Setting parametric limits on dialectal variation in Spanish

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Abstract

The present investigation departs from the perspective that dialects of languages may exemplify typological distinctions, and as such, may be defined within parametric limits. More specifically, this synchronic study focuses on the inter- and intra-dialectal variation attested within the Spanish language, heretofore exempted from the scrutiny that has characterized syntactic studies of other Romance languages. The analysis of said variability, which centers on the licensing of null and overt subjects, reveals intralingual differences that serve to bolster syntactic-theoretical argumentation and corroborate the structures and principles of the Minimalist Program. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Linguistic theorizing, as carried out within the Principles and Parameters framework, has proceeded, to date, largely uninformed by pertinent facts revealed within the sub-discipline of dialectology. While the theory has been significantly articulated by reference to proposals regarding attested morpho-syntactic differences between languages (e.g., Spanish versus English, or Spanish versus French), the study of synchronic variation as observed between and within dialects of the same language (e.g., Standard Latin American Spanish versus Dominican Spanish), with notable

* This work draws on several primary sources. Preliminary speech samples were collected in the Dominican Republic in 1992 by the author, and additional data was gathered in New York in 1997 by Kimann Johnson. In 1998, the author again traveled to the Dominican Republic and New York to complete more extensive interviews in the service of a larger study of Dominican Spanish; data was collected from forty-six speakers representative of diverse socio-economic classes and geographical regions. This more recent investigation was generously funded by the Faculty Research Assistance Program and the Academic Senate of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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exception, has been relegated to the domain of sociolinguistics. However, it should be clear that an informed assessment of dialectal variation and change can afford unique perspectives into the constraints and limits on possible grammars, and, in turn, make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the nature of the language faculty. Drawing on the insights of Henry (1995, 1997) and Wilson and Henry (1998) on variability in Belfast English, the present work departs from the perspective that dialects of languages may exemplify typological distinctions, and as such, may be defined within the parametric limits afforded by Universal Grammar. Such an orientation to the examination of varieties of Spanish avails a view of the Dominican Spanish vernacular as a source of facts appropriate to a theory of language, rather than as a peculiar linguistic object that deviates from the pan-American normative standard.

Speech samples, collected from speakers representative of diverse backgrounds, amply attest to the intralingual variation that serves to distinguish Dominican Spanish from other varieties; said variation centers on the availability of null referential and expletive subjects and the positional licensing of subjects in declarative, non-finite, and interrogative clauses. The descriptive generalizations of the differential patterns observed between Dominican Spanish and Standard Latin American Spanish and within the dialect itself are amenable to analysis within Chomsky's (1993, 1995) Minimalist Program, where linguistic variation is expressed in terms of the morphological strength of abstract CASE features specified on lexical items and the requisite feature matching that motivates movement of these elements to functional projections. Thus, the distinguishing properties that emerge from inter- and intra-dialectal comparisons will be shown to be characterized by highly constrained differences relating to the strength of morpho-syntactic specifications that will entail the presence or absence of particular derivations and derived structures. It will be argued specifically that speakers of Dominican Spanish have available an I-language that is variable between parameter settings of nominal TENSE and AGR features; on this view, speakers are bi-lingual in their native language, a state of affairs that typifies linguistic change in progress.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 is devoted to the presentation of speech samples which provide the reader with the requisite overview of the linguistic properties at issue. Dominican Spanish will be revealed to demonstrate apparently contradictory patterns with respect to the availability of null subject pronouns and the position of subjects across grammatical structures. Section 3 presents the theoretical orientation for accommodating the facts of language and dialectal variation within current syntactic-theoretical constructs, and introduces cognate research programs and proposals from diachronic and developmental studies. Section 4 presents the analysis which is the kernel of the work. Section 4.1 exposes the specific framework of analysis, the Minimalist Program, delineating those aspects most relevant for the ensuing analysis; section 4.2 introduces the facts of Dominican Spanish into current syntactic theory, confronting and advancing the Minimalist Program with new empirical data. Finally, section 5 concludes the paper, recapitulating the main finding – namely, that speakers of Dominican Spanish have available to them two distinct grammars, as dictated by competing morphological strengths of nominal fea-
tures on the functional nodes TENSE and AGR – and embedding linguistic variability within a more general theory of language.

2. Overview of the data

The immense diversity of the dialects of Latin American Spanish has stimulated significant popular interest and scholarly attention. Monographs and book-length accounts have added to our knowledge by synthesizing and comparing the salient features of individual dialects. What invariably emerges from the literature is the uniqueness of the dialects of Spanish spoken in the Caribbean region, with the Dominican Republic at the forefront of linguistic innovation. Henríquez Ureña (1940) and Jiménez Sabater (1975) present the most complete analyses of the dialect, detailing the lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic characteristics that identify this dialect of Spanish and distinguish it from the Spanish spoken in other Latin American nations and from the established Latin American Spanish norm. As expected, variations in the lexicon abound. The introduction of Taino/Arawak indigenisms such as aji', cabuya, and guancibana, and Africanisms such as name, cachimbo, and féferes speak to historical contact, and continued innovations in the lexicon attest to the vitality of the language, and to Dominicans' tendency to language play in particular. However, these linguistic processes and practices are not always positively appraised (cf. Toribio, forthcoming):

(1) Hay un conjunto de frases propias del país, y hay cosas que se ponen de moda... Hay pueblos donde la gente tiene más cuidado en hablar un buen castellano...

‘There is a set of phrases that is unique to the nation and there are things that come into style. ... There are towns where people take more care in speaking a good Spanish ...’

Perhaps more salient are the regional variations based in pronunciation, particularly of syllable-final consonants. Especially noteworthy are the processes that affect syllable-final liquids, the most prevalent being lamdacism (/ɾ/→[l]), glide formation (/l/→[j]), and rotacism (/l/→[ɾ]). For example, as illustrated in (2), the items saltar ‘jump-infin.’, saltas ‘jump-2sg.pres.’, and saltaban ‘jump-3pl.imperf.’ may be rendered with distinct pronunciations in the capital city of Santo Domingo, in the northwestern agricultural countryside of the Cibao Valley, and in the southern region.

(2) a. norm: [saltár], [sáltas], [saltában]
b. Santo Domingo: [sáltal], [sálta], [saltában]/[saltába]
c. Cibao Valley: [sájtaj], [sájta], [saltában]/[saltába]
d. Southern coast: [sártar], [sárta], [sartában]/[sartába]

1 For a recent, comprehensive treatment, the reader is referred to Lipski (1994).
More notably, the Dominican Spanish dialect has witnessed a decrease in morphological distinctions which may owe to reduction of other alveolar consonants. A common feature is the weakening of syllable-final /s/, which may be subsequently elided, as illustrated in (2). While Henríquez Ureña's (1940: 139) early survey of the language revealed that "en la dicción culta se procura evitar la modificación" ('in educated speech one tends to avoid the modification'), some fifty years later Lipski (1994) estimates the consonantal reduction to be so common as to be nearly categorical, even among educated speakers. Also attested across regional and social dialects are the velarization and elision of syllable-final /n/, though, as indicated in the transcriptions in (2), the nasalization remains on the preceding vowel.

