

# Anaphora resolution in the non-native Spanish grammar of French and English speakers: The role (or lack thereof) of cross-linguistic structural similarity

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# What

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**A formal proposal of linguistic theory**

Recent views of the null subject parameter (Holmberg 2005; Sheehan 2006)

To revisit:

- Carminati's (2002) null – overt subject divide in anaphora resolution
- The Interface Hypothesis (i.e. Sorace, 2011) account of non-native data.

# Why

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- need to go beyond traditional or classic proposals or the null subject parameter to account for anaphora resolution in L2A
- empirical data that does not abide by Carminati's (2002) PAH
- the Interface Hypothesis (i.e. Sorace, 2011) is too broad of a generalization: the categorical status of overt pronouns in the L1 and the L2 may be better predictors of learners' choices in relation to anaphora resolution

# Null vs overt subjects

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## **Position of Antecedent Hypothesis (PAH)** (Carminati, 2002)

In [+null subject] languages, null and overt subject pronouns differ with respect to antecedent choice in ambiguous constructions, in the case of both forward and backward anaphora

# Anaphora

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## FORWARD ANAPHORA

Juan<sub>i</sub> saludó a Pablo<sub>j</sub> mientras  $\emptyset_i$  / él<sub>j</sub> tocaba la guitarra

Juan<sub>i</sub> greeted Pablo<sub>j</sub> while  $\emptyset_i$  / he<sub>j</sub> was playing the guitar

## BACKWARD ANAPHORA

Mientras  $\emptyset_i$  / él<sub>j</sub> tocaba la guitarra, Juan<sub>i</sub> saludó a Pablo<sub>j</sub>

While  $\emptyset_i$  / he<sub>j</sub> was playing the guitar, Juan<sub>i</sub> greeted Pablo<sub>j</sub>

# Previous results

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The PAH holds for:

L1 speakers of [+null subject] Romance languages

→ *null and overt subjects*

L2 speakers of [+null subject] Romance languages (with L1 English)

→ *null subjects* (ie. Mayol, 2009 for Catalan; Alonso Ovalle, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2011 for Spanish)

**but NOT for overt subjects**

ie. Sorace & Filiaci (2006) for Italian; Jegerski et al. (2011) for Spanish; Bel et al. (2010) for Catalan

# Previous results

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**The PAH doesn't hold for overt subjects...**

... because their distribution involves the syntax-pragmatics interface

**The Interface Hypothesis**

(Sorace & Filiaci, 2006; Sorace, 2011, among many others)

Structures involving an interface between syntax and another cognitive domain are problematic for non-primary language acquisition, bilingual language acquisition and language attrition.

**BUT...**

# Previous results

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The PAH: Italian and Spanish

Results from Spanish (native speakers) are less clear-cut than results for Italian (Filiaci, 2011; Filiaci et al., 2013)

## **WHY?**

Spanish overt pronouns are relatively insensitive to syntactic prominence compared to Italian pronouns but also to null subjects in both languages (Filiaci et al., 2013:16)



# Previous results

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**THUS...**

Accessibility to Noun Phrase antecedents may be determined by the prosodic and referential characteristics of overt pronouns (Ariel, 1990, 2006) - (Cardinaletti, 1997; Cardinaletti & Starke, 1999).

# Traditional view of the null subject parameter

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Chomsky (1981); Rizzi (1982, 1986); Jaeggli (1982)

**English and French** = [-pro-drop]

**Spanish** = [+pro-drop]

- **null subjects as in (1)**

1) *[e] he encontrado el libro*

("I found the book")

*[e] está lloviendo*

("It is raining")

- **free inversion in simple sentences as in (2)**

2) *[e] ha comido Juan*

("Juan ate")

- **long wh-movement of subject as in (3)**

3) *el hombre<sub>i</sub> que me pregunto a quién [e]<sub>i</sub> había visto* ("the man x such that I wonder who x saw")

- **empty resumptive pronouns in embedded clauses as in (4)**

4) *esta es la chica<sub>i</sub> que me pregunto quién cree que [e]<sub>i</sub> lo hizo* ("this is the girl that I wonder who thinks that she did it")

