



SUBJECT EXPRESSION VARIATION IN SPANISH SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A CORPUS STUDY

8th International Workshop in Spanish Sociolinguistics, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Falcon Restrepo Ramos | Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies



What has been done recently in the literature?

- a. L2 subject expression (SE) variation (Geeslin et al., 2008; Geeslin et al., 2015, Linford and Shin, 2012) and bilingual children (Silva Corvalan, 2015)
- b. In heritage speakers (Montrul, 2004)
- c. And monolingual children (Ballester, 2010; Montrul et al., 2015, Shin et al., 2015)

Interesting previous findings

1. Geeslin et al. (2015) – U-shaped pattern of SE development

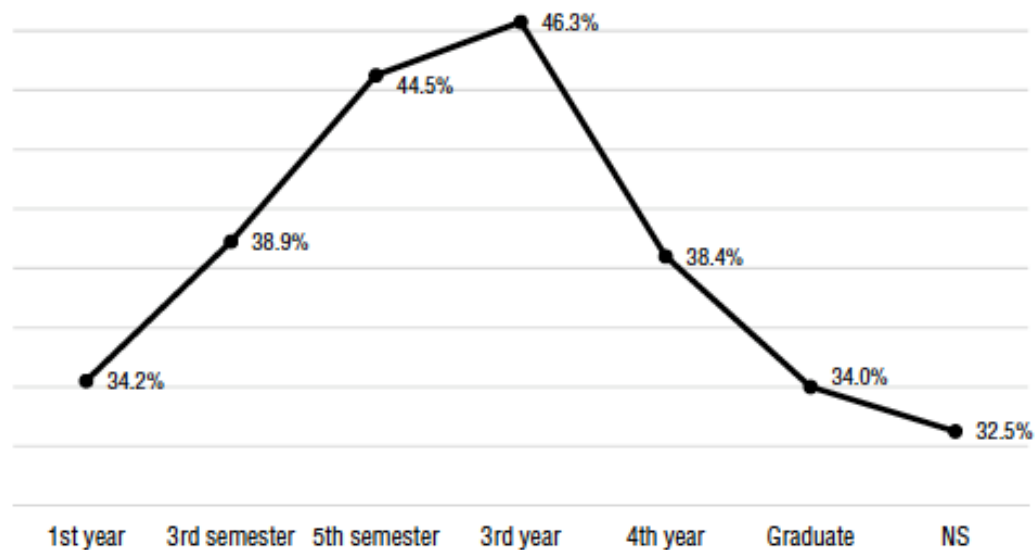


Figure 10.1 Rates of overt subject pronoun selection by group

Interesting previous findings

2. Geeslin et al. (2013, 2015), Shin et al. (2015), Orozco (2015), and Otheguy et al. (2015) - Linguistic factors conditioning the use of subject expression according to individual differences:

Internal factors

Person

TMA and TMA continuity

Specificity of the referent

Verb class

External factors

Proficiency and gender

Elicitation tasks previously used:

- (1) Sample item taken from the WCT:

Pedro: *Bueno yo estaba seguro que él no sabía a dónde iba pero cuando le pregunté, ...*

... *me dijo “¡Claro que sí! ¿No confías en mí o qué?”*

... *él me dijo “¡Claro que sí! ¿No confías en mí o qué?”*

Coded as switch reference, preterite, same TMA (continuity), and 3sg. (Geeslin et al., 2015: 196)

The purpose of this study

What?

Sociolinguistic factors influencing the variable use of SE in our Spanish L2 learners across levels of proficiency

Why?

To go further into the SE developmental path

How?

Novel usage-based approach

Research questions

According to subject pronouns and NPs (SE) selection across levels of proficiency:

- a. How SE selection rates differ in the written compositions of L2?
- b. Which linguistic variables predict the rates of selection of subject pronouns and referential NPs?

Data

A novel approach in L2 SE variation:

Final draft of the first in-class composition assignment of the semester collected in-class.

- No instructor's feedback was made regarding subject expression.
- Learners upload an electronic version to MySpanish Lab platform and Qualtrics.

