

# Subject pronoun usage among Spanish dialects

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## 1. Introduction

Research on Spanish subject pronouns is complicated by a number of poorly-documented and sometimes mutually contradictory assumptions, all of which have been repeated for so long within different theoretical models—as well as in pre-theoretical descriptive studies—as to take on the status of received wisdom. Among these assumptions are:

(1) Spanish is a null-subject language. This 'prodrop' feature of Spanish is usually tied to the rich verb morphology of Spanish, which identifies the grammatical subject with a high degree of accuracy, rendering overt subject pronouns usually redundant. Comparisons between Spanish and English from the perspective of second language acquisition routinely mention lack of prodrop in English, together with the types of interference that can result from misapplication of L<sub>1</sub> parameters in the acquisition of L<sub>2</sub>: (a) ungrammatical elimination of subject pronouns in English, and (b) categorical retention of overt subject pronouns in Spanish. The former misapplication produces immediate syntactic violations, and represents a discontinuous transition between grammaticality and ungrammaticality. The second case, retention of overt subject pronouns in Spanish, is more highly ramified, since prodrop in Spanish is in principle optional (except in the case of obligatorily null expletive subjects). Native speakers of Spanish, representing a broad spectrum of regional variants and dialects, are not always in agreement as to the desirability or even acceptability of null versus overt subject pronouns when presented with test utterances in which prodrop could apply, and observation of unmonitored speech reveals an equally great variation in actual production. There is much anecdotal commentary as to the

relatively higher frequency of overt subject pronouns in certain Spanish dialects (generally those in which phonological erosion of verbal inflection makes positive identification of null subjects less transparent), but a solid classification of Spanish dialects in terms of overt subject pronoun usage has yet to be demonstrated (cf. Hochberg, 1986; Silva-Corvalán, 1982; Morales, 1986a, 1986b; Poplack, 1980; Pousada and Poplack, 1982; Cantero, 1978; Mondéjar, 1970; Jiménez Sabater, 1975, pp. 164-5).

(2) For every instance in Spanish where an overt subject pronoun can occur, this pronoun is truly optional, in that a completely grammatical and acceptable utterance results from suppression of the overt pronoun (allowing for possible ambiguous reference if verb morphology and other structures are not sufficient to identify the subject).

(3) As a correlate of (2), there are no instances in Spanish where overt pronouns are required, that is, where replacement of an overt pronoun by a null pronoun will result in an ungrammatical or unacceptable utterance.

(4) There are instances in Spanish in which only null pronouns may occur, i.e. where replacement of a null pronoun by an overt pronoun results in ungrammaticality.

In the following remarks, we will explore each of these assumptions in turn, to reveal that while they are generally in accord with observed facts, they are by no means valid for all varieties of Spanish. When studying the behavior of subject pronouns in Spanish dialects it is imperative that baseline studies be conducted, and that the true qualitative nature of Spanish pronominal behavior be taken into account.

2. On the obligatorily null status of certain subject pronouns.

The most obvious instances which account for the vast majority of Spanish dialects are null expletive subjects, of the existential verb *haber*, of weather predicates, extraposed sentences, etc.:

(1)

[Ø] Hay muchas montañas en México.

[Ø] Llueve frecuentemente durante los meses de invierno.

[Ø] Es difícil llegar a un acuerdo.

Another source of normally null pronouns are inanimate subjects:

(2)

Me gustó esa película; [Ø] fue muy divertida.

Despite these general strictures, there are Spanish dialects which depart from the use of obligatory null subjects. The vernacular Spanish of the Dominican Republic routinely places non-referential *ello* in the subject position of expletive clauses; many of these same Dominican sociolects also employ overt subject pronouns with inanimate subjects:

(3)

Me gusta el café dominicano; él es muy sabroso.

