Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands

*Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence*

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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**
  - Unaccusative
  - Unergative

- **Focus**
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- **Subject**
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. **Verb type**
2. **Focus**
3. **Definiteness**

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- **Verb type**
  - Unaccusative
  - Unergative

- **Focus**
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- **Subject**
  - Definite
  - 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

Results per condition

- **Monolinguals**
- **Heritage speakers**

Hypotheses
1. Dutch HS of Spanish will show less overgeneralization of preverbal subjects
2. Both focus and definiteness are more vulnerable than verb type

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 preverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.
   - **Support for cross-linguistic influence**

References

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

Results across conditions:

- **Judgment task**
- **Production task**

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 preverbal 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**

The Interface Hypothesis

- **External interface**
  - (syntactic-pragmatics / discourse)
- **Internal interface**
  - (syntax-semantics)

- **FOCUS & DEFINITENESS**
- **VERB TYPE**

Support for cross-linguistic influence

Table: Results across conditions

- **Monolinguals**
- **Heritage speakers**

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

Heritage speakers

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

Support for cross-linguistic influence