Subject Position in Spanish as a heritage language in the Netherlands
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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
A boy arrived

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy

Unergative
Definite

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

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)

The Interface Hypothesis
Broad Narrow

3. Definiteness
2. Focus
1. Verb type

Spanish has flexible word order:

Constrained by:

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
A boy floated

But... V2:

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

Adv

Subject position in English

CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE FROM ENGLISH OR SIMPLIFICATION?

MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

Method

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

Verb type
Focus
Subject

Definite
Indefinite

Unaccusative
Broad

Unergative
Narrow

Definiteness
Focus &

Subject

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 postverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.

Support for cross-linguistic influence

References