Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands

Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence

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Subject Position in Spanish as a Heritage Language in the Netherlands: Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence

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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 chico
A boy arrived a boy

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:
1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Unaccusative
Verb type is robust (Montrul, 2005)

Unaccusative
Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (De Praza-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

Unaccusative
Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

Heritage speakers in the Netherlands
2005, De Praza-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

Unaccusative

The Interface Hypothesis

External interface (syntax-pragmatics/discourse)
more vulnerable

Internal interface (syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable

VERB TYPE
less vulnerable

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative
Unergative

Focus
Broad
Narrow

Subject
Definite
Indefinite

RESULTS PER CONDITION

Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

Experiment 1: Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands

Participants
24 heritage speakers

• Born in the Netherlands, or arrived before 5
• 1 Dutch speaking parent, 1 Spanish speaking parent
• No Caribbean dialects

18 monolingual speakers of Spanish

• Recently immigrated to the Netherlands.
• No knowledge of Dutch
• No Caribbean dialects

Hypotheses
1. Dutch HS of Spanish will show less overgeneralization of preverbal subjects
2. Both focus and definiteness are more vulnerable than verb type

Results per condition

Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

Experiment 2: Heritage Spanish in the US

22 heritage speakers in New Jersey

• Born in the US, or arrived before 5
• 2 Spanish speaking parents
• No Caribbean dialects

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and definiteness

⇒ Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis

2. In judgment, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize postverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.

3. In production, American heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects

⇒ Support for cross-linguistic influence

References


