

Contrastive Focus in Yucatecan Spanish

Rodrigo Gutiérrez-Bravo¹, Martín Sobrino¹, Melanie Uth²

¹ El Colegio de México

² Universität zu Köln

In this talk we provide a description and analysis of contrastive focus constructions in Yucatecan Spanish, the dialect of Spanish spoken in the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico. In this variety of Spanish fronted focus constructions are notoriously common.

- (1) *Yo originalmente A SU HIJO contraté.*
I originally ACC his son I.hired
'Originally, I hired HIS SON.' (SSC: IO)

At first sight, examples like (1) appear to indicate that Yucatecan Spanish allows for the kind of focus fronting that has been reported for many other varieties of Spanish (Zubizarreta 1998, 1999), but which is absent from Mexican Spanish (Gutiérrez Bravo 2006). However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that fronted foci in Yucatecan Spanish behave in a way that is completely different from that of any other variety of Spanish that we are aware of. For example, unlike Standard Spanish, the Yucatecan variety of Spanish allows fronted focus to be preceded by the negation particle *no*, as in (2). Secondly, in Yucatecan Spanish there is a verb focus construction in which the main verb is fronted to a left peripheral position and a finite verb form of *hacer* ('do') is inserted as a dummy verb into the clause, as in (3).

- (2) *No ESO lo mancha; TÚ lo manchas.*
not that it stains you it stain
'THAT is not staining it; YOU stain it.' (SSC: JL)

- (3) *Ellos, VENIR hicieron acá en Yucatán.*
they to.come do.past.3pl here in Yucatan
'They, they CAME here to Yucatán' (SSC: RH)

We provide evidence in favor of the hypothesis that constructions such as the ones above originate from language contact between Yucatecan Spanish and the Mayan language Yucatec Maya, since the syntax of the above mentioned Yucatecan Spanish focus constructions is strikingly similar to the syntax of comparable constructions in Yucatec Maya.