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# L1 attrition in a multidialectal setting: Input and Intake in L1 Spanish null and postverbal subjects

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# Aims of the study

In this paper we:

1. explore a new model for reconciling instances of L1 grammatical attrition within a Generative Grammar account of the architecture of the Language Faculty;

2. exemplify L1 syntactic attrition in the 'parametric' property of subject realisation patterns in Spanish adult bidialectal grammars (Domínguez and Hicks 2016);

3. explain the nature of the attested syntactic attrition through the role of Intake (as opposed to just Input), extending the model of Putnam & Sánchez (2013).

# Non-parameter UG models of grammar

- Recent generative approaches to the language faculty architecture assume a minimally specified UG, eschewing highly specified parameters of morphosyntactic variation.

- The computational component (syntax) is universal, consisting only of core syntactic operations constrained by general principles of economy.

- Variation is encoded in the lexicon through options for assembly of morphosyntactic features onto lexical items (e.g. Case, Gender, Tense), including functional categories (D, T, v, C, etc.)

- Morphosyntactic properties may not necessarily be resilient to changes in the linguistic environment.

# Input in a bidialectal context

- In language contact situations, L1 Input may not cease or be replaced by L2, but instead may simply be substantially (qualitatively) different from monolingual L1 input.

- This is the case for Spanish speakers who migrated to the US and settled in a multidialectal community (e.g. NYC, Miami etc.); see Dominguez (2013), Otheguy and Zentella (2012).

- The Mainland (MS) and Caribbean (CS) varieties of Spanish in such contact situations exhibit grammatical differences in the realisation of syntactic subjects, either as null subjects or postverbal subjects.

# Null & postverbal subjects in Spanish

- Null/overt subjects

  Syntactic constraint: licensing of pro

  1. Susana dice que *pro*/ella está contenta
     *Susana says that pro/she is   happy*
     'Susana says that she is happy'

  Pragmatic constraint: focus

- Postverbal VS / VOS subjects

  Syntactic constraint: subjects licensed postverbally

  2. Ha venido  Juan
     *has arrived Juan*

  Pragmatic constraint: focus

  3. Ha  comprado el  libro Juan
     *has bought    the book Juan*

# CS/MS Microparametric differences

Caribbean Spanish 'overuses' overt subjects and 'underuses' postverbal subjects (Toribio 2000; Mayol 2012; Camacho 2008, 2011, 2013; Martínez-Sanz 2011; Otheguy et. al. 2007; Otheguy and Zentella 2012):



Legend: ■ Cuba  ■ Spain

Null Subjects: Cuba 52.3%, Spain 70.8%
Postverbal Subjects: Cuba 12.5%, Spain 25.5%
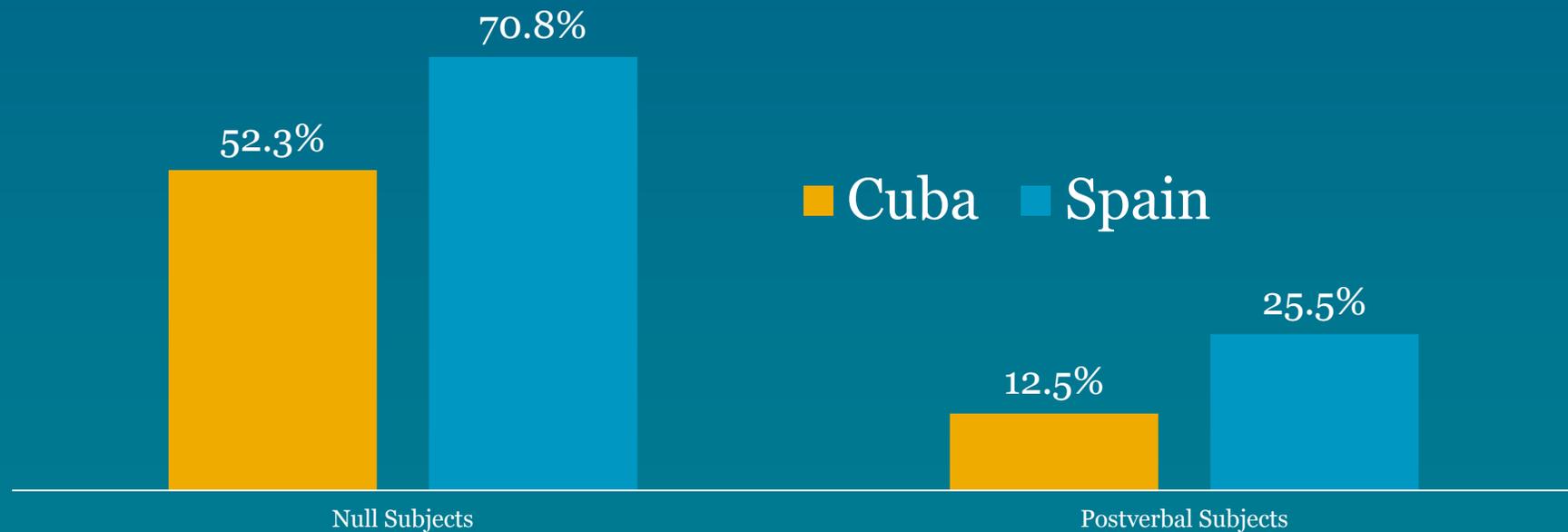
Source: Domínguez (2013)

