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ABSTRACT

A study of the language use of 45 transitional Spanish-English bilinguals focused on subject pronoun usage patterns evolving when the bilingual has acquired both a prodrop (Spanish) and a non-prodrop (English) language and frequently switches between them. Subjects were of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican background, and had not attained the language proficiency of fluent Spanish monolinguals. Findings suggest that modifications of Spanish in a bilingual setting involve underdifferentiation of null and overt subject pronouns, whose behavior is not fixed by parameters but determined by pragmatic and perhaps prosodic configurations. Spanish overt pronouns appear to be losing their status as stressed or strong pronouns as opposed to inherently weak null pronouns, thus paralleling English, where overt subject pronouns are normally unstressed but can receive contrastive or emphatic stress. Transitional bilingual Spanish speakers seem to be approaching the stage where the only feature distinguishing null and overt pronouns is the presence or absence of phonetic substance. It is concluded that the resetting of the null subject option is not the normal outcome in unbalanced bilingualism, but that the possibility for null subjects exists in Spanish at all levels. (MSE)

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Spanish pro-drop meets the bilingual speaker

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1. Spanish is a null subject language (i.e. allowing optional nonovert subject pronouns), and is frequently cited in claims that a recurring cluster of syntactic characteristics represent a single prodrop parameter: subject-verb inversion, obligatory null subjects in existential/expletive constructions, that-t violations, null resumptive pronouns, etc. (cf. Chomsky 1981). 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 L₁ parameters in the acquisition of L₂: (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 expletive subjects). Native speakers of Spanish, representing a broad spectrum of regional variants and dialects, are rarely 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 a great deal of 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-Corvalan 1982, Morales 1986a, 1986b, Poplack 1980, Pousada and Poplack 1982, Cantero 1978, Mondéjar 1970).

2. The situation of the Spanish/English bilingual, who has acquired a prodrop and a non-prodrop language and who frequently switches between the two, is largely unstudied. There is much anecdotal mention of the proliferation of overt Spanish subject pronouns among U. S. bilinguals, often cited as interference from English, but this is

seldom documented. One possible reason for these descriptive lacunae is that the detailed manifestations of prodrop in Spanish have not always been considered, nor has there been much systematic comparison among Spanish speakers of differing levels of bilingualism, or proficiency in Spanish. A frequent working assumption is that only two diametrically opposed poles exist: the native speaker of Spanish (or proficient learner), who correctly applies prodrop, and the native speaker of English (or bilingual with heavy English interference) who fails to apply prodrop in Spanish. However, observation of both Spanish learners and native Spanish speakers of differing levels of bilingualism reveals not a simple dichotomy but rather a wide spectrum of variation, whose elucidation promises to be of relevance to the analysis of prodrop languages in general, as well as to the syntax of bilingual and semi-native speech.

3. Assuming (somewhat simplistically) that true balanced bilinguals will correctly handle major parametric settings of both languages in fashions indistinguishable from monolingual speakers, any useful data on parameter modification among bilinguals will have to come from speakers whose proficiency is not entirely equal in each language. In the case of incipient alteration of Spanish prodrop, data must be drawn from speakers who have acquired Spanish as a native language, but whose abilities in that language may not always attain the levels characterizing fluent monolingual speakers. In the United States setting, what may be called 'transitional' bilinguals (TB) exist in large numbers, and in certain regions may actually represent the majority of the 'bilingual' population.

The circumstances which produce TB speakers vary widely, but include moves away from Spanish-speaking neighborhoods or communities, mixed-ethnic marriages where only one partner speaks Spanish, or conditions of social mobility or individual choice which results in a decision not to employ Spanish among individuals capable of doing so, and to not teach the language to their children. It is difficult to arrive at a non-circular definition of a Spanish TB speaker, using only linguistic criteria. The only

reasonable approximation to a usable working definition involves external observations or self-assessed Spanish language ability as well as longitudinal behavior. In the case of the TB speaker of Spanish in a typical United States setting (e.g. urban or suburban environment, availability of at least a small Hispanic population in the midst of a predominantly Anglo-American setting, no bilingual or Spanish-dominant educational programs), at least the following combination of features give a reasonable prediction of TB status:

(1) Spanish was spoken in earliest childhood either as the only language of the home or in conjunction with English;

(2) A rapid shift from Spanish to English occurred before adolescence, involving the individual in question, immediate family members and/or the surrounding speech community.

