

Subject Position across Intransitive Predicates in Spanish in Contact with Catalan in Minorca: Language Pairing Effects and Interface Vulnerability

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Recent years have witnessed an increased interest in the study of bilingualism and language contact from a theoretical point of view. These studies assume a grammar that is compartmentalized into different modules; some of them internal (lexicon, phonology, syntax, morphology, and semantics) and some external (discourse/pragmatics). These modules are connected by interfaces, a notion that has proven of great utility in this line of research. For instance, Sorace (2005) and Sorace & Filiaci (2006) have shown that the lexico-semantic and the discourse-pragmatic interfaces are vulnerable to interlingual influence. Moreover, Tsimpli & Sorace (2006) have shown that the discourse-pragmatic interface (external) is more vulnerable to interlingual influence than the lexico-semantic interface (internal). An ideal structure to test this hypothesis is subject position in Spanish, as it is regulated by both interfaces. Zapata et al. (2005), for instance, consider subject position in the contact Spanish of heritage speakers in the U.S. Their results further support Tsimpli & Sorace (2006). Participants revealed more target-like behaviors in distinguishing between unergative and unaccusative predicates (an internal interface property) than in distinguishing between broad and narrow focus (an external interface property). While these results support Tsimpli & Sorace's (2006) claim, it should be noted that in English the distinction between unergative and unaccusative predicates has syntactic reflexes, although word order is not one of them; the deployment of narrow subject focus, on the other hand, does not have syntactic reflexes, as it is largely conveyed through intonation. Thus, similarities between the languages at the lexico-semantic interface and differences between the languages at the discourse-pragmatic interface are confounded with the differential vulnerability of the two interfaces. The present project addresses this question by examining subject position in Spanish in contact with Catalan. In both languages, subject position is a syntactic reflex of predicate type and focus. While Spanish and Catalan exhibit the same word order preferences, they differ in how categorical these preferences are across intransitive predicate types (internal interface). Thus, the languages are more different in the contrast between unergative and unaccusative predicate subject position preferences, at the internal interface, than in the contrast between broad and narrow subject focus, at the external interface.