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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:

- Verb type
- Focus
- Definiteness

Unaccusative
Unaccusative
Narrow
Definite

Un chico llegó
Llegó un chico

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

The Interface Hypothesis
(Sorace & Serratrice, 2009)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

- Eén jongen floot
- Buiten/er schreeuwe een jongen

But...V2:

- Een jongen floot
- Outside/there shouted a boy

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- Verb type
- Focus
- Subject

CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE FROM ENGLISH OR SIMPLIFICATION?

Unaccusative
Unaccusative

Un chico llegó
Llegó un chico

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 Dutch and Spanish heritage speakers will show more vulnerability 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:

- Narrow
- Definite

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 verbal 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