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

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- Verb type: Unaccusative vs. Ergative
- Focus: Broad vs. Narrow
- Subject: Definite vs. Indefinite

Results per condition

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

The Interface Hypothesis

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled

But... V2:

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- Verb type: Unaccusative vs. Ergative
- Focus: Broad vs. Narrow
- Subject: Definite vs. Indefinite

Examples:

Unaccusative – narrow – indefinite

El chico llegó
The boy arrived

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled

Focus

Heritage speakers

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

Broad Narrow

Definite Indefinite

Unaccusative

Unacc. Unerg. Broad Narrow Def. Indef.

Unacc. Unerg.

3. Definiteness

2. Focus

1. Verb type

External interface (syntactic-pragmatics / discourse) more vulnerable

Internal interface (syntactic-semantics) less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS more vulnerable

VERB TYPE less vulnerable

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- Verb type: Unaccusative vs. Ergative
- Focus: Broad vs. Narrow
- Subject: Definite vs. Indefinite

Results per condition

Results across conditions:

• 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
  - Narrow & indefinite

2. In production, American heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects
   - Support for cross-linguistic influence

2. Both focus and definiteness are more vulnerable than verb type
   - Verb type is robust (Montrul, 2005)
   - Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (Zapata et al., 2005)
   - Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2005)

Support for cross-linguistic influence


References


The Interface Hypothesis
