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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:
Un chico silbó Llegó un chico
A boy whistled Arrived a boy

Heritage speakers
Speakers of a minority language, acquired during childhood in a naturalistic setting in the home context.

Previous Research:
Heritage Spanish in the US
Comparing verb type & focus → unclear findings:
• Verb type is robust (Montrub, 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; Montrub, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:
Verb type
Unaccusative
Unergative
Subject
Broad
Narrow
Focus
Definite
Indefinite

RESULTS ACROSS CONDITIONS:

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:
Een jongen floot
A boy floated
But... V2:
Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen
Outside/There shouted a boy

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

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

Results across conditions:

References

The Interface Hypothesis
(Ochoa & Serrano, 2001)

External interface (syntactic-pragmatics / discourse)
more vulnerable
Internal interface (syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
VERB TYPE
more vulnerable
less vulnerable