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Citation for published version (APA):

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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:

- Verb type
- Focus
- Definiteness

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

Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US
- Comparing verb type & focus: unclear findings:
  - Verb type is robust (Montrul, 2005)
  - Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2005)
  - Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (Montrul, 2005; De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)
- Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects (Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

The Interface Hypothesis

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb type</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Definite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Indefinite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Unaccusative → narrow→ indefinite

RESULTS ACROSS CONDITIONS:

- Experiment 1: Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands
  - Participants: 24 heritage speakers
    - 22 heritage speakers in New Jersey
    - 2 Spanish speaking parents
    - No Caribbean dialects
    - Proficiency-matched to the Dutch HS
  - Conclusions:
    - 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

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
  - Proficiency-matched to the Dutch HS

Conclusions:
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, and focus, but not definiteness
2. In production, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.
3. In production, American heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects

References