# Features in Spanish varieties

The CS/MS distinction with respect to subject use is derived from different feature specifications of the functional category T(ense); see Toribio (2000, 2001), Camacho (2008), Sheehan (2006)

- Like typical null subject languages, MS is specified with a feature [$u$D] (following Sheehan, 2006). This ensures a pronominal subject in the specifier position of T is null (other than for specific semantic effects, e.g. focus).

- CS is only optionally specified with [$u$D] on T, essentially having both 'null subject' and 'non-null subject' options (Domínguez & Hicks, 2016). Hence two possible derivations for overt subject sentences in CS, one employing T without [$u$D], the other employing T with [$u$D] ⇨ higher overt subject realisation rate.

# Miami-Dade County (in 2008)

Other
3%

South America
17%

Central America
15%

Dominican Rep
3%

Puerto Rico
6%

Mexico
3%
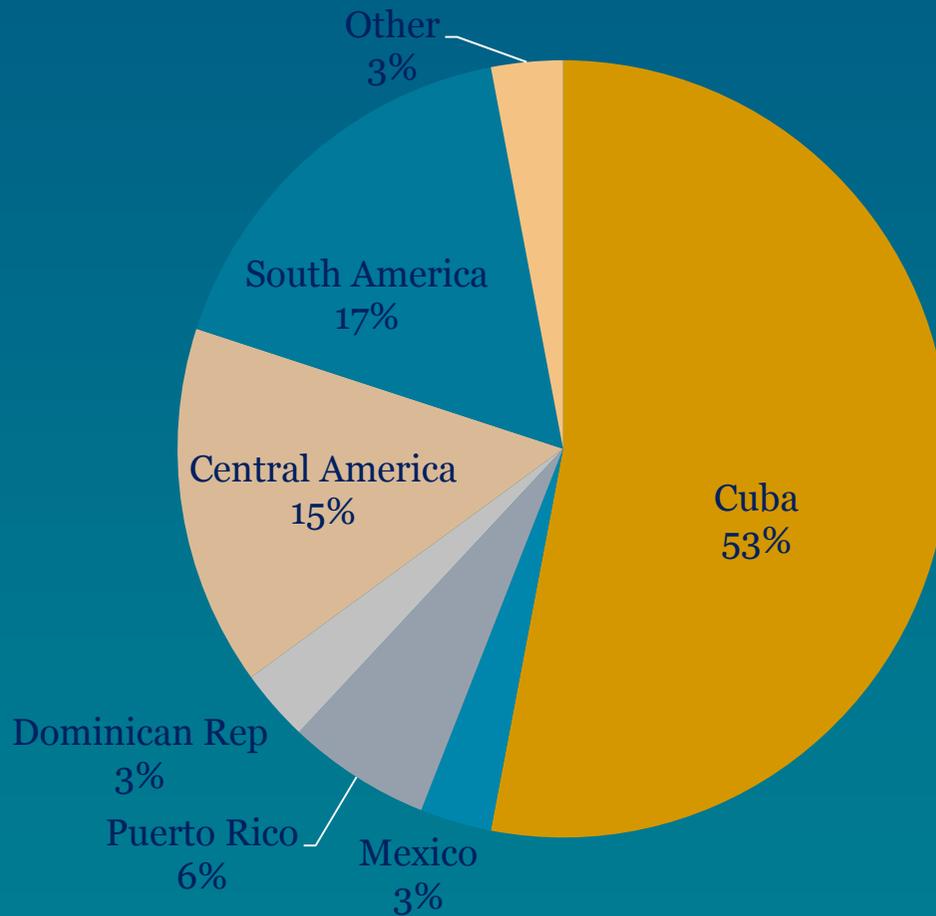
Cuba
53%

*62% of the population is Latino/Hispanic

*70.3 % speak a language other than English (national average is 20%)

