Subject position in Spanish adult and child heritage speakers in the Netherlands

Heritage Language Acquisition: Breaking New Ground in Methodology and Domains of Inquiry

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Universitetet i Tromsø, The Arctic University of Norway, 20-09-2016
Heritage speakers

- Specific type of bilingual
- Drop in input in the heritage language
- Variability in ultimate attainment
- Focus on the end-state
- What about the developmental path?
Subject Position in Spanish
Spanish has flexible word order:

Un chico llegó
A boy arrived

Llegó un chico
Arrived a boy
Theory

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. **Predicate type**

2. **Focus**
Theory

Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. **Predicate type**

**Unergative** verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Un chico</th>
<th>silbó</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A boy</td>
<td>whistled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unaccusative** verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Llegó</th>
<th>un chico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrived</td>
<td>a boy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

S V  
V S
Subject position with intransitives in Spanish is constrained by:

1. **Predicate type**

2. **Focus**

### Broad focus

¿Qué pasó?  
What happened?

Un chico  
A boy

Silbó  
Whistled

S  
V

### Narrow focus

¿Quién silbó?  
Who whistled?

Silbó  
Whistled

un chico  
a boy

V  
S
## Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Broad focus</th>
<th>Narrow focus</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative predicates</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>VS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unergative predicates</td>
<td>SV</td>
<td>VS</td>
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</table>
Most studies with heritage speakers of Spanish in the US:

- **Heritage speakers do not have monolingual-like knowledge of verb type and focus constraints on word order**
  
  (Zapata et al., 2005; De Prada-Pérez & Pascual y Cabo, 2012)

- **Heritage speakers overgeneralize preverbal subjects compared to monolingual speakers**
  
  (i.a. Hinch Nava, 2007).
The Present study
1. ADULT heritage speakers

2. CHILD heritage speakers
Method

Acceptability Judgment Task

- Unaccusative & Unergative verbs

- Broad & Narrow focus. Context ending in:
  - ¿Qué pasó? (What happened?) → introducing broad focus
  - ¿Quién + V? (Who V-ed?) → introducing narrow focus

- Definite & Indefinite subjects.
  - As a control factor
Method

Acceptability Judgment Task

- 2 sentences:
  - **SV** - *Un chico silbó*  
    
    -2  -1  0  1  2
  
  - **VS** - *Silbó un chico*
    
    -2  -1  0  1  2

- Written and aural
- Untimed
EXAMPLE: Unaccusative - Narrow focus

Es mi cumpleaños y hay mucha gente de visita en mi casa. De repente suena el timbre pero como justo estoy recibiendo un regalo de mi tío, no puedo abrir la puerta. Va mi esposa. Cuando regresa, le pregunto: '¿Quién llegó?' Mi esposa me dice:

It’s my birthday and there are many guests in my house. Suddenly the doorbell rings, but since I’m just receiving a gift from my uncle, I cannot open the door. My wife goes. When she gets back, I ask her: “Who arrived?”. My wife tells me:

**Unos primos llegaron. → SV**
Some cousins arrived. They are in the kitchen

```
0  0  ●  0  0  0
-2 -1  0  1  2
```

**Llegaron unos primos. → VS**
Arrived some cousins. They are in the kitchen

```
0  0  0  0  ●
-2 -1  0  1  2
```

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

- 17 heritage speakers of Spanish in the Netherlands
  - Age: 19-36
  - Educational level: university – **No students of Spanish**!
  - High-intermediate to advanced proficiency level (as measured by means of self-reports, the *DELE* and a lexical decision task)
  - Simultaneous bilinguals from birth
  - 2nd generation HS
  - Mixed families
  - Variety of Spanish: Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina
Participants

• Control group: 18 Spanish monolinguals
  • Similar to the heritage speakers in terms of:
    • Age
    • Educational level
    • Variety of Spanish (Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Venezuela)
## Results

**Expected pattern:**

<table>
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Results - Monolinguals

<table>
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</tbody>
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Results - Monolinguals

Monolinguals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>Indefinite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results for Monolinguals show that:

- Definite and Indefinite forms are generally higher in the broad context.
- In the narrow context, Indefinite forms tend to be higher than Definite forms.
- Unaccusative and Unergative verbs show similar trends across contexts.
Monolinguals

Mixed effects model:

Independent variables:

- Predicate type (t=-2.56, p=0.01)
- Focus (t=5.81, p=8.79*10^-7)
- Definiteness (t=-3.61, p=8.34*10^-4)
Results - Monolinguals

