

Single-language and code-switching strategies in immigrant and heritage varieties: Spanish subject personal pronouns in Toribio's cross-modal hypothesis

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In an important theoretical contribution to our understanding of language contact, Toribio elaborates on the familiar generalization, best known from the work of Silva-Corvalán, that contact varieties resemble monolingual lects of the same language in overall grammar, but differ with regard to (a) the selection of structures and (b) the semantic-pragmatic constraints on the use of structures. In Toribio's valuable elaboration of this basic idea, these peculiar patterns of selection and constraint in the contact variety are not the same in all contexts of use, but differ depending on whether the bilingual is in the single-language mode, or in the codeswitching mode where stretches of speech in the contact variety alternate, rapidly and relatively seamlessly, with stretches in the acrolect. The insight is that the same type of process that distinguishes the contact variety from its monolingual reference lects also distinguishes, within the contact variety, the codeswitching mode from its single-language reference mode.

Toribio's proposal includes the notion of CONVERGENCE, suggesting that the processes of selection of structures and modification of constraints have their origin in acrolectal influences. In this proposal, the peculiar selections and constraints of the contact variety are always at play; however, they are more at play when both languages are highly activated under the codeswitching mode, and less so when the activation is skewed toward the immigrant-heritage language, as the bilingual tries to suppress the mixing. Toribio's proposal is an insightful, substantive, and testable contribution to our understanding of contact speakers.

Toribio's syntactic proposal that it is the codeswitching mode that brings forth the convergence of selections and constraints is congruent with the lexical proposal in Otheguy and García (1993), which attempts to show that lexical insertions from the acrolect into the contact variety are found to different extents in different forms of speech. The forms of speech have to do not with mode, as in Toribio, but with the topic under discussion. A topic related to the host culture leads to an increase of lexical insertions from the acrolect, while a topic related to the

area of origin tends to suppress lexical insertions. Using Spanish as the contact variety and English as the acrolect, it was found that the rate of lexical insertions into Spanish increases when U.S. society is being discussed, and diminishes when Latin American culture, or memories of Latin America, become the subject of conversation. Cohering proposals of this sort, drawn up with data from different domains, are significant for the growth of theoretical understanding of languages in contact.

Toribio supports her proposal through a case-study that focuses on the variable use, and variable position, of subject personal pronouns (henceforth SPPs) in the Spanish of two bilingual U.S. residents. At issue is under what circumstances can the Spanish SPP be overt (the null SPP is the statistically favored alternative) or postposed (the overwhelming statistical favorite is preposed) in three forms of speech: the monolingual reference lects, the single-language mode of the contact variety, and its codeswitching mode.

In a felicitous formulation of the original selections-and-constraints proposal, Toribio conceives of bilinguals as "searching for parallels" between their two languages. Since SPPs are nearly categorically preposed in English, the parallels-seeking strategy should obviously lead, in the contact variety and especially within the codeswitching mode, to more preposed and fewer postposed SPPs. Even though this is a statistical prediction that Toribio cannot test in a case study, she lays the groundwork well, showing that while the two speakers postpose SPPs liberally when speaking Spanish in the single-language mode, their SPPs in the Spanish stretches of their codeswitching mode are mostly preposed.

The bilinguals are expected to behave differently in the two modes not only with regard to the placement of SPPs, but also with regard to their frequency of use, convergence pressures gaining leverage from the fact that, in English, SPPs are not only nearly categorically preposed but also nearly categorically overt. Thus speakers should tend to use more Spanish overts, and fewer nulls, while codeswitching (and fewer overts, and more nulls, while in single-language mode). In keeping with the case-study

format, Toribio focuses on qualitative differences between the two varieties and the two speech modes. The expectation is that the analyst should detect, in the Spanish contact variety, and especially in the codeswitching mode, not simply more overt SPPs, but overt SPPs used in a way that would have been unusual within the Spanish monolingual reference lects, or perhaps even within the single-language mode of the contact lects.

In studying this prediction, the antecedent research on general Spanish, and on its differences with U.S. Spanish, has not served Toribio well. The conventional wisdom is that, in Latin American and Iberian varieties, a good way to understand variable use of Spanish SPPs is to compare the SPPs of Spanish with those of English. Spanish null SPPs are said to be equivalent to plain unstressed English SPPs, and Spanish overt SPPs are said to be equivalent to stressed English SPPs. (Presumably, the consequence would be that, much more than in the reference lects, one is likely to find, in the contact variety, and especially in codeswitching mode, Spanish overts where, contrary to pattern, English would have unstressed.)

This conventional wisdom does not enjoy strong empirical support. Although it is true enough that one can construct sentences where the equivalence holds, one can also construct sentences where it doesn't and, more important, it is a relatively easy matter to find stretches of naturalistic discourse where, contra the generalization, overt Spanish SPPs are clearly equivalent to plain unstressed English ones. The passages in (1) and (2) are from the corpus under construction by Ricardo Otheguy and Ana Celia Zentella at the City University of New York. The informant is from an area of generally low usage of overt SPPs (the highlands of Mexico) who knows no English and is (necessarily) in single-language mode; the passage in (2) is also by an informant, who knows no English and is in single-language mode, but who hails from a high overt-SPP-using area (Cuba).