2.1. The availability of null pronominal subjects

The aforementioned consonantal changes may have given rise to incipient phonological restructuring: nasalization may be ascribed with phonemic value (e.g., for some speakers [sáiťa] contrasts with [sáltă]). Moreover, the loss of syllable-final /s/ has had significant consequences in the verbal system, eliminating distinctions across numerous verbal paradigms: as {-s} is the morpheme for second person in the singular paradigm, in most tenses and moods, its reduction has resulted in the convergence of second with third persons, and in the imperfect and conditional, first, second, and third persons are rendered homophonous. The latter alteration is especially noteworthy, for in the traditional linguistic literature, the distinctions encoded by richness of inflectional endings have been linked to the availability of null subjects. Thus, we would predict that the reduction and loss of morphological distinctions in verbal endings would effect the rise of overt (and obligatory) pronominal

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2 García et al. (1988) note that Dominicans are very conscious of their radical pronunciation, especially in view of other highly conservative Latin American varieties; but their lexical regionalisms and syntactic innovations evade self-censure.

3 The two-step process is as follows: the segment loses its supralaryngeal features and only the aspiration remains, and then the consonant slot is lost altogether.

4 More precisely, the /n/ is velarized in syllable rhymes: instituto [iŋ-s-ti-tu-to] 'institute' (cf. Harris, 1983). The nasal segment fails to undergo the customary assimilation of place features; it is rendered as the velar variant, save in the context of labial consonants, to which it assimilates.

5 To be sure, the distinction may go undetected by the untrained listener, as the author's first attempt at transcription proved.

6 Many researchers have tried to relate the null subject property to rich verbal inflection, pointing out that languages such as Standard Spanish have an agreement system which is quite complex, whereas languages such as English have one which is very poor. Chomsky (1981) suggests that in null subject languages, AGR(eement) in INFLEX(ion) makes it possible to recover the information made unavailable by the fact that the subject is phonetically missing. Elaborating, Rizzi (1982) proposes that the characteristic property of null subject languages is that their verbal inflection is specified with a feature [+pronoun], i.e., it has clitic-like pronominal properties. In this mode of inquiry, Lipski (1977) proposes that the Spanish subject pronoun cliticizes onto the verb, recovering the person and number features that may be lost by the weakening of verbal agreement. Such an account, fails, however, since these subject pronouns do not demonstrate the behavior common to clitics. For example, as noted by Suñer and Lizardi (1995) these pronouns can be separated from the verb by negation. In addition, unlike clitics which are, by definition, unstressed, pronouns such as nosotros and usted(es) must be stressed.
subjects. This is only apparently the case in Dominican Spanish, i.e., it is unclear whether we can regard the deterioration and loss of morphological endings as the catalyst or determining factor in the appearance of overt subjects.

It is unmistakable, however, that in marked contrast to Standard Latin American Spanish, in which subject pronouns are typically expressed only for emphatic purposes, Dominican Spanish allows for subjects to be freely employed, without added pragmatic force, as observed in (3) (note that the pronominal forms under consideration appear in italics throughout the ensuing transcripts, though the morpho-phonological reductions previously outlined are not represented).

(3) Overt subject pronouns with specific and non-specific human reference:

a. *Yo no lo vi, él estaba en Massachusetts, acababa de llegar, pero muy probable para el domingo pasado, que fue Día de las Madres allá, él estaba en Nueva York ... El estaba donde Eugenia, y yo creo que él se va a quedar allá ... 'I didn’t see him, he was in Massachusetts, he had just arrived, but quite probably by last Sunday, which was Mother’s Day there, he was in New York. ... He was at Eugenia’s, and I think that he is going to stay there ...’

b. Simplemente tus padres te dicen, <<Bueno m’hijo, todo lo que tú me pidas yo te lo doy, pero tu carrera tú tienes que hacerla tú>>.

‘Your parents simply tell you, “Well son, all that you ask of me I will give it to you, but your career you have to make it for yourself”.’

c. En esa área del Rodeo no se hablaba bien el español. Ellos usaban a veces unas palabras dialécticas, que a veces uno mismo ni las entendía ... Yo recuerdo que a veces ellos hablaban delante de uno y uno no entendía las palabras.

‘In that area of El Rodeo people didn’t speak Spanish well. They sometimes used dialectal words, that sometimes we ourselves didn’t understand ... I recall that sometimes they spoke in front of us and we didn’t understand the words.’

d. Nosotros a veces nos descuidamos, salvo que no sea para un discurso, como por ejemplo una entrevista ... En eso nosotros nos descuidamos mucho, los dominicanos específicamente.

‘We sometimes are careless, except in cases of speeches, as for example an interview. In that we are careless, Dominicans specifically.’

e. Ellos me dijeron que yo tenía anemia ... Si ellos me dicen que yo estoy en peligro cuando ellos me entran la aguja por el ombligo, yo me voy a ver en una situación de estrés.

‘They told me that I had anemia ... If they tell me that I am in danger when they put the needle in my belly-button, I am going to find myself in a stressful situation.’

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7 In Hebrew, for example, thematic null subjects are possible only in those paradigms in which person agreement is not ‘defective’ (Borer, 1986). Likewise, as reported in McCloskey and Hale (1984), Irish allows thematic null subjects with the rich agreement synthetic forms, but not with the poorly inflected analytic forms.
However, this marked use of subject pronouns has proliferated throughout the pronominal system, so that even verb forms that remain distinct with respect to person and number are nonetheless accompanied by the subject pronoun, e.g., nosotros llegamos [nosotryeyámos] ‘we arrive-1pl.pret.’, tú llegaste [tuyeyáte] ‘you arrive-2sg.pret.’, ellos llegaron [eyooyeyáro] ‘they arrive-3pl.pret.’. That is, any subject pronoun may be overtly expressed without emphatic force, not merely those which would be most plainly necessitated by phonological reductions. Therefore functional compensation hypotheses such as those proposed by Hochberg (1986) and Cameron (1992) cannot account for the appearance of subject pronouns in the Dominican vernacular. Furthermore, the diversity of inflectional systems that license null subjects makes clear the difficulty of arriving at the requisite notion of inflectional richness; witness the availability of null subjects in Chinese, which lacks overt verbal agreement (cf. Huang, 1984), and the unavailability of null subjects in Icelandic, which demonstrates agreement as rich as that in Standard Spanish (cf. Sigurðsson, 1989, 1993).*

We might instead invoke paradigmatic pressure or parametric shift in accounting for the preponderance of subject pronouns in evidence, a proposal that finds support in the use of the thematic pronoun even for inanimate subjects, as in (4), where in normative speech only a null pronoun is felicitous, and in the over-use of uno ‘one’ with first-person singular reference, and with impersonal reference alongside the neutral pronouns tú and usted ‘you’ (5), where other dialects might employ a null non-specific plural pronoun or an impersonal se construction.

(4) Overt subject pronoun with non-human reference:
   a. [Re: river] Él tiene poca agua.
      ‘It has little water.’
   b. [Re: buses] Ellas se saben devolver en Villa; ellas pasan de largo.
      ‘They often turn around in Villa; they pass you by.’
      ‘My cistern doesn’t lack water; it has water.’

(5) Personal and impersonal neutral pronouns tú, uno, and usted.
   a. Uno habla regularcito aquí.
      (cf., e.g., Se habla regularcito aquí.)
      ‘We speak somewhat normally here.’

