

Priming effects in the use of *más* + negative constructions: A quantitative analysis of oral data

Sara Zahler and Manuel Díaz-Campos
(Indiana University)

Previous researchers have noted variation in several varieties of Caribbean and Latin American Spanish with regard to the placement of pre-posed (1a) and post-posed (1b) *más* to the following negative words: *nada*, *nunca*, *nadie*, and *ningún* in [*más* + negative word] constructions (Kany, 1945).

(1) a. no estudié ***más nada*** sino hasta sexto grado. (CC4FD_87)

b. estudié hasta sexto grado ***nada más***. (CC4FD_87)

Research into this variation has analyzed it from a generative perspective, arguing that pre-posing of *más* relative to the negative word results in different syntactic and semantic interpretations from post-posing (García Cornejo, 2008; Gutiérrez-Rexach & González-Rivera, 2012). Specifically, post-posing is asserted to be the only variant permitted in comparative constructions, while the use of a negative word as a focal particle corresponds with post-posing of *más*. One prior study using a variationist analysis to empirically test the afore-mentioned claims (Díaz-Campos & Zahler, 2013) demonstrates that polarity was the only linguistic factor to significantly constrain variation between pre- and post-posed *más* in Caracas Spanish, though its effect was not categorical. Additionally, while comparatives always co-occurred with the post-posed variant, as predicted by previous studies, these cases represented less than 1% of the total occurrences. None of the other proposed constraints from the generative literature were supported by the results of the variationist analysis. We further explore [*más* + negative word] constructions by examining the role of priming of a previously occurring *más* within the preceding three clauses. The analysis contributes to the understanding of the effects of recency of use in the pattern of variation involving [*más* + negative] word constructions.

396 tokens of [*más* + negative word] and [negative word + *más*] constructions were extracted from the corpus *Estudio Sociolingüístico de Caracas* (1987) (Bentivoglio & Sedano, 1993). These tokens were subsequently coded according to eight linguistic factors (priming, placement of the construction relative to the speaker's turn, polarity, whether the sentence was comparative, animacy, grammatical subject, and placement of the negative construction relative to the verb,) and three social factors (age, gender and social class). The data were then analyzed using GoldvarbX (Sankoff et al., 2005).

Results reveal that [*más* + negative word] is used 44%, while [negative word + *más*] appears 56% of the time. From the eight linguistic factors submitted to a logistic regression analysis, only polarity and priming were selected as predictors of [*más* + negative word]. Polarity has the strongest magnitude of effect with a range of 40, while priming has a magnitude of effect of 38. Negative sentences favor the usage of preposed *más* with a weight of .79, which is an indication of a non-focal interpretation in formal analyses. The use of a prior preposed *más* significantly favors the use of [*más* + negative word] with a weight of .68. These findings provide more evidence for priming effects, which can be considered an implicit learning mechanism that reflects the way speakers experience language (Bock et al. 2007) as well as vary in the use of it.

References

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