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
  - 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**

The Interface Hypothesis
Giose & Sedanov, 2011

External interface (syntax-pragmatics/discourse)
more vulnerable » less vulnerable

Internal interface (syntax-semantics)
more vulnerable » less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable » less vulnerable

Verb type
- Unaccusative
- Unergative

Focus
- Broad
- Narrow

Definiteness
- Definite
- Indefinite

Definite
- A boy
- Un chico

Indefinite
- El chico

Unergative
- Llegó
- Silbó

Unaccusative
- S
- V

Broad
- Adv

Narrow
- S
- V

Definite
- S
- V

Indefinite
- S
- V

Example:
Un acc. - Unerg. - 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. Va 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 goes and sees that it’s my cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: ‘Who arrived?’ My wife tells me:…’

Experiment 1: Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands

Participants
24 heritage speakers
- 22 Spanish speaking parents
- No Caribbean dialects
- No monolingual speakers

Monolinguals
- 2 Spanish speaking parents
- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Monolinguals</th>
<th>Heritage speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unacc. Unerg.</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad Narrow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Def. Indef.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Results across conditions

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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 production, Dutch Heritage speakers of Spanish show preference for 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