- (1) [The question is why the sudden interest in doing college work]

Es una larga historia, un poco personal a lo mejor pero... eh... (a) yo en la prepa era un haragán, o sea (b) yo me la pasaba en las canchas de básquetbol y todo eso, y pues ya en la Universidad fue así como que cambió. (308M)

"It's a long story, perhaps a little personal but... ah... in high school I was a bum, in other words, I spent all my time in the basketball courts and all that, and then in college it changed."

- (2) [The question is about baseball players and their high salaries]

(a) Yo creo que (b) ellos son buenos. Aunque (c) yo no sé mucho de deporte pero cuando los (d) veo por la televisión, (e) parecen ser buenos... Parece que sí, porque como que (f) ellos han estudiado tanto y

(g) son campeones, (h) creo que sí (i) se lo merecen. (003U)

"I think that they are good. Although I don't know much about sports but when [I] see them on TV, [they] seem good... It seems that way because they have studied so much and are champions, [I] think that [they] do deserve it."

The English equivalent of the overt in (1a) could perhaps be stressed: *in high school I was a bum*, but this is unlikely; more likely, the English SPP would be reduced from /ay/ to schwa, and the stress would be as in *in high school I was a bum*. In (1b) the Spanish overt is not at all equivalent to a stressed pronoun in English, where the stress would almost certainly fall on either *all* or *spent*. In (2), the Spanish overts could easily be thought of as English stressed in (2b) and (2c), but not in (2a). In (2f) the stress could be in the pronoun, *because they have studied so much*, but it is more likely to be in the participle or in *so*, *because they've studied so much*. Significantly, in Toribio's example (11), Speaker A's own overt SPPs, even when in the single-language mode, are not necessarily equivalent to English stressed pronouns; Toribio's (11a) is repeated here in (3).

- (3) ... y iba feliz, contenta, cantando unas canciones, apreciando la belleza del de los árboles, y en eso oyó una canción de un pajarito cantando. (a) Ella paró a escucharlo. Al parar, (b) no sabía ella que a detrás de ella iba un lobo persiguiéndola.
"... and she was happy, content, singing some songs, taking in the beauty of the trees, and right then she heard a song of a bird singing. She stopped to listen to him. On stopping she didn't know that behind her there was a wolf following her."

Here the English equivalent *she* of the *ella* in (3a) and (3b) could perhaps have a full /i/ vowel and be stressed, *she stopped to listen*, *she didn't know*, but this is unlikely; we would probably get a reduced vowel in the SPP, and stress as in *she stopped to listen* and *she didn't know*.

There is, then, no hard equivalence between Spanish overt and English stressed, not even in this bilingual's usage. To understand the appearance of a Spanish overt SPP, much more has to be done than simply equate it with an English stressed SPP. Any notion that the Spanish Latin American or Iberian baseline, or the baseline of U.S. bilinguals in single-language mode, can be expressed in terms of such a clear-cut equivalence between the languages is illusory.

In a related but separate phase of the analysis, Toribio correctly points out that switch reference, disambiguation, and contrast are among the factors that statistically favor overt SPPs in Spanish. To support the thesis at issue in her case-study format, Toribio would produce qualitative, comparative illustrations of the tendencies in the two modes, as she did in the case of SPP position. She

would then show her bilinguals' speech behavior in single-language mode, while strongly under the influence of the constraints that favor overts for switch reference, disambiguation, and contrast; and then show them in the codeswitching mode, demonstrably less influenced by the constraints or abandoning them altogether.

The problem is that at least Speaker A's usages in the single-language mode here illustrate not the long end of the statistical tendencies that manifest the constraints, but rather the short ends of the skewings. The overts in his single-language mode, in (3a) and (3b), are definitely neither a switch reference (*she* is the continuing subject in both), nor a disambiguation (*paró a escucharlo* couldn't have been anybody but her), and are unlikely to be contrastive. Consequently, when we do see the same speaker in the codeswitching mode using overts in non-switch-reference, non-disambiguating, non-contrastive environments, we're not being exposed to the comparison between modes that would support the thesis at issue, because he is doing the same in both modes.

Toribio thus leaves us in a good place for scientists to be: a good, original idea that, in her words, "allows for the formulation of principled predictions that may be profitably understood as a point of departure for future

work" (p. 172), and one that has been partially supported by good case-study data. As all good ideas, however, Toribio's proposal can run into empirical problems that make that future work even more challenging. To meet the challenge, it will be in order to discard the excessively reductionist equivalence between Spanish overts and English stressed, and to deal with great care with the notions of switch-reference, disambiguation, and contrast. It will also be important to work on the original selections-and-constraints idea, especially to try to clarify what is meant by "pragmatic-semantic constraints". The hyphen of this familiar formulation bridges the gap between grammar and usage that is at the heart of the original proposal (that contact varieties differ from the monolingual reference lects in usage but not in grammar), a proposal that has been insightfully expanded in Toribio's cross-modal hypothesis.

Reference

- Otheguy, R. & Garcia, O. (1993). Convergent conceptualizations as predictors of degree of contact in U.S. Spanish. In A. Roca & J. M. Lipski (eds.), *Spanish in the United States: Linguistic contact and diversity*, pp. 135–154. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.