(source: US Census Bureau)

# L1 grammatical change
## (Dominguez 2013)

20 first-generation Cuban-Spanish speakers in Miami show change in their use of null and postverbal subjects:
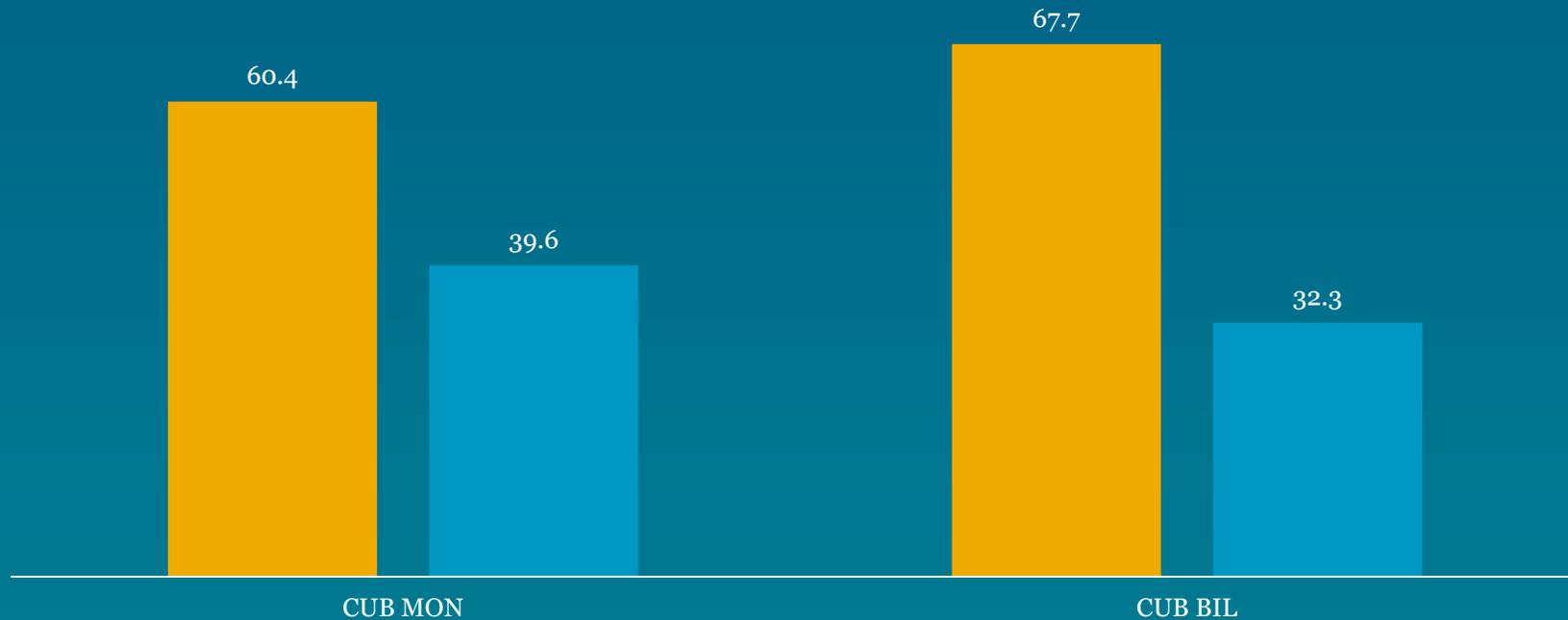
