

The distribution of null and overt subjects in Guajiro Spanish and the existence of two different conjugations (analytical and synthetic) in Wayuunaiki: living with crosslinguistic-influence?

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Guajiro Spanish is a language contact variety of Spanish spoken by the Guajiro indigenous people of Colombia and Venezuela. The indigenous language, Wayuunaiki, has a double conjugation system: an analytical conjugation and a synthetic conjugation. With respect to the analytical conjugation, we could say that it is a [-Null Subject] language like English is, although it seems to have freedom to omit the overt subject when the subject has been mentioned in previous sentences. However, we can say that, in the case of the synthetic conjugation, Wayuunaiki is a [+Null Subject] language, which means that referential null subjects are possible and that Wayuunaiki, like Spanish, displays null expletives.

This dual conjugation system of Wayuunaiki is linked to whether the verb is stative, active transitive, or active intransitive. This results in an important difference between Wayuunaiki and Spanish, which may create a possible locus for variation in personal pronoun usage between the bilingual and monolingual varieties under analysis.

In this paper, we present an analysis of the use of overt and null subject pronouns produced by a group of Guajiro Spanish speakers (bilingual speakers of Wayuunaiki and Spanish) from the Guajira region in Colombia and a group of Spanish monolingual speakers from the same region, who will serve as the benchmark.

The results suggest that the Wayuunaiki verb class distinction might be playing a role in the distribution of overt subject pronouns in the speech of the bilingual group, a claim that is supported by the fact that overt pronouns are preferred with stative verbs by both the intermediate and the advance bilingual groups, whereas in the monolingual group the realization of overt subjects is higher with active intransitive verbs, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of overt subject pronouns by verb type for the monolingual and bilingual groups

Verb type	Native Spanish	Verb type	Advanced group	Intermediate group
Active intransitive verbs	(41%)	Stative verbs	(39%)	(41%)
Stative verbs	(32%)	Active intransitive verbs	(33%)	(36%)
Active transitive verbs	(24%)	Active transitive verbs	(32%)	(32%)
Total N of tokens	(31%)	Total N of tokens	(35%)	(36%)

While we acknowledge that this use of overt pronouns may be due to non-linguistic reasons, the fact that there seems to be a relationship between the type of verb and the rate of null/overt pronouns in the bilingual cohort, but not in the monolingual data, leads us to attribute this relationship to the fact that in Wayuunaiki the conjugation linked to stative and active intransitive verbs requires obligatory subject pronouns.

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