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-Perez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)
• Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects
  • Definite
  • Indefinite

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb type</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Definite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Indefinite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 hijo, no puedo abrir la puerta. Yo me siento y veo que son unos primos. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: ‘¿Quién llegó?’ Mi esposa me dice: ‘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 son, I cannot open the door. My wife says and sees that it’s a couple cousins. When she gets back, I ask her: ‘Who arrived?’ My wife tells me:’

Results across conditions:

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:

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

References

The Interface Hypothesis
(Gasche & Serratrice, 2009)

External interface
(syntax-pragmatics/ discourse) more vulnerable

Internal interface
(syntax-semantics) less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITIVENESS
more vulnerable

VERB TYPE
less vulnerable

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Un acc. un chico
A boy

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

But... V2:

Un acc. un chico
A boy

Silbó un chico
Whistled a boy

Definite

The boy arrived

El chico llegó
Arrived a boy

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
18 monolingual speakers of Spanish
• Recently immigrated to the Netherlands.
• No knowledge of Dutch
• No Caribbean dialects

Results per condition

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

Monolinguals

Heritage speakers

Supported by cross-linguistic influence

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

Supported by cross-linguistic influence

References