The sources of these anomalous pronominal configurations are unknown. Expletive *ello* is in all probability a spontaneous event, the result of the traditional marginality of Santo Domingo following the early colonial period, and the abundance of other phenomena suggestive of linguistic drift and innovation in Dominican Spanish. The use of overt subject pronouns for inanimate subjects may be related to the long-standing presence of one or more Afro-Romance creole languages in the Dominican Republic, all of which require overt subject pronouns for inanimate and expletive subjects; Haitian Creole—whose traces in vernacular Dominican

Spanish are found throughout the language—is the most obvious source, although Papiamentu was once spoken by small communities in the Dominican Republic. Some investigators have claimed that Spanish—as spoken by Africans and their descendents—actually creolized in the Spanish Caribbean, but the evidence used to support such claims is sketchy and susceptible to alternative explanations. It is true that vernacular Brazilian Portuguese, with a strong Afro-Portuguese component and the likely product of an earlier semi-creole, also uses overt subject pronouns for inanimate subjects, but such usage is completely unattested in other Latin American regions with strong Afro-Hispanic presence, such as vernacular Cuban Spanish of remote eastern regions, the speech of the Colombian Chocó and even the Spanish of the Afro-Colombian village Palenque de San Basilio, where the Afro-Iberian creole language Palenquero (in which overt inanimate subject pronouns are obligatory), the Chota Valley of highland Ecuador, etc.

### 3. Pronominal restrictions based on backwards coreference

In addition to these cases in which a context-free (i.e. without reference to possible antecedents) overt pronoun is strictly prohibited (except for the aforementioned Dominican dialects), there are combinations in Spanish in which it has been claimed that overt pronouns are highly disfavored or actually ungrammatical. Normally in Spanish overt subject pronouns are construed as focused or stressed, receiving a form of contrastive emphasis. Contrastively stressed elements are analyzed as a type of quantifier, and at the level of semantic interpretation or Logical Form undergo Quantifier Raising to COMP (Chomsky, 1981; May, 1985); thus *Ella habla* 'she speaks' has the representation:

(4)

$$Ella\ habla = [[_{COMP}\ \text{for } \underline{x} = \underline{ella}\ [\underline{x}\ \text{habla}]]]$$

As a corollary to the status of overt subject pronouns as strong or contrastively stressed elements, it has been claimed (e.g. Montalbetti, 1984, 1986) that in sentences like those in (5), overt pronouns are unacceptable in second position. This follows from the fact that overt pronouns which alternate with null pronouns cannot be bound by an operator (in this instance, the quantifier or WH-word).

(5)

a. *Todos los estudiantes<sub>i</sub> piensan que Ø<sub>i</sub>/\*ellos<sub>i</sub> son inteligentes*

‘All students<sub>i</sub> think that Ø<sub>i</sub>/\*they<sub>i</sub> are intelligent’

b. *¿Quién<sub>i</sub> piensa que Ø<sub>i</sub>/\*él<sub>i</sub> es inteligente?*

‘Who<sub>i</sub> thinks that Ø<sub>i</sub>/\*(s)he<sub>i</sub> is intelligent?’

According to this same analysis, it is possible for an overt pronoun to be linked to a null pronoun, which in turn is bound by an operator:

(6)

*Todos los estudiantes<sub>i</sub> dicen que pro<sub>i</sub> piensan que ellos<sub>i</sub> son inteligentes*

‘All students<sub>i</sub> say that [they<sub>i</sub>] think that they<sub>i</sub> are intelligent’

To the extent that monolingual Spanish overt subject pronouns have the structure of (4), i.e. similar to that of a quantifier or WH-word, repeated instances of the same pronoun should exhibit at least some of the coreferentiality restrictions exhibited by (5) and (6). If no contrastive focus is intended, coreference as shown in (7) is at best marginal, if not totally unacceptable, for most monolingual Spanish speakers, even those representing ‘pronoun-heavy’ Caribbean dialects:

(7)

a. *??Ella<sub>i</sub> piensa que ella<sub>i</sub> es inteligente*

`She<sub>i</sub> thinks that she<sub>i</sub> is intelligent'

b. ??Yo<sub>i</sub> creo que yo<sub>i</sub> puedo hacer eso.

