Subject Position in Spanish as a Heritage Language in the Netherlands: Interface Vulnerability and Cross-linguistic Influence

Brechje van Osch, Suzanne Aalberse, Aafke Hulk & Petra Sleeman
University of Amsterdam

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**

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. **Verb type**
2. **Focus**
3. **Definiteness**

Un chico **llegó**

Llegó **un chico**

DEFINITENESS » FOCUS & VERB TYPE

- **Un chico llegó**
- **A boy arrived**

Subject position in Dutch

Main clauses:

- Een jongen floot
  - A boy whistled

But... V2:

- Builen er schreeuwde een jongen
  - Outside/There shouted a boy

MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

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

Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US

Comparing verb type & focus → unclear findings:

- Verb type is robust (Montrom, 2005)
- Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2005)
- Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (De Prada-Peñas & Pascual y Cabo, 2005)
- Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects

(Defínita, 2003; Luzano, 2006; Domínguez, 2013; Zapata et al., 2005)

Heritage speakers and monolingual speakers of Spanish

2005, De Prada-Peñas & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results per condition

Experiment 1: Heritage Spanish in the Netherlands

Heritage speakers

- **Un chico llegó**
- **A boy arrived**

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish

Subject Position in Dutch

Main clauses:

- Een jongen floot
  - A boy whistled

But... V2:

- Builen er schreeuwde een jongen
  - Outside/There shouted a boy

MORE EVIDENCE FOR POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS

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 across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

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

Definite

A boy        arrived       Arrived    a boy
S           V            V         S

Def. Indef.  Adv. V S

Un acc. Ung.  Broad Narrow  Def. Indef.

Results across conditions:

Conclusion

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