The OPC in Spanish and Polish Monolingual Speakers

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Montalbetti’s (1984) Overt Pronoun Constraint (OPC) is presumed to be a universal principle of grammar instantiated into null-subject grammars.

The OPC has been looked at from the point of view of second language acquisition, but it has not been studied experimentally looking at how monolinguals treat the structure.

The objective of this study is to provide empirical data that confirms Montalbetti’s work.
According to the OPC, unlike the null pronoun, the overt pronoun can never refer back to a quantified expression (1) or a WH-word antecedent (2): The overt pronoun needs to refer to a third person within the discourse.

Overt (1a) 
Nadie$_i$ cree que él$_{i}$ va a ganar
‘No one$_i$ believes that he$_{i}$ will win.’

Null (1b) 
Nadie$_i$ cree que Ø$_{i}$ va a ganar
‘No one$_i$ believes that he$_{i}$ will win.’

Overt (2a) 
¿Quién$_i$ cree que él$_{i}$ va a ganar?
‘Who$_i$ believes that he$_{i}$ will win?’

Null (2b) 
¿Quién$_i$ cree que Ø$_{i}$ va a ganar?
‘Who$_i$ believes that he$_{i}$ will win?’
Research Questions

1. Do monolinguals (of Spanish and Polish) have clear-cut intuitions that reflect the restrictions that the OPC proposes?

2. Will these monolinguals treat quantified antecedents differently from WH-word antecedents, within the OPC?

3. Will both monolingual groups treat the given antecedents similarly across languages?
Hypothesis

1. If Spanish and Polish monolinguals do not have clear-cut intuitions that reflect the restrictions, as proposed by the OPC, then present gradient judgments are due to the syntax-pragmatics interface.

2. If Spanish and Polish monolinguals treat quantified antecedents differently from WH-word antecedents within the OPC, then the two types of antecedents vary in distribution.

3. If both monolingual groups treat the given antecedents similarly across languages, then the data presented highlight the universality of the OPC, since it is treated similarly across languages.
Methodology

- Participant Groups:
  - Group A: Spanish monolinguals $N=20$
    - Spain
  - Group B: Polish monolinguals $N=20$
    - Poland
Task 1: Sentence Selection Task

- The sentence selection task tests the interpretation of a target bound reading with quantified, WH-word, and referential antecedents.

- This task included the following types of antecedents:

  - nadie/nikt ‘no one’ (k = 4)
  - la mayoría de/Większość ‘most of’ (k = 4)
  - muchos/wiele ‘many’ (k = 4)
  - todos/wszyscy ‘everyone’ (k = 4)
  - quién/kto ‘who’ SG. (k = 4)
  - quiénes/którzy ‘who’ PL. (k = 4)
  - referential antecedents (k = 8)
Task 1: Sentence Selection Task

- Participants read a context in Spanish/Polish and are asked to choose an appropriate concluding sentence between (a) and (b), or (c) to choose both (a) and (b).

- In this task they were choosing between a null and overt subordinate subject.
Un grupo de amigos siempre sale a bailar los fines de semana. Toman por lo menos 5 cervezas.

A group of friends always goes out dancing over the weekend. (They) drink at least 5 beers.

a) Nadie cree que él toma demasiado.
   No one believes that he drinks too much.

b) Nadie cree que toma demasiado.
   No one believes that Ø drinks too much.

c) (a) y (b)
Results: Sentence Selection Task

Response in a forced bound interpretation

- Polish
- Spanish

- nikt/nadie
- wiekszosc/la may, de
- wiele/muchos
- wszyscy/todos
- kto/quién
- ktorzy/quiénes
Results: Sentence Selection Task

- Three antecedents are treated similarly by both Spanish and Polish monolinguals:
  - muchos (61%) /wiele (60%) ‘many’
  - quién (81%) /kto (80%) ‘who’ SG.
  - quiénes (66%) /którzy (69%) ‘who’ PL.
Results: Sentence Selection Task

- In Polish, it appears as though the following antecedents are accepted more:
  - kto (80%), którzy (69%), większość (69%)

- In Spanish, the following antecedents are accepted more:
  - Quién (81%), la mayoría de (79%), nadie (78%), todos (69%)
Task 2: Picture Matching Task

- The picture matching task tests the interpretation of bound and unbound readings with quantified, WH-word, and referential antecedents with the presence of both null and overt pronouns in the subordinate subject position.

