The Portuguese Subjunctive and Its Acquisition by L2 Learners

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Abstract

This study consists of two parts. In the first part, the author reconsiders the usage of Portuguese subjunctive forms based on studies of modality and the latest research on the Spanish subjunctive. In the second part, he investigates learners' use and acquisition of Portuguese subjunctive forms.

First, the author demonstrates the basic system and ideas of the Portuguese subjunctive. The subjunctive is a mood that is used mainly in subordinate clauses and comprises three temporal forms: the present, the past imperfective, and the future. The future subjunctive, contrary to its name, does not function as the future tense of the present subjunctive. These two forms work as non-past tenses of the subjunctive, and do not overlap with one another, so that, the author claims, they are two different non-past tense forms of that mood. The subjunctive forms are used in specific subordinate nominal, adverbial, and relative clauses, as well as in some limited main clauses. With respect to meaning-function, they are in widespread use in expressions, for example, volitive, causative, objective, dubitative, conditional, concessional, and emotional

expressions. The author then reviews some hypotheses, mainly in Spanish grammar, such as Terrell and Hooper (1974), which seek to identify a common idea through these expressions.

Second, the author reviews mood and modality studies in contrastive linguistics and Japanese grammar. In Portuguese and Spanish grammar, the subjunctive is generally understood in a dichotomy with the indicative mood and is classified at the top of verbal morphemes. On the other hand, in mood and modality studies, the subjunctive is a mood, and is merely one of the modal forms used to express *irrealis*, so that it is not logical to claim a dichotomy with the indicative mood, which is a modally unmarked form. Additionally, from the point of view of Japanese mood and modality, in which modality is compounded by *Discourse Modality* and *Propositional Modality*, the Portuguese subjunctive only functions as an *irrealis* marker in propositions, while the indicative can express discourse and propositional modality.

Considering these facts, the mood and modality system seems to be difficult for learners to acquire. The author, therefore, reviews research on second language subjunctive acquisition. In second language morpheme order studies and acquisition order studies, there are few examples that target subjunctive acquisition. Only since the 2000s have some studies into Spanish subjunctive acquisition, and from the second half

of that decade, French and Portuguese studies, started to appear. Although it is impossible to directly compare all research studies for methodological variation, there are some commonalities: the positive effects of studying in the target-language environment; facility in acquisition of volitive, temporal, and conditional expressions; and difficulty in acquisition of emotional and relative expressions. Meanwhile, some studies do not agree on the use and acquisition of dubitative expressions.

Reflecting on the results of previous studies, the author raises four research questions: the acquisition order of subjunctive expressions; the acquisition and error analysis of the future subjunctive; the observation of confusion in the use of subjunctive and conditional forms (future and future preterite indicative); and subjunctive acquisition by Japanese learners.

The data sources of this study are written data from the Corpora do Português como Língua Estrangeira (PLE, compiled by the University of Lisbon) and the Corpus de Produção Escrita de Aprendentes de Português como Língua Segunda (PEAPL2, compiled by the University of Coimbra), all of which are collected by the same method. Informants' proficiency is evaluated based on the Common European Framework of Reference, so it is possible to investigate pseudo-longitudinal acquisition from quantitative horizontal data. The corpora were annotated by TreeTagger and analysed

by AntConc. The author then created a list of productions and coded the data according to lemma, tense, context of the production, presence of error, informants' native language, proficiency, and theme of composition.

Following the data analysis, the author reports global learners' use of the subjunctive from the perspective of their native language, proficiency, theme of composition, and verbal tense. As follows, he provides a detailed description of subjunctive use in 30 contexts, organized with reference to Bento (2013).

Finally, the author observes learner use for the four research questions. First, with regard to acquisition order, the author found constant acquisition from elementary to advanced learners in directive-causative, purposive, counter-factive, concessive, and non-referential relative expressions. In addition, he found intermediate learner use in volitive and conditional expressions, and the attrition by advanced learners in generic relative expressions. With respect to other expressions, he found only a small number of uses.

Second, with regard to the future subjunctive, although some elementary level learners use this form, its use is mainly concentrated in intermediate learners. In addition, learners' native languages do not seem to positively affect their use of the future subjunctive. Observed by context, the future subjunctive is used primarily in

conditional and temporal expressions, but also, certainly, in generic relative and emotional contexts. On the other hand, the future subjunctive is erroneously used in main clauses and referential relative expressions that require indicative forms, and nominal clauses and counter-factive expressions that require other subjunctive forms.

Third, there is some overuse of the future indicative and future preterite (conditional) in subjunctive-required contexts, such as volitive, temporal, and non-referential relative expressions, while most verbal forms are used in a target-like fashion. Many of the errors are made by intermediate learners and by large-size native speaker groups such as English, German, and Italian.

Fourth, the data show that Japanese learners produce subjunctives mainly in concessive contexts, while quite a few uses are in volitive, temporal, and conditional expressions, in which, in general, the subjunctive forms are frequently used. In addition, their use is concentrated in advanced learners, and the future subjunctive is used more frequently than in general.

In summary, the first half of this thesis criticizes the traditional morphology-based view of the indicative-subjunctive dichotomy, and proposes a function-based view based on mood and modality studies that treat the subjunctive as a modal expression. This will contribute to resolving certain problems, such as

exceptional subjunctive use in emotional expressions or non-use in interrogative expressions, and to refining grammar books and teaching materials for better learner understanding.

The second half, namely the main part of this thesis, is a study on the acquisition of the Portuguese subjunctive. As we will have seen in the first half, the subjunctive is a complex grammar feature, and research into its acquisition is still developing. It is necessary to accumulate and integrate more research examples to further understand its acquisition, error, and confusion with other forms, from learners' perspectives, and it is expected that these studies will also contribute to renovating teaching syllabi and materials.