Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands
van Osch, B.A.; Aalberse, S.P.; Hulk, A.C.J.; Sleeman, A.P.

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Subject Position as a Heritage Language in the Netherlands: Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence

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University of Amsterdam

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**
  - Un chico llegó
  - Llegó un chico

- **Unergative**
  - A boy whistled
  - Whistled a boy

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

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

Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

The Interface Hypothesis

**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)

- **Definiteness**

- **Heritage speakers generalize preverbal subjects**
  - (Hinch Nava, 2007; Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

**Method**

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- **Verb type**
  - Unaccusative
  - Unergative

- **Focus**
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- **Subject**
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

**Examples**

- **Unaccusative → narrow → indefinite**

  Es mi cumpleaños y hay mucha gente de visita en mi casa. De repente suena el timbre pero como justo estoy recibiendo un regalo de mi tío, no puedo abrir la puerta. Yo mi esposa y ve que son unos primos. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: ¿Quién llegó? Mi esposa me dice: It’s my birthday and there are many guests in my house. Suddenly the doorbell rings, but since I’m just receiving a gift from my uncle, I cannot open the door. My wife says and see that it’s some cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?”. My wife tells me:

- **Unaccusative → narrow → indefinite**

  Cuando regresa, le pregunto: ¿Quién llegó? Mi esposa me dice: When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?”. My wife tells me:

**Results across conditions:**

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**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

**References**


**The Interface Hypothesis**

**Subject position in Dutch**

Main clauses:

- Een jongen floot
  - A boy whistled

But... V2:

- Builten/er schreeuwde een jongen
  - Outside/There shouted a boy

**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:**

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**Results across conditions:**

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