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# Subject position in L2 and heritage Spanish in the Netherlands

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# Introduction

## Comparing heritage speakers and L2 speakers

- Linguistic domain
  - Syntax & phonology: HS > L2
  - Other domains: HS = L2
- Task type
  - Written & explicit tasks: L2 > HS
  - Oral & implicit tasks: HS > L2

(Montrul, 2009, Bowles, 2009, Montrul 2012)

# Introduction

## Comparing heritage speakers and L2 speakers

- Most studies have looked at explicitly instructed phenomena:
  - Gender agreement
  - Tense, aspect mood
  - Ser vs. estar
  - Etc.
- What about implicitly acquired phenomena?

# Subject position

## Subject position with intransitive predicates

- Interface phenomenon
  - **Notoriously vulnerable** (Tsimpili & Sorace 2006; Sorace & Filiaci, 2006; Iverson et al, 2008; Montrul, 2008)
- No explicit instruction

# Subject position

Spanish has flexible subject position:

**S**

**Un chico**

*A boy*

**V**

**llegó**

*arrived*

**V**

**Llegó**

*Arrived*

**S**

**un chico**

*a boy*

# Subject position

Subject position in Spanish is constrained by many factors:

- Unaccusativity
- Focus
- Definiteness of the subject
- Heaviness of the subject
- Animacy of the subject
- Verbal aspect
- Adverbial Phrases

(Roggia, 2011)

# Subject position

Subject position in Spanish is constrained by many factors:

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- Verbal aspect
- Adverbial Phrases

(Roggia, 2011)



# Subject position

## 1. Unaccusativity → syntax-semantics

### Unergative

<b>Un chico</b>	<b>silbó</b>
<i>A boy</i>	<i>whistled</i>
<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>

### Unaccusative

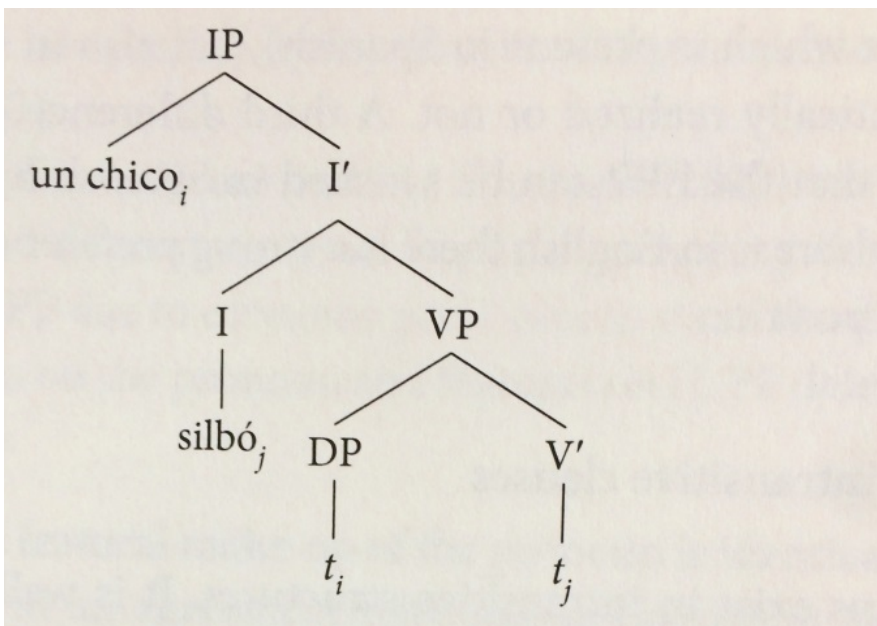
<b>Llegó</b>	<b>un chico</b>
<i>Arrived</i>	<i>a boy</i>
<b>V</b>	<b>S</b>

