

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**STRUCTURAL MARKEDNESS AND SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE:
A STUDY OF WORD ORDER AND THE LEFT
PERIPHERY IN MEXICAN SPANISH**

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Abbreviations

1	First person
2	Second person
3	Third person
ACC	Accusative preposition
ACC-CL	Accusative (direct object) clitic
Ag	Agent
CL	Clitic
DAT-CL	Dative (indirect object) clitic
Ex	Experiencer
<i>exp</i>	expletive
Loc	Location
p	Plural
s	Singular
Temp	Temporal adverb
Th	Theme

Structural Markedness and Syntactic Structure: A study of Word Order
and the Left Periphery in Mexican Spanish

by

Rodrigo Gutiérrez-Bravo

Abstract

This dissertation investigates a number of word order phenomena attested in Spanish in general and in Mexican Spanish in particular, concentrating on the unmarked word order of this language and the perturbations of this order that result from two left-peripheral movement operations, topicalization and *wh*-movement. The core proposal developed here is that the unmarked word order in Spanish is not the result of some licensing condition related to the subject (i.e. Case, agreement, etc.), but rather results from the interaction between the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) and considerations regarding structural markedness.

The analysis developed here argues that, in the unmarked case, the EPP in Spanish is satisfied in the specifier of the highest inflectional projection by the argument of the verb that ranks highest in the thematic hierarchy, which may but need not correspond to the grammatical subject. To disassociate the constituent that

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satisfies the EPP from any specific grammatical relation, I propose that it be referred to as the Pole of the clause.

I propose that Spanish clauses with different constituents in the Pole position have different degrees of structural markedness, depending of their semantic role. *Agents* and *experiencers* constitute the least marked instance of a Pole. Other arguments and adjuncts which rank lower in the thematic hierarchy constitute more marked instances of a Pole. I argue that beyond a certain degree of structural markedness (when the constituent that would satisfy the EPP ranks low in the thematic hierarchy) it is better not to satisfy the EPP altogether. This explains a number of Spanish verb-initial constructions where the highest inflectional specifier is left empty. I argue that Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 1993), where well-formedness conditions are interpreted as violable constraints, provides a straightforward analysis of this state of affairs.

Finally, I show that the two fundamental properties of the Pole position, its sensitivity to the semantic role of the constituent that occupies it and being the position where the EPP is satisfied, allow us to explain a number of word order facts observed in two left-peripheral phenomena in Spanish, topicalization and the fronting of interrogative operators.

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