
Review by Rafael Orozco

Does the paper make a novel contribution to the understanding of the topic under investigation? [max 250 words]

The research reported in the reviewed manuscript investigates the realization of referential subjects in L2 Spanish by adult German native speakers. It offers a detailed examination of how L1 influences the acquisition of subject pronoun expression (SPE). The study is grounded in robust empirical data and employs innovative statistical methods, providing valuable insights into L2 learnability and subject realization patterns. Overall, it corroborates previous empirical findings and makes a novel contribution to the understanding of the topic under investigation. Specifically, it provides new insights into the L2 acquisition of null subject grammars by focusing on German native speakers learning Spanish, a pairing that has not been systematically studied before. The paper employs innovative statistical analytic procedures (MuPDARF) to analyze corpus data, which allows for a detailed comparison of L1 and L2 speaker behavior. The findings reveal that while L2 speakers exhibit target-like use of null subjects and DPs in many contexts, they face persistent difficulties with pronouns. This distinction between different types of overt subjects (DPs and pronouns) and the comprehensive examination of pragmatic and syntactic factors add depth to the existing body of research. Furthermore, the study challenges the interface hypothesis by showing that factors beyond interface complexity, such as L1 influence and L2 learnability, play significant roles in subject realization in L2 Spanish. These contributions advance the understanding of the interplay between L1 and L2 grammars and the specific challenges faced by learners, offering valuable implications for both theoretical and practical applications in language teaching and acquisition scholarship.

Is the empirical content of the paper sound (i.e. the data are collected and presented properly, the experiments are well designed, the statistics is well done, the examples contain no spelling mistakes, etc)? [max 400 words]

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Is the argument coherent and sound, with no major flaws and/or shortcomings, within the context of the theoretical assumptions made by the author? [max 500 words]

Overall, the author presents a coherent and sound argument. The methodology section is detailed, describing the corpus data, participant demographics, and statistical analysis procedures. The use of the CEDEL2 corpus and the MuPDARF procedure is well-justified. The results are presented clearly with appropriate use of tables and figures. The statistical analysis is robust, and the interpretation of the data is logical. No major flaws or shortcomings are apparent within the context of the theoretical assumptions made.

Are there any relevant scholarly works that have been overlooked by the author? If the answer is YES, please provide the full references.

The author and, consequently, the paper will benefit from incorporating some recently published literature on subject pronoun expression. Some of the works listed below would be helpful. They include both those cited in this evaluation and others that would help the author in broadening the theoretical and methodological basis of the investigation.

Bessett, Ryan. M. 2018. Testing English influence on first person singular “yo” subject pronoun expression in Sonoran Spanish. In J. E. MacDonald (Ed.), *Contemporary Trends in Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics: Selected papers from the Hispanic Linguistic Symposium 2015* (pp. 355-372). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ihll.15.17bes>

Carvalho, Ana. M., Rafael Orozco, & Naomi Lapidus Shin. (Eds.). 2015. *Subject Pronoun Expression in Spanish: A Cross-Dialectal Perspective*. Washington: Georgetown University Press. [This volume has a whole section on the acquisition of SPE]

Geeslin, Kimberly and Gudmestad, Aarnes. 2016. Subject expression in Spanish: Contrasts between native and non-native speakers for first and second-person singular referents. *Spanish in Context* 13(1).53-79. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sic.13.1.03gee>

Labov, William. 2010. *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 3: Cognitive and cultural factors*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Orozco, Rafael & Luz Marcela Hurtado. 2021. A Variationist Study of Subject Pronoun Expression in Medellín, Colombia. *Languages* 6(1):5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages6010005>

Shin, Naomi Lapidus & Daniel Erker. 2015. The emergence of structured variability in morphosyntax: Childhood acquisition of Spanish subject pronouns, in Ana M. Carvalho, Rafael Orozco y Naomi Lapidus Shin (eds.), *Subject pronoun expression in Spanish: A cross-dialectal perspective*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press: 169-190.

Tamminga, Meredith, Laurel MacKenzie, and David Embick. 2016. "The Dynamics of Variation in Individuals." *Linguistic Variation* 16(2): 300–336. doi:10.1075/lv.16.2.06tam.

Torres Cacoullos, Rena & Catherine E. Travis. 2018. *Bilingualism in the Community Code-switching and Grammars in Contact*. Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press.

Torres Cacoullos, Rena, and Catherine E. Travis. 2011. Testing convergence via code-switching: Priming and the structure of variable subject expression. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 15: 241–67.

Torres Cacoullos, Rena, and Catherine Travis. 2019. Variationist typology: Shared probabilistic constraints across (non-)null subject languages. *Linguistics* 57: 653–92.

Travis, Catherine E., and Rena Torres Cacoullos. 2012. What do subject pronouns do in discourse? Cognitive, mechanical and constructional factors in variation. *Cognitive Linguistics* 23: 711–48.

Have you seen this paper, its content, the proposed analysis, or the conclusions published in other venues? [If your answer is YES, please add the relevant reference.]

No. This has been my first contact with it.

If you accept the paper with minor revisions, please list the revisions you would advice (you are not required to proofread the paper) [max 500 words]

The paper would benefit from mentioning the main phenomenon that it explores: subject pronoun expression (SPE). In line with recent research on this linguistic variable, the term low pronominal expression languages is preferred over null subject languages. On the other hand, the term high pronominal expression language is preferred over non-null subject language. Regarding the predictor variables analyzed, there is a rich literature that deals with them. The author would benefit from consulting Carvalho, Orozco & Shin's (2015) edited volume. Regarding the variables explored in this investigation, what were traditionally considered linguistic variables or predictors have recently been reclassified as linguistic and cognitive (Labov 2010, Tamminga et al. 2016). The author may wish to update the terminology. In presenting the results, maybe the two random forests (Figures 2 and 3) can be placed next to each other for ease of comparison and reader friendliness. While proofreading the paper, the last two pages are in need of a great deal of attention. Additionally, it is suggested that the author revise the discussion and make it a standalone section which could be renamed Interpretation and discussion. The finding that L2 speakers behave like L1 speakers in terms of acquisition is apparently not new. To the best of my knowledge, it has been around for a while. I understand that Clark and Clark, Krashen, and also Terrell, among others, address that. The issue of the difficulty of the acquisition of pronouns also include native speakers, see for instance Shin & Erker (2015) and Orozco & Hurtado (2021), among others. Finally, some of the contents of section 5 could be moved to the new section to leave a shorter Conclusion section

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