Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands
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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
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

Un chico
A boy

llegó
Arrived

Unacc. Unerg.

Unacc.

Unerg.

But... V2:

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

Adv

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

The Interface Hypothesis

External interface (syntactic- pragmatics / discourse)

Internal interface (syntax-semantics)

more vulnerable

less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS

VERB TYPE

more vulnerable

less vulnerable

Method

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type

Unaccusative

Unacc.

Unergative

Unerg.

Focus

Broad

Narrow

Subject

Definite

Indefinite

Unacc. Unerg.

Results per condition

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Def. Indef.

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 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