8 After reviewing the typology of agreement systems that license null subjects, Jaeggli and Safir (1989) propose that the crucial property in determining the set of null-subject languages is not morphological richness, but morphological uniformity, i.e., null subjects are possible only in those paradigms in which either all forms are morphologically complex, as in Standard Spanish, or none of them are, as in Chinese, but if the paradigm is mixed, as in English, null subjects are precluded. Hermon and Yoon (1989) note that while this uniformity account avoids some of the problems encountered by the agreement-based approaches, it too is empirically inadequate; for example, Swedish is quite uniform, and yet does not allow any type of null subject (cf. Platzack, 1987). While different theories assign a different role to the relation of subject-verb agreement, all agree that it is the special status of the inflectional system of a language that licenses null subjects. For a review of the typology of agreement systems that license null subjects, the reader is referred to Gilligan (1987).
b. *Uno* cuando vino *uno* no sabía mucho el español, porque *uno* habla su inglés. *Uno* miraba a los muchachos jugando y *uno* ahí trancadito. Poco a poco *uno* se adaptó ... A mí me gusta allá, pero entonces, como *uno* tiene su negocio aquí ... *uno* no va a coger para allá para trabajarle a otro.

(cf., e.g., ... Cuando vine no sabía mucho el español ... )

‘When I came I didn’t know much Spanish, because I spoke English. I looked at the kids playing outside and I was locked up. Little by little I adapted ... I like it there, but then, since you have your business here ... you’re not going to go there to work for another.’

c. *Uno* se da cuenta que *uno* es adulto ya: nadie te controla, nadie va a ver tus notas, nadie te dice si *tú* vas o no vas. *Tú* haces lo que *tú* te propones a hacer.

‘You realize that you are an adult: nobody controls you, nobody’s going to see your grades, nobody tells you if you can go or not. You do what you set out to do.’

d. Entre *tú* más estudias *tú* te vas proyectando mejor y estás adquiriendo más experiencia. Algo que *tú* no conoces o no conocías a través de los estudios *tú* lo vas a conocer. Si *tú* decías una palabra mal anteriormente, ... *tú* ya la hablas correctamente.

‘The more you study the better you project yourself and acquire more experience. Something that you don’t know or didn’t know through studies you begin to know. If you used to say a word badly before, you now speak it correctly.’

e. Todo es relativo a como *usted* vea las cosas ... Algo que no me gusta es que *usted* tenga que trabajar para mantener a los vagos.

‘It’s all relative to how you see things ... Something I don’t like is that you have to work to maintain the lazy.’

And perhaps the most intriguing and most telling characteristic of the dialect is the presence of the non-referential pronoun *ello*, which is completely devoid of thematic content and force; the overt expression of the expletive, exemplified in (6), is striking, as it has no equivalent expression in other varieties of Spanish.

(6) Overt expletive pronoun:

a. *Ello* llegan guaguas hasta allá.

(cf. Llegan guaguas hasta allá.)

‘There arrive buses there.’


‘There were a lot of people on stand-by.’

c. *Ellos* querían renovar el centro para el turismo y *ello* hay mucha gente que lo opone.

‘They wanted to renovate the center for tourism and there were many people who opposed it.’

Jiménez Sabater (1975: 164–165) provides an explicit statement of the interrelation of all of the aforementioned properties: “En el habla dominicana actual parece
sentirse cada vez más la necesidad de diferenciar la segunda de la tercera persona del singular utilizando los respectivos pronombres antepuestos al verbo. Estos se mencionan, cuando menos, una vez en cada oración o período ... En la zona del Cibao estas expresiones más o menos redundantes coinciden curiosamente con la utilización del pronombre fósil *ello* como sujeto antepuesto a verbos ‘impersonales’ (‘In contemporary Dominican speech one finds the need to differentiate between second and third persons more and more by inserting the respective pronouns before the verb. These are used at least once in each sentence or turn ... In the Cibao region, these more or less redundant expressions coincide, surprisingly, with the use of the fossil pronoun acting as subject before ‘impersonal’ verb forms’). These identifying characteristics are accompanied by concomitant innovations in the placement of subjects, foregrounding the perennial problem of the relation between inflectional morphology, null pronouns, and word order variation.

2.2. The placement of overt subjects

Another prominent distinguishing feature of Dominican Spanish is the pattern of word order attested in declaratives, interrogatives, and infinitival constructions. The word order of declaratives in Standard Latin American Spanish is relatively free, demonstrating a sensitivity to pragmatic considerations such as theme-rheme requirements (e.g., *Llegó Juan* vs. *Juan llegó* ‘Juan arrived’), and syntactic considerations such as verb class (e.g., *Juan llegó* ‘Juan arrived’ vs. *Juan cantó* ‘Juan sang’). In contrast, word order in Dominican Spanish is relatively fixed – subject-verb-object – irrespective of sentence type or verb class, a fact frequently noted in the literature. Further corroboration for the fixing of pre-verbal positional licensing for subjects is the fact that the pattern is maintained even in questions, where the Standard Latin American Spanish norm requires that the verb appear in second position, pre-posed to the subject (cf. Toribio, 1990, 1993b; Suñer, 1994). As shown in (7), in Dominican Spanish the pre-verbal position is available to pronouns and full NPs alike (again, the subject phrases under consideration appear in italics in the ensuing examples). This lack of inversion in questions is noted in Henríquez Ureña (1940) and by Jiménez Sabater (1975: 169), the latter stating that the pre-verbal positioning of subject pronouns in questions “es prácticamente general en el español de la República Dominicana” (‘is practically generalized in the Spanish of the Dominican Republic’).

(7) Interrogatives:

a. Papi, ¿qué ese *letrero* dice?
   (cf. Papi, ¿qué dice ese *letrero*?)
   ‘Daddy, what does that sign say?’

b. ¿Qué yo les voy a mandar a esos muchachos?
   ‘What am I going to send to those boys?’

c. ¿Qué número tú anotaste? ... Ahorita tú vas a ver si sale.
   ‘What number did you write down? ... In a while you will see if it comes out (a winner).’
d. ¿Cuánto un médico gana?
   'How much does a doctor earn?'

e. Y con quién Fredi está allá?
   'And with whom is Fredy there?'

Dominican Spanish also employs an additional strategy as a means of circumventing the inverted order, namely, the pseudo-cleft illustrated in (8), which, in turn, could explain the focus strategy, in (9), whose null operator is very pronounced in the Dominican vernacular (cf. Toribio, 1992, 1993b).

(8) Pseudo-cleft:
   a. ¿Dónde fue que tú estudiaste?
      (cf. ¿Dónde estudiaste (tú)?)
      'Where did you study?/Where was it that you studied?'
   b. ¿En qué es que tú te vas a graduar?
      'What will you graduate in?/In what is it that you will graduate?'
   c. ¿Qué es lo que ese muchacho me trae?
      'What is that boy bringing me?/What is it that that boy is bringing me?'
   d. ¿Cuánto fue que él me dijo que costaba?
      'How much did he tell me it costs?/How much was it that he told me it costs?'
   e. ¿Cuándo es que ustedes se van?
      'When is it that you are leaving?/When are you leaving?'

(9) Focus strategy:
   a. Yo quiero es comida.
      (cf. Comida quiero yo/Lo que (yo) quiero es comida.)
      'I want food/What I want is food.'
   b. Allá en los Estados Unidos yo hice fue el kinder.
      'There in the United States I went to kindergarten./It was kindergarten I went to.'
   c. Ese niño está es enfermo.
      'That child is sick/What that child is is sick.'
   d. Tú trajiste fue una sola maleta nada más.
      'You brought only one suitcase/What you brought was only one suitcase.'
   e. Mamá tiene que ir es al mercado.
      'Mom has to go to the market/It's to the market that mom has to go.'

