The Importance of Clause Type in Portuguese (Un)inflected Infinitives

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Portuguese personal infinitives are governed by a subject and are variably inflected to include person and number information. This study examines the factors that condition the presence or absence of inflection in subordinate clauses introduced by the preposition *para*, 'to', 'for', 'so', exemplified in (1) below with the variable inflected element in parentheses.

(1) Eles   vão   estudar   muito para **<u>eles</u>** **<u>passar(em)</u>** a   aula.
they   go   to-study   much so   they they-to-pass the   class
'They're going to study a lot so they pass the class.'

Both Perini (2002) and Gorski (2000) claim that certain "very common" prepositions, such as *de* 'of', do not take inflected forms. After finding counter-examples based on the construction in which *de* appears, the inadequacy of the preposition-frequency-based argument serves as one point of departure for the present work on clauses with highly frequent *para*. Mode of communication has also been found to be relevant (Perini 2002, Gorski 2000, and Canever 2013), with higher inflection rates in writing than in speech, and is examined in the present study as well.

For this study, 500 tokens were extracted from Twitter and the Corpus do Português (Davies & Ferreira 2006-). Only tokens with overt plural person subjects were included to avoid ambiguity in singular and null forms in Portuguese. The analysis was conducted both in RStudio (RStudio Team 2012) and GoldVarb Lion (Sankoff et al. 2012). The independent variables analyzed were person, polarity, clause type, corpus, speaker, and verb lemma. These last two were included in a mixed effects model as random effects. The four different clause types coded for were *pedir para* 'to ask that', *dar para* 'to be possible to', *para* 'so that' (=purpose clause), and *para* 'for'. In this last case, the action in the subordinate clause is, crucially, not the purpose of the action in the main clause.

The results show that purpose clauses have an extremely high inflection rate and the highest of all of the clause types. The difference in inflection rates was statistically significant between purpose clauses and non-purpose clauses, the latter of which disfavored inflection. Additionally, person was a significant factor, with second and third persons favoring but first person disfavoring inflection.

The differences in inflection rates by clause type, along with the high rate of inflection in purpose clauses, show that Perini's (2002) claim is insufficient to explain data patterns and that more fine-grained analyses such as this one are necessary. Furthermore, the fact that more than half of the speech-like Twitter tokens were inflected stands in stark contrast to the mere 8% found by Gorski (2000) and indicates that mode of communication deserves further examination in research on this topic. This study shows the importance of clause type in variationist work on verb morphology, as well as the value of using social media sites as a source for extracting informal writing that mimics speech in the absence of sufficient data from oral interviews.

References

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