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

3. Definiteness
(De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

Un accusative
Narrow
Definite

Un ergative
Broad
Definite

Unaccusative
Narrow
Indefinite

The Interface Hypothesis

Brechje van Osch & Suzanne Aalberse, 2017

External interface
(syntax-pragmatics/discourse)
more vulnerable

Internal interface
(syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable

VERB TYPE
less vulnerable

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled

But... V2:

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

Adv V S

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
- Recently immigrated to the Netherlands.
- No knowledge of Dutch
- 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 per condition

Monolinguals

Unacc. Unerg.
Broad Narrow
Def. Indef.

Heritage speakers

Unacc. Unerg.
Broad Narrow
Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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