Finally, and more interestingly, Dominican Spanish permits overt pre-verbal subjects in non-finite (infinitival and gerundive) clauses, as in (10), the attested subject infinitive order standing in marked contraposition to that observed in Standard Latin American Spanish, in which the subject would appear post-posted to the infinitival verb (cf. Toribio, 1993a).

(10) Non-finite clause with overt nominative subject:
   a. Ven acá, para nosotros verte.
      (cf. Ven acá, para verte (nosotros).)
      'Come here, for us to see you.'
b. A la carne se le mezcla limón para usted lavarla.  
'To the meat, you add lemon for you to wash it.'

c. Me gusta la forma de ellos hablar.  
'I like their way of speaking.'

d. ¿Es que no te dicen sin tú preguntar?  
'Is it that they don't tell you without you asking.'

e. Tienes que ir a cambiarle un dinero a estas mujeres antes de ellas irse para allá.  
'You have to go exchange some money for these women before they leave.'

f. Yo lo dudo que Carmen venga ... Ella vive enferma, sin los médicos encontrarle nada.  
'I doubt that Carmen will come ... She is always sick, without the doctors finding anything wrong with her.'

g. En tú estando con ella, nada te pasa.  
'In you being with her, nothing will happen to you.'

While Henríquez Ureña (1940) reports the pre-verbal positioning of subjects in infinitival clauses as possible for the expression of pronouns, it is described by Jiménez Sabater (1975: 169) as having displaced the canonical post-verbal positioning only three decades later, "propagado ya a aquellos casos en que el infinitivo viene acompañado de un sustantivo y no de un simple pronombre como sujeto" ('extended to those cases where the infinitive is joined to a noun and not simply to a pronoun acting as subject'). We therefore concur with the latter's conclusion: "Podríamos pensar que se está extendiendo un esquema 'sujeto-verbo' en el cual un orden riguroso de las palabras (sujeto precediendo al verbo) sería rasgo relevante" ('we might believe in the diffusion of a subject-verb pattern in which a strict word ordering (subject preceding the verb) is a pertinent feature').

2.3. Summary of the data

The previously presented speech samples, collected from speakers representative of diverse socio-economic classes and ages, amply attest to the phonological and morpho-syntactic properties which serve to distinguish Dominican Spanish from other varieties. As noted, said variation centers on the reduction of syllable-final alveolar consonants and the availability of null referential and expletive subjects and the positional licensing of subjects in declarative, non-finite, and interrogative clauses. It merits stressing that null subject pronouns and post-verbal positioning of subjects are indeed available to the speakers sampled. A review of the foregoing transcriptions, however brief, reveals that within one speaker's speech there are segments that are replete with overt referential subject pronouns, whereas others contain very few, and the overt expletive ello appears in only a subset of the contexts where it is theoretically possible; moreover, the post-verbal position is employed, with greater frequency for pronominal than for full NP subjects, across the construction types discussed. In other words, Dominican Spanish exhibits properties of non-pro-drop languages (e.g., English, French) while at once demonstrating structures com-
mon to pro-drop languages (e.g., Standard Spanish, Italian). The co-existence of these typologies is readily observable in the speech samples produced by all of the speakers interviewed; consider in this respect the intra-dialectal variability exposed in the extended speech of the following speakers:

(11) a. Dédeme yo contarle ... Cuando él vino la primera vez, que vino con veintiocho mil dólares en papeletas y dijo que le iba a echar plata a la casa y yo le dije que no se le puede echar plata a la casa sin tú hablar con los otros hermanos tuyos, ¿tú oyes? porque después cuando yo me muera, tú te vas a hacer dueño de la casa tú solo ¿y los otros qué van a hacer? ... ¡Ay, ese hombre gastó un dinero ahí! ... ¡Y de luz que pagaba una cantidad! Sin consumir la luz. Porque ello no hay luz, aquí no hay luz, no ... Una vez le dijo ladron al jefe de la compañía, porque no hay necesidad de que hayan apagones habiendo dinero. Ya agua hay, y va a haber más agua todavía ... Ya aquí no nos falta agua, ya aquí no nos falta agua ... Y cuando conecte otra tubería, habrá en la llave ya, ... sí ello viene un poquitico ya en la llave ya ... Yo me bebo yo solo un litro de Remi Martín... a mí no me hace nada, y es lo único que tengo. ¿Tú sabes qué hago yo con mi cama? Me la preparo antes de yo ponerme a beber, por si acaso me emborrache.

'Let me tell you ... When he came for the first time, he came with twenty-eight thousand dollars in bills and said that he was going to come to invest money into the house and I told him that you can’t invest money into the house without you speaking with your brothers, you hear, because later when I die, you will become owner of the house all by yourself, and what will the others do? ... Oh, that man spent a great deal of money there! ... And in electricity he paid a huge amount! Without consuming electricity. Because there is no electricity, there is no electricity ... One time he called the chief of the company a thief, because there is no need for there to be power outages when there is money. There is water now, and there will be more water yet ... We don’t lack in water, we don’t lack water ... And when I connect the other pipes, there will be (water) in the tap, ... yes, there is already a little in the tap ... I drink a liter of Remi Martín by myself ... it does nothing to me, and it’s all I have. Do you know what I do with my bed? I prepare it before I set to drinking, just in case I get drunk.'

b. Si te pasaras un día en mi trabajo, te dieres cuenta que la forma de yo hablar es una mezcla de todos los diferentes tipos de razas de países. El problema es que donde yo trabajo es una farmacia y estoy ahí más porque puedo hablar español. Entonces hay muchas personas de diferentes países y cuando llega una persona por decir, de Puerto Rico, pues yo tengo que saber cómo es que ellos hablan y a que es que ellos se refieren cuando hablan de algo específico, entonces cuando viene otra persona de, vamos a decir, del Salvador, que hablan también español, yo tengo también que tratar de entenderlos a ellos, entonces es un trabajo muy interesante. Y la gente me dice <<Pero tú no hablas como los dominicanos>> ... La pronunciación de los
dominicanos, comparado con los otros países es más ... no pronuncian bien las sílabas, las cortan, hablan diferente.9

‘If you spent a day at my job, you would notice that my form of speaking is a mix of all of the different types of countries’ races. The problem is that where I work is a pharmacy and I am there more because I can speak Spanish. Then there are many people from different countries and when someone arrives let’s say, from Puerto Rico, well I have to know how they speak and what is they are referring to when they speak of something specific, then when another person comes from, let’s say, El Salvador, that also speak Spanish, I have also to try to understand them, so it’s a very interesting job. And people tell me “But you don’t speak like Dominicans” ... Dominicans’ pronunciation, compared with other countries is more ... they don’t pronounce syllables, they cut them, they speak differently.’

Such intra-dialectal variability will be central to the syntactic-theoretical analysis proffered in the ensuing discussion.

