Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands

Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence

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

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

The Interface Hypothesis


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
A boy arrived
S
V

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy
V
S

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Broad
Silbó un chico
Whistled a boy
V
S

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy
V
S

Definite
El chico llegó
The boy arrived
S
V

Uncertain findings:
Comparing verb type & focus

Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

Heritage speakers overgeneralize postverbal subjects

Examples:
Unaccusative Narrow
Unaccusative Indefinite

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative
Unergative
Focus
Broad
Narrow
Subject
Definite
Indefinite

Results per condition

Results across conditions:

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and not definiteness
• Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis

2. In production, 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


Contact: b.a.vanosch@uva.nl