

# The Development of Subject Pronoun Realization in Latin American Spanish: A Diachronic Corpus Study

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The last three decades have seen a surge in studies on the apparent rise and extension of overt subject pronoun use in varieties of Latin American Spanish (LAS), such as Dominican Spanish (DS) (Toribio 2000). Given LAS's rich history of language contact over the last five centuries, the observed decrease in use of null subjects is likely a result of contact-induced simplification. Following Trudgill's (2011) sociolinguistic typology, this contact would be characterized as short-term adult second-language acquisition which is consistent with the scenario for the African slaves brought to the Americas by the Spanish from the 16th century onward. Indeed, there are numerous non-standard varieties of Spanish spoken by Afro-Hispanic communities throughout Latin America. These Afro-Hispanic Languages of the Americas (AHLAs) have been described as the result of "conventionalized advanced second languages," much in line with Trudgill's proposal (Sessarego 2013; Sessarego & Gutiérrez-Rexach 2017). The L2-difficulty of the rules surrounding null subject use would have led adult learners to overproduce overt subjects. Their errors would have then become nativized in the speech of the next generation. The current "partial" status of null subjects in varieties such as DS could reflect language in change as the variety moves from a null subject language to a non-null subject language à la van Gelderen's (2011) Subject Cycle. What is needed then is a robust diachronic analysis of null subjects. To achieve this, I constructed a corpus of 57 texts from eight countries over four centuries, supplemented by transcriptions of previous fieldwork and historical texts in AHLA varieties. The aim is to determine whether the corpus supports the hypothesis that the rate of overt subject pronouns has risen significantly since contact with African L2-speakers.

## References:

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