3. Characterizing dialectal variation within parametric limits

As laid out, the linguistic patterns manifest in Dominican Spanish reveal that this dialect has expanded to encompass (phonological rules and) morpho-syntactic constructions that are not uniformly reproduced in the dialects of other Latin American nations today. One might speculate that these innovations reflect the contributions of linguistic contact. However, such a conjecture is not borne out in the findings of extensive research reported in the literature. Remarking on the potential import from the African languages that were carried to the Caribbean region, Lipski (1994) reports that “no major innovation in pronunciation, morphology or syntax in Latin American Spanish is due exclusively to the former presence of speakers of African languages or of any form of Afro-Hispanic language, creole or otherwise (1994: 133). And speaking specifically to Dominicans’ continued contact with the French-based creole of the adjoining nation, Lipski states, “the impact of Haitian Creole on Dominican Spanish is largely confined to the rural border region, and to life on the sugar plantations” (1994: 237). Finally, in like manner, Jiménez Sabater (1975: 168) cautions against attributing the innovations to linguistic contact with English: “Es de dudarse que estemos ante un fenómeno de interferencia del inglés o de ninguna otra lengua extranjera. Un rasgo morfosintáctico tan característico difícilmente habría podido calar de modo tan profundo en una masa analfabeta como la de nuestro país, donde predomina, antes bien, el arcaísmo castellano – o la evolución de tendencias lingüísticas netamente hispanas – y en la que apenas se cuentan escasos préstamos léxicos de otros idiomas, por oposición a lo que sucede con otras zonas antillanas como Puerto Rico en donde también es corriente este orden de palabras” (‘It is

9 This participant’s pronunciation and syntactic constructions were the most demonstrative of careful speech, perhaps owing to dialectal leveling.
doubtful that we have before us a case of interference with English or any other foreign language. A morpho-syntactic feature could have hardly reached so deeply into the illiterate masses of our country, where the linguistic tendencies lean towards the use of archaic Castillian forms or of typically Hispanic solutions and where lexical loans from other languages are rare and strikingly different from what occurs in other Caribbean areas like Puerto Rico where this word order is also common. We must, therefore, look beyond cross-linguistic contact in explicating the presence of the attested linguistic forms.

With notable exceptions, studies of dialectal variation and change have, in the main, fallen outside the purview of theoretical linguistics, within the realm of dialectology (cf. Milroy, 1992). To understand linguistic variation and change from a linguistic-theoretical perspective, we must understand the constraints on possible grammars offered by the nature of the language faculty, as put forth within linguistic theory, and in particular, within Principles and Parameters Theory (cf. the extensive research literature grounded in Chomsky, 1981, 1986). Developed by reference to careful and deliberate comparisons between languages, Principles and Parameters Theory has refined its conceptual apparatus to a well-articulated structure consisting of a core system of universal principles, with cross-linguistic variation ascribed to well-delimited parametric differences. However, the continued advancement of this research program remains largely uninformed by the facts of variation between or within dialects of the same language. For example, linguistic scholars investigating pro-drop have assumed that there exist languages such as Spanish and English that represent divergent settings. The question arises as to whether, and if so, how the theory can accommodate differences found between and within dialects of a single community, as is the case in the Dominican Republic and in the Dominican diaspora (cf. Toribio, forthcoming).

Considerations of parsimony dictate that the differences between Standard Latin American Spanish and Dominican Spanish should reflect possible grammatical differences, i.e., distinct choices of parameter settings, rather than unique language- and dialect-specific rules. In other words, the ways in which dialects differ (e.g., Dominican Spanish versus Standard Latin American Spanish) should perfectly mirror the ways in which languages differ from one another (e.g., Standard Spanish versus Standard English or French). In fact, recent explorations of dialectal variation have revealed that dialects of languages in themselves have parameters, and as such, may also be defined within parametric limits (cf. Benincà, 1989; Kayne, 1994; Henry, 1995). For example, in examining dialects of English, Henry (1997) concludes that the kind of variation attested between Belfast English and Standard English is broadly of the same type as that found between different languages. Advancing this line of inquiry, Wilson and Henry (1998: 8) submit that “if dialects do set their parametric limits, then it would seem useful for theoretical linguists to take account of dialectal variation in explaining the necessity of linguistic diversity within Universal Grammar.” From the point of view of linguistic theory, then, there should be noth-

10 We concur with Wilson and Henry (1998) that such abstraction is admissible and necessary, if we are to productively proceed in comparative research.
ing special about dialect variation as distinct from language variation. Articulating this same view, Benincà (1989: 3): states, "In a linguistic group of interrelated dialects with little differentiation, we can expect to find realized only those possibilities which are admitted by the theory. It is evident, then, that the more the dialects are similar to one another, the more possible it becomes to find, for a specific grammatical area, the ideal case of some dialects differing only in respect to phenomena that can be traced unambiguously to a single parameter".

Such a mode of inquiry is appropriate in the analysis of the data presented herein: Dominican Spanish presents a clustering of properties not present in Standard Latin American Spanish, a clustering which, a priori, would point to the presence of a second, co-existing grammar. That is, when viewed from a properly typological perspective, the linguistic patterns observed, which, as verified in previous and ongoing research are systematically corroborated (cf. Toribio, 1993b, 1996), insinuate that Dominican Spanish is undergoing significant syntactic restructuring. The typological distinctions exemplified in the dialect may be interpreted as pointing to grammatical re-setting, "un hecho perfectamente explicable dentro de las posibilidades que ofrece el mismo sistema español" ("a fact which is perfectly explainable within the possibilities that the self-same system of Spanish offers") (Jiménez Sabater, 1975: 169). In other words, the complex of innovations is understood as circumscribing a grammatical option made available within the language system (in fact, a typological distinction readily observed within the Romance language family – witness the contrasts represented between Standard Spanish and French).11

Before proceeding, however, it merits noting that although the co-existence of distinct grammars of the same language in a single speech community has eluded characterization within the confines of traditional synchronic syntactic analyses, descriptions of such linguistic phenomena have characterized much recent study of language change and development. The application of the Principles and Parameters approach to grammar to the study of historical change was instigated by Lightfoot (1979) and has had fruitful results (cf. the collection of papers compiled and edited by van Kemenade and Vincent, 1997). Especially relevant for the present purposes is the view advocated by authors such as Kroch (1991) and Roberts (1993), who suggest that in the change from a grammatical property X to a distinct grammatical property Y, a language may demonstrate both X and Y simultaneously.12 On such a view, grammatical change is characterized by a transitional state of co-existing, competing grammars. A similar state of affairs has been addressed in language acquisition, a central, motivating issue in linguistic theorizing. Whereas language

11 Its linguistic-theoretical import notwithstanding, the investigation brings to light additional aspects of dialectal variation that merit scrutiny. For instance, are speakers aware of the linguistic novelty? If so, do they have a favorable judgment of the innovations? Would they abandon the vernacular for a more conservative variety? Questions as these were also explored in interviews with Dominicans in the Dominican Republic and in New York, and are reported in Toribio (forthcoming), which examines the affective and social factors that enter into language loyalty.

12 In Toribio (1993b), I develop and elaborate an analysis according to which Dominican Spanish makes available a dual setting of Nominative Case licensing: under the configurations of specifier-head agreement and strict c-command government.
development has been generally assumed to result from the addition of new formal properties and the deletion of pre-existing representations, researchers such as Roeper (1996) have explored the possibility that the addition of a new feature may change the status of previous structures in the grammar, without obliterating them. In this technical and yet intuitive sense, Roeper concludes, all children exhibit a form of bi-lingualism in the course of acquisition. In fact, Roeper makes similar assertions regarding adult competence, suggesting that adult monolinguals too demonstrate 'islands of bi-lingualism', as manifested in the deployment of syntactic operations which are commonly perceived as circumscribing distinct speech modes (e.g., the formal preposing that produces forms such as *whereafter*).