(3) Subsequent use of Spanish is often confined to conversation with a few relatives (typically quasi-monolingual Spanish speakers of the grandparents' generation).

(4) When addressed in Spanish by individuals known to be bilingual, TB speakers often respond wholly or partially in English, thus giving rise to asymmetrical conversations.

TB speakers typically have a lopsided competence-performance ratio, being able to recognize and process nearly all varieties of the language in question (including jokes, nonstandard dialect forms, slurred and distorted speech), and also able to sustain nominally acceptable conversations in the language. They may, however, produce utterances that fully fluent speakers do not accept as grammatical.

4. The data for the present study were collected in Houston, where as much as one fourth of the (non-official) population speaks some form of Spanish. A total of 45 informants was chosen, evenly divided among individuals of Mexican (MX), Cuban (CU) and Puerto Rican (PR) background. In each case, determination of TB status was done

entirely through an informally obtained personal biography as to the circumstances in which Spanish and English were learned and used; there was no prior assessment of Spanish language abilities. Each informant was interviewed for approximately 30 minutes by a fluent Spanish/English bilingual; the format was free conversation. For purposes of illustration, these data have been supplemented in the following examples by samples from two vestigial dialects culturally and geographically far removed from the three major U. S. Hispanic groups: the isleños of St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana (IS) (cf. MacCurdy 1950, Lipski 1987), and vestigial Spanish of the Caribbean island of Trinidad (TR) (cf. Lipski 1985). It is not the purpose of the present study to consider quantitative dimensions of subject pronoun usage; rather, the corpus was scanned for evidence of substantial qualitative divergence from widely accepted norms among monolingual Spanish speakers from the ancestral countries of the interview subjects. None of the subjects uniformly applied pronominal strategies that would not be accepted in monolingual usage, and given that the group was chosen by extra-linguistic criteria, there were a few speakers who produced no deviations from generally accepted pronominal patterns. On the other hand, most of the interview subjects produced configurations which are not normally found among monolingual speakers, and it is from a selection of such cases that the following observations emerge. Although the examples to be discussed depart rather drastically from monolingual usage, judgements of acceptability were obtained, for the samples chosen for analysis, from a panel consisting of three university-trained speakers from each of the countries: Cuba, Puerto Rico and Mexico. The panelists had no formal training in linguistics, and were either monolingual Spanish speakers or heavily Spanish-dominant; only in cases of concurrent judgment, that the selected examples were marginal or unacceptable in their respective dialects, were the examples subject to further analysis. However, no attempt will be made here to analyze relative acceptability judgements, a complex topic that would lead the discussion far afield.

5. Turning to the specifics of prodrop in Spanish and the lack thereof in Spanish, it is natural to suppose that an individual having English as L₁ and who learns Spanish as L₂ will at some point attempt to apply the same distribution of nouns and (overt) pronouns to Spanish.¹ Phinney (1988) and others have noted that English-speaking learners of Spanish do not immediately adopt prodrop, as might be suspected by uncritical acceptance of the postulated unmarked status of this parameter in Universal Grammar, and from the data from English child language acquisition, in which many children appear to make an initial hypothesis that English is a prodrop language (cf. also Hilles 1986, Zobl 1986, Hyams 1986). Universal Grammar, as envisaged by Chomsky (1981, etc.) represents a psychologically real window into the language acquisition process; in particular, it is assumed that all language-specific parameters (such as prodrop) are initially set at the universally unmarked value at the onset of L₁ acquisition. It is the behavior of children learning English, who appear to initially entertain a prodrop hypothesis, subsequently revised to the very limited prodrop status of adult English, which provides support for the inference that [+prodrop] is the unmarked value in UG. Conversely, the substantial literature on Spanish child language acquisition gives no evidence that children learning Spanish make an initial [-prodrop] assumption.²

