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van Osch, B.A.; Aalberse, S.P.; Hulk, A.C.J.; Sleeman, A.P.

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

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

Un chico llegó un chico
Llegó un chico

Unaccusative
The Interface Hypothesis
(Sorace & Serratrice, 2009)

During home Spanish has flexible word order:
Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

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)

• Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

Heritage speakers in the Netherlands: Experiment 1

24 heritage speakers
• Born in the Netherlands, or arrived before 5
• 1 Dutch speaking parent, 1 Spanish speaking parent
• No Caribbean dialects
• Raamlinguists
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:

Unacc. Unerg.
Broad Narrow
Def. Indef.

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Un chico llegó
Llegó un chico

Unaccusative

But... V2:

Un chico llegó
Llegó un chico

Unaccusative

Subject position with intransitives in Dutch is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Results per condition

Monolinguals
Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

Monolinguals
Heritage speakers

References


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 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

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:

Monolinguals
Heritage speakers

Support for cross-linguistic influence

References