Sample

Topic: Write a letter (minimum 150 words) to a friend back home about[...]:

Mi amiga Nicole también la te gusta estudiar en el estadio. Ella tiene veintidós años, es atlética, trabajadora, bonita, y inteligente. Mi amiga Taylor tiene veintiuno años, es cómica, simpática, perezosa y interesante. [1130Bspan1#4, female]

Topic: Last night you helped with a fashion show/dinner to raise money for Accion callejera (180 words on average) [...].

[...] los niños y yo fuimos al supermercado para comprar comida [...]. Necesitamos comprar todo para servir a los clientes durante el desfile. En la mañana, nosotros empezamos cocinando. [1131Bspan2#4, female].

Topic: Ustedes van a escribir un folleto (brochure) para los nuevos estudiantes con información sobre las actividades que pueden hacer en su tiempo libre (250 words on average). Esperemos que quieran hacer algo diferente, interesante, y vacano. ¡Tenemos el lugar para ustedes! Si quieres ser un/a mejor atleta o si quieres descubrir una nueva actividad que te gusta, tenemos algo para todo. [2200ISpan1#10, male].

Topic: Te vas a casar este año y quieres planear los detalles de: ¡tu boda y tu luna de miel! (250 words on average) Un poco tarde, el llegué al club en que mis amigas y yo estábamos en para conocerme. Hemos sido inseparables desde dicha noche. El es tanta cómica y tiene una actitud muy positiva. También, es un trabajador duro en sus estudios como yo. De hecho, estudiamos a juntos a veces. [3700ASpan#4, female].

Participants

- 57 native English speakers from the US learning Spanish as their L2 and enrolled in 3 different levels of Spanish courses at UF. Five native speakers served as the control group.

Speaker Type	L2ers				Control
Proficiency	Beginners 1 (1130)	Beginners 2 (1131)	Intermediate 1 (2200)	Adv. L2ers (3000)	Native
N	16	16	16	9	5

