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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The Interface Hypothesis

Brechje van Osch, Suzanne Aalberse, Aafke Hulk & Petra Sleeman, 2011

External interface (syntactic-semantics/discourse) 
more vulnerable 

Internal interface (syntax-pragmatics) 
less vulnerable 

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS

VERB TYPE

more vulnerable 

less vulnerable 

Subject position in Spanish

Spanish has flexible word order:

Un chico llegó
A boy arrived

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Unaccusative

Unergative

Verb type

Focus

Subject

Unaccusative

Unergative

Broad

Narrow

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

Results per condition

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

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.

Support for cross-linguistic influence

References