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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     Llegó      un chico
A boy         arrived  Arrived    a boy

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 (De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

• Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects
  (Hinch Nava, 2007; Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:
Een jongen      floot
A boy          whistled

But... V2:
Buiten/er     schreeuwde een jongen
Outside/there shouted a boy

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative    • Narrow
Unergative     • Broad

Focus
Definite       • Broad
Indefinite     • Narrow

Subject
Definite       • Broad
Indefinite     • Narrow

Examples:
Unaccusative → narrow → indefinite
Es mi cumpleaños y hay mucha gente de visita en mi casa. De repente suena el timbre pero como justo estoy recibiendo un regalo de mi tío, no puedo abrir la puerta. Yo mi esposa y yo queríamos unos primos. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: ¿quién llegó? Mi esposa me dice:
It’s my birthday and there are many guests in my house. Suddenly the doorbell rings, but since I’m just receiving a gift from my uncle, I cannot open the door. My wife goes and sees that it’s some cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?”. My wife tells me:

Results per condition
Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

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