- Use of null subjects has significantly increased (p=0.04).
- Use of postverbal subjects has significantly increased (p=0.02).
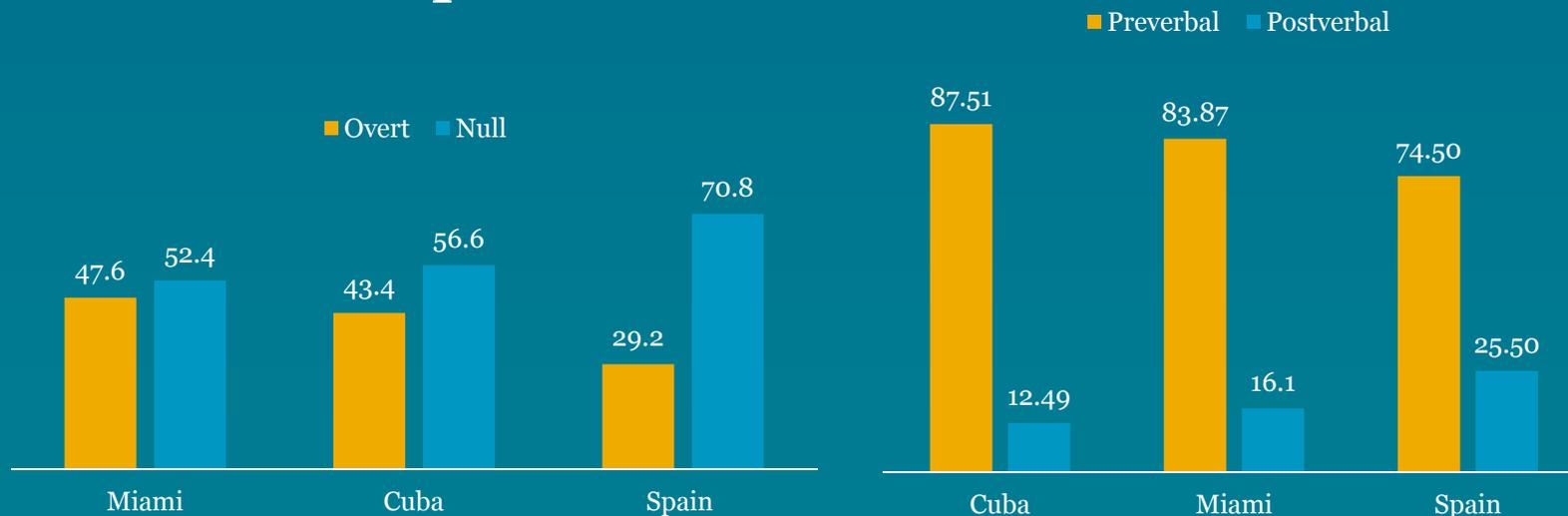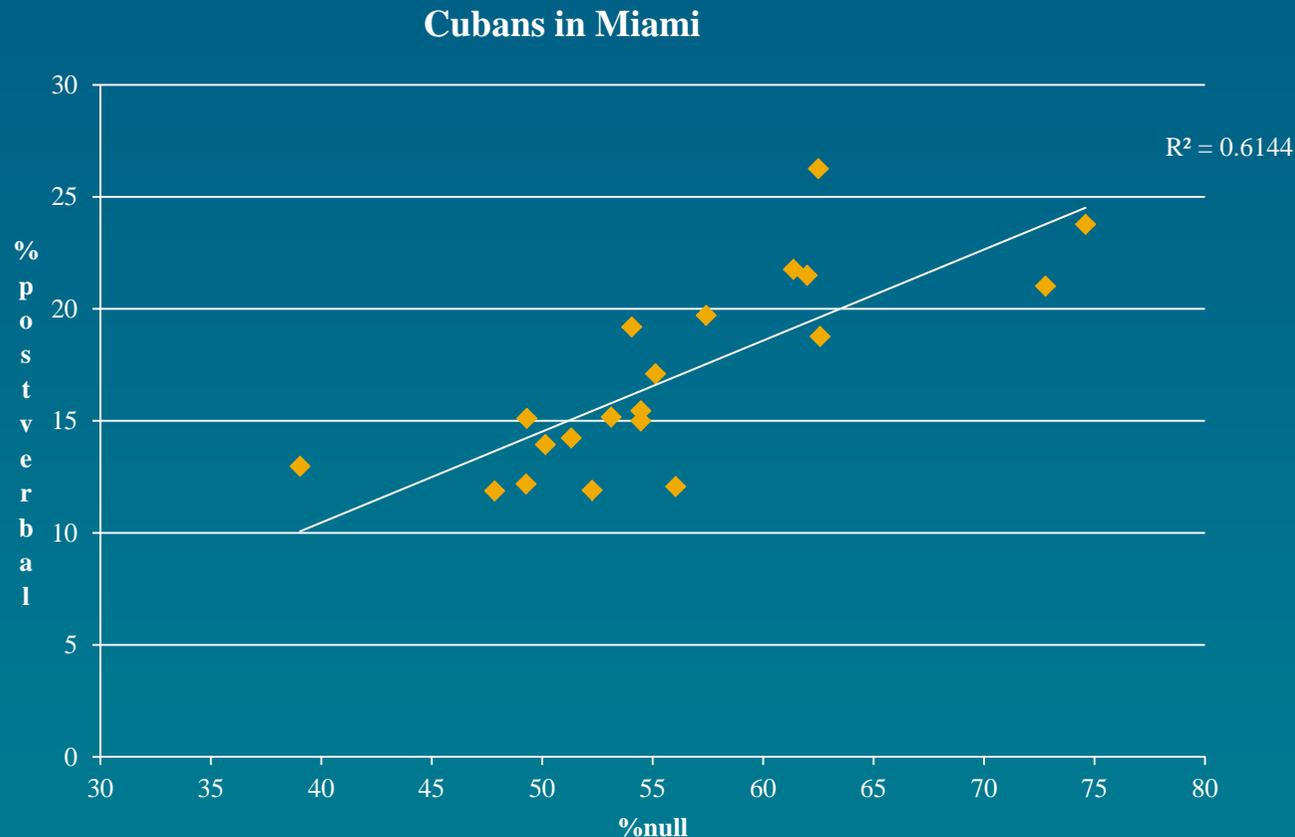
# Increased postverbal subjects