# Subject position

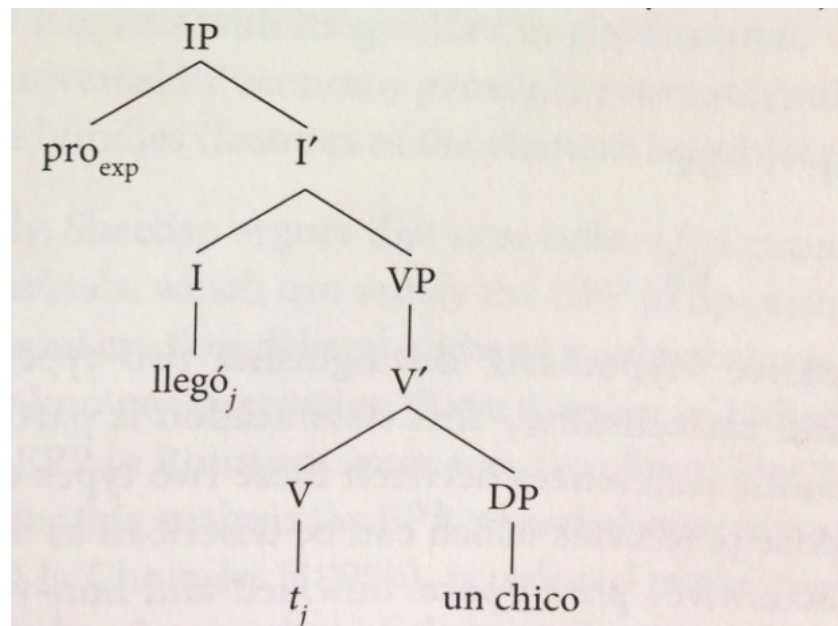
## 1. Unaccusativity → syntax-semantics

**Syntax:** the single argument of unergatives is underlyingly the subject, while the single argument of unaccusatives is syntactically a direct object (Perlmutter, 1978)

*unergatives*



*unaccusatives*



# Subject position

## 1. Unaccusativity → syntax-semantics

**Semantics:** Split-intransitivity hierarchy: semantic notions (telicity, agentivity) are involved. There is a universal continuum (Sorace, 2000)

*Change of location*  
*Change of state*  
*Uncontrolled processes*  
*Continuing of a preexisting state*  
*Existence of state*  
*Uncontrolled processes*  
*Controlled processes (motional)*  
*Controlled processes (nonmotional)*

**Core unaccusatives**



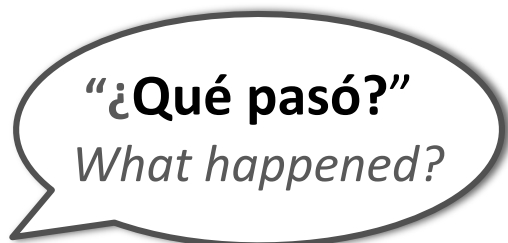
*periphery*

**Core unergatives**

# Subject position

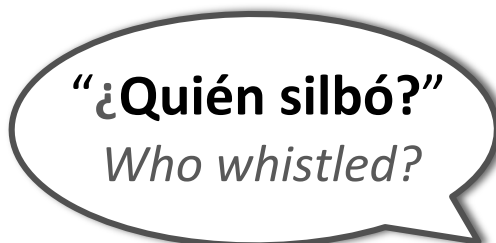
## 2. Focus → syntax-discourse

### Broad



<b>Un chico</b>	<b>silbó</b>
<i>A boy</i>	<i>whistled</i>
<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>

### Narrow



<b>Silbó</b>	<b>un chico</b>
<i>Whistled</i>	<i>a boy</i>
<b>V</b>	<b>S</b>

# Subject position

## 3. Definiteness → syntax-discourse

### Definite

**El chico**

*The boy*

**S**

**llegó**

*arrived*

**V**

### Indefinite

**Llegó**

*Arrived*

**V**

**un chico**

*a boy*

**S**

# Previous research

## Comparing HS and L2 speakers

- Montrul (2005): Both HS and L2 had knowledge of unaccusativity but in the low proficiency group, HS outperformed L2. No other factors were taken into consideration.

# Previous research

## Heritage speakers

### **Unaccusativity is robust:**

- Montrul (2006)

### **Focus is more robust than unaccusativity**

- De Prada Pérez & Pascual y Cabo (2012)
- De Prada-Pérez (2010) (Spanish-Catalan)

### **Both are vulnerable**

- Zapata et al. (2005)

# Previous research

## L2 speakers

### **Unaccusativity is robust (more than focus):**

- Hertel & Pérez-Leroux (1999)
- Montrul (2004, 2005) (only intermediate and advanced learners)
- Lozano (2006)

### **Focus is more robust than unaccusativity**

- Domínguez (2013)
- Parafita-couto et al (2014)
- Sánchez-Álvaro (2016) (beginners)
- Domínguez & Arche (2008) (beginners & intermediate learners)



# Previous research

## L2 speakers

### **Both are vulnerable**

- Hertel (2003) (low & intermediate learners)

### **Both are acquirable**

- Hertel (2003) (advanced learners)
- Domínguez & Arche (2008) (advanced)
- Sánchez-Álvaro (2016) (advanced)

# Previous research

## Furthermore:

- No control group
- Different proficiency levels
- Different methods
- Are additional factors controlled for?
- Qualitative vs. quantitative interpretation of the results?

