

## **Toward an In-Depth Analysis of Subject Pronoun Expression: A View from Xalapa, Mexico**

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The alternation between null and overt pronominal subjects, i.e., subject pronoun expression (SPE) has been investigated by variationist sociolinguists since the 1970s. The effects of the verb on SPE have been explored since the 1980s, mainly in terms of lexical categories (Bentivoglio 1980; Enríquez 1984), establishing that psychological or mental activity verbs favor overt subjects while external activity verbs favor null subjects (Carvalho et al. 2015). Meanwhile, social constraints on SPE have not been sufficiently explored (Orozco & Hurtado 2021). This study seeks to answer questions that emerged from increased SPE research during the 21st century. We probe the effects of eight predictors (four internal and four external) on 3,760 tokens from a socially-stratified corpus of Spanish spoken in Xalapa, Mexico. The constraints explored include grammatical person and number, TMA, age, sex, education, and socioeconomic status.

Our results reveal an overall pronominal rate of 25% and internal conditioning congruent with findings throughout the Hispanic World (cf. Carvalho et al. 2015; Lastra & Martín-Butragueño 2015; Otheguy & Zentella 2012). Grammatical number and person exerts the strongest pressure among linguistic constraints while speaker age does so among social predictors. The robust effect of age sets Xalapa apart from most other Hispanic speech communities, as SPE is not known to be strongly conditioned by social predictors (Carvalho et al. 2015:). When age does condition SPE, its effect is not as strong as it is in this speech community. Concurrently, the pronominal rate found among teenagers (10%) is below the lowest overall pronominal rate in the Hispanic world. The lower pronominal rate among younger speakers is consonant with findings in other varieties of Spanish such as Dominican (Alfaraz 2015), Mexico City (Lastra & Martín-Butragueño 2015), Colombian (Orozco & Hurtado 2021), and Peninsular Spanish (Prada Perez 2015). Moreover, circumstantiated analyses of the intersection between age, education, socioeconomic status and grammatical person and number uncovers that speakers currently in college favor the first person plural while those with a postgraduate education favor the first person singular. This finding suggests that university students seem to have an increased sense of collectivity whereas those with further education appear more individualistic. The effects of pronominal subject + verb collocations reveal, among other things, opposing tendencies for forms corresponding to a single verb. For instance, *era* 'I was' promotes overt subjects whereas *son* 'they are' has the opposite effect. Thus, our analysis debunks the premise that the effect of the verb on SPE can be accurately analyzed in terms of lexical categories or verb infinitives.

Our analytical approach is both flexible and fine-grained, thus improving our explanatory power of pronominal expression. We use binary logistic multilevel models and logistic regression followed by average marginal effects for SPE to provide a more intuitive, high resolution comparative panorama than prior studies. Marginal results improve interpretability, reliability between studies, and causal relevance, especially for interactions. Further, the study of the effects of age shall help determine, among other things, whether we are in the presence of an acquisitional feature also possibly present in other pro-drop languages. (500 words)

## References

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