6. In English, the [-prodrop] value is fixed quite early in the acquisition process, so that by the time of post-childhood L₂ acquisition, we can assume the parameter to be so completely internalized as to require complete resetting during L₂ acquisition. Phinney (1988), in reviewing the four logical possibilities, hypothesizes that greatest ease of transfer will involve identical settings between the two languages, either unmarked or marked (e.g. prodrop to prodrop or non prodrop to non prodrop). Evidence of English-speaking learners of French and vice versa tend to confirm this hypothesis, since neither group reverts to the putatively universal prodrop option in transferring between the two non prodrop languages. The next stage in the hierarchy of difficulty involves transfer from a marked to an unmarked parameter setting, and the most difficult represents

transfer from an unmarked to a marked value. In this respect, Phinney presents evidence suggesting that English-speaking learners of Spanish acquire the (unmarked) prodrop parameter relatively earlier than Spanish-speaking learners of English acquire the more marked [-prodrop] setting.³ To date, no comprehensive study of acquisition of Spanish by English speakers has dealt with more complex interaction among full NPs, overt pronouns and null pronouns, nor of problems of coreference and anaphora.

In the opposite direction, i.e. acquisition of a non prodrop language (English) by speakers of a prodrop language (Spanish) available studies yield conclusions which are at least partially congruent with those mentioned above. For example, White (1985) has shown that Spanish-speaking learners of English carry over the [+prodrop] option at the lower levels of proficiency; she also notes that different aspects of the prodrop parameter are transferred at different rates.⁴

7. The assertion is often made, although rarely substantiated, that Spanish-English bilinguals use overt subject pronouns more frequently than their counterparts in monolingual Spanish communities. Recent work by, e.g., Silva-Corvalan (1982, 1986) in Los Angeles and Morales (1986a) in Puerto Rico is providing an empirical basis for the study of subject pronoun usage among bilinguals with varying degrees of fluency in English, and the results indicate that no bilingual speaker categorically retains all overt subject pronouns, and even speakers with what appear to be unusually high rates of overt subject pronouns do not demonstrate other non-prodrop characteristics, such as overt existential or impersonal subjects. Thus any strong hypothesis regarding parameter resetting under conditions of unbalanced bilingualism is disconfirmed.

There are more subtle aspects of subject pronoun usage which hint at qualitative differences between at least some bilingual speakers (e.g. unbalanced or transitional bilinguals) and their monolingual counterparts. When dealing with a null subject L₁ and a non-prodrop L₂ or vice versa, at least three logical configurations are possible: (1) automatic carryover of L₁ settings during at least the early stages of L₂ acquisition; (2)

reversion to universally 'unmarked' values during early stages of L₂ acquisition; (3) no demonstrable interaction between L₁ and L₂ parameters, regardless of discrepancies. The third option, a null hypothesis, is theoretically unexciting, although it may well be true (most language teachers can adduce some anecdotal evidence). The first option reflects the strongest form of the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, which has been disconfirmed in extreme versions, although it undoubtedly describes the behavior of certain language learners. The second hypothesis, resurfacing of unmarked parameter settings, is a version of second language acquisition as pidginization (e.g. Schumann 1978), together with 'bioprogram' features which break already established patterns to form new grammars in which Universal Grammar shines through (as exemplified by, e.g. Bickerton 1981). In the case of prodrop, it is frequently impossible to separate reversion to universal settings from the other two possibilities. If we accept the notion that null subjects are universally unmarked, then the frequent reluctance of English speakers to use Spanish null subjects to their full extent remains unexplained by models of reversion to universal settings. Spanish speakers learning English at times use ungrammatical null subjects, but usually only instead of resumptive pronouns or empty expletives. The issues, then, remain unresolved, and I propose that examination of bilingual speakers of varying ability levels may aid in separating the relevant variables.