- **apparent violations of the \**[that-t]* filter as in (5)**

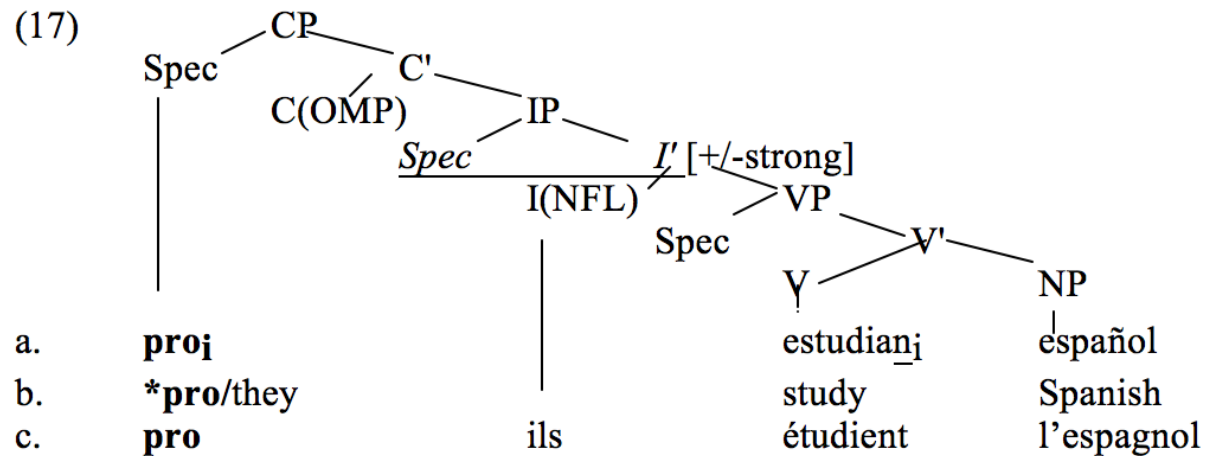
5) *¿quién<sub>i</sub> crees que [e]<sub>i</sub> se irá?*

("who do you think (that) will leave")

# Traditional view of the null subject parameter

Early on Authier (1992) and Roberge (1986, 1990) questioned the status of French as a [-null subject] language

In L2A Liceras et al. (1998)



# Traditional view of the null subject parameter

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The stylistic value of Spanish subject pronouns (Liceras, 1988)

- no subset-superset relationship between English and Spanish

- **Optional versus obligatory *pro***

- |     |                           |                               |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (6) | Ellos salieron a las ocho | ("They left at eight")        |
| (7) | *Ello llovió mucho ayer   | ("It rained a lot yesterday") |

- **Indefinite or definite**

- |      |                                                    |                                                 |
|------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| (9)  | <i>pro</i> Lllaman a la puerta                     | ("They knock on the door")                      |
| (10) | Lola dijo que <i>pro</i> han confirmado la noticia | ("Lola said that they have confirmed the news") |

# The null subject parameter revisited

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Overt subject pronouns in [+null subject languages] can be:

## Weak

- phonetic realization of the null subjects
- marked version

## Strong

- emphatic
- the equivalent of *moi, toi...*

[Holmberg, 2005; Sheehan, 2006]

**When? How?...**

# The null subject parameter revisited

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Subject pronouns in Spanish / French / English

(15a) — telefonará mañana

(15b) **Él/ella** telefonará mañana [weak]

(15c) **Él/ella** telefonará mañana [strong]

(16a) **Je** téléphonerai demain [clitic]

(16b) **moi**, je téléphonerai demain [strong]

\*je et tu, nous téléphonerons demain

moi et toi, nous téléphonerons demain

(17) I will call tomorrow [weak]

# The study

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In order to investigate anaphoric resolution in native and non-native speakers of Spanish, we developed an acceptability judgment task in which participants were asked to rate a possible antecedent for a null or overt pronoun.