- This task included the following types of antecedents:

  nadie/nikt ‘no one’ \((k = 8)\)
  la mayoría de/większość ‘most of’ \((k = 8)\)
  muchos/wiele ‘many’ \((k = 8)\)
  todos/wszyscy ‘everyone’ \((k = 8)\)
  quién/kto ‘who’ SG. \((k = 8)\)
  quiénes/którzy ‘who’ PL. \((k = 8)\)
  referential antecedents \((k = 16)\)
Task 2: Picture Matching Task

- Participants read a context in Spanish followed by a set of 2 pictures and a concluding sentence.

- Based on the concluding sentence the participants are asked to choose a picture (A or B) as the correct depiction.
Example: Picture Matching Task

Kuzyni są w restauracji. Już zjedli obiad.
The cousins are in the restaurant. They have already eaten dinner.

Nikt nie wie czy on woli herbate czy kawe.
No one knows whether he wants tea or coffee.
Results: Picture Matching Task

Correctly choosing the bound interpretation

- nikt/nadie
- wiele/muchos
- wszyscy/todos
- kto/quién
- który/quién
Results: Picture Matching Task

- When expecting a correct unbound interpretation, the Spanish monolinguals are more accurate with *nadie, la mayoría de, quién, and quiénes.*

- The Polish monolinguals are much stronger with *wszyscy.*

- Both language groups treat *wiele/muchos* equally.
Results: Picture Matching Task

- When expecting a correct bound interpretation, the Polish group is a bit more accurate with *nikt, wiele, kto*.

- The Spanish group is more accurate with *la mayoría de, todos, quiénes*.
Results: Spanish & Polish Antecedent Types

Interpretation choice of null subjects

- POL Quant.
- SPA Quant.
- POL WH-word
- SPA WH-word

Bound
Unbound
Results: Spanish & Polish Antecedent Types

Interpretation choice of overt subjects

- POL Quant.
- SPA Quant.
- POL WH-word
- SPA WH-word

Legend:
- Bound
- Unbound
Results: Polish Antecedent Types

- When expecting a bound interpretation, Polish monolinguals show a strong preference for bound readings with null subjects, accepting it 69% of the time with the quantified antecedents and 66% of the time with the WH-word antecedents.

- When expecting an unbound interpretation, Polish monolinguals show a strong preference for the unbound readings with the overt subjects, accepting the quantified antecedents 66% of the time and the WH-word antecedents 63% of the time.
Results: Spanish Antecedent Types

- When expecting a bound interpretation, Spanish monolinguals show a strong preference for the bound readings with null subjects, accepting it 70% of the time with the quantified antecedents and 61% of the time with the WH-word antecedents.

- When expecting an unbound interpretation, Spanish monolinguals show a strong preference for the unbound readings with overt subjects, accepting the quantified antecedents 68% of the time and the WH-word antecedents 73% of the time.
Conclusions

- Current results indicate that both monolingual groups prefer quantified antecedents over the WH-word antecedents with the bound interpretation (null subject pronoun).

- In general, Spanish monolinguals appear to outperform the Polish group in almost all of the antecedent types in the forced bound context (SST) and in the unbound context (PMT: overt subject pronoun).

- Both language groups performed well within the bound context (PMT: null subject pronoun), although with different antecedents. Some antecedents provided more accuracy than others.

- It appears as though both language groups obey the overt pronoun constraint but it is not as clear-cut as predicted.
Conclusions

- When forced into a bound context reading both groups responded above par at 60% or higher, while the choice of interpretation produced less clear results, showing confusion with the nikt antecedent in an unbound context. Here, Polish monolinguals chose the unbound reading 50% of the time, suggesting an ambiguous reading.

- The Polish group displayed similar problems with the wszyscy antecedent in a bound context, where an ambiguous reading is acceptable. The Spanish group produced the same results with the quién antecedent.

- Experimental data contribute to capture intuitions in a more fine-grained way since they provide gradient differences between the types of variables.
What’s Next…

- Further analysis of the antecedent types
- Statistically different?
- Spanish and Polish heritage speakers
Thank you!
¡Gracias!
Dziękuję!