

¿Cómo tú estás? A variationist analysis of word order in Caribbean Spanish

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Spanish direct *wh*-questions allow two possible orders of subject and verb: the inversion of subject and verb (VS), and the non-inversion (SV), as can be seen respectively in example (1) and (2). The latter is not canonical but has been observed in Caribbean Spanish. Previous studies have investigated what linguistic factors constrain this phenomenon (Lipski, 1977; Heap, 1990; Ordóñez & Olarrea, 2006; Brown and Rivas, 2011). Using a variationist analysis, the current study shows that two linguistic factors not previously proved in the literature (i.e. epistemic verbs and singular subject) significantly favor the non-inversion of subject and verb in direct *wh*-questions in Caribbean Spanish.

(1) ¿Cómo estás tú?

How are _{SING-2nd} you _{SING-2nd}

How are you?

(2) ¿Cómo tú estás?

How you _{SING-2nd} are _{SING-2nd}

How are you?

Previous studies proposed several hypotheses to explain the emergence of this non-inversion of subject and verb in direct *wh*-questions in Caribbean Spanish. A few of them investigated factors that constrain this phenomenon. However, these studies either were based on researchers' intuition (Lipski, 1977), on grammaticality judgement tests (Heap, 1990; Ordóñez & Olarrea, 2006), or had very few manipulated cases (Lantolf, 1980). One of the few studies that employed variationist analysis on this phenomenon was Brown and Rivas (2011). Nevertheless, they limited their data to Puerto Rican Spanish, and the effects of subject person, subject number, epistemic verb and copula need further investigation. The current study provides a variationist analysis on natural speech of three dialects of Spanish, namely the Spanish of Puerto Rico, Cuba and Dominican Republic. The study investigates whether the non-inversion of subject and verb in *wh*-questions is proved in these three dialects based on natural speech data, and which linguistic factors constrain this phenomenon.

The study employed the corpus *La lengua hablada de la generación joven de San Juan, La Habana y Santo Domingo* (Reyes Beniez, 2001). In total 60 sociolinguistic interviews were used, 20 for each city. The speech of both the interviewers and interviewees were examined. All the direct *wh*-questions with overt subject were identified and coded for the dependent variable: the

inversion or non-inversion of subject and verb. These interrogative questions were also coded for the following independent variables: 1) subject form (pronominal, lexical, heavy subject); 2) subject person (first, second, third); 3) subject number (singular, plural); 4) verb type (epistemic, copula, other); 5) question type (informative; non-informative); and 6) dialect (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic).

In total 496 tokens were coded and submitted to logistic regression in Rbrul. The results showed that second and first person subject, non-informative questions, pronominal subject, epistemic and other verbs, as well as singular subject promoted the non-inversion of subject and verb. The variable dialect was not significant.

In conclusion, the use of the non-inversion of subject and verb was prevalent in the corpus analyzed and showed similar patterns in the three Spanish dialects examined. This study contributes to the literature on word order in Caribbean Spanish by showing the role of two linguistic factors not previously proved in the literature: epistemic verbs and singular subject favor non-inversion. Such findings should be explored in the future in order to further examine the role of semantic and pragmatic factors in word order patterns.

References

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