

Infinitival Complement Clauses: Data from L2 Acquisition of European Portuguese

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In this paper, we present results concerning the acquisition of infinitival complement clauses by Peninsular Spanish learners of European Portuguese (EP), focusing on complements of causative (e.g. *deixar* ‘let’) and perception verbs (e.g. *ver* ‘see’). More specifically, we discuss the acquisition of Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) (1), Inflected Infinitive complement (IIC) (2), and Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC) (3) in L2 Portuguese.

- (1) A Maria viu os meninos / -os ler o livro.
the Maria saw the boys.ACC them.ACC read.INF the book
‘Maria saw the boys read the book.’
- (2) A Maria viu os meninos / eles lerem o livro.
the Maria saw the boys.NOM they.NOM read.INF.3PL the book
‘Maria saw the boys read the book.’
- (3) A Maria viu os meninos a ler / lerem o livro.
the Maria saw the boys.ACC to.ASP read.INF./read.INF.3PL the book
‘Maria saw the boys reading the book.’

This study follows the *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere 2000, 2008, a.o.) and considers the two main tasks involved in the L2 acquisition process according to this hypothesis: mapping and reassembly. “Mapping” corresponds to an initial stage of acquisition of an L2 in which the learners associate (or map) specific L1 feature combinations with the L2 lexical items that are perceived as closest to the ones of the L1. As for “reassembly”, it involves more complex operations, such as adding features that are not part of the inventory of the L1 and avoiding L1 features that are not encoded in the L2. It is in this stage that learners reassemble features not associated with the same lexical items and configurations in the L1 and in the L2.

Considering the three structures exemplified in (1)-(3), only the ECM structure is available in both languages, i.e. Spanish (Castillo 2001; Torrego 2010; Tubino 2010) and EP (Raposo 1981; Gonçalves 1999; Hornstein, Martins & Nunes 2006). ECM has been associated with a defective T (Gonçalves 1999), with defective ϕ -features (Hornstein, Martins & Nunes 2006), and we predict that this structure will be acquired earlier by the EP L2 learners (Spanish L1 speakers), since the relevant feature configuration can be mapped from the L1 to the L2. On the other hand, the IIC (available only in EP) may be acquired later, since it requires adding features by the EP L2 learners (namely, adding ϕ -features to T). In fact, Spanish does not have an infinitival complement structure characterized by a non-defective T in which a Nominative Subject is licensed and which presents overt morphological subject-verb agreement (that is, an inflected infinitive verb form). Lastly, we also predict that the PIC poses additional difficulties to the EP L2 learners since its acquisition requires the mapping and reassembly of the aspectual features associated with the progressive value of the PIC (that obligatorily expresses non-culminated events, Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria 1997). In Spanish, this aspectual feature is associated with a gerundive verb form, whereas in EP it is associated both with an aspectual head (the preposition *a* ‘to’) and with an infinitival verb form that can be either inflected or non-inflected (Raposo 1989; Duarte 1992; Barbosa & Cochofel 2005).

To test these predictions, we designed two acceptability judgment tasks. The first one allowed us to compare the acquisition of ECM and of the IIC, by testing four conditions: (i) Accusative Subject + inflected infinitive; (ii) Accusative Subject + non-inflected infinitive (ECM); (iii) Nominative Subject + Inflected infinitive (IIC); (iv) Nominative Subject + non-inflected infinitive. The second task was designed to test the acquisition of the PIC, and also tested four conditions: (i) Accusative Subject + prepositional inflected infinitive (PIC); (ii) Accusative Subject + prepositional non-inflected infinitive (PIC); (iii) Nominative Subject + prepositional inflected infinitive; (iv) Nominative Subject + prepositional non-inflected infinitive. We tested a control group of monolingual EP speakers (N = 43) and three groups of adult Spanish L2 learners of EP (formal instruction context) corresponding to distinct proficiency levels: A1/A2 (N = 31); B1 (N = 26); B2 (N = 11). Both tasks consisted of the evaluation of a set of sentences and the correction of the rejected sentences.

The results of the first task show that the ECM and the structure with Accusative Subject

and Inflected Infinitive achieve higher acceptability rates in all groups. However, the GLMM (subject as a random factor) indicates that a Group*Condition Interaction is significant ($F(12,1760) = 37.355, p <.001$), with statistically significant differences ($p <.05$) between the control group and all the EP L2 learners groups. Interestingly, the corrections provided by the participants for the rejected sentences show that, across all conditions, most participants replace the Nominative and the Accusative Subjects by a Dative Subject. Hence, we can hypothesize that the problem may be not the inflected infinitive itself, but an influence of L1 properties, namely properties regarding Differential Object Marking. On the other hand, the IIC is rejected by all groups, including the control group. Even though unexpected, this result seems to be in line with what has been reported by Barbosa, Flores & Pereira (accepted), i.e., low acceptance rates of the IIC under causatives and perception verbs by monolingual and heritage EP speakers.

Regarding the second task, EP L1 speakers show high acceptance rates of the PIC, with both inflected and non-inflected infinitive, and reject the conditions that correspond to ungrammatical sentences in EP (Nominative Subjects with prepositional infinitives). Crucially, the GLMM (subject as a random factor) built for this condition reveals the effect of Group $F(3, 1760) = 6.736, p <.001$ and of a Group by Condition interaction ($F(12,1760) = 30.132, p <.001$). Statistically significant differences ($p <.001$) were found between the control group and all the L2 learners groups. Furthermore, the EP L2 groups present lower acceptance rates of the PIC with an inflected infinitive as opposed to the PIC with a non-inflected infinitive. Finally, the corrections provided by the L2 learners show that they do not replace the PIC by Gerund constructions, a fact we interpret as confirming a difficulty in mapping the aspectual features of the Gerund construction available in the L1 with the PIC in the L2.

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