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

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

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; Mornin, 2015; Zapata et al., 2005)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled

But... V2:

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unaccusative</th>
<th>Unergative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>Indefinite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Example: Unaccusative = narrow = indefinite

It’s my birthday and there are many guests 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:

Unacc.s
Some cousins arrived.

Results per condition

Heritage speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unacc. Unerg.</th>
<th>Broad Narrow</th>
<th>Def. Indef.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Reference

References


Conclusions

1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type and focus, but not definiteness

Support for cross-linguistic influence

Support for the Interface Hypothesis

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

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 focus and definiteness are more vulnerable than verb type

Results across conditions

Heritage speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monolinguals</th>
<th>Heritage speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Method

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type

Unaccusative
Unergative

Focus

Broad
Narrow

Subject

Definite
Indefinite

Results per condition

Conclusion

• External interface (syntactic-pragmatics / discourse) more vulnerable → less vulnerable
• FOCUS & DEFINITENESS more vulnerable → less vulnerable

The Interface Hypothesis

(Geeslin & Serraschitz, 2009)