

Phonetically unrealized elements in agrammatism: The case of *pro*

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This paper aims to characterize difficulties in inversion in agrammatic speech through a contrast with non-impaired individuals. The languages under examination, namely Catalan, Galician and Spanish, are instances of null subject languages, i.e. they allow post-verbal subjects with independence of the nature of the verb (Rizzi 1982, Belletti 1988, Belletti and Leonini 2004). This is due to the possibility of licensing a null pronominal subject, an ‘associate’ (Chomsky 1995), in the pre-verbal position:

- (1) a. Ha trucat en Joan (Catalan)
 have-pres.3rd.sg *phone-past.part* *the* *J.*
 ‘John has phoned’
- b. Foi Xoán (Galician)
 go-pret.3rd.sg *X.*
 ‘John went’
- c. La ha hecho Juan (Spanish)
 it-CL-fem *have-pres.3rd.sg* *do-past.part* *J.*
 ‘John has done it’

Yes/no questions in the varieties under study may be constructed both with the order SV or VS. In order to observe the production patterns displayed by agrammatics and compare it to non-damaged speakers, the production of yes/no interrogatives in 15 agrammatics and 15 matched controls have been analyzed. An example from the question elicitation task has been included in (2).

(2) Potser toco el piano, pregunta-m’ho.

Maybe I play piano, ask it to me

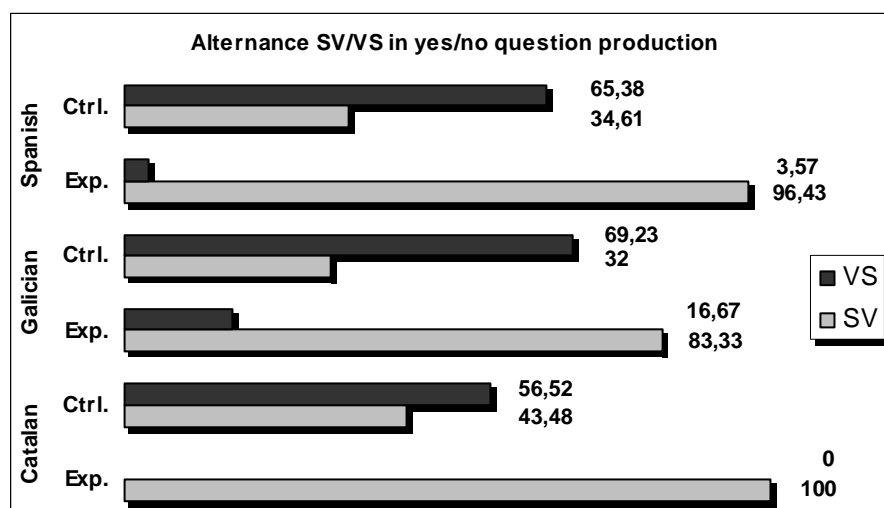
Expected question: Toques el piano?

Do you play piano?

According to Rizzi (1997, 2002), the construction of total interrogatives crucially depends on high portions of the CP-field, generally assumed as problematic in non-fluent aphasics (Menn and Obler 1990). Even though our mild Ibero-Romance sample revealed mastery of yes/no questions to a 67.78% across languages (122/180 response), their production has been found to diverge from non-pathological adult-like usages. Structural accounts (Friedmann and Grodzinsky’s (1997) Tree-Pruning Hypothesis) seem suffer from some shortcomings in order to account for these data.

Another factor, the preference for overt material vs. phonetically unrealized elements, has already been documented in agrammatic patients for null interrogative operators (Martínez-Ferreiro, in press). Hence, a systematic avoidance of the order VS in the experimental results can be expected since this order will imply the control of an expletive ‘pro’ in pre-verbal position. An analysis of the sentences correctly produced and including an overt subject reveals that there is a clear dissociation in the behavior of the agrammatic and the control subjects. While for controls inversion is more productive than the SV form, for agrammatic subjects the reverse pattern is preferred.

Table 1: Alternance SV/VS in yes/no question production.



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