Variable Pronominal Use in Colombian Spanish: ¿Qué Pasa en Nueva York?

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This study expands on previous analyses of the variable use of subject personal pronouns (SPPs) in Spanish and has a manifold purpose. I determine the pronominal rate in the New York Colombian speech community. I explore the linguistic and social constraints that condition the use of overt SPPs. I explain the impact of these forces and compare their effects with those on other populations. The data was culled from sociolinguistic interviews with a socially stratified group of Colombian residents of the New York City metropolitan area. I conducted a series of statistical regression analyses to test nine linguistic and eight social constraints explored in previous studies of SPP usage (cf. Flores-Ferrán 2002, 2004, Orozco & Guy 2008, Otheguy, Zentella & Livert 2007). These constraints include discourse style, verb reflexivity, age, educational attainment, sex, and socioeconomic status.

The results offer a reliable point of comparison between SPP expression in Colombia and NYC. They reveal a higher pronominal rate in New York, which may result from the simultaneous influence of contact with English and dialect leveling. The findings further indicate that overt SPPs are significantly affected by one external and five internal constraints including continuity of reference, TMA form of the verb, lexical content of verb, and speaker’s age. These constraints and their effects are, for the most part, the same that condition SPPs in Colombia. They lend validity to Guy’s (2000) theory that the factors constraining language variation and change are consistent within different segments of a speech community. However, some emerging differences between the two communities may indicate traces of dialect leveling in NYC. These findings provide an indication of how language and dialect contact simultaneously affect the Spanish of New York Colombians. They also help increase our understanding of the sociolinguistic forces constraining language variation in Spanish.

References