Monolinguals rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
Results - Monolinguals

Monolinguals rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
- Narrow focus
Results - Monolinguals

Monolinguals rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
- Narrow focus
- Indefinite subjects
Results – Adult HS

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</table>
Results – Adult heritage speakers

[Bar chart showing the distribution of definite and indefinite pronouns across broad and narrow contexts for unaccusative and unergative verb types.]
Results – Adult HS

Mixed effects model:

Independent variables:
- Focus \( (t=2.83, p=0.007) \)
- Predicate type \( (t=-2.79, p=0.008) \)
- Definiteness Not significant \( (t=-1.04, p=0.30) \)
Results – Adult heritage speakers

Heritage speakers rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
Results – Adult heritage speakers

Heritage speakers rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
- Narrow focus
Results – Adult heritage speakers

Heritage speakers rate VS relatively higher for:

- Unaccusative predicates
- Narrow focus
- Indefinite subjects

![Graph showing comparison between SV and VS for definite and indefinite subjects.](image-url)
Heritage speakers give lower ratings to SV orders ($t=-3.06$, $p=0.003$)
## Summary – Adult HS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult monolinguals</th>
<th>Adult heritage speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept both orders</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb type</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definiteness</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgeneralize</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>VS</td>
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</table>
Questions

• Why overgeneralization of VS?

  Cross-linguistic influence from Dutch. Much evidence for VS in Dutch due to V2 in root clauses:

  Gisteren vertrok Jan
  Yesterday left John
  Adv V S
Questions

Developmental path:

• When do child heritage speakers start overgeneralizing VS?
• When are verb type and focus constraints on word order acquired?
1. ADULT heritage speakers

2. CHILD heritage speakers
Previous research – L1 acquisition

- Monolingual children acquiring Spanish seem to have knowledge of the distinction between unergative and unaccusative verbs *early on*. (Snyder et al., 1995; Bel, 2005, but see Pladevall Ballester, 2010)

- No studies have looked at focus constraints
Previous research – child HS

............
Method

- Oral preference judgement task:
  - Unaccusative & Unergative verbs
  - Broad & Narrow focus (contextualized in a story)

- Only definite subjects
- Same verbs as adult study
Three dogs are playing at the beach and having a lot of fun. While they play, their friend the cat comes and sees them and he gets very sad because they had not asked him to join them.
• ¿Qué pasó? (What happened?)  → introducing broad focus

• ¿Quién + V? (Who V-ed?)  → introducing narrow focus
El gato llegó
Llegó el gato
Participants

- 13 child heritage children
- Age: 5-6
- Born in The Netherlands
- 1 Spanish-speaking parent, 1 Dutch-speaking parent
  - Mostly Argentina, Spain and Peru
- Some of them went to a Spanish Saturday-school
Participants (2)

- 4 child heritage children
- Age: 9
- Born in The Netherlands
- 1 Spanish-speaking parent, 1 Dutch-speaking parent
  - Mostly Argentina, Spain and Peru
- Some of them went to a Spanish Saturday-school
Results – 5 year olds

<table>
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</table>
Results – 5-year olds

Child heritage speakers prefer SV overall regardless of Verb type

---

Results – 5-year olds

Child heritage speakers prefer SV overall regardless of Verb type

- Verb type

---

### Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>VS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>VS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Note:** The bar charts illustrate the distribution of SV and VS preferences between adults and children for unaccusative and unergative verb types.
Results – 5-year olds

Child heritage speakers prefer SV overall regardless of

- Verb type
- or Focus
Results – 5-year olds

Child heritage speakers prefer SV overall, unlike adult HS
Results – 9 year olds

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</table>
Results – 9-year olds

The older child heritage speakers prefer SV with
- Unergative predicates

![Bar chart showing preferences between unaccusative and unergative predicates for SV and VS.

- SV preference is higher for unergative predicates.

- VS preference is higher for unaccusative predicates.

- The data suggests a preference for SV with unergative predicates among 9-year-olds.
Results – 9-year olds

But no clear preferences established for:

- Focus
Results - overgeneralization

- Monolinguals
- Heritage speakers
- 5-year-olds
- 9-year-olds

SV (orange) VS (red)
Summary – child HS

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>9 yo</th>
</tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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## Discussion

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<td>√</td>
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THANK YOU!

b.a.vanosch@uva.nl & elisabet.garciaglez@gmail.com