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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References

Subject position in Spanish
Spanish has flexible word order:

Un chico llegó
A boy arrived

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

Heritage speakers
Speakers of a minority language, acquired during childhood in a naturalistic setting in the home context.

Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US
- Comparing verb type & focus – unclear findings:
  - Verb type is robust (Montrul, 2008)
  - Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2008)
  - Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (de Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2010)
- Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects (Hinch Nava, 2007; Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2008)

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses: Een jongen floot
A boy floated

But... V2:

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verbs type: Unaccusative - Unergative

Focus: Broad - Narrow

Subject: Definite - Indefinite

Results per condition

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

Hypotheses
1. Dutch HS of Spanish will show less overgeneralization of preverbal subjects
2. both focus and definiteness are more vulnerable than verb type

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

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

Results across conditions:

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and definiteness
2. In judgment, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal 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

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verbs type: Unaccusative - Unergative

Focus: Broad - Narrow

Subject: Definite - Indefinite

Results per condition

More evidence for postverbal subjects

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and definiteness
2. Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis
3. In production, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.
4. In production, American heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects
- Support for cross-linguistic influence

The Interface Hypothesis
(Galán & Semel, 2011)

External interface
(syntax-pragmatics
/disourse)
more vulnerable

Internal interface
(syntax-semantics)
less vulnerable

Focus & Definiteness
more vulnerable

Verb Type
less vulnerable

Subject Position in English or Simplification?