8. What occurs for many TB Spanish speakers is use of overt subject pronouns which differs qualitatively and quantitatively from usage among monolingual Spanish speakers from the same dialect groups. Several facets of subject pronoun usage promise to be viable candidates for inclusion in expanded models of Spanish in an unbalanced bilingual situation. These include the following:

(a) Multiple occurrence of coreferential subject pronouns. There is no consensus on the acceptability of overt subject pronouns vs. null subjects in any variety of Spanish, but multiple occurrence of coreferential pronouns becomes increasingly unacceptable as the number of repetitions increases. The following examples, drawn from a corpus of

materials representing bilingual Spanish speakers in the United States for whom Spanish is the recessive language (cf. Lipski 1985a), represent extreme cases in a continuum of variation whose opposite pole is monolingual use of null subjects:

(1)

Nojotros tratamos de que vaya otra persona mas que nosotros porque nojotros estamos para aquí (MX) 'We try to have someone other than us go, because we are [meant] for here.'

Yo decidí ser maestra porque yo estuve trabajando con niños y yo pensé que yo podía hacer lo mismo (MX) 'I decided to be a teacher because I was working with children and I thought that I could do the same thing.'

Yo me di cuenta cuando yo estaba joven yo tuve que dejar mi colegio para seguir trabajando para mi mama, porque ella estaba viuda y ella no tenía entrada del dinero, y yo tenía que, tuve que salir a trabajar a ayudarla a ella. (MX) 'I realized when I was young, I had to leave school to keep on working for my mother, because she was a widow and she had no income, and I had to, I had to go out and work to help her.'

Yo seguí a mi hijo en la escuela d'él y yo me metí a ayudarle a las profesoras de voluntaria, fue donde yo seguí la carrera de seguir en el colegio (MX) 'I followed my son in his school and I began helping the teachers as a volunteer, that was where I got the idea of continuing in school.'

Yo voy y yo nado y yo visito mis amigos y mi abuela (CU). 'I go and I swim and I visit my friends and my grandmother.'

Cuando yo estaba trabajando de ayudante de maestra, yo me dí cuenta de los problemas que estaban teniendo los niños en las escuelas, y yo estaba trabajando en primero. (MX) 'When I was working as a teacher's aid, I realized the problems that the children were having in the schools, and I was working in first [grade].'

Yo tengo do sijo [dos hijos]; yo tengo a Al y yo tengo a Paul (IS) 'I have two children, I have Al and I have Paul.'

Ellos; son de aquí de los Estados y ellos; hablan mas inglés que yo (MX) 'They are from here in the United States and they speak more English than I do.'

Mis padres; aprendieron inglés cuando ellos; entraban en la escuela (MX) 'My parents learned English when they entered school.'

Yo sé las palabras pero cuando yo tengo que encontrar las palabras es cuando yo tengo problemas (MX) 'I know the words but when I have to find the words is when I have problems.'

No single instance of an overt subject pronoun in (1) would be out of place in any Spanish dialect, but the accumulation of overt pronouns involves a threshold of acceptability, which differs for each speaker, but which is exceeded for nearly all monolingual speakers by sentences such as (1). While (1) may suggest that for the speakers in question, prodrop has disappeared, this is not the case. All of the speakers who produced the examples in (1) also produced sentences containing appropriately configured null subjects. All speakers also employed subject-verb inversion, although the most frequent tokens were quasi-fossilized combinations such as creo yo 'I think.'

The matrix dialects represented by the speakers included Mexican Spanish, in which overt subject pronouns are not exceptionally frequent, and Caribbean Spanish, where higher rates of overt pronoun retention are normal. Bilingual Puerto Rican or Cuban speakers did not produce more sentences such as (1) than speakers of Mexican origin, nor was there a significant correlation between overall fluency in Spanish and the frequency of redundant subject pronoun repetition.

