Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands
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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 a boy

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:
1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Definite
A boy whistled

Broad
During home

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Een jongen floot

But... V2:

Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen

EXAMPLE: Unaccusative – narrow – 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. Ya mi esposa ve y me grita unos primos. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: ‘¿Quién llegó?’. Mi esposa me dice: ‘It’s my birthday and there are many quests 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 some cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?” My wife tells me: “Some cousins.”’

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

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Results across conditions:

SV
VS
other
missing

Results per condition

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and 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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative
Unergative

Focus
Broad
Narrow

Subject
Definite
Indefinite

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:

SV
VS
other
missing

The Interface Hypothesis
(Quirk & Team, 1985)

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

Focus & Definiteness
(Quirk & Team, 1985)
more vulnerable » less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS » VERB TYPE

Definite
A boy

Unacc. Unerg.

Broad Narrow

Unacc. Unerg.

Unacc. Unerg.

Definite
Indefinite