

Teaching information structure in a heritage language: Focus realization in Peninsular Spanish

We address the issue of *information structure* (IS, specifically: *focus* or also *new information*), which we approach from the perspective of the interface between linguistics and language pedagogy in order to prepare the topic for the needs of teachers of Spanish as a heritage language (HL). We focus on simultaneous bilingual speakers who speak Peninsular Spanish as their HL and German as their other language. We also make reference to other varieties of Spanish since they show a different pattern with respect to the strategies used for focus realization (see, e.g., Muntendamm 2009, Feldhausen & Vanrell 2014, 2015, Leal et al. 2018).

There are relatively few approaches that perform a synthesis of research on HL-based multilingualism and usability for the language learning process in a multilingual context in Europe (Fernandez Ammann et al. 2015: 11, García García 2021, to appear/2023). Consequently, there is a great demand among teachers of Spanish as a HL for detailed expertise in language areas from the perspective of multilingualism that we want to address here (see, e.g., Lleó et al. 2013: 107; Reich 2014: 12f., García Sánchez & Feldhausen 2016, Ramos 2018, Potowski 2018, García García et al. 2020).

In this contribution we would like to approach this need and present reflections on how insights from multilingualism research on the phenomenon of focus can be useful for practical teaching. To this end, we propose a method for addressing the complex issue of IS in teaching heritage speakers.

IS is the phenomenon of information packaging (Chafe 1976, Vallduví 1993, Krifka 2007) that responds to the demands of the communicative situation by organizing sentence constituents according to communicative needs. The organization can be understood as a structuring of the sentence by syntactic, prosodic or morphological means. These means and their use differ greatly from language to language. Although Spanish and German use syntactic and prosodic means, the concrete strategies for realizing focus differ significantly between the two languages. Since the adequate use of these means is necessary for communicative success, bilingual speakers should be aware of these differences (see also Jiménez-Fernández 2021).

After a short introduction to the basics of IS and its study in the context of heritage languages, we report on a production study conducted with Spanish-German heritage speakers and present the experimental results on the different syntactic and prosodic strategies of focus realization. These show differences between monolingual and heritage speakers of Peninsular Spanish and form the basis of the language pedagogical part.

Relying on the method of the eclectic approach (Spanish: *método del enfoque ecléctico* or *comunicativo moderado*; see Santos Gargallo 1999, Moreno Garcia 2015), we propose a procedure how to implement the topic of IS in the Spanish as a heritage language classroom. In three phases of learning (perception of structures, analysis and comprehension in context, and production), language teaching benefits from the advantages of the method: (a) including the communicative function without forgetting the importance of language as a system, (b) welcoming heterogeneity, as it allows classes to be adapted to the needs, interests and learning styles of each group, and (c) relying on activities to consolidate structures in context and activities for fluency.

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