Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands

*Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence*

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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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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 un chico
A boy arrived a boy

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:
1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

Speakers of a Spanish has flexible word order: constrained by:
3. Definiteness
1. Verb type

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, 2015)
• Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy whistled

But... V2:

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

Method
Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Unaccusative, Unergative

Focus
Broad, Narrow

Subject
Definite, Indefinite

Results per condition

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 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

The Interface Hypothesis

Quantity & Semantics

External interface
(syntax-pragmatics/ discourse)

Internal interface
(syntax-semantics)

more vulnerable
less vulnerable

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS
more vulnerable
less vulnerable

References