

Word order and NP characteristics in Cuban Spanish: pragmatic and sociolinguistic variation

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Previous research has acknowledged that a certain free variation exists between subject-verb (SV) and verb-subject (VS) word order in Spanish and other typologically similar languages. This apparent free variation appears to be encountering resistance in Caribbean Spanish (CS), which has demonstrated a tendency towards a more static SV order (1b, 2b) in comparison with other non-Caribbean Spanish dialects (nCS). (1a, 2a) (Suñer, 1983; Toribio, 1994; Morales, 1999; Ordóñez y Olarrea, 2006; Camacho 2011, 2012, 2013). This has been attributed to various factors related to the syntax-semantics interface (unaccusative hypothesis) and syntax-pragmatics interface (topicalization and focus). As a result, CS would appear to violate certain semantic and discursive restrictions, and as a result, would appear to be distancing itself from the rest of Spanish and moving towards languages such as English and French, among others. This typological change cannot be confirmed since this property has been less explored, compared to other properties of the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) (Otheguy & Zentella, 2012). Previous data is mainly qualitative in nature and based on judgment tasks and limited quantitative data restricted to specific regions of CS, and often focuses on pronouns but largely ignores other NP in CS. Specifically, no previous natural data exists from Cuban Spanish from the Island in terms of this and other properties of the NSP to support a distinct typology hypothesis.

1. (a) ¿*Qué haces (Ø/ tú)?* (nCS)
‘What are you doing?’

(b) ¿*Qué tú haces?* (CS)

2. (a) *Llegó la hija a casa.* (nCS)
‘The daughter arrived home.’

(b) *La hija llegó a casa.* (CS)

The present work poses to contribute findings on word order in Cuban Spanish based on natural speech data that contribute to the NSP debate. For this study, 3,000 tokens were extracted from a corpus of 44 speakers from 3 geolectal regions recorded *in situ* in Cuba in 2013-2014. These tokens were coded and according to various linguistic (pronominality, subject type, NP weight, specificity, animacy) and social factors (age, gender, education, region) that influence word order from a variationist and typological perspective (Tagliamonte, 2012), and then analyzed using Rbrul. The data was then compared to similar natural data from Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Barranquilla (Colombia), and México. The findings from this study prove that Cuban Spanish prefers the order SV in 92% of the analyzed cases, with lower factor weight found in nominal and heavy-NP forms, with no significant patterns among the social factors. A statistically significant difference was found between the Caribbean and non-Caribbean variants, with different behavior among different NP types, evidencing that these varieties differ from nCS and possibly evidencing a distinct typology in this and other properties of the NSP (Otheguy & Zentella, 2012; Camacho 2012, 2013), which challenges many of the syntactic proposals for Spanish (Suñer, 1994; Ordóñez & Olarrea, 2006; Gooddall, 2008), and makes room for typological debate and genetic explanations.

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