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van Osch, B.A.; García González, Elisabet; Hulk, A.C.J.; Aalberse, S.P.; Sleeman, A.P.

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

Brenchje van Osch, Elisabet Garcia 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 Spanish
Spanish has flexible word order:

- Un chico
- llegó
- arrived

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

- Me
- dice:
- suena
- un
- juego
- whistled
- a boy
- but V2!

- 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.

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

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

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

Conclusion
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