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ScienceDirect

Lingua 155 (2015) 85–97

Lingua

www.elsevier.com/locate/lingua

Discourse-sensitive clitic-doubled dislocations in heritage Spanish

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Received 1 December 2012; received in revised form 20 December 2013; accepted 8 January 2014
Available online 21 February 2014

Abstract

This experimental study tests the predictions of the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace, 2011, 2012) using two constructions whose appropriateness depends on monitoring discourse information: Clitic Left Dislocation and Fronted Focus. Clitic Left Dislocation relates a dislocated and clitic-doubled object to an antecedent activated in previous discourse, while Fronted Focus does not relate the fronted constituent to a discourse antecedent. The Interface Hypothesis argues that speakers in language contact situations experience difficulties when they have to integrate syntactic with discourse information. We tested four groups of native speakers on these constructions: Spanish monolinguals, bilinguals with more than 7 years residence in the US, intermediate and advanced proficiency heritage speakers. Our findings suggest that attrition has not set in the adult L2 bilingual speakers, and that the heritage speakers perform similarly to the monolingual and the adult sequential bilingual natives.
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Keywords: Interface hypothesis; Syntax-discourse; Heritage speakers; Clitics; Spanish

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of language acquisition has seen a steadily growing interest in a subset of bilinguals referred to as heritage speakers (HSs). In the context of North America, the term ''Heritage Speaker'' has been broadly understood as referring to a bilingual speaker of a non-majority language who has acquired this language naturalistically within a majority language societal context (e.g. Montrul, 2004, 2008; Polinsky, 2007; Rothman, 2007, 2009; Silva-Corvalán, 1994; Toribio, 2001).[1] For instance, heritage speakers have either grown up speaking Spanish, Hindi, or Russian natively in their country of origin before immigrating at an early age, or in the U.S. or Canada after their parents settled in the new country. Chronologically, English is introduced as their second language, but it becomes their dominant language in adulthood. The heritage language can either be an exclusive L1 or one of the L1s in the context of simultaneous

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[1] In recent years, the term ''heritage speaker'' has been increasingly used outside of the context of the United States and Canada. Historically, however, other terms have been used in Europe, Australia, and other loci, including ''generation 1.5,'' ''background language bilinguals,'' and ''minority language bilinguals.'' Differences in terminology in this regard are just that, provided the inclusion criteria for heritage language bilinguals apply. As discussed in Rothman (2009), all heritage speakers are bilinguals, but not all bilinguals are heritage speakers; the type of language contact of the bilingual situation delimits inclusion.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2014.01.002

bilingualism (2L1). It is important to highlight from the outset that one should not confuse or conflate *language dominance* with either *nativeness* or *acquisition chronology*. Language dominance notwithstanding, HSs are native speakers of the heritage language precisely because they acquire it in a socially nurturing environment in early childhood. Any competence differences between adult HSs and monolinguals, which can be demonstrated through experimental scrutiny, do not change the fact that the HSs acquired this language as a native L1.

With this in mind, it is understandable that much of the research on heritage language acquisition has focused on describing and explaining difference.[2] The heritage language is—typically—the heard and spoken family language, which means that its distribution, once the majority language is introduced, is situation-specific and restricted. The introduction of the majority language may occur in a simultaneous or successive fashion. According to Montrul (2008), these factors can cause arrested development in the heritage language or what she and her colleagues have labeled *incomplete acquisition*. Moreover, HSs primarily receive input from speakers—first-generation immigrants and other heritage second-generation speakers—who are themselves living in a language contact situation. Thus, attrition (individual and cross-generational) is likely to affect the input HSs receive (see Sorace, 2004, 2012; Rothman, 2007, 2009; Pascual y Cabo and Rothman, 2012 for discussion). These factors contribute to variable input both in terms of quantity and quality. Such variation is not characteristic of the environment of naturalistic monolingual learners, at least not to the same degree.[3] Together, input and experience constitute the deterministic variables for language acquisition, loss, and maintenance that have been used to explain HS competence outcomes (Montrul, 2008; Pires and Rothman, 2009; Pascual y Cabo and Rothman, 2012). Factoring in the extensive contact with the majority (societal) language throughout the lifespan of HSs, it should not be surprising to find that HS adults fall into varying degrees of proficiency in the heritage language (Montrul, 2004; Montrul and Potowski, 2007), with the typical case being that the heritage language is the less dominant of the two. HSs are linguistically quite diverse, ranging from so-called ''overhearers'' (Au et al., 2002) to very advanced speakers (Montrul, 2004). Indeed, this diversity constitutes one of the difficulties in defining heritage speakers as a group.

Perhaps the most well known case of heritage languages in the context of the US is that of Spanish. The HSs we have tested in this experiment, for instance, were exposed to Spanish as their first language when they were infants. Some were born in Spanish-speaking countries and then immigrated to the US with their families when they were very young. Others were born in the US but were exposed to the home and immediate community language (Spanish) exclusively until they were enrolled in daycare or pre-school.[4] Thus, during the first years of their lives, many of these speakers were exposed to linguistic input comparable to that which monolingual Spanish native speakers receive. While it is important to note that this is not necessarily the experience of all HSs, who may receive less input because one parent may not be a Spanish speaker or because they may receive English input from siblings, this does not change the fact that they acquire the language as a first language.

Let us elaborate on that point. While there might not be one definition of ''Native Speaker'' that is universally accepted, it is uncontroversial to assume that native speakers learn their native language naturalistically and in infancy. It is based on these two factors that we consider HSs to be native speakers of the heritage language. While it is often the case that the native language is also the language of the majority and of the cultural community, this does not necessarily need to be the case. Furthermore, while native speakers can be monolingual, monolingualism is clearly not a prerequisite for nativeness. Indeed, the issue of equating monolingualism with nativeness is not new and has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Piller, 2001; Rothman, 2008; Rothman and Treffers-Daller, 2014).

Finally, there is the issue of frequency in the input. It is safe to say that no one would question nativeness in monolinguals if a given community (or section thereof) provided infants with less or more input than another. This has been found to be the case for different socioeconomic backgrounds in the U.S. (Hart and Risley, 1995), a difference that may be compensated for with intervention (Suskind et al., 2013). Similarly, we would not question that the so-called ''balanced'' simultaneous bilinguals would be native speakers of these languages. Therefore, while we acknowledge that not all HSs may receive the same amount of input as monolinguals, we reason that receiving less input alone does not strip HSs of their native status as far as the heritage language is concerned.

An important difference between HSs and monolingual speakers comes from the HSs' subsequent exposure to English, which eventually becomes their dominant language. As exposure to English increases in early childhood, the

[2] We use the term *difference* throughout because we believe this to be the least evaluative term. We do not view *difference* to be necessarily divergent or target-deviant per se. In the spirit of Pascual y Cabo and Rothman (2012) and others, we do not view HS differences from monolinguals as anything more than a set of descriptive facts.

[3] To be sure, monolingual children are also exposed to variable input. However, such variation is not usually the result of language contact and its attrition effects. In other words, monolinguals do not receive the majority of their input from speakers who themselves have limited contact with their native language community.

[4] As is well known, there are communities in the US, for example, parts of Miami, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Mexico, and Texas, where Spanish is the dominant language. This balance shifts almost inevitably for individual HSs upon entering school where English is the majority language of education and newly formed social relationships.

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