(b) Excessive or anomalous 'backward pronominalization.' This includes instances where null pronouns corefer to overt pronouns that occur later in the sentence. The long debate over backward pronominalization is far from resolved, but in non-prodrop languages like English, it appears that earlier 'command and precede' views that a pronoun could not precede its antecedent can be circumvented by a more elaborate theory of dependency relationships that does not make direct reference to linear order: a pronoun can precede its antecedent under some circumstances, but it cannot c-command its antecedent (Reinhart 1983). The situation in null subject languages like Spanish is more complex, since three entities are involved: full nominals, overt pronouns, and null pronouns.⁵ Lujan (1985) has claimed that in prodrop languages like Spanish, strong (e.g. lexical) pronouns cannot precede their antecedents. This was later amended (Lujan 1986) to the Stressed Pronoun Constraint: an antecedent may bind a stressed pronoun iff this pronoun does not alternate with an unstressed pronoun. Although all of Lujan's examples involved overt/null pronouns potentially coreferring with full nominals, the situation is partially similar for the alternation between overt and null pronouns.⁶ If a Spanish null pronoun has an overt pronoun for an antecedent, it is rare to find, in monolingual speech, acceptable cases where a null pronoun precedes its 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 in monolingual speech for a null pronoun in the matrix sentence to corefer to an overt

pronoun which is c-commanded by or otherwise subordinated to the overt pronoun. In situations of coreference between overt pronouns and null pronouns, the former behave almost like free nominals with respect to the Binding Conditions, which stipulate that a free nominal must be referentially free (not obligatorily coindexed with another NP) in its binding domain (Chomsky 1981). At this stage, it is not 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. Whatever the case, in the speech of many TBs, it is not unusual to find deviations from this pattern, in which null pronouns in matrix sentences corefer with following overt pronouns:

(2)

Q_i tenía muy buena recomendación pa que é_i siguiera con la carrera de electrónica (MX) '[He] had a very good recommendation for him to continue his career in electronics.'

Q_i creo que yo_i tengo bastantes problemas con la gramática (MX) '[I] believe that I have enough problems with grammar.'

Q_i no pude creer que yo_i ha hecho esos errores (MX) '[I] couldn't believe that I had made those mistakes.'

It is also frequent for a null pronoun to corefer to a following overt pronoun in clauses conjoined by y 'and,' o 'or,' pero 'but,' etc. This does not violate any grammatical principle, since the pronouns are in separate matrix clauses, but for the pragmatic reasons mentioned above, this type of transition from less specific (null) to more specific

(overt) pronoun does not normally occur in monolingual varieties of Spanish except perhaps after hesitation or distraction. Examples from the present corpus in which null pronouns corefer to a following conjoined overt pronoun include:

(3)

Cuando Q_i fui a pasar mis vacaciones con mi tía, que luego yo_i la ayudé (PR)
 'When [I] went to spend my vacation with my aunt, then I helped her.'

Alguien me habla en español y Q_i entiendo pero yo_i contesto en inglés (MX)
 'Someone talks to me in Spanish and [I] understand but I answer in English.'

Yo_i no le creí, pero Q_i comencé a arreglar mis papeles ... y cuando yo_i estaba arreglando mis papeles ... (MX) 'I didn't believe her, but [I] began to get my papers ready, and when I was getting my papers ready ...'

Pa que Q_i no le tengan miedo a uno y sigan $ellos_i$ adelante (MX) 'So that [they] aren't afraid and they keep on.'

Q_i voy afuera otra vez y yo_i vengo adentro (CU) '[I] go outside again and I come inside.'

Alla Q_i te pagan, y si $ellos_i$ no gustan cómo estas jugando, Q_i te dicen (MX) 'There [they] pay you, and if they don't like how you're playing, [they] tell you.'

(c) '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 freely alternate.

Even among TB 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:

(4)

Nojotros_i hablamos con ellos y O_i vemos con qué quieren ayuda y entonces nojotros_i les ofrecemos ayuda (MX) 'We speak with them and [we] see what they want help with and then we offer them help.'

Yo_i fui la mayor y yo_i no me acuerdo que yo_i hablaba inglés cuando O_i comencé la escuela (MX) 'I was the oldest and I don't remember that I spoke English when [I] began school.'

Yo_i me recuerdo en Puerto Rico cuando yo_i tenía 18 años, cuando O_i fui a pasar mis vacaciones con mi tía, que luego yo_i la ayudé a ella. (PR) 'I remember in Puerto Rico when I was 18, when [I] went to spend my vacation with my aunt, that then I helped her.'

