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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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Subject position in Spanish

Spanish has flexible word order:

- **Un chico llegó** = A boy arrived
- **Llegó un chico** = Arrived a boy

The Interface Hypothesis

(Sorace & Serratrice, 2009)

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Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. Verb type
2. Focus
3. Definiteness

The Interface Hypothesis

(Levine & Sankoff, 2011)

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

FOCUS & DEFINITENESS ➞ VERB TYPE more vulnerable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Un chico llegó</th>
<th>Llegó un chico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A boy arrived</td>
<td>Arrived a boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interface hypothesis states that in a naturalistic setting, the Dutch HS of Spanish will show less vulnerability than the American HS over generalization of preverbal subjects.

Subjects: 22 heritage speakers in New Jersey

Method

- **Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task**
  - **Verb type**
    - Unaccusative
    - Unergative
  - **Focus**
    - Broad
    - Narrow
  - **Subject**
    - Definite
    - Indefinite

Results across conditions:

- **Monolinguals**
- **Heritage speakers**

Results per condition:

- **SV**
- **VS**

Conclusions

1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors verb type, focus, and not definiteness ➞ Partial support for the Interface Hypothesis
2. In judgment, 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

References


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 Caribean dialects

18 monolingual speakers of Spanish
- Recently immigrated to the Netherlands.
- No knowledge of Dutch
- No Caribean 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

Results across conditions:

- **Monolinguals**
- **Heritage speakers**