On the universality of wh-islands: Experimental evidence from Spanish
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Key features of our experiment

- **Spanish**
  - Existence of wh-islands has been disputed (Torrego 1984, López Sancó & Laka 2019)
- **Acceptability experiment**
  - Allows us to make valid comparisons across languages
- **Wh-islands and whether islands**
  - Whether islands yield very weak effects, might not obtain in Spanish
- **Subject and object extraction**
  - Some languages show differences (Slovenian, Stepanov et al. 2018)

Acceptability Experiment: Methods

- 7-point scale (1 = ‘malo’ bad and 7 = ‘bien’ good)
- 4 tokens per condition; 36 experimental items
- 72 filler items (2:1 filler/experimental ratio)
- 9 lists counterbalanced; 9 additional lists with reversed order
- 59 native Spanish speakers; all living and tested in native country at time of study
  - Outliers screened out based on fillers and if Spanish was not dominant language
  - Main verbs for condition: preguntar, preguntarse, querer saber, necesitar saber
  - Wh-element for wh-islands: cuándo ‘when’ and dónde ‘where’, and whether islands: si ‘whether/if’

Findings & Discussion

- **Spanish shows clear island effects for both wh-islands and whether islands**
  - This is true for both subject or object extraction
  - Whether island violations are more acceptable than wh-island violations
  - Effects are comparable in size to what has been observed in other languages
  - Supports standard views of wh-islands
    - They follow from universal properties of grammar and/or processor.

- **No evidence for 'subliminal island effect' in Spanish**, where wh-island condition is still marginally acceptable (e.g. Brazilian Portuguese, Almeida 2014).
  - Our results show both a large DD score for the island effect and a low acceptability rating for the island-violating condition.
  - Spanish is only one language, but results suggest that wh-islands are perhaps not subject to significant cross-linguistic variation.