

The interaction of person and perseveration in a variationist analysis of Caribbean Spanish heritage speaker subject pronoun expression

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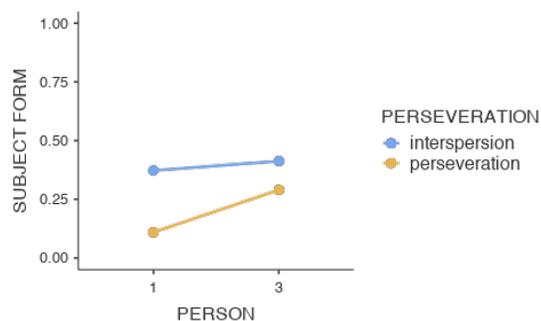
Previous research on Spanish subject pronoun expression (SPE) has identified mostly functional factors, but also one mechanical factor, *perseveration* or *priming*, regulating subject form alternation between expressed and unexpressed subjects in Spanish, as in (*Ella*) *baila en su oficina* ‘She dances in her office’. Priming has been widely explored in the psycholinguistic literature and, more recently, in corpus linguistics. A priming effect is reported where the use of a structure, when more than one structure is available, increases the probability of that same structure being used in a subsequent utterance. In SPE, some authors have explored priming by including the form of the subject of the previous verb form as a variable. Several previous studies using variable rule analyses report that pronouns lead to pronouns and null subjects to null subjects (Abreu, 2012; Cameron, 1994; Cameron & Flores-Ferrán, 2004; Flores-Ferrán 2002; Travis, 2007; Travis & Torres-Cacoulllos, 2012). Otheguy (2015), however, presents cross-tabulated data from eight interviews from Otheguy & Zentella’s (2012) NYC corpus and concludes that there is no priming effect. The current paper contributes to this debate by examining priming in two analyses, cross-tabulated data and a mixed-effects model.

Some of the antecedent research has also examined the interaction of priming with some functional factors (distance from previous mention and coreferentiality). The results seem to indicate that priming is stronger in coreferential contexts. Thus, the interaction of functional and mechanical factors seems to be a productive avenue for a better understanding of the role of priming in SPE. This paper expands on previous literature by examining the interaction of perseveration and a functional factor, grammatical person. The nature of 1sg pronouns is deictic but that of 3sg is referential, therefore, the relevance of overt pronominal subjects for reference-tracking is different for 1sg than for 3sg subjects, which can have an effect on priming. Moreover, the interaction between person and priming can additionally clarify some of the conflicting previous results regarding priming, since previous studies differ in the grammatical persons included in their data (e.g. Travis & Torres-Cacoulllos, 2012, only included 1sg data in their analysis while Otheguy, 2015, included data from all grammatical persons).

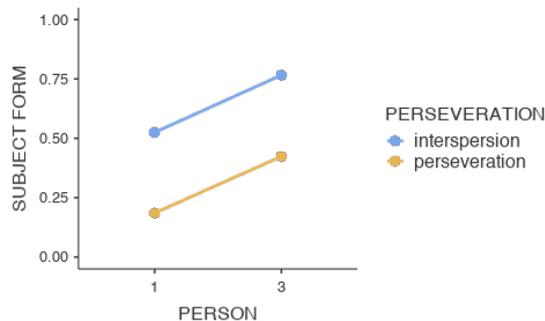
In order to address this question, data from 21 Spanish-English bilinguals with two profiles: born in the U.S. or who migrated to the U.S. by age three and born abroad and who migrated to the U.S. after the age of 8, was extracted from a sociolinguistic interview with the author. They were all of Caribbean heritage. All conjugated verbs in 1sg or 3sg within the envelope of variation (Otheguy & Zentella, 2012) (N = 4,340) were extracted and coded for subject form, person and number, and switch reference, in addition to perseveration, when the previous subject had the same form, or interspersion, when the previous subject had a different form. An initial mixed-effects analysis, in particular a General analysis for linear models (Gallucci, 2019) was performed using Jamovi (The Jamovi Project, 2019), which is a graphical user interface for R (R Core Team, 2018), with switch reference, person, perseveration, and proficiency as fixed factors and participant as a random factor.

Overall, participants used significantly more overt pronominal subjects in 3sg (48.4%) than in 1sg subjects (28.1%). The cross-tabulated analysis replicated previous work where the effect of the high frequency of unexpressed subjects in Spanish results in both types of subjects being more frequently preceded by unexpressed subjects. The mixed effects model revealed several interactions, including a switch reference*person*perseveration interaction, $X^2(1) = 6.505$, $p = 0.011$. As the graphs show, in same referent context, there is a higher rate of overt pronominal subjects in 3sg than in 1sg but only in contexts of preservation. In contrast, in contexts with a different referent, subject pronoun rates are higher in 3sg than in 1sg both in interspersion and in perseveration contexts.

SAME REFERENCE



SWITCH REFERENCE



One explanation for the interaction of perseveration and grammatical person could be that, there is more of a 'yo-yo effect', in Travis' (2007) terms, due to the fact that deictic subjects can be considered given information because they are present in the context and are not related to information flow (Travis, 2007). Alternatively, a different explanation could be found in the psycholinguistic literature, where they have reported a surprisal effect; less frequent forms exhibit stronger priming. In 1sg, overt pronominal subjects are less frequent than in 3sg; thus, they are more subjective to priming. We suggest avenues for future research to tease these apart.

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