

Constraints on Subject Pronoun Use in Southeastern US Spanish: Findings from Roswell, Georgia

Philip Limerick (*University of Georgia*)

The expression of subject pronouns in Spanish is one of the most extensively studied features both in monolingual and contact varieties of the language (Bentivoglio 1987; Cameron 1993; Carvalho & Child 2011; Erker & Guy 2012; Flores-Ferrán 2004; Orozco & Guy 2008; Otheguy & Zentella 2012; Otheguy, Zentella & Livert 2007; Silva-Corvalán 1982; Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2010; Travis 2007, among others). Most studies that have looked at subject pronoun use and linguistic variation in general were carried out using data from speakers living in strictly urban or rural communities. The goal of this paper, however, is to examine the use of pronouns in Roswell, Georgia, an exurb of Atlanta that does not fit into the typical urban/rural dichotomy. A variationist study in this specific type of geographical region allows for linguistic analysis of a unique, emerging speech community comprised of a significantly increasing Hispanic population, which grew from approximately 10.6% of the city's total population in 2000 to 16.6% by the 2010 U.S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010). Specifically, I studied the influence of both linguistic and social variables on the frequency distribution of subject pronoun use by speakers of this highly understudied, emergent dialect of US Spanish.

The present study examines subject expression among 10 Mexican speakers who are residents of Roswell and whose average length of residency in the US is 14 years. Sociolinguistic interviews with an average duration of one hour were conducted in Roswell (Wilson 2013) and later transcribed to allow for coding and analysis of subject pronouns as well as the potential factor groups that may influence subject expression such as person, number, TMA (tense-mood-aspect of verb), coreferentiality index, previous expression, and specificity of the antecedent, as well as social variables such as age, gender, length of residency, and age of arrival. Tokens were coded and analyzed, using mixed-effects multivariate analysis in Rbrul. Results indicate an overall pronoun rate of 21%, which is similar to the rate reported for Mainland newcomers in NYC (Otheguy et al. 2007). However, the results of the multivariate analysis suggest that pronoun usage in Roswell Spanish diverges from these communities, with differential effects observed for factors such as person/number and coreferentiality index. This analysis of subject pronoun expression in the Roswell Spanish data reveals an intermediate stage of language shift in this particular speech community.