The previous observations converge in suggesting that a speaker's linguistic competence may be characterized as representing distinct grammars of what is commonly identified as a unitary language. And these self-same observations can be brought to bear on the present investigation into intra-dialectal variation or bi-dialectalism. Dominican speakers may be said to have available I-languages representing stages of the change from what in the literature is identified as a canonical pro-drop typology (e.g., Standard Spanish-type null subjects and post-verbal subjects) to a non-pro-drop typology (e.g., English- or French-type overt subjects and pre-verbal subjects). Accordingly, we postulate that a dual parameter setting is indicated for speakers of Dominican Spanish, and we turn to consider these inter- and intra-dialectal differences as they relate to parametric limits.

4. Dialectal variation within the Minimalist Program

The aforementioned syntactically informed assessments of dialectal variation motivate the analysis to be put forth. Dominican Spanish will be shown to be a source of facts pertinent to a theory of language, rather than a peculiar linguistic object that diverges from Standard Latin American Spanish. More specifically, the descriptive generalizations that emerge from the comparison of patterns observed within this dialect, and between Dominican Spanish and Standard Latin American Spanish, will be analyzed within Chomsky's Minimalist Program, where linguistic variation is expressed in terms of strength of abstract morpho-syntactic features and (checking operations within) functional projections. The proposal thus re-examines the traditional notion that inflectional morphology, null subjects, and positional constraints are correlated in general syntactic derivations, but couches the inquiry within the Minimalist framework that has emerged in recent syntactic research.

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13 Roeper suggests that such a conceptualization of language development would explain certain puzzling patterns attested in the acquisition of inversion in English. He notes, for instance, that many children pass through a period in which inversion is optional: the utterance 'What he can do?' is heard alongside 'What can he do?' in the same stage.

14 An obvious limitation to the approach is how to interpret the notion of strength, since, as stated, there is apparently no necessary correlation between morphology and strength.
4.1. The framework of analysis

In his Minimalist Program, Chomsky (1993, 1995) proposes a simple and constrained conceptualization of human language, in which the language faculty consists of two central components: a lexicon and a computational system. The computational system is composed of invariant principles, with language-specific variation restricted to functional elements and general properties of the lexicon. The derivation of a particular linguistic expression involves a choice of items from the lexicon and a computation that constructs the interface representations – the articulatory-perceptual representation (associated with Phonetic Form, PF) and the conceptual-intentional representation (associated with Logical Form, LF). Conditions on well-formedness determine which derivations and derived objects are licit and interpretable at the interface levels.

While in earlier models lexical items were envisioned as being introduced in their base form and moving in the course of derivation to acquire morphological markings (e.g., NP-movement for Case-marking; verb-movement for affixation), in articulating the Minimalist assumptions, Chomsky proposes that lexical items are selected from the lexicon fully endowed with their inflectional features, including phi-features, Case features, and scopal features. These inflectional features, collectively referred to as CASE features, must be checked against the specifications on functional nodes. This process of Morphological Checking is represented as a generalized form of the CASE Filter: all CASE features must be checked. In the Minimalist Program, the morphological features on the nodes TENSE and AGR check properties of the verb that raises to (adjoin to) them, and they check properties of the NP that raises to their Specifier position. Specifically, TENSE checks the tense on the verb and the (nominative) Case on the subject NP; AGR checks the phi-features – features referencing person, number, gender, etc. – on the verb and its arguments. As the functional elements TENSE and AGR check the features of the verb and the associated NPs, they disappear, yielding only a verb and arguments that are paired.

However, unlike the traditional Case Filter, which was assumed to hold at S-structure, Morphological Checking may occur at any point in the derivation up to LF, as required. Whether checking takes place in overt syntax or in the LF component depends on the morphological strength attributed to the functional features. Following in the line of research initiated by Pollock (1989), Chomsky assumes that the features on TENSE and AGR may be weak or strong. Weak morphological features may survive into PF as they are invisible in this component. In contrast, strong morphological features are visible at PF, but are not proper components of PF, and would cause the derivation to crash. Therefore, strong morphological features must be checked and eliminated prior to Spell-Out, but weak morphological features remain after Spell-Out – in fact, by the economy principle duly termed Procrastinate, they must remain – and are checked instead at the level of LF, a less costly operation.

For Morphological Checking and convergence to occur, an element with some feature must be in a specific structural relation with a checker for that feature. The Checking Domain of a head comprises all elements included in its maximal projec-
tion, where inclusion is understood in the sense of Chomsky (1986), and thus includes adjuncts and Specifiers, but excludes elements contained within complements of the head; schematically, the Checking Domain of X in (13) is \{UP, ZP, WP, H\} (Chomsky, 1995: 177–178).

(13)

```
XP₁
  └── UP

XP₂
  └── ZP₁
      └── X'₁
          └── X₁
          └── YP

WP
  └── ZP₂

H
  └── X₂
```

For the ensuing discussion, the important positions in the Checking Domain of X are SpecX, where nominal arguments will check Case and phi-features against X, and the position adjoined to X, since the verb will adjoin to functional heads to have its verbal features checked.

By way of example, consider the checking of verbal features exemplified in the diagram in (14). Following the work Pollock (1989) and furthering his own earlier work (Chomsky, 1991), Chomsky articulates the traditional INFL(ection) node into AGR and TENSE, locating AGR above TENSE (omitted here are a possible phrase headed by the functional element NEG(ation), and the phrase headed by COMP).

(14) Checking of verbal features

```
AGR-P
   └── AGR'
        └── AGRᵥ,n
             ─── TENSE-P
                  └── TENSE'
                        └── TENSEᵥ,n
                            └── VP
                                └── Subjectᵥ,a
                                    └── V'
                                        └── Vᵥ,a
```


In order for the derivation to converge, AGR and TENSE must contain the same phi-features which appear on the verb. To check its agreement and tense features, the verb will raise to adjoin to AGR and TENSE before or after Spell-Out, the Head Movement Constraint of Travis (1984) respected. In languages such as English, the verbal features of TENSE and AGR are weak and hence may survive into PF without ill effect. Thus, as consistent with the principle Procrastinate, overt raising prior to PF is barred, and as a consequence, English main verbs are realized within the VP.

As discussed, AGR and TENSE also contain nominal features – the phi-features and Case features – which will be checked off against the corresponding inflectional features of NPs. To check its AGR and TENSE features, the subject NP will raise to the TENSE and AGR projections, as shown in (15):

(15) Checking of nominal features

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{AGR-P} & \quad \text{AGR' } \\
& \quad \text{AGR}_{v,n} \quad \text{TENSE-P} \\
& \quad \text{TENSE'} \\
& \quad \text{TENSE}_{v,n} \quad \text{VP} \\
& \quad \text{Subject}_{t,a} \quad V' \\
& \quad V_{t,a} \quad \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

In English, the nominal features of AGR are weak and may appear at PF. In contrast, the nominal features of TENSE are strong, and therefore, raising of the subject NP to SpecTENSE occurs prior to Spell-Out. In this way, the Extended Projection Principle of earlier approaches reduces to a morphological property of TENSE in the Minimalist Program.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Chomsky assumes the existence of an AGR projection to which objects will raise; this AGR-o position immediately dominates VP. The projection is omitted from the representation in (15), as it is not relevant to the present discussion. However, it merits mentioning that there is no intrinsic distinction between the features that are contained in the AGR projection above TENSE-P (AGR-s), to which subjects raise, and the AGR-o projection. Thus, like subjects, objects do not raise to SpecAGR before Spell-Out in English.
4.2. Feature specification in Standard Latin American Spanish and Dominican Spanish

Within the restricted framework of Minimalist Program, differences between languages and language varieties are attributed to aspects of the lexicon and to the differences in the morphological features of the lexical elements which occupy functional category nodes. As explained, the strength of verbal and nominal features of AGR and TENSE varies independently, determining distinct language types (of course, other nodes are involved in linguistic variation, most notably among these, the COMP node, not considered here). In the ensuing paragraphs, we consider how the facts of Standard Latin American Spanish and the variation attested in the Spanish of the Dominican Republic are accommodated within the parameters of the Minimalist Program.