Coding and Variables

Internal factors

Person

TMA

TMA continuity

Switch Reference

Verb class

Clause type

External factors

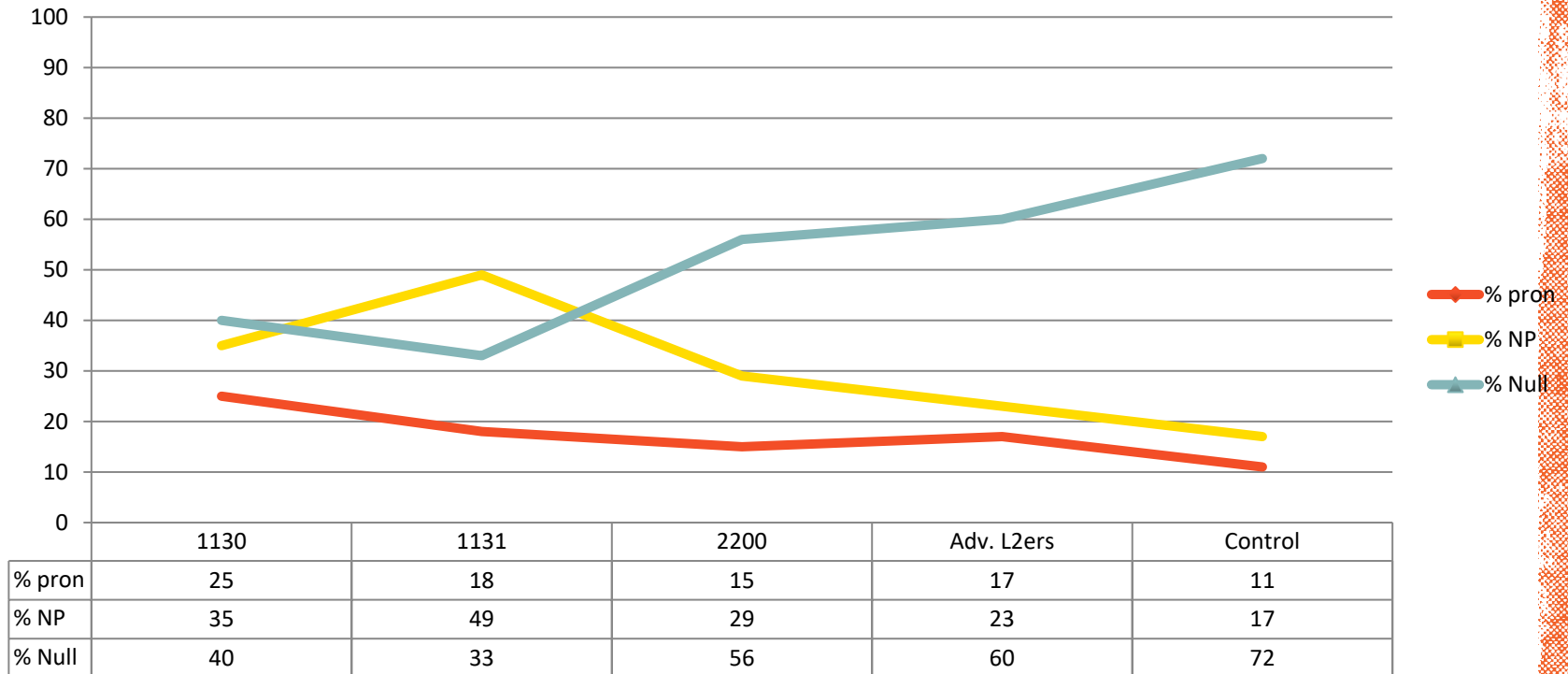
Proficiency and gender

Binary dependent variable: a. Overt subject pronoun vs null
b. Overt Np vs null

Multivariate analysis application Goldvarb X 3.0

Overall Selection Rates: 1661 tokens

% Subject form across proficiencies



Pronouns

Factors conditioning pronouns in beginners' compositions over null subjects

Factor Person	N	%	Weight	% of Data
1pl	8	50	0.62	7
3sg animate	68	48.5	0.61	29
1sg	116	38	0.50	49
2sg informal	5	18	0.26	12
3pl animate	8	12.5	0.19	12
<i>Range</i>			43	

NPs

Factors conditioning NPs in beginners' compositions over null and pronoun subjects

Factor Person	N	%	Weight	% of Data
3sg inanimate	55	82	0.74	34
3pl inanimate	13	72	0.51	9
3sg animate	48	46	0.35	53
<i>Range</i>			39	

Factor N % Weight % of Data

Switch Reference	N	%	Weight	% of Data
Yes	91	43	0.66	59
No	33	22	0.28	41
<i>Range</i>			38	

Comparison between first mention and switch reference

Factor Switch Reference	N	%	Weight	% of Data
First Mention	77	60	0.64	60
Switch Reference	14	16	0.29	40
<i>Range</i>			35	

Pronouns

Factors conditioning pronouns in beginners' 2 compositions over null subjects

Factor <i>Person</i>	N	%	Weight	% of Data
1sg	12	60	0.74	10
3pl	12	46	0.62	14
1pl	39	32	0.48	63
3sg	4	16	0.26	13
<i>Range</i>			48	

NPs

Factors conditioning NPs in beginners' 2 compositions over null and pronoun subjects

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	115	83	0.83	37
Switch	33	39	0.47	41
Non-Switch	35	23	0.20	41
<i>Range</i>			63	

Factor

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
3sg animate	26	84	0.69	15
3pl animate	88	77	0.53	56
3sg inanimate	39	66	0.34	29
<i>Range</i>			35	

Pronouns

Factors conditioning pronouns in intermediates' compositions over null subjects

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>TMA</i>				
Past	16	59	0.75	8
Present	59	18	0.48	92
<i>Range</i>			27	

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Gender</i>				
Masc.	34	37	0.65	26
Fem.	41	15	0.45	74
<i>Range</i>			20	

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>TMA Cont.</i>				
No	29	34	0.63	23
Yes	46	17	0.46	77
<i>Range</i>			17	

NPs

Factors conditioning NPs in intermediates compositions over null and pronoun subjects

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	82	67	0.80	25
Switch	42	19	0.55	44
Non-Switch	17	11	0.20	31
<i>Range</i>			60	

Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
3pl animate	35	87	0.67	22
3pl inanimate	29	83	0.61	19
3sg inanimate	60	77	0.43	43
3sg animate	17	61	0.31	15
<i>Range</i>			36	

