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
Llegó un chico

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:
1. **Verb type**
2. **Focus** (Hertel, 2003; Luzano, 2006; Dominguez, 2013; Zapata et al., 2005; de Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)
3. **Definiteness** (Roggia, 2011)

Unacc. Unerg.

Unacc. Unerg.

**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, 2007; Montrul, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

**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
  - Unergative

- **Focus**
  - Broad
  - Narrow

- **Subject**
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

**Results per condition**

- **Monolinguals**
  - Unacc./Unerg.
  - Broad Narrow
  - Def./Indef.

- **Heritage speakers**
  - Unacc./Unerg.
  - Broad Narrow
  - Def./Indef.

**References**

**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 production, 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**

**The Interface Hypothesis**
(Quirk & Soergel, 2013)

- **External interface** (syntactic-pragmatics / discourse)
  - more vulnerable
- **Internal interface** (syntax-semantics)
  - less vulnerable

**FOCUS & DEFINITENESS**
VERB TYPE

**Focus**

- Broad
- Narrow

- Definite
- Indefinite

**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:**

- **Judgment task**
  - SV
  - VS
  - other
  - missing

- **Production task**
  - SV
  - VS
  - other
  - missing