`I think that I can do that'

Sentences like (8) are demonstrably more acceptable with the indicated coreference. In this case, the overt subject pronoun of the lowest clause is bound by a null pronominal, which in turn is linked to another overt pronoun, behaving as an operator:

(8)

a. *Ella<sub>i</sub> dice que pro<sub>i</sub> piensa que ella<sub>i</sub> es inteligente'*

`She<sub>i</sub> says that pro<sub>i</sub> thinks that she<sub>i</sub> is intelligent'

b. *Yo<sub>i</sub> digo que pro<sub>i</sub> pienso que yo<sub>i</sub> puedo hacer eso.*

`I<sub>i</sub> say that pro<sub>i</sub> think that I<sub>i</sub> can do that'

The data in (7)-(8) are related to the broader issue of 'backwards pronominalization' involving null and overt pronouns. This includes instances where null pronouns corefer to overt pronouns occurring later in the sentence. The long debate over backwards pronominalization is far from resolved, but in non-prodrop languages like English, it appears that earlier 'command and precede' theories in which a pronoun could not precede its antecedent can be circumvented by a more elaborate theory of dependency relationships which does not make direct reference to linear order: a pronoun can precede its antecedent under some circumstances, but it cannot c-command its antecedent (Flynn, 1987a, 1987b; Goodluck, 1987; Lust, 1981; Lust and Clifford, 1986; Lust et al., 1980; McCray, 1980; Reinhart, 1983, 1986; Solan, 1981, 1983, 1987; Wasow, 1986). The situation in null subject languages like Spanish is more complex, since three entities are involved: full nominals, overt pronouns, and null pronouns. Luján (1985) has claimed that in prodrop languages like Spanish, strong (e.g. lexical) pronouns cannot precede their

antecedents. This was later amended (Luján, 1986) to the STRESSED PRONOUN CONSTRAINT: an antecedent may bind a stressed pronoun iff this pronoun does not alternate with an unstressed pronoun (e.g. the object of a preposition). This produces contrasts such as those in (9):

(9)

a. Cuando  $é_l_i$  trabaja,  $\{ *Juan_i / ?é_l_i / \emptyset_i \}$  no bebe.

‘When  $he_i$  works,  $\{ *John_i / ?he_i / \emptyset_i \}$  does not drink.’

b. Cuando  $\emptyset_i$  trabaja,  $\{ Juan_i / é_l_i / \emptyset_i \}$  no bebe.

‘When  $\emptyset_i$  works,  $\{ John_i / he_i / \emptyset_i \}$  does not drink.’

c. Cuando  $Juan_i$  trabaja,  $\{ *Juan_i / ??é_l_i / \emptyset_i \}$  no bebe.

‘When  $John_i$  works,  $\{ *John_i / ??he_i / \emptyset_i \}$  does not drink.’

d.  $Juan_i$  no bebe cuando  $\{ *Juan_i / ??é_l_i / \emptyset_i \}$  trabaja.

‘ $John_i$  does not drink when  $\{ *John_i / ??he_i / \emptyset_i \}$  works.’

e.  $\emptyset_i$  no bebe cuando  $\{ \emptyset_i / *é_l_i / *Juan_i \}$  trabaja.

‘ $\emptyset_i$  does not drink when  $\{ *John_i / *he_i / \emptyset_i \}$  works.’

It is rare to find, among monolingual speakers, acceptable cases where a null pronoun precedes an overt pronominal antecedent, even when the null pronoun does not c-command the overt pronoun. Moreover, in sentences in which no constituents have been moved and in which no pronoun receives contrastive emphasis, it is nearly impossible for a null pronoun in the matrix sentence to corefer to an overt pronoun which is c-commanded by or otherwise subordinated to the null pronoun. In situations of coreference between overt and null pronouns, the former behave almost like free nominals with respect to Binding Condition C, which covers referential expressions (nouns). At this juncture, it is not yet clear whether rigid grammatical constraints are involved, or whether the avoidance of null pronouns preceding coreferential overt pronouns

is pragmatic in nature, a manifestation of general patterns of information transfer in which maximal information is given the first time an element is defined, while successive references to the same element use only the minimum information required for positive identification (e.g. Lasnik, 1989). Regardless of the ultimate origin of the limitations on the behavior of overt pronouns in Spanish, in none of the examples in (9) does the replacement of a null pronoun by an overt pronoun violate one of the Binding Conditions. The unacceptability of some overt pronouns is due to more subtle properties of Spanish pronouns.

