

Information structure and word order acceptability in Cibaeño Dominican Spanish:
an experimental approach

Although Spanish allows flexible word order, research has found that acceptability of different orders to be determined by the discourse [10, 8], thus motivating multiple interface syntactic accounts [10, 6]. Zubizarreta [10] has received considerable attention as experimental researchers [7, 5, 4, 3] have found that different varieties of Spanish do not confirm the predictions of this account, i.e. narrow-focus constituents appear at the clausal right edge and constituents not within the scope of focus scramble leftward. Overall, data from empirical studies suggest that 1) multiple focus-related strategies are available and 2) p-movement does not feature prominently in speaker evaluations.

The current study contributes to this line of investigation by testing the explanatory adequacy of [10] for Cibaeño Dominican Spanish (CDS) via contextualized acceptability judgments (4-point Likert, plus an IDK option) for a variety of discourse-related contexts in an Internet-based questionnaire. Dominican Spanish is claimed to be undergoing structural and typological change (e.g. [2, 1]), such that a rigid SV(O) system is emerging—findings that are partly confirmed by [9], an experimental study of Caribbean Spanish participants. Notably, although that study examined Caribbean Spanish participants age 17 to 71, including individuals from Puerto Rico (N=30), Cuba (N=20), and the Dominican Republic (N=12), it did not analyze country of origin as a variable. Here, we examine experimental results from CDS participants age 17 to 21 (N=34).

A curious asymmetry emerges from the results (Table 1). Comparing transitive-predicate ratings of subject narrow-focus replies (1), a paired, two-tailed t-test reveals no statistical difference between SV and VS ($p=0.308$), but with unaccusative predicates (2), SV is rated statistically higher than VS ($p<0.001$). Zubizarreta [10] predicts preference for VS in Spanish, which is not supported by these results. In all-focus contexts with unaccusative predicates, there is no statistical difference between ratings of SV and VS ($p=0.892$). In all-focus eliciting contexts with transitive predicates, ratings of VSO and VOS reveal that VOS is acceptable ($\mu=3.163$, $s.d.=1.052$) and rated statistically higher than VSO ($p<0.005$), suggesting that word order and intonation mark focus in CDS and that word order is not inflexible as has been claimed for Caribbean Spanish. The findings of this study echo other empirical studies that have found that multiple focus-related strategies available and a p-movement strategy that, while not unattested, does not feature prominently in speaker evaluations.

We test the claim of inflexible word order further via contrastive/corrective replies in CDS (3). However, in this case, the *in situ* object contrast ($\mu=3.77/4$) is rated significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than *ex situ* ($\mu=1.83/4$). This low rating, combined with the existence of focalizing *ser* constructions in CDS (4), suggests that word order rigidity may in fact be epiphenomenal, resulting from other language-internal changes.

Table 1

	transitive predicate				unaccusative predicate			
	all-focus		subject narrow focus		all-focus		subject narrow focus	
	VSO	VOS	SV	VOS	SV	VS	SV	VS
mean	2.606	3.163*	3.364	3.212	3.197	3.213	3.531**	2.898
s.d.	1.176	1.052	0.974	1.043	0.975	1.052	0.815	1.020

Examples

(1) Context: You are at your parents' house when your sister arrives with a bouquet of flowers. Your mother says, "How wonderful! Who gave you those flowers?". She replies:

- a. Me las regaló Silvio. (cIVS)
cl.DAT.1sg cl.ACC.f.3pl give.PST.3sg Silvio
- b. Silvio me las regaló. (ScIV)
Silvio cl.DAT.1sg cl.ACC.f.3pl give.PST.3sg
'Silvio gave me them (as a gift).'

(2) Context: You are attending a reunion of university friends. Your friend Julio leaves briefly to use the restroom. While he is away, Patricia and Maite walk away to buy some drinks. Julio comes back and notices that the group has gotten smaller and asks you: "Who left?" You reply:

- a. Salieron Patricia y Maite. (VS)
go-out.PST.3pl Patricia and Maite
- b. Patricia y Maite salieron. (SV)
Patricia and Maite go-out.PST.3pl
'Patricia and Maite went out.'

(3) Context: Your cousin Lucía and her friend Deysi arrive. Your mother asks "How are you?" She answers, "Great! We went shopping downtown and Luci bought a shirt." Lucía corrects her:

- a. Lucía— Compré UNOS PANTALONES. (in situ focus)
buy.PST.1sg some pants
- b. Lucía—UNOS PANTALONES compré. (ex situ focus)
some pants buy.PST.1sg
'I bought SOME PANTS (not a shirt).'

(4) Llegamos fue ayer. (from Camacho 2016: 14, ex. 2e)
arrived.PST.1pl be.PST.3sg yesterday
'It was yesterday (that) we arrived.'

References

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