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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
A boy arrived
Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects
(De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2005)

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

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Verb type & focus
Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands
Experiment 1:

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable

Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.
Parental

Un acc. Unerg.

Results per condition

实验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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Examples
Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.

Results across conditions:

- Monolinguals
- Heritage speakers

Subject position in English

Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Example:
Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.

Results across conditions:

- Monolinguals
- Heritage speakers

The Interface Hypothesis
(Quirk & Sankoff, 1975)

External interface
(syntax-pragmatics/disourse)
more vulnerable

Internal interface
(syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable

Verb type
more vulnerable

Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.

Results across conditions:

Subject position in English

Unacc. Unerg.
Subject

Definite
Broad
Unacc. Unerg.

References