#### 4. Putting the claims to the test: a Cuban pilot study

Despite the claims of Luján and others as to the unacceptable status of overt subject pronouns bound by quantifiers and the cases of backwards pronominalization found in (9), there has been little empirical research to determine the true behavior of native Spanish speakers across dialects. In those few instances where such surveys have been made, the results differ significantly from the assertions reported above, and call into question the necessarily null status of subject pronouns in (6)-(9). I did a pilot study among three groups of speakers of Cuban Spanish: recent arrivals from Cuba with little or no exposure to English; Cubans in south Florida who were completely fluent in Spanish and English; and Cuban-American bilinguals tending towards English dominance. The sentences in the appendix were presented to the three groups, and speakers were asked to comment on the acceptability of the sentences. Half of the speakers in each group received only the test sentences with no indication of what portion of the sentence they were to comment on; the other half was asked explicitly whether the underlined elements could be coreferential. The results from all three groups, including monolingual speakers fresh out of Cuba, are a far cry from the categorical claims of ungrammaticality of overt pronouns contained in the studies surveyed above. While Cuban Spanish is admittedly a 'pronoun-heavy'



variety, the relatively high rates of acceptability of overt pronouns in these contexts also occurs in other Spanish dialects. In a recent informal survey of a number of natives of Spain at Penn State, the majority found the sentences with overt pronouns bound by quantifiers at least passable, if not totally unproblematic, and several speakers from the Basque Country (not bilingual, but who learned Euskera in school) had the highest rates of acceptance of the overt pronouns. These initial findings are largely anecdotal and unsystematic, but they underscore the need for considerable empirical research—as yet unrealized—to determine baseline values of acceptability of null and overt pronouns in widely varying Spanish dialects and sociolects.

#### 5. Apparent cases of obligatorily overt pronouns

As to whether overt pronouns are ever required in Spanish, in all varieties they are highly favored if not categorically required in sentences with explicit pairwise contrasts (where overtly doubled objects are also required), and conjoined subjects, such as:

(10)

Juan me insultó y luego {yo/\*Ø} lo insulté {\*Ø/a él}

Juan y {yo/\*Ø} llegamos un poco tarde a la fiesta.

No native speaker will object to the obligatory nature of overt pronouns in such sentences. In some dialects, however, non-conjoined or uncontrasted subject pronouns appear to be essentially obligatory in some contexts. For example in the Antillean dialects (where some have suggested that at least pronominal subjects have become subject clitics), overt pronominal subjects in questions are strongly preferred over null subjects:

(11)

¿Qué {tú/??Ø} quieres?

That not simple disambiguation following loss of the distinguishing final /s/ is at stake, similar tendencies occur with first-person pronouns:

(12)

¿Qué {yo/??Ø} hago ahora?

¿Dónde {nosotros/??Ø} podemos comprar eso?

That compensation for loss of word-final /s/ and /n/ is not the primary force motivating the use of overt subject pronouns, we consider Andalusian varieties of Spanish, in which loss of final /s/ is categorical, and yet in which overt subject pronouns are considerably less frequent than, e.g. in the Caribbean.

#### 6. Another pilot study: non-disambiguating *yo*

To further illustrate the unstudied and often surprising correlations (or lack thereof) between use of overt subject pronouns and retention of morphological identification of the subject on verbal desinences, I conducted a brief pilot study using the transcriptions from the Norma Culta project from Spain and Latin America. Selecting only interviews based on free conversation in which there was a lively exchange between the interviewer and the respondent (i.e. in which the respondent did not launch into lengthy explanations or monologues), the data were sifted for occurrences of first-person singular verb forms and their accompanying null or overt subject pronouns (Ø or *yo*, respectively). Since this was only a preliminary overview and not a rigorous study, only individual instances of first-person singular reference were identified, without taking into consideration surrounding discourse considerations, such as possible focus, contrast, or additional emphasis. Verb forms were classified as unambiguous—in which no confusion with other verb forms was possible (present indicative, preterite, synthetic and analytic future, present perfective), and ambiguous forms—homophonous with one or more other forms