## SAMPLE EXPERIMENTAL ITEM

Juan saludó a Pablo mientras \_\_\_\_ / él tocaba la guitarra.

*¿Quién tocaba la guitarra?*

*List A:*    **Juan** es el hombre que tocaba la guitarra    [Subject]

*List B:*    **Pablo** es el hombre que tocaba la guitarra    [Object]

*List C:*    **Ni Juan ni Pablo, otro hombre**    [Neither]

1	2	3	4	5
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# The study

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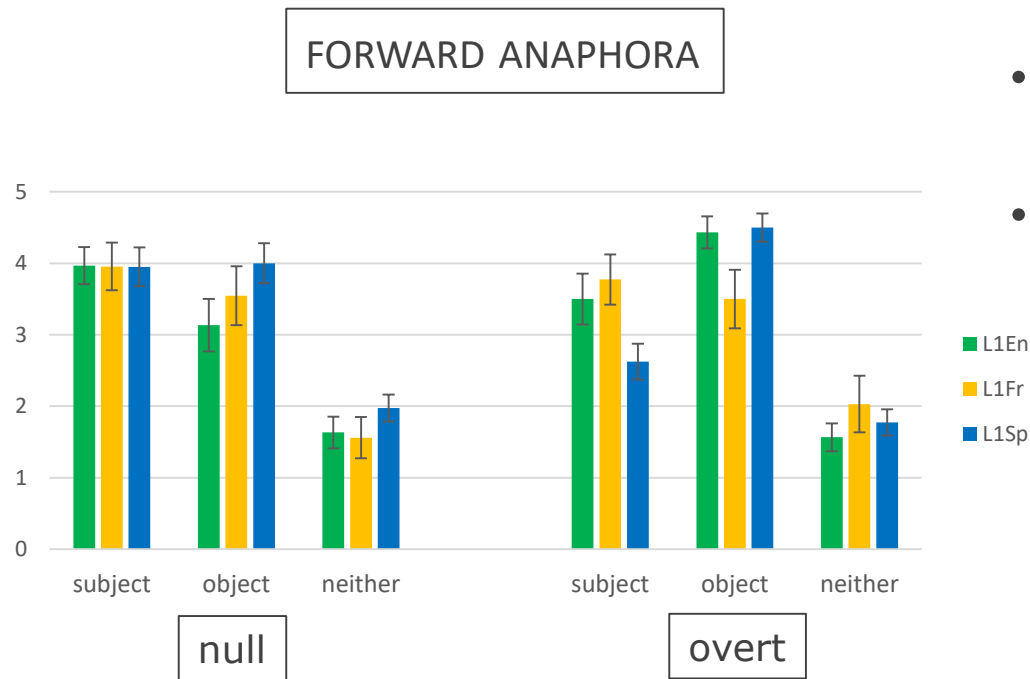
The following groups participated in this experiment:

- 15 L1 English – L2 Spanish
- 11 L1 French – L2 Spanish
- 20 L1 Spanish

The L1 Spanish speakers were recruited in Mexico and the L2 speakers were recruited in Canada.

