marker of identity and social belonging. It becomes a way for speakers to position themselves—not just in relation to the dominant language or society, but also within their own ethnolinguistic group. In this light, the use of *mismo si* could be interpreted as a symbolic expression through which Hispanic migrants in French-speaking contexts negotiate and signal in-group identity. Although sociolinguistic indexicality assumes that linguistic forms can carry social meaning and signal group membership, the communities in which *mismo si* form appears are often geographically and socially disconnected, which makes it difficult to argue for a shared identity encoded through the same linguistic item. In the absence of data on stylistic variation, speaker awareness, or social perception, claims of indexicality remain speculative. Thus, while identity-related interpretations are not impossible, the recurrence of *mismo si* is more convincingly explained as lexical transfer in contact situations.

The innovation signals not only bilingual competence but also cultural hybridity: the construction embodies the linguistic blending that mirrors the lived experience of the speakers.

Pérez Arreaza (2017) and Pato (2020) also point to the importance of such morphosyntactic innovations as identity strategies. For these speakers, employing *mismo si* might serve a dual purpose: fulfilling a specific communicative function in nuanced discourse and, at the same time, reinforcing a sense of shared experience and linguistic solidarity within the migrant group. Thus, the emergence and use of *mismo si* can be understood not as a

failure or deviation, but as a linguistically creative and socially shaped adaptation—a novel form arising from cross-linguistic contact in bilingual contexts. This case exemplifies how contact-induced change can be shaped by identity dynamics and how migrant communities play an active role in the evolution of their heritage language (see [Pato, 2023](#)).

Only time will ultimately determine whether the use of *mismo si*, as a product of sustained contact between Spanish and French, consolidates as a defining feature of Hispanic identity in minority-language contexts such as Montreal, Lausanne, Roussillon, or Liège. While the innovation may currently appear marginal or context-specific, its potential to gain symbolic and communicative relevance within these communities cannot be underestimated. As [Córdoba Henao \(2013, p. 8\)](#) and [Pato \(2022\)](#) rightly note, linguistic forms that become tied to personal and collective identity—those that are perceived not merely as pragmatic tools but as reflections of one’s place in a community—have a stronger chance of stabilizing and persisting.

In this sense, the adoption of *mismo si* goes beyond structural convergence with French. Its incorporation into everyday speech could be seen as a linguistic act of self-identification—a way for speakers to navigate their dual cultural affiliations. If individuals come to perceive this usage not as an error or deviation from Standard Spanish, but rather as an authentic marker of their bilingual and bicultural experience, then its use becomes ideologically charged and socially meaningful.

Moreover, linguistic outcomes of contact are not solely determined by the structural compatibility between languages but are heavily shaped by the social contexts in which they occur. Factors such as migration patterns, intergenerational transmission, institutional support for minority languages, and speaker attitudes all play crucial roles in determining whether a form like *mismo si* will become entrenched in the local variety of Spanish in contact with French. For example, in cities like Montreal—where bilingualism is institutionalized and Spanish-speaking communities are well established—there is fertile ground for the emergence of such hybrid forms as markers of group cohesion and cultural resilience.

Therefore, while linguistic innovation can originate from structural overlap or necessity, its long-term adoption often hinges on social perception, speaker agency, and community dynamics. If *mismo si* becomes increasingly associated with expressions of identity among Hispanic migrants, particularly younger generations, it may eventually transcend its origins as a mere calque to become part of the evolving grammar of Spanish in contact zones, a truly cross-linguistic form.

6. Conclusions

Spanish is a component of Montreal’s multicultural identity, with a substantial and active community that enriches the city’s social, cultural, and economic spheres. The influence of Spanish-speaking countries on Quebec and Canada’s economy underscores the importance of Spanish language skills for future growth.

In relation to the phenomenon under study, this type of structure can be considered compatible structural borrowing and cross-linguistic forms, i.e., elements that are inserted into the target language without drastically affecting its grammar due to their functional correspondence with pre-existing structures. In this case, *même si* and *mismo si* share a similar concessive function, their comparable syntactic structure allows for cross-linguistic interference, which in turn facilitates their adoption in bilingual contexts. Moreover, as Romance languages, they are closely related.

From the perspective of Distributed Morphology, *mismo si* can be explained as a case of functional morphological calque, where the syntactic structure of Spanish is maintained, but it is realized with forms influenced by French. *Mismo si* is a good example of variation in vocabulary insertion, conditioned by sociolinguistic factors or bilingual acquisition, and

a functional reinterpretation of existing morphemes (*mismo*) in new syntactic positions. This case shows how Distributed Morphology, through the separation of syntax and post-syntactic morphology, can model calque phenomena in situations of linguistic contact, where the functional structure is preserved and the inventory of phonological exponents is adapted to the bilingual input. All of this makes it possible to explain superficial changes without postulating profound changes in grammar.

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