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

Brechje van Osch, Elisabet García González, Suzanne Aalberse, Aafke Hulk & Petra Sleeman
University of Amsterdam

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

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

Subject position in Spanish
Spanish has flexible word order:

- Un chico llegó
- A boy arrived
- V

- Llegó
- A boy
- Adv/Obj

- S

- MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

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

Previous Research:

Children

Monolingual
- Have knowledge of verb type by age 2
- No previous research on other factors

Bilingual
- No previous research

Adults

Monolingual
- Verb type & focus influence word order
- Many other factors, such as definiteness as well

Bilingual
- Do not have monolingual-like knowledge of all the factors determining word order

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 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 says to me:

- Uns unos primos.

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.

Subjects, sentential negation and imperatives in child Spanish and Catalan.

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