Data concerning the placement of adverbs and negative markers provides evidence of overt verb-raising in Standard Latin American Spanish (cf. Sufier, 1994). As movement is triggered by strong features, we assume that the verbal features of AGR and TENSE are strong, ensuring that the verb will raise into these functional projections prior to Spell-Out. When the verbal features of these inflectional heads have checked the features on the lexical item, they disappear. If the verb does not raise to AGR and TENSE overtly, the strong verbal features survive to PF, rendering the derivation illicit. Therefore, overt raising is a prerequisite for convergence in Standard Latin American Spanish.

Recall that the morphological features of AGR and TENSE serve a second function, additionally checking the properties of the nominal that raises to their Specifier position. The nominal features of AGR check the phi-features of NP in SpecAGR; the nominal features of TENSE check the (nominative) Case features of NP in SpecTENSE. The nominal features of AGR also play a role in determining the availability of null subjects. Chomsky proposes that strong nominal AGR features are a prerequisite for null subjects. As Standard Latin American Spanish allows null subjects, we assume that the nominal features of AGR are strong. Since the nominal features on AGR are strong, all subject NPs, both null and overt, must raise to SpecAGR prior to Spell-Out to ensure convergence. However, since Standard Latin American Spanish permits VSO word order as an alternative to SVO in declaratives (as determined by theme/rheme considerations), we make the crucial assumption that TENSE dominates AGR in Spanish; a similar proposal is set forth by Pollock (1989) for French. Such a reordering of the functional nodes is straightforward and consonant with Minimalist assumptions: feature strength on functional nodes is one element of language variation, relative positioning of these functional nodes is another.

In (16), then, the verb, drawn from the lexicon fully inflected, adjoins first to AGR where its phi-features are checked, and then to TENSE, where its tense features are checked. The raising of V takes place prior to Spell-Out, triggered by strong verbal features on the functional nodes. The subject NP raises from its position internal to the VP into SpecAGR, where its phi-features are checked. As the nominal features of AGR are strong (licensing null subjects), raising takes place overtly. In contrast, the nominal features on TENSE are weak and may appear at PF.
without causing a crash. Since convergence is compatible with Procrastinate, raising of the subject is delayed until LF (note that since the SpecTENSE position is not filled prior to Spell-Out, it is not projected). In accordance with this derivation, a subject NP will be realized in post-verbal position.

(16) Standard Latin American Spanish, with overt lexical subject

The analysis presented thus far, although adequately accounting for the patterns of word-order in Standard Latin American Spanish, do not fully account for the availability of null subjects. Strong nominal features on AGR are a necessary but insufficient condition for the licensing a null subject; the features of TENSE are also relevant to the licensing of null subjects. This intuition underlies Rizzi’s (1986) theory on null subjects, according to which the formal licensing (associated with Case-marking) and identification of null pronouns are achieved by the same source. Updating Rizzi’s theory, Chomsky claims that “pro is licensed only in the Spec-head relation to \([Agr \ a] Agr\), where \(a\) is \([+\text{tense}]\) or V, Agr strong or V=V*”, a special class of verbs (1995: 176). As shown in (17), the verb raises to check off the verbal features of AGR and TENSE which are strong. As the nominal features of AGR are also strong, verb raising creates the \([\text{TENSE}+\text{AGR}]\) complex required in the licensing of null subjects. The pro subject raises to SpecAGR, where it checks off strong nominal AGR features; raising of pro to SpecTENSE for Morphological Checking is precluded, as the nominal features of TENSE are weak.

(17) Standard Latin American Spanish, with pro subject
Nevertheless, we postulate that *pro* does raise to SpecTENSE. In Minimalist terms, raising is motivated by a 'self-serving last resort' strategy, the principle of Greed (Chomsky, 1995: 201): raising of *pro* to SpecTENSE applies because it must, as required by *pro* theorem. Notably, raising of overt subjects is obviated on considerations of economy.¹⁶

Now, we have observed that in the Minimalist Program Universal Grammar specifies the interface levels, the elements that constitute these levels and the computations by which they are constructed. Language variation in this program is determined by variation in the PF component and in aspects of the lexicon. For basic parametric differences in constituent ordering and in the licensing of null subjects, Chomsky looks to the AGR and TENSE nodes and their verbal and nominal features. Along the lines discussed, the placement of the verb relative to other elements of the sentence reveals important clues as to the nature of the functional heads TENSE and AGR in Dominican Spanish. As with Standard Latin American Spanish, in which the verbal features of TENSE and AGR are strong, and will be visible if not checked off, in Dominican Spanish main verbs must raise to AGR and TENSE before Spell-Out. Thus, we will not invoke the strength of verbal features in account-

¹⁶ Toribio (1996) presents an alternative proposal for achieving the requisite configuration for the licensing of *pro*: weak nominal TENSE features are absorbed by the strong nominal AGR features; such 'lowering' of TENSE features would create the [AGRTENSE+AGR] complex which will license the null subject in SpecAGR. On such a view, the verbal features of TENSE should also be absorbed by AGR, precluding the raising of the verb to the TENSE-adjunction position, an issue which is not addressed therein. It merits noting that this transfer of TENSE features may be implicated in accounting for the A-bar status of SpecT in Standard Latin American Spanish (cf. Toribio 1993a,b). Such a line of inquiry would be contrary to the view put forth by Chomsky, who argues that it is the verbal features of TENSE and AGR, together labeled L-features, which determine the status of a position: a structural position that is narrowly L-related, i.e., non-adjoined, has the basic properties of an A-position. Nevertheless, the proposal here presents a viable and appealing mechanism for explaining the many interrelated syntactic properties that characterize this dialect.
ing for the linguistic innovations. Still in keeping with Minimalist assumptions, then, we turn to consider the nominal features of TENSE and AGR in accounting for the attested variability.

Chomsky notes that a language might allow both weak and strong nominal features (1995: 199). He points out, in particular, that Arabic demonstrates a VSO and SVO pattern which correlates directly with richness of verbal inflection. However, unlike what is observed in Arabic, post-verbal subjects in Dominican Spanish do not correlate with richness of inflection; that is, rather than demonstrating a stable and transparent system, this dialect represents a grammar which is in the process of restructuring. Assume that in Dominican Spanish AGR incorporates weak nominal features. This morphological property has two effects: overt raising of NP to SpecAGR is precluded on grounds of economy, and null subjects cannot be licensed, as AGR is not endowed with the requisite phi-features. As discussed, this morphological property (let's call it 'B') exists alongside the setting which is attested also in Standard Latin American Spanish (property 'A'). The same considerations extend to the nominal features of TENSE: Dominican Spanish TENSE incorporates strong nominal features. This means that this dialect will demonstrate both overt raising of NP to SpecT (consonant with the innovative property B), alongside short movement of NP to SpecAGR, as dictated by the weak nominal specification of TENSE (the 'older' property, A).

