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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:
- Unaccusative
- Unergative

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

Experiment 1: Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands
24 heritage speakers
- 22 heritage speakers in New Jersey
- Born in the US, or arrived before 5
- No Caribbean dialects
- Proficiency-matched to the Dutch HS

Results per condition
- SV
- VS
- other
- missing

Results across conditions:
- 22 heritage speakers
- SV
- VS
- n.s.

Conclusions
- Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type and focus, but not definiteness
- Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis
- In production, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.
- Support for cross-linguistic influence

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:
- Verb type
- Focus
- Subject

References