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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 un chico
**Llegó un chico**

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

Definiteness
Heritage speakers during adulthood often make errors with preverbal subjects (Hertel, 2003; Lozano, 2006; Domínguez, 2013; Zapata et al., 2006).

 Previous Research: Heritage Spanish in the US

- Comparing verb type & focus → unclear findings:
  - Verb type is robust (MontIEL, 2005)
  - Verb type and focus are vulnerable (Zapata, 2006)
  - Verb type is more vulnerable than focus (de Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

- Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects (Hirsh, 2006; MontIEL, 2005; Zapata et al., 2006)

Cross-linguistic influence from English or simplification?

Method
Contextualized scalar acceptability judgment task:

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

Results per condition:

SV:Unacc. Unerg. VS:Broad Narrow

1. Dutch HS show knowledge of the factors
2. Both focus and definiteness are more vulnerable

Conclusions
1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors
2. Overgeneralization: more vulnerable
3. Support for cross-linguistic influence

References

Subject Position in Dutch

Main clauses:

Een jongen floot
Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen

But... V2:

Buiten/er schreeuwde een jongen
Outside/there shouted a boy

Results across conditions:

Judgment task Production task

1. Dutch heritage speakers show knowledge of the factors
2. Overgeneralization: more vulnerable
3. Support for cross-linguistic influence

Results across conditions:

SV:Unacc. Unerg. VS:Broad Narrow

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