This study goes beyond previous analyses of the variable use of subject personal pronouns (SPPs) in Spanish. We use Caribbean Spanish data from two communities: one monolingual, the other (in New York City) simultaneously in contact with English and other varieties of Spanish. Using 6,012 tokens, we conducted a series of statistical regression analyses to test twelve linguistic and eight social constraints explored in previous studies of SPP usage (cf. Carvalho 2011; Flores-Ferrán 2002, 2004; Orozco & Guy 2008; Otheguy, Zentella & Livert 2007; Otheguy & Zentella 2012; Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2010). These constraints include grammatical person, preceding subject, TMA, verb category, subject continuity, age, educational attainment, sex, and socioeconomic status. Besides analyzing overall pronominal usage, this study is the first to explore the conditioning factors on the first person singular SPP (yo ‘I’) as well as the third person singular pronouns (ella/el ‘she/he’) and the plural personal pronouns (nosotros ‘we,’ ustedes ‘you,’ ellas/ellos ‘they’) in the communities under study. Thus, we test several hypotheses and answer a series of research questions regarding pronominal rates and constraints on SPP expression at various levels; we also further test the theory of interdialectal parallelism (Guy 2000). Moreover, we test the premise that a pronominal expression study which breaks down SPPs into individual pronouns would necessarily substitute for an analysis where the different grammatical persons remain collapsed together.

The results reveal a higher pronominal rate in NYC. Interestingly, they also show a lower pronominal rate among younger speakers in the monolingual community. Overall SPP usage is conditioned mainly by external constraints (including grammatical person, subject continuity, TMA form of the verb, and verb type) despite differences in range values between the two speaker groups. The constraint and individual factor effects are, for the most part, also the same in both populations. Furthermore, those constraints which strongly condition all SPPs tested together also condition yo and most likely el/ella and plural SPPs separately in each population under study. On the other hand, constraints whose effects on all SPPs is rather weak, rarely condition any of the individual subject pronouns. Our results suggest that the analysis of SPPs taken separately, at least in the communities under study, does not offer a completely more advantageous alternative than that of all SPPs treated as a single linguistic variable. Intriguing similarities in linguistic conditioning between the two populations persist despite the simultaneous effects of contact with English and dialect leveling in NYC. These findings help increase our knowledge of the conditioning effects on pronominal usage in Spanish and, in general, of the sociolinguistic forces constraining language variation. Additionally, these results contribute to augment our understanding of language variation and change concerning Spanish in North America, Spanish in contact with other languages and, more generally, in language contact situations.