in the same paradigm (imperfect indicative, all subjunctive forms, conditional). Data were sampled from Madrid, Seville, Mexico City, Bogotá, San Juan, and La Paz, representing a wide cross-section of dialect zones and areas in which verbal endings are eroded or are strongly maintained. The results of this preliminary survey reveal rather striking differences among the dialects, as well as a surprisingly high frequency of overt *yo* in contexts which appear to have no contrastive or focus attached to them, and in which the corresponding verbal forms are completely unambiguous. In particular, dialects with strong retention of word-final consonants such as Bogotá, La Paz, and Madrid often use non-disambiguating non-contrastive *yo* at rates comparable to or higher than in consonant-deleting dialects, thus suggesting something considerably less powerful than the focus configuration in (4) for overt subject pronouns. The case of Sevilla is particularly interesting, since in this dialect word-final consonants are routinely elided, thus creating considerable verbal ambiguity, and yet overt subject pronoun usage is significantly lower than in consonant-strong dialects such as Bogotá, La Paz, and Mexico City. In San Juan, on the other hand, loss of word-final consonants occurs at a reduced rate compared to Seville, and yet overt pronoun usage is the highest of all the varieties sampled. Also rather unexpected is the high degree of uniformity in the percentages of overt and null pronouns with both the ambiguous and non-ambiguous verb forms across a variety of typologically very different dialects, even taking into account the high degree of subject inversion in Mexican Spanish (of the *creo yo, estaba yo* variety), as well as the frequent occurrence of formulaic expressions such as *yo creo* and *yo pienso* in all the dialects surveyed. This brief cross-section of pronominal usage underscores the urgent need for baseline studies, en route to the determination of the effects of language contact and language attrition on the Spanish pronominal system.

Although this brief pilot study is insufficient to draw substantial conclusions, there appears to be a significant discrepancy between speakers' explicit views about the contrastive or focus use of overt subject pronouns and actually observed usage. Claims as to the necessarily focused status of non-disambiguating overt subject pronouns are typically advanced by linguists, whose innate grammatical intuitions are have usually been overlaid by the formal study of language; such claims have rarely been put to the test in the living laboratory of speech communities. Moreover in at least two cases (Bogotá and Mexico) the data suggest that more educated speakers may actually use MORE instances of overt *yo* in non-focused non-disambiguating contexts than their less educated compatriots. Thus it may be the case that more educated speakers not only pay more attention to disambiguation and focus through the use of overt pronouns, but also extend the use of overt pronouns to contexts for which no obvious semantic motivation exists.

#### 7. Subject pronoun behavior among transitional bilinguals and vestigial speakers

An additional dimension is added to the study of Spanish pronominal variation when one considers subject pronoun usage among transitional bilinguals (English-dominant and representing a gradual shift to English) as well as vestigial Spanish dialects found in various isolated regions. As a general observation, transitional Spanish-English bilinguals use more overt subject pronouns than monolingual Spanish speakers, including combinations of two or more pronouns which most native speakers find odd if not totally unacceptable. Some examples include (MX = Mexican origin; CU = Cuban origin; PR = Puerto Rican origin; IS = Louisiana Isleño Spanish; TR = Trinidad vestigial Spanish):

yo sé las palabras pero cuando yo tengo que encontrar las palabras es cuando yo tengo problemas (MX)

ello[s] venden y ello[s] van (CU)

yo lo jablo onde yo quiero (PR)

cuando ella termina, ella tiene que tirá el agua (IS)

cuando ello<sub>1</sub> hablo[an], ello<sub>2</sub> comprenden (TR)

yo tengo do sijo; yo tengo a Al y yo tengo a Paul (IS)

Yo fui la mayor y yo no me acuerdo que yo hablaba inglés cuando comencé la escuela (MX)

Yo quiero decir cariño pero yo no sé si es eso (MX)

Nojotros tratamos de que vaya otra persona más que nosotros porque nojotros estamos para aquí (MX)

Yo decidí ser maestra porque yo estuve trabajando con niños y yo pensé que yo podía hacer lo mismo (MX)

Yo aprendí francés, yo tomé francés por tres años, pero yo no sé hablar muy bueno porque yo lo perdí todo. Si yo pudiera, yo quería aprender todas las lenguas, para que yo, cuando yo vaya a un país, yo misma pueda hablar (PR)

Ella<sub>i</sub> hablaba el inglés que ella<sub>i</sub> sabía (CU)

Yo voy y yo nado y yo visito mis amigos y mi abuela (CU).

