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 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:

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

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

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

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**Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US**

- Comparing verb type & focus → unclear findings:
  - Verb type is robust (Montebello, 2005)
  - Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata et al., 2005)
  - Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (de Prada-Pérez et al., 2011)
- Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects
  (Hinch Nava, 2007; Montebello, 2005; Zapata et al., 2005)

**Method**

Contextualized Scalar Acceptability Judgment Task:

- **Verb type**
  - Unaccusative
  - Unergative
- **Focus**
  - Broad
  - Narrow
- **Subject**
  - Definite
  - Indefinite

**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

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**Results per condition**

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

**Results across conditions**

- **Unacc. Unerg.**
- **Broad Narrow**
- **Def. Indef.**

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**The Interface Hypothesis**

(Quirk & Seuren, 2011)

**External interface**

(syntax-pragmatics / discourse)

- more vulnerable ➔ less vulnerable

**Internal interface**

(syntax-semantics)

- more vulnerable ➔ less vulnerable

**FOCUS & DEFINITENESS** ➔ less vulnerable

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**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

**Conclusions**

1. Dutch heritage speakers know 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 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

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**References**