

**Variable Subject Personal Pronoun Expression:  
The Case of Colombian Costeño Spanish**

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Spanish is a so-called 'pro-drop' language, in which pronominal subjects are variably present. This study expands on a previous examination of the variable use of subject personal pronouns (SPPs) in the speech of residents of Barranquilla, the largest city in the Caribbean region of Colombia. This study examines the linguistic and social constraints that most significantly affect the distribution of overt and null SPPs in Colombian Costeño Spanish. Moreover, these factor groups are compared to those that significantly constrain the occurrence of SPPs in New York City reported by Otheguy and Zentella (2006).

The data set explored in this study was extracted from the Barranquilla corpus which consists of approximately 30 hours of sociolinguistic interviews with twenty residents of Barranquilla. Our informant pool consists of ten men and ten women from middle and working class extraction, whose ages range from 15 to 85 years old. In analyzing our corpus, we conduct a series of statistical regression analyses using a total of twelve internal and five external factor groups. The internal factor groups examined in this study have been used in previous studies of SPP expression by Otheguy and Zentella (2007) and Flores-Ferrán (2002, 2004, 2007). These factor groups include person and number of the subject pronoun, TMA form of the verb, discourse connection of referent, type of lexical content of the verb, and type of clause where the verb appears.

The results of the study indicate that overt SPPs are significantly constrained by one external and six internal factor groups which include continuity of reference, verb regularity, TMA form of the verb, grammatical person and number of the subject, and speaker's age. The findings indicate that the Costeño speakers are different in several respects both from Otheguy and Zentella's NYC Colombian expatriates, and from other 'mainland' dialects. The results for speaker's age show age grading which may indicate a change underway in this community, towards lower rates of SPP expression. As in other studies, switch reference strongly favors pronoun expression, but there is no clear evidence of a general functional effect on the use of overt pronouns. These results, which provide a baseline of data from a noncontact speech community, can be usefully compared with potentially contact-influenced varieties. Studies of SPP use in the Spanish of New York City have relied on recent arrivals as a source of information about usage in the home countries of Spanish speakers. A broad sample of speakers from a non-diasporic home country speech community offers a more reliable point of comparison.

References

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