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:

Un chico llegó
Llegó un chico

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 (Montibeller, 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; Montibeller, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen

But... V2:

Buiten/er schreeuwe een jongen
Outside/There shouted a boy

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:
Verb type
Focus
Subject

CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE FROM ENGLISH OR SIMPLIFICATION?

Unaccusative
Broad
Unaccusative
Unaccusative
Subject position in English

More evidence for postverbal subjects

Unaccusative
Unaccusative

Unaccusative

Subject position in Dutch

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

Unaccusative
Broad
Unaccusative
Unaccusative

Unaccusative

Unaccusative

Unaccusative

Subject position in English

The Interface Hypothesis

External interface (syntax-pragmatics / discourse)
more vulnerable

Internal interface (syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

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:

Use of postverbal subjects

More evidence for postverbal subjects

Results across conditions:

More evidence for postverbal subjects

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 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

References