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the Development of Subject Position

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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 un boy arrived
- Llegó a boy

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

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

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

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:

- Some cousins arrived.
- Two cousins arrived.

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.

Results

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