## Intransitive structures (SV-VS)

■ inverted     ■ non-inverted



60.4

39.6

67.7

32.3

CUB MON

CUB BIL

Preference for inversion has significantly increased for the Bilingual Cuban group ($\chi 2 = 4.44$, df = 1, $p = .03$).

# Correlation between postverbal and null subjects (Domínguez & Hicks 2016)



**Cubans in Miami**

R² = 0.6144

Changes in one of the properties examined are dependent on changes in the other for the Miami group (linear regression analysis)

# Paradox of syntactic attrition

Given that L1 attrition appears to be attested, the model of the grammar needs to allow for it. We claim that the lexical feature-based, parameter-free model of UG allows for this, unlike traditional parameter models.

Yet given this, why then is L1 syntactic attrition not more widely attested? To address the apparent paradox, we need to focus on what set of grammatical and extralinguistic conditions engender attrition in mature grammars.

We extend the model of Putnam & Sánchez (2013), who account for the L1 properties (and relatively low L1 proficiency) of heritage language grammars within a generative, feature-based approach.

# Intake and syntactic attrition

- Following Putnam & Sánchez, Intake – rather than simply Input – is important to feature reassembly.

- For them, in heritage language contexts, Intake of L2 is favoured by greater levels of psycholinguistic processing of the Input, e.g. processing for comprehension.  Relevant processing activates the morphosyntactic features of lexical items in the Input and favours Intake.

- Late sequential bidialectals are necessarily different in that they are post- critical period. Yet while functional properties are typically stable at this stage, we would predict that suitable conditions might still favour Intake.

# What favours Intake in L1 attrition?

- Intake is likely to be qualitatively different when the 'L2' is not a distinct language but a distinct dialect. Other potentially significant considerations:

- The bidialectal Spanish speakers' grammars already permit both null and overt subjects; the difference concerns the different feature specifications that underlie each option in the two varieties.

- The L1 grammar already provides a complex and sensitive relationship between syntactic subject types and the subtle interpretive properties that they correlate with.

- the 'L2' lexical feature specifications available for the relevant functional head are a proper subset of their L1's. There are no new features to learn.

# Summary

- L1 attrition is traditionally difficult to accommodate within theoretical models which deny flexibility in steady-state mature grammars.

- Feature-based 'minimal UG' approaches change the landscape for intra-speaker variation in L1.

- If the model allows for attrition, then why does L1 grammatical attrition appear to be rare and restricted?

- The answer may lie in the conditions that lead to suitable processing of the input data for feature reassembly onto lexical items (Intake) – understood to be relevant to L1 in the primary language learning years (heritage grammars), but perhaps also relevant post-critical period.