(d) Disjoint reference of identical overt pronouns. 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 (explicit 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 TB speakers, disjoint (non-contrastive) reference between overt third person pronouns is not unusual:

(5)

Ello[s]_i venden y ello[s]_j van (CU) 'They_i sell and they_j go.'

Quando ello_i hablo[an], ello_j comprenden (TR) 'When they_i speak, they_j understand.'

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

(6)

sus_i padres_j hablaban puro español cuando Ø_k trabajaron, cuando ellos_i eran niños (MX) 'Their_i parents_j spoke only Spanish when they_k were working, when they_i were children'

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

(7)

Quando [yo]_i estaba en escuela, [ella]_j trabajaba de lunch lady (MX) 'When [I]_i was in school, [she]_j worked as a lunch lady'

For nearly all of the above cases, monolingual Spanish speakers from Spain and Latin America concur in judgements of unacceptability, although in the case of (1), there is gradation in the reactions.

9. With respect to possible differential behavior involving overt and null pronouns between Spanish-English bilinguals and monolingual Spanish speakers, a partial list of proposals includes the following points:

(i) There is no evidence that prodrop as an integral parameter has been, or is being, eliminated from the grammar of bilingual Spanish speakers, of any level of fluency.

(ii) There is no evidence that any group of bilingual speakers is losing the option of free inversion. Every conceivable combination is found among the data, ranging from individuals who use an extraordinarily high number of redundant subject pronouns but make extensive use of inversion, to individuals who do not deviate from fully fluent Spanish speakers in use of redundant subject pronouns, but who rarely or never make use of inversion. This suggests, although does not prove, that null subjects and free inversion are at least partially separable parameters in Spanish.

(iii) The common impression that many bilinguals err in the direction of redundant subject pronouns is due to a few well-delimited qualitative differences between monolingual Spanish and some varieties of U. S. Spanish spoken in conjunction with English. One example is repetition of pronouns after coordinating conjunctions.

(iv) Also frequent among many TB speakers is the repetition of subject pronouns in subordinate clauses. Among monolingual Spanish speakers, repetition of pronouns, in the absence of lengthy intervening material and when no contrastive emphasis is intended, is regarded as inappropriate, and the gradual accumulation of such pronouns by some bilingual speakers contributes to notions of categorical pronoun retention.

(v) Monolingual varieties of Spanish permit but do not encourage an overt pronoun to corefer with a c-commanding and preceding full NP, when no contrastive emphasis is intended. In TB speech, overt pronouns routinely corefer to full NPs. The overt pronoun is still free in its binding category, and disjoint reference with respect to the subject of the matrix clause can and does occur.⁷ Monolingual Spanish speakers, on the other hand, place tighter constraints on possible anaphoric interpretations, by affording to overt pronouns a status closer to that of full NPs than of (null) pronominals.

(vi) Many TB speakers differ from monolingual speakers in pragmatic restrictions on necessary coreference of repeated or conjoined pronouns, having in particular a greater freedom from necessary coreference among repeated pronouns. All of these factors combine to indicate a gradual erosion of grammatical and pragmatic differences between null and overt subject pronouns in bilingual Spanish, a hybrid configuration reflecting both the pro-drop option found in all varieties of Spanish and the unique typology of subject pronouns found in English.

10. The preliminary findings from TB Spanish speakers suggest that what is at issue in the speech of bilinguals speaking both pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages is not the setting of this parameter, which may in fact not be reducible to a simple binary switch. Rather, incipient modifications of Spanish in a bilingual setting involve underdifferentiation of null and overt subject pronouns, whose behavior is not fixed by parameters but rather determined by pragmatic and perhaps prosodic configurations. Spanish overt pronouns are evidently losing their status as stressed or strong pronouns as opposed to inherently weak null pronouns, thus paralleling English, where (overt) subject pronouns are normally unstressed, but can optionally receive contrastive or emphatic stress. TB Spanish speakers are approaching, perhaps asymptotically, the stage where the only feature distinguishing null and overt pronouns is the presence or absence of phonetic substance. Should this point ever be reached, where null and overt pronouns can freely and indiscriminately corefer in any and all configurations, a typologically unique form of pro-drop would result. This might in turn potentially result in loss of the null subject option, not via the erosion of inflectional material (as in the development of French), but rather through the proliferation of unstable coreferential patterns occasioned by relaxation of constraints on coreference between overt and (preceding/c-commanding) null pronouns. Such a path of evolution is speculative at this juncture, since the TB speakers providing the present corpus often represent the

initial stages of language loss, and may not exemplify a stable or replicable speech community.

