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Introduction

1.1. General Introduction and Objectives of This Study

During the last decade, the study of syntactic microvariation has received increasing attention. The main goal of syntactic microvariation is testing syntactic hypotheses and possible correlations between syntactic variables across closely related languages (Barbiers & Cornips 2001; Cornips & Poletto 2005). In particular, recent syntactic dialect atlas projects have taken such a research path. Two examples of current European projects aimed at studying microvariation are the Northern Italian syntactic dialect atlas (ASIS) and the syntactic atlas of Dutch dialects (SAND) (see Barbiers & Cornips 2001).¹ So far, little attention has been paid to the study of microvariation across Spanish dialects, especially to microparametric syntax across Afro-Hispanic contact varieties. From a theoretical point of view, what is fascinating about these languages is their richness in constructions that would be considered ungrammatical in standard Spanish.

The majority of the dialects that emerged in Latin America at the time of slavery from the contact of African languages and Spanish are not ‘radical

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¹ More information about the ASIS (Atlante Sintattico d’Italia) and SAND (Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch Dialects) projects can be found at http://asis-cnr.unipd.it and http://meertens.nl/projecten/sand/sandeng.html.
creoles,\textsuperscript{2} languages highly influenced by substrate patterns, which would be unintelligible for a standard Spanish (stSp) speaker; rather, these varieties often consist of comprehensible vernaculars with a comparatively reduced inflectional morphology, and with other clear traces of fossilized second language acquisition strategies. Besides, from a purely linguistic point of view, these dialects might be considered even more natural systems, as they contain constructions which survived leveling phenomena imposed elsewhere by standardization processes (Weiß 2001).

To indicate the nature of their situation, halfway between ‘radical-creoles’ and standard systems, the terms ‘semi-creoles’ (Holm 1992) and ‘partially restructured languages’ (Holm 2004) have been proposed in the literature on contact linguistics. Their close relatedness to the standard can provide linguists with a great empirically-based testing ground for formal hypotheses (see Kayne 1996, 2000).

This work has a twofold aim. The first objective is to provide a syntactic description of the Afro-Bolivian Spanish (ABS) Determiner Phrase (DP). This dialect presents phenomena that offer a real challenge to current linguistic theory. For this reason, the present investigation accurately explores ABS DP structures. This analysis provides a testing ground for current linguistic hypotheses, and when appropriate, it proposes new solutions in light of the collected empirical data. The second goal is to shed light on the origin of ABS by analyzing the available sociohistorical data as well as the linguistic evidence found in this language. Particularly, I will test whether a creole hypothesis (Lipski 2008) can be proposed for this language or a different explanation should be provided instead.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The language architecture assumed in this study is the one provided by the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001). According to this research program, the language faculty, the module of the human mind devoted to language, is defined by a small number of syntactic operations (\textit{Merge}, \textit{Move}, and \textit{Agree}). The cyclical application of \textit{Merge} and \textit{Move} builds constituent

\textsuperscript{2} In this book the expression ‘radical creole’ is mentioned on several occasions. In the literature on creolistics, this expression is often used to indicate that the language formed rapidly, within a generation, usually via nativization of a pidgin. Nevertheless, in the current work, I am employing it with the meaning of ‘language remarkably divergent from the superstrate,’ without necessarily referring to its stages of formation.
structure. The operation Merge selects two items from the collection of lexical elements (Numeration) and combines them. The operation Move creates a copy of a certain element and merges it in a different part of the syntactic structure. The syntactic constituent must receive an overt form; this overt realization occurs at Spell-Out, where the derivation splits and results in two independent paths, leading to two separate representations: Logic Form (LF) and Phonetic Form (PF).

Agree, on the other hand, does not create constituent structure. The operation Agree is a formal mechanism for valuation of certain features (unvalued) and deletion of others (uninterpretable) in the narrow syntax. In fact, in the most recent formulations of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 2001, 2002), syntactic derivations are viewed as strictly dependent on feature valuation and checking. The distinction between interpretable and uninterpretable features has proven very useful. Several features have an interpretation at Logic Form (LF); thus they are semantically-interpretable features. Other features lack such semantic import and are present to trigger the necessary operations during the derivation. Said uninterpretable features have to be matched via Agree and are finally deleted before Spell-Out.

(1)

\[ \text{CS} \xrightarrow{\text{Merge, Move, Agree}} \text{Lexicon} \rightarrow \text{Spell-Out} \]

\[ \text{LF} \]

\[ \text{PF} \]

1.3. Organization of the Volume

Chapter 1 consists of a general overview of this work. It presents the current study’s objectives as well as the theoretical framework assumed to analyze the data.

Chapter 2 provides a sociohistorical and linguistic account for the development of Afro-Bolivian Spanish to shed light on its origin.

Chapter 3 illustrates a variety of linguistic models that have been proposed to account for language variability. This chapter elaborates on the importance of enhancing a stronger dialogue between formal generative theory and sociolinguistic methodology, in line with recent microparametric studies (Adger & Smith 2005; Barbiers & Cornips 2001). In doing this,
chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology employed for data collection.

Chapter 4 offers a description of the most important issues concerning the generative study of the nominal domain during the last forty years. It begins with an account of the main assumptions behind the stipulation of the DP Hypothesis, and then illustrates several related studies that have contributed to the evolution of syntactic theories of DP. Chapter 4 provides an outline of frameworks and ideas that will be evaluated in this book according to the empirical data encountered for ABS.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed account of bare nouns in ABS. It tests Chierchia’s (1998) Nominal Mapping Parameter and speculates on the nature of the ABS nominal domain in light of Longobardi’s (1994) generalization on the structure of DPs.

Chapter 6 surveys N-ellipsis in stSp and ABS. It analyzes the differences and similarities encountered in these two languages. Results will provide a testing ground for previous theoretical models developed exclusively on stSp data. Microparametric findings will also allow us to build novel generalizations to account for the cross-linguistic facts.

Chapter 7 focuses on processes of gender and number agreement across the ABS DP. The analysis assumes current minimalist models of feature valuation (Pesetsky & Torrego 2007), which partially contrast with previous assumptions on the nature of Agree (Chomsky 1995). Cross-dialectal differences between Afro-Bolivian Spanish and standard Spanish are accounted for in a systematic fashion, as computationally determined by differences in the specification of lexical and functional items and by restrictions on syntactic operations.

Chapter 8 analyzes variable number and gender agreement marking across the ABS DP. This chapter tries to enhance a long-awaited dialogue between quantitative sociolinguistic methodology and syntactic generative theory. In line with several sociolinguistic studies, this study recurs to a statistical software program (VARBRUL) to analyze cases of variable gender/number agreement. Nevertheless, differently from traditional sociolinguistic investigations, results are explained by adopting recent minimalist assumptions on agreement and feature valuation processes (Frampton & Gutmann 2000).

Finally, Chapter 9 summarizes the content of the present volume and provides the conclusions to this study.