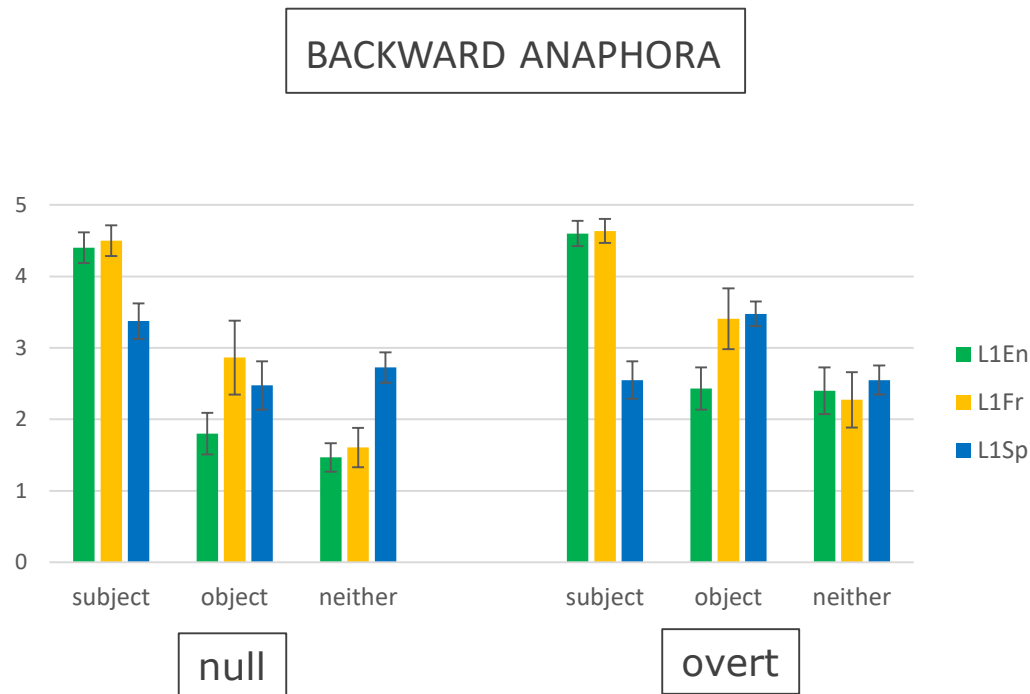


# Results



- groups do not differ significantly with null subjects
- with overt subjects:
  - L1Sp and L1En groups pattern together in a preference for object antecedents
  - L1Fr group shows a trend towards a preference for subject antecedents

# Results

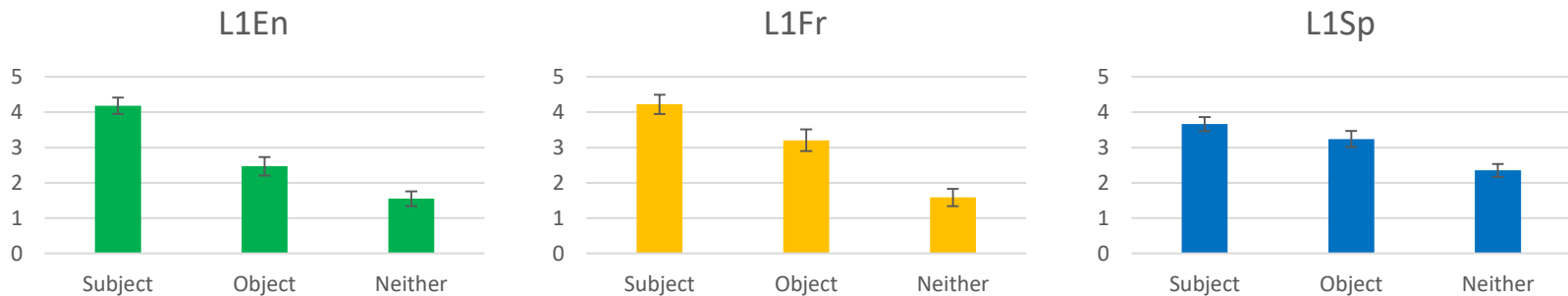


- while there are some differences in ratings between groups, all groups rate subject antecedents significantly higher than object antecedents with null subjects
- with overt subjects:
  - L1Sp group rates object significantly higher than subject antecedents
  - L1En and L1Fr groups rate subject significantly higher than object antecedents

# Results

Native and non-native speakers' ratings of null and overt subjects with different antecedents did not vary significantly by type of anaphora ( $F(4,86)=2.116$ ,  $p=.101$ ) and so we will consider forward and backward anaphora together.