Taking property A to be a nominal feature specification, we assume that it is identical in Standard Latin American Spanish and Dominican Spanish. Property B, the innovation, is the property of interest to us here. The derivations which Dominican Spanish shares with Standard Latin American Spanish were shown in (16) and (17); the derivation which are determined by the innovative feature specifications is illustrated in (18). The SpecAGR position remains empty prior to Spell-Out – it is not warranted on the grounds of Morphological Checking – and is not projected.

(18) Dominican Spanish, with weak nominal AGR features and strong nominal TENSE features

```
NP -> TENSE-P
   ^     |
   |     V
   |     AGR-P
   |     AGR'
   |      t_w
   |      VP
   |      t_v
   |      V'
   |      t_v
   |      ...
```
The formerly weak nominal TENSE features became strong, and the formerly strong nominal AGR features became weak, entailing the loss of the null subject and the loss of post-verbal subject order licensed in (17).

As proposed, the derivation in (18), in which the nominal features of AGR are weak and the nominal features of TENSE are strong, exists alongside the derivation in (17), with the opposite nominal feature specifications on AGR and TENSE, accounting for apparently contradictory data such as that presented in the speech samples throughout, and in particular those in (11), where, within individual speakers’ productions, we observed distinct typological tendencies; selected data pairs from these excerpts are contrasted in (19) and (19’):

(19) Parameter setting represented in (17)

Null Subjects:

a. ... vino con veintiocho mil dólares ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... he came with twenty-eight thousand dollars’

b. ... no se le puede echar plata ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... you can’t invest money ...’

c. ... y dijo que le iba a echar plata ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... and he said he would invest money ...’

d. ... aquí no hay luz, no. (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... there is no electricity here.’

e. ... no hay necesidad ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... there is no need ...’

f. ... va a haber más agua ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... there will be more water ...’

g. ... a mí no me hace nada, y es lo único que tengo. (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... it does nothing to me, and it is all I have.’

h. En mi trabajo se requiere ... (Speaker 11b)
   ‘In my job it is required ...’

i. Si te pasaras un día en mi trabajo, te dieres cuenta ... (Speaker 11b)
   ‘If you spent a day at my job, you would notice ...’

Post-verbal Subjects:

j. ... de que hayan apagones ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘... that there be blackouts ...’

k. ... qué hago yo ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘what I do ... ’

l. ... cuando llega una persona ... (Speaker 11b)
   ‘... when someone arrives ...’

(19’) Parameter setting represented in (18)

Overt Subjects:

a. Cuando él vino la primera vez ... (Speaker 11a)
   ‘When he came for the first time ...’
b. ... y yo le dije que ... (Speaker 11a)  
'... and I told him that ...'

c. ... cuando yo me muera, tú te vas a hacer dueño ... (Speaker 11a)  
'... when I die, you will become owner ...'

d. Porque ello no hay luz ... (Speaker 11a)  
'Because there is no electricity ...'

e. ... ello viene un poquitico ya en la llave ya ... (Speaker 11a)  
'there comes a little in the tap now ...'

f. Yo me bebo yo solo un litro ... (Speaker 11a)  
'I drink a liter myself ...'

g. ... que yo hable español. (Speaker 11b)  
'... that I speak Spanish.'

h. Entonces yo trato de que ... (Speaker 11b)  
'Then I try to ...'

i. ... tú sabes ... (Speaker 11b)  
'... you know ...'

Preverbal Subjects:

j. ... sin tú hablar con los otros hermanos tuyos ... (Speaker 11a)  
'... without you speaking with your brothers ...'

k. ... antes de yo ponerme a beber ... (Speaker 11a)  
'... before I set to drinking ...'

l. ... la forma de yo hablar es una mezcla ... (Speaker 11b)  
'... the way I speak is a mix ...'

m. ... donde yo trabajo ... (Speaker 11b)  
'... where I work ...'

n. ... cómo es que ellos hablan ... (Speaker 11b)  
'... how it is that they speak ...'

o. ... y a qué es que ellos se refieren ... (Speaker 11b)  
'... and what it is they refer to ...'

Notice that the data items in (19) and (19') are comparable in structure, and, more importantly, are drawn from the speech of the same speakers – speakers employ the null and overt subjects and post- and pre-verbal subjects freely, as expected if their grammars include dual specifications on TENSE and AGR.

4.3. Summary of the analysis

The proposal that has been presented herein is in keeping with central Minimalist premises, according to which the task of the language learner is to assemble the appropriate set of functional features on lexical items to drive the computational system of the grammar. Therefore, in a non-trivial sense, language variation and change represents the addition and reorganization of abstract feature specifications on lexical items and functional projections. Such a conceptualization is successfully invoked in explaining the apparently contradictory patterns attested in Dominican
Spanish – Dominican Spanish as demonstrating overt/pre-verbal subjects and null/post-verbal subjects at once. The contradiction is resolved if we assume that lexical items and functional projections may be specified as bearing weak nominal TENSE and strong nominal AGR features, or they may be marked as bearing the opposite specifications, namely, strong nominal TENSE and weak nominal AGR features. Thus, speakers of Dominican Spanish may be characterized as bi-lingual, demonstrating two distinct grammars, with contrasting TENSE and AGR feature specifications; the intralingual shift in TENSE and AGR features entails the presence or absence of particular syntactic derivations.

5. Conclusion

We have reviewed several types of synchronic evidence that converge in demonstrating that Dominican Spanish differs in significant respects from other Latin American Spanish varieties, and that the Dominican vernacular itself demonstrates notable intra-dialectal variability. In our analysis of these data, we have argued that the ways in which Dominican Spanish differs from Standard Latin American Spanish mirror the ways in which languages differ from one another, namely, within parametric limits. Dominican Spanish is distinguished as incorporating strong nominal TENSE and weak nominal AGR features, licensing derivations that incorporate overt pronominals and pre-verbal subjects. Moreover, the intra-dialectal variability noted in the speech samples collected, and corroborated in the extensive research literature, indicates that the dialect additionally presents weak nominal TENSE and strong nominal AGR features, motivating structures in which the normative null subjects and pre-verbal positioning are also licit.

Accordingly, it has been argued that speakers of Dominican Spanish may acquire an I-language that is variable between parameter settings (strong versus weak) of nominal TENSE and AGR features. On this view, speakers are bi-lingual in their native language, acquiring two grammars with opposed, competing values for the relevant parameters. The availability of the ‘old’ forms (Standard Spanish-type pro-drop properties licensed by strong nominal AGR and weak nominal TENSE) alongside the innovations (English- and French-type non-pro-drop properties licensed by weak nominal AGR and strong nominal TENSE) is a state of affairs that typifies linguistic change in progress. Thus, though Dominican Spanish has maintained null pronouns and post-verbal subjects, hallmarks of pro-drop language typology, the possibility may be disappearing, and the prognosis for this regional vernacular is not in the introduction of the non-pro-drop patterns (overt subjects and fixed positional licensing, which are already in evidence), but in the suppression and subsequent loss of the older competing structures.

The present work has successfully endeavored to synthesize and elucidate the apparently contradictory grammatical forms attested in a dialect of Spanish. But the larger contributions of the work are manifold. The analysis advanced lends additional empirical support to the proposal put forth by Henry and Wilson regarding parametric limits of variation within dialects of the same language, and makes more
precise the early formulations of the application of Principles and Parameters Theory to dialectal variation. Likewise, the proposal proffered brings the findings of researchers in historical change and language acquisition to bear on synchronic analyses. Finally, the neat accommodation of these observations on linguistic variation and change within Chomsky’s restricted theory of Minimalism makes evident the potential import of dialectology to syntactic theory.

References

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