Focus and information structure in Cibaeño Dominican Spanish
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Although Spanish allows flexible word order, numerous theoretical studies have shown acceptability of different orders as determined by the discourse context [8, 13]. The underpinnings of these findings have fueled formal accounts [7, 13] incorporating information structure (IS) with tremendous import for other Romance varieties. Zubizarreta [13] has received considerable attention as experimental researchers [4, 5, 6] have falsified the validity of the Romance Nuclear Stress Rule and its associated Prosodic Movement axiom, by which narrow-focus (i.e. rheme) constituents appear at the clausal right edge and constituents not within the scope of focus move leftward. Overall, empirical data suggests that 1) multiple focus-related strategies are available and 2) p-movement is absent from speaker evaluations.

The current study contributes to this line of investigation by testing the explanatory adequacy of Zubizarreta [13] for Dominican Spanish (DS) via contextualized word order acceptability judgments (4-point Likert, plus IDK option) for a variety of discourse-related contexts using an Internet-based questionnaire with audio prompts to control for prosody. Dominican Spanish is claimed to be undergoing structural and typological change (e.g. [1, 2]), such that a system with rigid SV(O) word order is emerging—findings that are partly confirmed by ratings of SV in Ortiz-López [10], which included Caribbean Spanish participants age 17 to 71 from Puerto Rico (N=30), Cuba (N=20), and the Dominican Republic (N=12), but did not analyze country of origin as a variable. In this study, we examine experimental results from Cibaeño Dominican Spanish (CDS) participants age 17 to 21 (N=34), all of whom grew up with monolingual exposure to CDS and have not spent more than six months outside of the DR. All were university students in Santiago de los Caballeros.

In subject narrow-focus results, a curious asymmetry emerges (Table 1). Comparing transitive-predicate ratings (1), a paired, two-tailed t-test reveals no statistical difference between SV and VS (p=0.308), but with unaccusative predicates (2), SV is rated statistically higher than VS (p<0.001). [13] predicts preference for VS in Spanish, which is not borne out here. In all-focus contexts with unaccusative predicates, there is no statistical difference between ratings of SV and VS (p=0.892). In all-focus eliciting contexts with transitive predicates, ratings of VSO and VOS reveal that VOS is acceptable (μ=3.163, s.d.=1.052) and rated statistically higher than VSO (p<0.005), suggesting that word order and intonation mark focus in CDS and that word order is not inflexible as claimed for Caribbean Spanish [9]. Contrastive/corrective focused (CF) data provide further insight. CF direct objects in CDS were rated significantly higher (p<0.001) in situ (μ=3.77/4) than ex situ (μ=1.83/4) position. Low ratings for ex situ (i.e. fronted focus) replies compared to in situ, suggests that leftward movement, a strategy for disambiguating information focus from CF, may be on the decline in this variety. However, the fact that subject CF may appear right-adjacent to argument wh-

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<th>Table 1. Experimental results.</th>
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(3) suggests that these constituents appear in IntP [10].

These facts constitute considerable microvariation in the CDS pre-verbal functional field beyond lack of subject inversion in questions (4, subject in bold), the possibility of overt expletives [3], and increasingly obligatory subjects [12].
Examples

(1) Contexto: Estás en casa de tus padres cuando entra tu hermana con un ramillete de flores. Tu madre le dice: “¡Qué maravilla! ¿Quién te regaló esas flores?” Ella le contesta, encantada:
   a. Me las regaló Silvio. (V-S)       b. Silvio me las regaló. (S-V)

(2) Contexto: Estás en una reunión con tus colegas de la universidad. Tu compañero Julio se va un momento al baño. Mientras él está en el baño, Patricia y Maite salen a comprar unos refrescos. Julio regresa, nota que hay menos gente y te pregunta: “¿Quién salió?” Tú le contestas:
   a. Salieron Patricia y Maite. (V-S)       b. Patricia y Maite salieron. (S-V)

(3) Contexto: Hablas con una amiga de una pareja que ha decidido mantener una relación abierta y, en un momento dado, hay confusión sobre las ideas que tiene cada uno. Para aclarar, tú le preguntas: “Pero ¿qué ELLA piensa? Ya sé lo que piensa el novio porque me lo dijo…”

(4) Cuánto un médico consume en un mes?
   How much does a doctor spend in a month?

Selected References