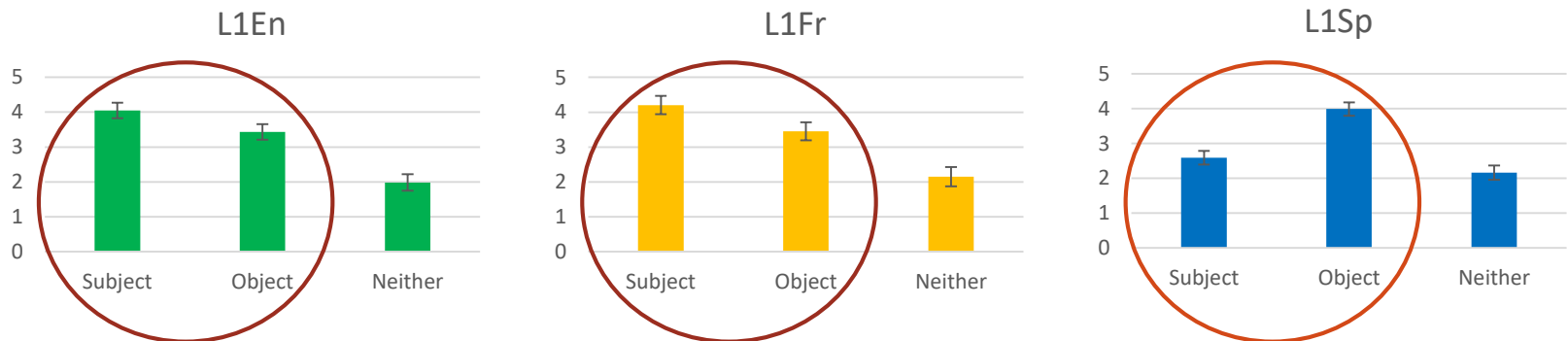
## NULL SUBJECTS



- though mean ratings vary somewhat between groups, overall we can see that all speakers significantly prefer to coindex the subject with the null pronoun, followed by the object and neither of the two ( $p<.000$ )

# Results

## OVERT SUBJECTS



- unlike with null subjects, the native and non-native groups display significantly different preferences for subject and object antecedents ( $p=.004$ )
- L1Sp group significantly prefers to coindex overt subjects with object antecedents, and they also rate subject antecedents higher than neither
- L1En and L1Fr groups, on the other hand, significantly prefer subject antecedents, like with null subjects

# Conclusions

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## L1 Spanish

The ratings for subject antecedents with overt subjects higher than expected (mean = 2.6) under the PAH

**HOWEVER**

This is to be expected if overt pronouns are interpreted as weak... and patterns nicely with the results reported by Filiaci et al. (2013) using an online methodology and non-ambiguous tasks.

This also illustrates the lack of sensitivity of Spanish overt pronouns compared to those in Italian.

# Conclusions

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## L1 English & L1 French

The results for forward anaphora suggest that **it is easier for the L1 English group to interpret Spanish pronouns as ‘strong’** because they do not have the dichotomy (clitic, strong) that is available in French.

## IN OTHER WORDS...

**Interpreting Spanish pronouns seems to be more difficult for the L1 French group**, for whom Spanish pronouns can be ‘clitics’ or ‘weak’ but are not interpreted as the ‘strong’ French subject pronouns (*moi*) that are in complementary distribution with clitic subject pronouns (*je*) in French.

# Conclusions

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## Forward vs. Backward Anaphora

The L1 English group patterns with the L1 Spanish group in the case of forward anaphora, but not in the case of backward anaphora, where it patterns with the L1 French group.

**WHY?**

Linear proximity overrides the interpretation of overt Spanish pronouns as strong and results in a preference for the object antecedent.

# Conclusions

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Recent syntactic proposals should/could provide a refined analysis intended to explain the degree of markedness of 'weak' overt pronouns in the various [+null subject] languages.

The superficial structural similarity which is what putting both English and French under the same parametric option (in the traditional / classic view) amounts to, does not provide an accurate framework for investigating the acquisition of the anaphoric preferences of null and overt subjects in Spanish or other [+null subject languages] by L1 English and L1 French speakers.



# Conclusions

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We need sophisticated experimental data to...

- provide information as to HOW weak and overt pronouns that have the same lexical realization are interpreted
- provide strong support for the proposal that linear proximity may influence the different anaphoric preferences shown by L1 English speakers in forward and backward anaphora

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