# Previous research

## Overall order preferences

### **Preference for preverbal subjects**

- Montrul (2005)
- De Prada Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012
- Hinch-Nava, 2007
- de Prada-Pérez, 2010
- Hertel, 2003 (only low & intermediate learners)
- Domínguez & Arche, 2008
- Domínguez, 2013

# Previous research

## Overall order preferences

**... although advanced L2 learners sometimes overgeneralize postverbal subjects in some conditions**

- Hertel, 2003
- Lozano, 2006
- Domínguez, 2013

# The present study

## CONTEXTUALIZED SCALAR ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT TASK

### VERB TYPE:

- Unaccusative: *llegar, regresar, entrar, irse, desaparecer, morirse, escaparse*
- Unergative: *bailar, correr, llamar, reírse, cantar, gritar, limpiar, tocar*

### FOCUS: Story ending in:

- ¿Qué pasó?                      → introducing broad focus
- ¿Quién + V?                      → introducing narrow focus

### DEFINITENESS:

- Definite subjects
- Indefinite subjects

# The present study

## CONTEXTUALIZED SCALAR ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT TASK

### CONTROL VARIABLES:

- Heaviness of the subject
- Animacy of the subject
- Verbal aspect
- Adverbial Phrases

# The present study

## EXAMPLE: Unaccusative – narrow focus – indefinite subject

Es mi cumpleaños y hay mucha gente de visita en mi casa. De repente suena el timbre pero como justo estoy recibiendo un regalo de mi tío, no puedo abrir la puerta. Va mi esposa y ve que son unos primos. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: '¿Quién llegó?' Mi esposa me dice:

*It's my birthday and there are many guests in my house. Suddenly the doorbell rings, but since I'm just receiving a gift from my uncle, I cannot open the door. My wife goes and sees that it's some cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: "Who arrived?". My wife tells me:*

**Unos primos llegaron.**

*Some cousins arrived.*

0	0	●	0	0
-2	-1	0	1	2

**Llegaron unos primos.**

*Arrived some cousins.*

0	0	0	0	●
-2	-1	0	1	2



# The present study

## PARTICIPANTS

### **21 heritage speakers**

- 1 Dutch speaking parent, 1 Spanish speaking parent
- Different varieties of Spanish: Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina (No Caribbean dialects)
- High-intermediate to advanced proficiency level

### **22 L2 speakers**

- Acquired Spanish after age 16
- Similar to HS in age, educational level and proficiency
- Minimum 6 months naturalistic exposure

### **18 monolingual speakers of Spanish**

- Different varieties of Spanish: Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Venezuela
- Similar to HS and L2 in age and educational level



# Predictions

1. Given the interface status of the phenomenon, both heritage speakers and L2 speakers will diverge from monolingual speakers
2. Even though the task is explicit, we do not expect an advantage for L2, given that word order is not taught in courses.
3. In line with previous research, we expect an overgeneralization of preverbal subjects

# Results

## Monolinguals

### Mixed effects model

#### *Independent variables*

- Unaccusativity (t=2.16, p=0.056)
- Focus (t=4.17, p=0.002)
- Definiteness (t=3.39, p=0.007)

# Results

## Heritage speakers

### Mixed effects model

#### *Independent variables*

- Unaccusativity (t=2.68, p=0.01)
- Focus (t=2.80, p=0.01)
- Definiteness (t=1.07, p= **0.30**)

