

Variable use of Spanish SPPs by Colombian Canadians

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According to the extended projection principle, the presence of a subject in a clause is mandatory (Chomsky 1982). Overt presence of a subject, however, is not always required and languages vary in their use of null and overt subjects. Languages such as English require that a subject is overtly expressed (1a), rendering phrases with a null subject ungrammatical (1b), while languages like Spanish allow for use of both overt (2a), and null subjects (2b).

- (1) a. *She wants bread.*
- b. **∅ wants bread.*
- (2) a. *Ella quiere pan.*
- b. *∅ quiere pan.*
 “(She) wants bread”

The variable use of subject personal pronouns (SPPs) in Spanish has been studied in monolingual and bilingual populations. Studies show that populations differ in the frequency with which overt and null SPPs are used. For instance, while speakers from Colombia and Mexico show some of the lowest frequencies of overt SP use, speakers from the Caribbean show some of the highest (Orozco 2015).

Some studies of bilingual populations, focusing on the Spanish-English bilinguals in the U.S., have observed higher frequency of use of overt SPPs as a function of length of residence in the U.S. (Otheguy and Zentella 2012, Montrul 2004). Considering that these speakers are in continued contact with English, a non-null subject language, it has been suggested that the observed higher frequency is due to transfer effects (Silva-Corvalán 1994). By contrast, other studies suggest the higher frequency of overt SPP usage may be due to the contact with speakers of Caribbean Spanish varieties in the U.S. (Flores-Ferrán 2004).

In this presentation, we report the results of an investigation regarding the variable use of SPPs in two generations of Colombian-Canadian Spanish speakers ($N_{g1F}=3$, $N_{g1M}=3$; $N_{g2F}=3$, $N_{g2M}=3$) living in London, Ontario. The Spanish-English contact situation in Canada differs from that in the U.S., which may lead to differing effects (Thomason 2000). For instance, while Spanish in the U.S. has been present since before the 17th century, presence of Spanish in Canada is more recent with the first significant wave of Spanish-speaking immigrants arriving at the beginning of the 20th century (Klee and Lynch 2009). Thus, in Canada, Spanish language and culture is less prevalent and language maintenance is difficult between generations (Guardado 2002). In addition, there is a lower frequency of immigration from Hispanic Caribbean regions. This unique language contact situation makes studying this population ideal to contribute to the aforementioned debate.

In this investigation, over 1500 tokens of subject pronoun usage in Colombian-Canadian Spanish are used to calculate frequency of use of overt SPPs, and to determine the social (generation, and gender), and linguistic factors (SPP person and number, switch reference, semantic verb type, and clause type) that condition variable SPP use in this population. Preliminary analysis suggests that frequency of use of Spanish speakers in Canada resembles more closely the frequency of

overt SPP use of monolingual Colombian speakers. This may indicate that higher frequencies of overt SPPs seen in U.S. populations may not be due to contact with English.

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