Also found in the speech of many TB Spanish speakers is the use of a redundant subject pronoun which stands in anaphoric relation to a (usually preceding) dropped pronoun, a usage which is clearly proscribed in fluent varieties of Spanish, when no contrastive emphasis is intended. This behavior may reflect English usage, i.e. the intersection of obligatory subject pronouns in

\_\_<sub>i</sub> siguiera con la carrera de electrónica (MX)

Pa que Ø<sub>i</sub> no le tengan miedo a uno y sigan ellos<sub>i</sub> adelante (MX)

Allá Ø<sub>i</sub> te pagan, y si ellos<sub>i</sub> no gustan cómo estás jugando, Ø<sub>i</sub> te dicen (MX)

This departure from Spanish grammatical restrictions among TB speakers suggests an eventual parameterization of TB speech in terms of pronominal reference, but the high degree of inter-speaker variability in this dimension makes it unlikely that a stable parametric difference will ever become established. Among TB speakers, the pronoun *yo* is most frequently retained in redundant contexts, followed by *nosotros*; these same pronouns are the most frequent in anaphoric violations, probably because of their high frequency of occurrence. The examples in the present corpus suggest not a totally random occurrence of redundant pronouns in conjunction with a preceding/c-commanding dropped pronoun, but rather a variable insertion of redundant pronouns following what the speaker perceives as a pause, shift of topic or momentarily emphatic construction. Objectively, a pause or other juncture is usually not present, which suggests yet another possibility, namely pronoun deletion in short stereotyped combinations (e.g. *creo que* 'I believe'). In light of the (admittedly limited) data collected to date, the most reasonable hypothesis is that TB speakers have acquired a rudimentary form of the pro-drop parameter in Spanish, namely the possibility for eliminating subject pronouns (and the obligatory

dropping of PRO with impersonal constructions involving haber), but have not acquired, or have partially lost, the ancillary co-occurrence restrictions which preclude the existence of an expressed pronoun with a dropped antecedent.

Transitional bilinguals or vestigial Spanish speakers may also exhibit 'mix and match' combinations of coreferential null and overt pronouns. Regardless of theories of right-to-left coreference between null and overt pronouns, it is unusual to find sentences in which coreferential null and overt pronouns randomly alternate. Even among bilingual speakers, this configuration is not common, but examples do occur at a rate which does not suggest simple performance errors, but rather emerging differences in the manipulation of overt and null pronouns:

(15)

Nojotros<sub>i</sub> hablamos con ellos y 0<sub>i</sub> vemos con qué quieren ayuda y entonces nojotros<sub>i</sub> les ofrecemos ayuda (MX)

Yo<sub>i</sub> fui la mayor y yo<sub>i</sub> no me acuerdo que yo<sub>i</sub> hablaba inglés cuando 0<sub>i</sub> comencé la escuela (MX)

Yo<sub>i</sub> me recuerdo en Puerto Rico cuando yo<sub>i</sub> tenía 18 años, cuando 0<sub>i</sub> fui a pasar mis vacaciones con mi tía, que luego yo<sub>i</sub> la ayudé a ella. (PR)

