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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
3. Definiteness

Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US
- Comparing verb type & focus → unclear findings:
  - Verb type is robust (Montes, 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

The Interface Hypothesis

Subject position in Dutch
Main clauses:
- Een jongen floot
  A boy floated
- Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen
  Outside/there shouted a boy

Subject position in English
Unaccusative
- Un chico llegó
  A boy arrived

Unaccusative

Unaccusative

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
- Dutch HS of Spanish will show less overgeneralization of preverbal subjects
- 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

EXEMPLARY: Unaccusative – Narrow – Indefinite

Results across conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>VS</th>
<th>Production task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indefinite</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results per condition

- Monolinguals
  - SV: 2
  - VS: 2

- Heritage speakers
  - SV: 1
  - VS: 1

Conclusions
- Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of factors verb type, focus, and definiteness
- Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis
- In judgment, Dutch heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize postverbal subjects, whereas American HS do not prefer either order.
- In production, American heritage speakers of Spanish overgeneralize preverbal subjects
- Support for cross-linguistic influence

References