11. The preceding remarks permit the inference that whether or not prodrop exists as a true parametric choice, resetting of the null subject option is not the normal outcome during unbalanced bilingualism. The possibility for null subjects remains in Spanish at all levels of fluency. These tentative first steps are not sufficient to make any substantive claims about the existence or nature of a prodrop parameter, but they do point to the study of bilingual speech patterns and incipient language shift as a fruitful testing ground for many hypotheses regarding systematic differences among grammatical systems.

Notes

¹ This is especially the case if we accept the hypothesis of Lust (1981: 94) that in early childhood, direction of anaphora accords with the Principal Branching Direction. Both Spanish and English are right-branching languages, and therefore any substantial differences regarding acquisition of anaphora will have to do with other factors, such as the prodrop option in Spanish.

² There is some evidence (cf. Padilla Rivas 1985, Solan 1987) that children learning Spanish as L₁ have a greater difficulty interpreting sentences combining (null) pro with a finite verb, as in (a) opposed to (b).

a. Juan_i dijo que pro_i {se_i/lo_j} golpeó.

b. Juan_i trató de PRO_i golpear {se_i/lo_j}.

This difference, however, is due to the fact that pro in (a) is really pro_{arb}, i.e. not necessarily coferential with the subject, while PRO in (b) must be coferential with the subject.

³ Evaluation of the data is complicated by the fact that whereas applying prodrop in English almost invariably produces ungrammatical results, under-utilization of prodrop in Spanish does not, except for cases involving impersonal subjects. Phinney admits that English speakers learning Spanish may continue to underutilize prodrop in the opinion of native Spanish speakers (cf. also Fleming 1977, Gunterman 1978), and concludes that parameter resetting proceeds by parts, and is not uniform and exceptionless.

⁴ In White's study, speakers were asked to judge the grammaticality of English sentences to which Spanish-type parameters had been applied; a significant number of speakers accepted null pronouns, inversion in declarative sentences, etc. This is not the same as discovering examples in actually produced L₂ speech, since failure to classify

deviant sentences which do not form part of the normal received corpus for the L₂ learner is not always an exact reflection of (partially) internalized parameters in the incipient L₂ or interlanguage grammar (cf. also Lust et. al. 1980). The conflation of a variety of syntactic characteristics into a single parameter is also problematic for comparative studies of language acquisition and erosion, since there is a not inconsiderable body of evidence which regards prodrop, free inversion, that-t violations, etc. as separable parameters, albeit closely related. Studies in L₁ acquisition of prodrop languages such as Spanish and Italian also reflect a rather stable developmental stage in which overt pronouns coexist with full AGR (cf. Zobl 1986, Solan 1987), from which the inference can be drawn that regardless of markedness considerations, the cluster of phenomena putatively assigned to prodrop neither develops nor transfers integrally as a group.

⁵ The number can be expanded to four, if contrastively stressed pronouns in Spanish are included (cf. Rigau 1986, Montalbetti 1986).

⁶ For additional observations on the differential behavior of null and overt subject pronouns in Spanish, cf. Rigau (1986), Montalbetti (1986), Padilla Rivera (1985).

⁷ This behavior reflects the speaker's strategy defined by Reinhart (1986: 143): 'when a syntactic structure you are using allows bound-anaphor interpretation, then use it if you intend your expressions to corefer, unless you have some reason to avoid bound anaphora.' The listener's strategy is similarly given as 'If the speaker avoids the bound anaphora options provided by the structure he is using, then unless he has reason to avoid bound anaphora, he didn't intend his expressions to corefer.' The speakers in question employ strategies such as defined by Reinhart (1986), Solan (1983), Wasow (1986), McCray (1980), etc., in preference to narrow syntactic restrictions, when constructing and parsing chains of coreferential elements.

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