Spanish routinely permits deletion of third person pronouns when the reference is clear, and an overt pronoun can cofer with a null pronoun, under the conditions sketched above. Not normally allowed is disjoint reference of superficially identical pronouns (null, overt or a combination of the two), in the same matrix sentence. As with the previous examples, the motivation behind such restrictions is pragmatic, given that the existence of pronouns presupposes a recoverable path of coreference to a (stated or inferred) antecedent, while the use

of null pronouns entails additional requirements of referential transparency. These often tenuous coreferential patterns can rarely tolerate semantic scattering of the sort that would occur from employing noncoreferential pronouns with identical surface forms, particularly when no contrastive stress is involved. In examples collected among bilingual Spanish speakers, disjoint (non-contrastive) reference between overt third person pronouns is not unusual:

(16)

ello[s]<sub>i</sub> venden y ello[s]<sub>i</sub> van (CU)

cuando ello<sub>1</sub> hablo[an], ello<sub>2</sub> comprenden (TR)

An overt pronoun may occasionally fail to corefer with a null pronoun, or with a full NP:

(17)

sus<sub>1</sub> padres<sub>2</sub> hablaban puro español cuando 0<sub>2</sub> trabajaron, cuando ellos<sub>1</sub> eran niños

(MX) 'Their<sub>1</sub> parents<sub>2</sub> spoke only Spanish when they<sub>2</sub> were working, when they<sub>1</sub> were children'

It is even possible to encounter cases where two null pronouns fail to corefer:

(18)

Cuando [yo]<sub>i</sub> estaba en escuela, [ella]<sub>j</sub> trabajaba de lunch lady (MX) 'When [I]<sub>i</sub> was in

school, [she]<sub>j</sub> worked as a lunch lady'

Few of these examples are unconditionally accepted by monolingual native speakers from the patrimonial dialects in question or from other Spanish dialects, but these bilingual and vestigial combinations may signal future pathways of pronominal evolution.

## 8. Summary and conclusions



There is not sufficient time in this brief encounter to cover all the possible configurations of null and overt pronouns in Spanish, but I hope that even this brief demonstration of the complex variation of pronominal usage in even the most canonical situations underscores the need for additional research. Despite the plethora of categorical assertions about Spanish subject pronouns, the reality is that the designation “null subject” or “prodrop” language is not a truly useful descriptor for the full range of Spanish dialects. To date there is not a single baseline study of any Spanish dialect in terms of subject pronoun behavior, which would set the stage for comparative analyses and the determination of the effects of language contact. Nor is there a pragmatic or syntactic model which will successfully account for observed null-overt subject pronoun variation in any Spanish dialect. Indeed, it is the very non-categorical alternation between null and overt pronouns which suggests the need for alternatives to the usual deterministic or probabilistic models which have been applied to Spanish syntax. Encounters such as the present symposium are crucial to ensure the convergence of theoretical, methodological and descriptive approaches and ultimately to emerge with a coherent, replicable, and defensible model of Spanish pronominal manifestations.

APPENDIX: Test sentences

1. Resulta que Pedro es más listo de lo que él parece.

`It turns out that Pedro is smarter than he seems.'

2. El doctor dijo que cuando ella manejaba, Elena debía usar sus lentes.

`The doctor said that when she drove, Elena should wear her glasses.'

3. En mi familia, cada niño piensa que él sabe más que los otros.

`In my family, each child thinks that he knows more than the others.'

4. El piensa que Carlos tiene un trabajo muy bueno.

`He thinks that Carlos has a very good job.'

5. Yo creo que yo voy a poder ayudarte esta tarde.

`I think that I will be able to help you this afternoon.'

6. Todos los profesores dicen que ellos nos van a dar un día libre.

`All the teachers say that they are going to give us a day off.'

7. Cuál de ustedes piensa que él tiene la respuesta?

`Which one of you thinks that he has the answer?'

8. Ella piensa que ella puede hacer lo que ella quiera.

`She thinks that she can do whatever she wants.'

9. Conoces a Jason y Kathleen? Ellos son de Miami y ellos hablan español.

`Do you know Jason and Kathleen? They are from Miami and they speak Spanish.'

10. Lourdes siempre sonríe cuando ella escucha música.

`Lourdes always smiles when she listens to music.'

11. Cada vez que él se enamora de otra muchacha, Juanito empieza a faltar a clase.

`Each time that he falls in love with another girl, Juanito starts to miss class.'

