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Citation for published version (APA):

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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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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

Unaccusative
Verb type

Subject

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, 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)

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:
Een jongen floot A boy floated

But... V2:
Buiten/er schreeuwe een jongen Outside/There shouted a boy

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative
Unergative

Focus
Broad Narrow

Subject
Definite Indefinite

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 tío, no puedo abrir la puerta. Yo mi esposa y yo gus 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 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:

Results per condition
Monolinguals
Heritage speakers

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