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Child and Adult Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands: The Development of Subject Position

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Heritage speakers
Speakers of a minority language, acquired during childhood in a naturalistic setting in the home context.

Subject position in Spanish
Spanish has flexible word order:

Un chico llegó. A boy arrived
Llegó un chico. A boy arrived

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by unaccusativity, focus, definiteness, animacy, verbal aspect, adverbial phrases, and subject heaviness

Heritage speakers

Previous Research:

Children
Monolingual
- Have knowledge of verb type by age 2 (Bel, 2001)
- No previous research on other factors

Bilingual
- No previous research

Adults
Monolingual
- Verb type & focus influence word order (Hertel, 2005; Lozano, 2006)
- Many other factors, such as definiteness as well (Roggia, 2011)

Bilingual
- Do not have monolingual-like knowledge of all the factors determining word order (Cazue, et al., 2008; De Prada-Pérez & Pescuezo y Cabo, 2012)
- Overgeneralize preverbal subjects (Hinch, 2007; Hertel, 2005; Cazue, et al., 2008)

SIMPLIFICATION OR CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE?

Method

Children
Preference Judgment Task:

Three dogs are playing at the beach and having a lot of fun. While they play, their friend the cat comes and sees them and he gets very sad because they had not asked him to join them.

> El gato llegó.

Subjects respond:
- Llegó el gato
- Llegó un gato
- Llegó el mismo gato

Adulst

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

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 esposo 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, she asks me: Who arrived? My wife tells me:

- Unos primos llegaron.
- Algunos primos llegaron.
- Unos primos llegaron.

24 heritage speakers
- Born in the Netherlands, or arrived before 5
- Mixed families
- No Caribbean dialects

18 monolingual speakers of Spanish
- Recently immigrated to the Netherlands.
- No knowledge of Dutch
- No Caribbean dialects

44 monolingual speakers of Spanish
- 9 and 13 years old
- Born and raised in Spain
- No knowledge of other languages

Research Questions

1. Will Dutch HS of Spanish show less overgeneralization of preverbal subjects (but deviate from monolinguals?)
2. (When) do bilingual children deviate from monolinguals?

The present study

A) Adult Participants
24 heritage speakers
- Born in the Netherlands, or arrived before 5
- Mixed families
- No Caribbean dialects

B) Child Participants
30 heritage speakers
- 9 and 13 years old
- Born in the Netherlands, or arrived before 5
- Mixed families
- No Caribbean dialects

Monolinguals

Results

Conclusions

1. Both monolingual and Dutch heritage speakers increase the preference of VS across the lifetime
2. In Dutch bilinguals, this VS preference is more pronounced in all age groups
3. This overgeneralization might be due to the influence of V2 in Dutch

References