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
S

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy
V

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 (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 (Hinch Nava, 2007; Montrul, 2015; Zapata et al., 2005)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled
S

But... V2:

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

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Definite Indefinite

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:
Verb type
Unaccusative Unergative

Focus
Broad Narrow

Subject
Definite Indefinite

Results across conditions:

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

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

Focus and word order interactions in second-language acquisition.

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

References

Subject position in English or simplification?

Internal interface (syntax-semantics)
more vulnerable

Focus & Definiteness

VERB TYPE

less vulnerable

The Interface Hypothesis

External interface (syntax-pragmatics / discourse)
more vulnerable