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; Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

Heritage speakers and language contact: 

- Unaccusative
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- Unergative
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

Cross-linguistic influence from English or simplification?

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
  - Unaccusative
  - Unergative

- Focus
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- Subject
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

Results per condition

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<th>Heritage speakers</th>
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Results across conditions

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Conclusions

1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and definiteness → Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis
2. In production, 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