



Morphosyntactic variation and gender agreement in three Afro-Andean dialects

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of gender agreement in three little studied Afro-Andean dialects: Chinchano Spanish (Perú), Yungueño Spanish (Bolivia) and Chota Valley Spanish (Ecuador). Data is presented showing a variety of DP gender agreement configurations significantly divergent from standard Spanish. A unified account for these phenomena is proposed combining quantitative methodology and several forms of data collection with a Minimalist approach to data explanation and interpretation. The provided analysis charts evolution and variation of gender agreement, arguing that the parallel development of gender agreement in these three Afro-Hispanic contact varieties can be explained by an approach in which change takes place along paths set by universal properties of grammar (feature valuation, locality of agreement, gradience of fitness in grammatical development, etc.).

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1. Introduction and socio-historical background

The study of Spanish dialects and morphological variation in different regions of Spain and Latin America was a landmark of traditional philological approaches. Using the tools and methods of linguistic geography, comparative grammar and structuralism, several schools flourished at both sides of the Atlantic during the 50s and 60s. The generative turn sparked by Chomsky's revolution represented a change in focus which slowly had an impact on existing theoretical perspectives, with a new emphasis on abstraction, generalizations mostly drawn from speakers' intuitions, and data sets based on individual grammaticality judgments. The Principles and Parameters approach (Chomsky, 1981) brought new insights to the formal study of morphological variation, with its reliance on the notions of core and periphery, and the impact of different parameter settings on morphosyntactic properties such as inflection and case. This trend was furthered by the Microparametric perspective of the late 80s and 90s (Benincà, 1989; Black and Motapanyane, 1996). The emergence of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 1993), the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995) and, in recent years, of the Biolinguistic perspective (Chomsky, 2001, 2005; Jenkins, 2000) has brought new theoretical tools to the formal study of morphosyntactic variation and to contact phenomena.

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The Biolinguistic perspective looks at language as a natural object, subject to the laws and principles of evolution (Larson et al., 2010; DiSciullo and Boeckx, 2011). Evolution is a pervasive phenomenon in the natural world. Languages, like species, adapt to the surrounding environment and evolve, triggering differentiation and variation. This is a well-known fact that can be traced diachronically across a number of different dimensions, triggering phonological, syntactic or semantic change (Keenan, 1994). Theories of syntactic change have focused on how to model change in syntactic properties, as a product of competing grammars (Kroch, 1989), parameter or micro-parameter resetting (Lightfoot, 1998) or as a change in the attraction/realization property of functional categories (Roberts and Roussou, 2003). Additionally, change and variation can be internally or externally driven. The most significant type of externally-driven variation is contact-induced variation. In general, the term ‘evolution’ will be used in this paper to refer to varying patterns across dialects/idioms. The term ‘change’ is normally used for shorter-span patterns whereas the term ‘evolution’ is reserved to refer to diversity occurring across millennia at many levels of the biological organization of organisms. Nevertheless, adopting an internal evolutionary perspective actually dilutes this distinction, in the sense that it can be assumed that languages change/evolve according to the external (social) environment, as species do in the natural environment.

The present study has a twofold aim. On one hand, it provides data on three little studied Afro-Andean dialects (cf. also Gutiérrez-Rexach and Sessarego, 2011; Sessarego and Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2011, 2012a,b). These data illustrate a variety of DP gender concord or agreement configurations significantly divergent from standard Spanish (stSp). On the other hand, it extends our previous joint work and proposes a unified account for such phenomena by combining a sociolinguistic methodology of data collection and a Minimalist approach to data explanation and interpretation. In doing so, the current work enhances the dialog between formal syntax and variationist studies (Sessarego, 2013a). It also provides an evolutionary analysis of variable gender agreement, one of the most common features of Afro-Hispanic languages and SLA varieties of Spanish (Sessarego, 2013b). It is shown that the parallel development of gender agreement in three Afro-Hispanic contact varieties – Chinchano Spanish (Perú), Yungueño Spanish (Bolivia) and Chota Valley Spanish (Ecuador) – can be explained by a mixed approach in which change takes place along paths set by universal properties of grammar.

The African presence in the Andes can be dated back to the very beginning of the Spanish discovery and colonization of these South American lands.² It is generally believed that the blacks who entered the region during this first phase of conquest (approximately up to the mid 17th Century) were for the most part not bozales (fresh from Africa) (Bowser, 1974). They were rather original from Spain and other already settled Latin American colonies. They were also usually educated in the Christian faith and could presumably speak good approximations to the language spoken by their masters (Sessarego, 2011a, 2013c, 2014a).

Conversely, after 1650 and due to the exponential decrease of the native population, bigger contingents of bozales were imported. They replaced the native workforce decimated by European diseases and the extreme working conditions imposed by the Spanish colonizers (Brockington, 2006). The language varieties that emerged from this second African wave, mainly proceeding directly from Africa, exhibited a variety of African transfers and common L2 errors (Lipski, 2005), which sometimes crystallized in the language varieties learned by the following slave generations. In some cases, these language features have been passed on from generation to generation and can still be attested in some of the most isolated Afro-Hispanic communities scattered across the Andean region. Three of such post-bozal dialects are Chinchano Spanish (CS), Yungueño Spanish (YS) and Chota Valley Spanish (CVS), spoken respectively in the rural surroundings of Chíncha (Coastal Peru), in the Yungas Valley (Department of La Paz, Bolivia) and in the Chota Valley (Departments of Imbabura and Carchi, Ecuador) (Lipski, 1987; McWhorter, 2000).

The Land Reforms of the 1950s had a huge effect on the lives of Afro-Andeans from both a cultural and an economic point of view.³ The social transformations triggered by this change also had an effect on the language spoken by these speech communities. Access to public education and the higher degree of mobility achieved after the elimination of forced work on haciendas particularly intensified the contact between the traditional Afro-Hispanic dialects and the local standard varieties of

² Blacks were introduced in these regions now known as Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia by the first decades of the 16th century by the *conquistadores*, who used them as soldiers and servants in many campaigns of exploration and settlement. Black slaves were active participants in the colonization process. Torres Saldamando (1900:409) states that: “El primer negro que pisó tierra peruana fue el que en 1526 desembarcó en Tumbes con Alonso de Molina cuando fue reconocido este puerto por los de Pizarro.” (The first black who entered Peru disembarked at Tumbes with Alonso de Molina when that port was reconnoitered by Pizarro’s men).

³ African slavery lasted in the Andes for more than three centuries. In Bolivia, it was formally abolished in 1826, immediately after the country’s independence from Spain (Crespo, 1977; Brockington, 2006); in Ecuador, formal abolition took place in 1854, under the presidency of José María Urbina (Bouisson, 1997); while in Peru, blacks’ freedom was declared by president Ramón Castilla y Markezado only in 1856, more than three decades after the independence from Spain of 1824 (Aguirre, 2005). Nevertheless, the official abolition of slavery, in practice, did not provide blacks with the civil rights enjoyed by white and mestizo citizens. As a matter of fact, they were not allowed to receive an education and they did not enjoy political representation. Moreover, they were forced to work as unpaid peons on the lands belonging to the haciendas, they did not own lands, and they were provided with just a small field to work for their own survival during their time off. This system lasted until the Land Reform, which took place in Bolivia in 1954, in Ecuador in 1964 and in Peru in 1975. This reform provided blacks with the right to vote and to receive an education. It also freed them from forced servitude and turned them into small landowners by distributing the lands which formerly belonged to the haciendas (Busdiecker, 2006; Chalá Cruz, 2006; Del Carmen Cuba, 2002).

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