12. Nosotros podemos comprar un carro nuevo si nosotros vendemos el carro viejo por un buen precio.

`We can buy a new car if we sell the old car for a good price.'

13. Si él sigue comiendo tanto, Rodolfo va a engordar mucho.

`If he keeps on eating so much, Rodolfo is going to get very fat.'

14. Algunos niños piensan que ellos son adultos y ellos quieren participar en todas las conversaciones.

`Some kids think that they are adults and they want to participate in all conversations.'

15. Ya, muchachos; quién va a admitir que él rompió el cristal?

`All right, kids; who will admit that he broke the glass?'

Table 1: Test #1, percentages of responses

SENTENCE	Monoling. (N = 5)			Balanced (N = 5)			Transit. (N = 5)		
	OK	?	NO	OK	?	NO	OK	?	NO
#1	80	20	0	100	0	0	80	0	20
#2	20	60	20	20	40	40	60	40	0
#3	0	60	40	20	60	20	80	20	0
#4	60	20	20	60	40	0	60	40	0
#5	80/40	20	0	80/60	20/20	0	80/20	20	0
#6	40/20	40/40	20	40/20	40/20	20	80/20	20	0
#7	20	60/40	20	20/20	40/20	40	20	80	0
#8	40/40	40/20	20	60/40	40/20	0	60	40/40	0
#9	60	40/40	0	60/40	20/20	20	40/40	60	0
#10	60/40	20	20	40/20	20/20	20	60	40	0
#11	40	60/40	0	40/20	40	20	20	80/40	0
#12	60/20	40/20	0	60/40	20	20	60	40/40	0
#13	40	40/20	20	40/20	20	20	60	40/40	0
#14	40/20	60/20	0	60/20	40/20	0	40	40/20	20
#15	40	60/20	0	60	20/20	20	40	40	20

Table 2: Test #2, percentages of responses

SENTENCE	Monoling. (N = 5)			Balanced (N = 5)			Transit. (N = 5)		
	OK	?	NO	OK	?	NO	OK	?	NO
#1	40	60	0	40	60	0	60	40	0
#2	20	60	20	20	60	20	40	60	0
#3	80	20	0	60	20	20	100	0	0
#4	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	20	80
#5	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0
#6	20	80	0	40	40	20	40	60	0
#7	20	60	20	20	60	20	40	0	60
#8	20	40	40	20	60	20	40	60	0
#9	80	20	0	80	20	0	80	20	0
#10	20	40	40	20	60	20	20	60	20
#11	40	40	20	60	40	0	80	20	0
#12	40	60	0	60	20	20	60	20	20
#13	20	60	20	20	60	20	80	20	0
#14	20	20	60	20	60	20	40	60	0
#15	20	20	40	40	20	40	40	60	0

**Table 3: Pilot study of first-person singular pronoun usage**

	non-ambiguous verb forms		ambiguous verb forms	
	<i>yo</i>	$\emptyset$	<i>yo</i>	$\emptyset$
Bogotá (low)	29%	71%	46%	54%
Bogotá (mid)	22%	78%	62%	38%
Bogotá (high)	51%	49%	79%	21%
Bogotá (all)	36%	64%	63%	37%
	(N = 170)		(N = 62)	
.....				
Buenos Aires (high)	23%	77%	43%	57%
	(N = 363)		(N = 72)	
.....				
La Paz (high)	39%	61%	54%	46%
	(N = 196)		(N = 48)	
.....				
Madrid (high)	28%	72%	41%	59%
	(N = 722)		(N = 82)	
.....				
México, D.F. (high)	34%	66%	67%	33%
	(N = 340)		(N = 116)	
México, D. F. (low)	22%	78%	43%	57%
	(N = 193)		(N = 68)	
Baja C. Norte (low)	2%	98%	14%	86%
	(N = 58)		(N = 7)	
Kino, Sonora (low)	24%	76%	33%	67%
	(N = 49)		(N = 3)	
.....				
San Juan (high)	40%	60%	60%	40%
	(N = 221)		(n = 67)	
.....				
Sevilla (high)	27%	73%	32%	68%
	(N = 369)		(N = 44)	

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