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
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Broad
Narrow

Unaccusative
Unergative

Un chico llegó un chico
Llegó un chico

Definite
Indefinite

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 (Montuori, 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

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy floated

But... V2:

Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen
Outside/there shouted a boy

Subject position with transitives in Dutch is constrained by:

Unaccusative
Unergative

MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Focus
Subject

Unaccusative
Unergative

Broad
Narrow

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

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

Results per condition

SV
VS

Results across conditions

Monolinguals
Heritage speakers

SV
VS

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, and focus, but not 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

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

Support for cross-linguistic influence

The Interface Hypothesis

Brechje & Sesiano, 2012

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

more vulnerable ➔ less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS ➔ VERB TYPE

more vulnerable ➔ less vulnerable