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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
- Llegó un chico

This makes subject position a highly complex phenomenon, prone to vulnerability in (bilingual) acquisition.

Subject position in Dutch

Subject position is constrained by animacy, verbal aspect, adverbial phrases, and subject headiness.

During Speakers of a Spanish has flexible word order:
- Zapata et al., 2005, De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012

Verb type & focus influence word order

No previous research on other factors

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, 2003; Lozano, 2006)
- Many other factors, such as definiteness as well (Rogge, 2011)

Bilingual
- Do not have monolingual-like knowledge of all the factors determining word order (Cayuela et al., 2003; De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)
- Overgeneralize preverbal subjects (Hinch-Frare, 2007; Hertel, 2003; Cayuela et al., 2003)

Simplification or Cross-Linguistic Influence?

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

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

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

Method

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. Y mi esposa se 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 joins in and says that it’s some cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?” My wife tells me:

Unas primos llegaron

El gato llegó

Llegó el gato

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