# Results

## L2 speakers

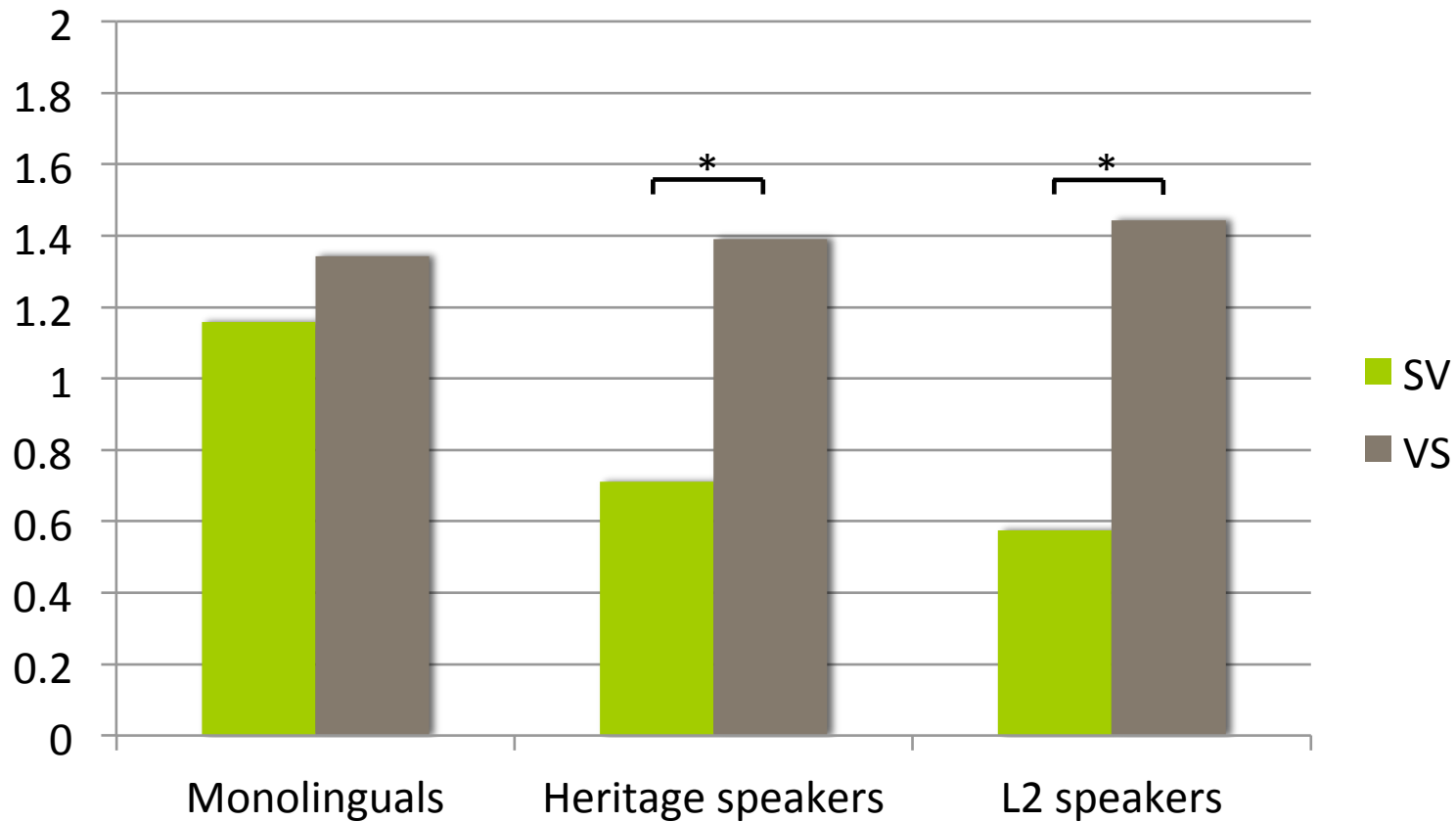
### Mixed effects model

#### *Independent variables*

- Unaccusativity (t=1.49, p= **0.15**)
- Focus (t=0.71, p= **0.48**)
- Definiteness (t=0.96, p= **0.35**)

# Results

## Ratings across conditions:



# Back to the predictions

1. Given the interface status of the phenomenon, both heritage speakers and L2 speakers will diverge from monolingual speakers
2. Even though the task is explicit, we do not expect an advantage for L2, given that word order is not taught in courses.
3. In line with previous research, we expect an overgeneralization of preverbal subjects

→ cross-linguistic influence from Dutch?

# Word order in Dutch

- Een man      schreeuwde  
*A man*      *shouted*  
**S**                      **V**

But...

- Buiten      schreeuwde      een man  
*Outside*      *shouted*      *a man*  
**ADV**                      **V**                      **S**
- Er      schreeuwde      een man  
*There*      *shouted*      *a man*  
**ADV**                      **V**                      **S**
- Dat      schreeuwde      een man  
*That*      *shouted*      *a man*  
**OBJ**                      **V**                      **S**

# Conclusion

To summarize:

- Neither heritage speakers nor L2 speakers of Spanish have completely monolingual-like knowledge on the constraints on word order
- Heritage speakers have an advantage over L2 speakers, due to their increased exposure to naturalistic input
- Both groups show overgeneralization of postverbal subjects, possibly due to influence from Dutch



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i Muchas Gracias!

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