Pronouns

Factors conditioning pronouns in Adv. L2ers' compositions over null subjects				
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>TMA</i>				
Past	21	44	0.77	23
Present	26	18	0.47	66
Future	1	4	0.13	10
<i>Range</i>			<i>64</i>	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	11	46	0.72	11
Switch	29	31	0.69	44
Non-Switch	8	8	0.27	45
<i>Range</i>			<i>45</i>	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
3	23	50	0.80	22
1	25	15	0.41	78
<i>Range</i>			<i>39</i>	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Gender</i>				
Masc.	22	38	0.71	27
Fem.	26	17	0.42	72
<i>Range</i>			<i>29</i>	

NPs

Factors conditioning NPs in Adv. L2ers' compositions over null and pronoun subjects				
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	52	68	0.93	27
Switch	11	11	0.39	37
Non-Switch	3	3	0.17	35
<i>Range</i>			<i>75</i>	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
3sg inanimate	29	78	0.62	40
3sg animate	19	33	0.42	60
<i>Range</i>			<i>20</i>	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
Future	17	44	0.74	14
Present	41	22	0.54	65
Past	8	14	0.21	20
<i>Range</i>			<i>53</i>	

Pronouns

Factors conditioning pronouns in natives' compositions over null subjects				
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	8	73	0.99	9
Switch	7	20	0.57	29
Non-Switch	1	1	0.25	28.9
<i>Range</i>			74	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
Present	13	16	0.71	81
Past	3	15	0.22	19
<i>Range</i>			49	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
1	10	45	0.90	19
3	3	33	0.53	8
4	3	3	0.37	73
<i>Range</i>			53	

NPs

Factors conditioning NPs in natives' compositions over null and pronoun subjects				
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>TMA</i>				
Future	10	31	0.93	22
Past	4	17	0.73	16
Present	11	12	0.24	62
<i>Range</i>			69	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Switch Reference</i>				
First Mention	16	64	0.84	36
Switch	9	20	0.28	63
<i>Range</i>			56	
Factor	N	%	Weight	% of Data
<i>Person</i>				
3pl animate	11	73	0.57	39
3sg animate	14	61	0.45	60
<i>Range</i>			12	

Factors' Direction of Effect in Pronouns by Proficiency

	<i>Beginners 1</i>	<i>Beginners 2</i>	<i>Intermediate 1</i>	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>Native</i>
Switch Reference				First* > Switch	First** > Switch
TMA			Past*	Past**	Present*
Person	1pl > 3sg	1sg* > 3pl		3*	1** > 3
TMA Continuity			No TMAC		
Clause Type					
Verb Class					
Gender of Participants			M	M*	

* > .70 weight

** > .84 Weight

Factors' Direction of Effect in NPs by Proficiency

	<i>Beginners 1</i>	<i>Beginners 2</i>	<i>Intermediate 1</i>	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>Native</i>
Switch Reference	Switch!	First*	First*>Switch	First**	First**
TMA				Future* > Present	Future ** > Past
Person	3sg*	3sg > 3pl	3pl A. > 3pl I.	3sg I	3pl
TMA Continuity					
Clause Type					
Verb Class					
Gender of Participants					

* > .70 weight

** > .84 Weight

Research Questions Revisited

- According to subject pronouns and NPs (SE) selection across levels of proficiency:
 - a. How SE selection rates differ in the written compositions of L2?

Results: selection rates differ on the type of subject (Nulls > NPs > Pronouns). No u-shaped pattern found

- b. Which linguistic variables predict the rates of selection of subject pronouns and referential NPs?

Pronouns: Person > TMA > Switch Reference > Gender

NPs: Switch Reference > Person > TMA

Conclusions

- The developmental path across all the levels of proficiency seems to be constrained by the L1 at beginning levels and follows a regular path of acquisition to reach native like proficiency. This finding is not consistent with previous models (Geeslin et al., 2015).
- Switch reference, person, TMA appeared as highly predicting factors of NPs subjects.
- In beginners, the *person* factor seems to be the only factor predicting the selection of subject pronouns.
- Finally, the usage-based approach promises to further delve into the research field of L2 subject expression.
- Tentatively, male participants tend to favor the use of pronouns at higher levels



Falcon Restrepo Ramos
 Department of Spanish and Portuguese
 University of Florida

frestrepo@ufl.edu