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:

- Unaccusative
- Unergative

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

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

- Narrow
- Unaccusative

But... V2:

- Definite
- Indefinite

The Interface Hypothesis

External interface (syntax-pragmatics/discourse) more vulnerable

Internal interface (syntax-semantics) less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS

VERB TYPE

more vulnerable

less vulnerable

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)

Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2005)

Verb type is robust (Montrul, 2005)

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS

more vulnerable

less vulnerable

Method

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

 Verb type

 Unaccusative

 Unergative

 Focus

 Broad

 Narrow

 Subject

 Definite

 Indefinite

 MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

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

Results across conditions:

- Support for cross-linguistic influence
  - Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis

Conclusions

1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type and focus, and 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