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Nominative Case blocking in inflected infinitival complements of perception verbs in European Portuguese

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BACKGROUND

In European Portuguese (EP), infinitival complements of perception verbs may vary:

- **Bare Infinitive Construction (BIC)**

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| (1) a. A mãe viu as crianças cair. | without agreement |
| the mother saw the children fall.INF | |
| b. A mãe viu as crianças caírem. | with agreement |
| the mother saw the children fall.INF.3PL | |
| <i>The mother saw the children fall.</i> | |

- **Prepositional Infinitive Construction (PIC)**

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| (2) a. A mãe viu as crianças a cair. | without agreement |
| the mother saw the children at fall.INF. | |
| b. A mãe viu as crianças a caírem. | with agreement |
| the mother saw the children at fall.INF.3PL | |
| <i>The mother saw the children falling.</i> | |

Background

Bare Infinitive Construction (BIC)

- **Non-inflected BIC:** the infinitival subject gets Accusative Case:

- (3) a. *A mãe viu-**as** cair.* [*the mother saw-3F.PL.ACC fall.INF.*]
 b. **A mãe viu **elas** cair.* [*the mother saw 3F.PL.NOM fall.INF.*]
The mother saw them fall.

- **Inflected BIC**

Most grammatical descriptions (Gonçalves, 1999; Raposo, 1981) assume that Nominative Case is available due to the presence of agreement inflection.

- (4) *A mãe viu [as crianças/elas caírem].*
The mother saw the children/them fall.

Background

Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC)

- The subject is marked with Accusative Case regardless of the presence of agreement inflection:

- (5) a. *A mãe viu-**as** a cair.* [*the mother saw-3F.PL.ACC at fall.INF*]
 b. **A mãe viu **elas** a cair.* [*the mother saw 3F.PL.NOM at fall.INF(.3PL)*]

- (6) a. *A mãe viu-**as** a caírem.* [*the mother saw-3F.PL.ACC at fall.INF(.3PL)*]
 b. **A mãe viu **elas** a caírem.* [*the mother saw 3F.PL.NOM at fall.INF(.3PL)*]
The mother saw them falling.

Background

Raposo (1989)

The sequence DP a V-Inf is a Small Clause (SC) whose predicate is a PP that contains a clausal projection with an empty subject (*PRO* or *pro*):

- (7) a. A mãe viu-as a cair.
 b. A mãe viu-**as**_i [_{PP} [_{DP} *v_i*] [_{PP} a [_{IP} *PRO_i* cair]]].
- (8) a. A mãe viu-as a caírem
 b. A mãe viu-**as**_i [_{PP} [_{DP} *v_i*] [_{PP} a [_{IP} ***pro_i*** caírem]]].



ACCUSATIVE



NOMINATIVE

From this perspective, it is not surprising that the SC subject gets Accusative Case from matrix V even in the presence of agreement inflection: in (8b) *pro* is valued as Nominative under AGREE with embedded inflection; therefore, the SC subject must raise to object so as to value its Case feature against matrix V (just as happens in the non-inflected infinitival case (6a)).

Goals

Problem

This nearly perfect picture, however, faces an empirical problem, namely the fact that many speakers do not accept sentences with an inflected BIC and a Nominative subject. They prefer the Accusative form of the pronoun in the context of the inflected infinitive: **A mãe viu-as caírem**.

Aim

- Even though previous studies have mentioned this fact (Barbosa, Flores & Pereira, 2018; Hornstein, Martins & Nunes, 2008; Pereira, 2015), none have addressed the issue in a systematic way. The present study aims to fill this gap. We report on the results of two Acceptability Judgment Tasks (AJTs) applied to a large pool of adult native speakers of EP.

STUDY 1

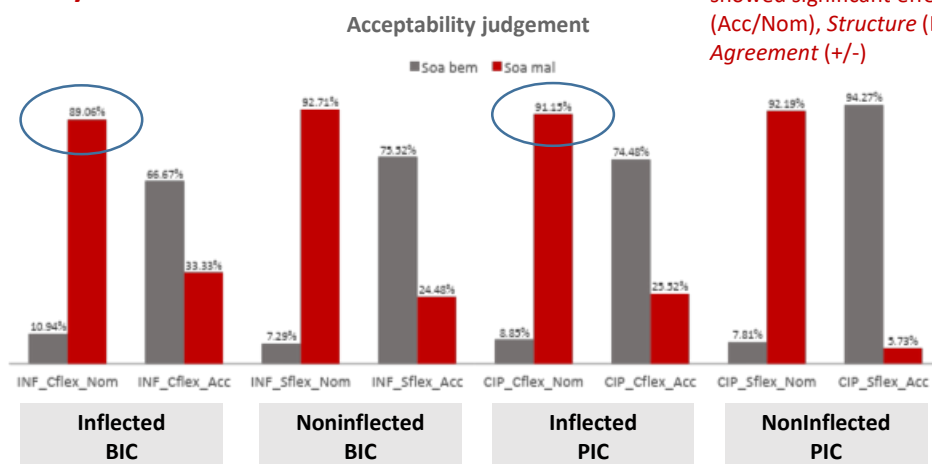
Participants

- ❖ The first AJT was applied to 48 participants
- ❖ All participants were native speakers of EP (*M age: 28,4; DP= 10,9*)

Materials

- ❖ 32 experimental items with **infinitival complements** of the perception verbs *ver* ('to see') and *ouvir* ('to hear').
- ❖ 64 fillers
- ❖ Design: 2x2x2 (within subjects)

RESULTS - Study 1



'Sounds bad' in the BIC with agreement inflection is 89%. This rate is not very distant from that obtained for the PIC (91.1%). Furthermore, in BIC and PIC sentences, the proportion of acceptance is higher for simple infinitives than for inflected infinitives (BIC: 75.52% against 66.67%; PIC: 94.27% against 74.48%, respectively).

CONCLUSIONS — INFLECTED INFINITIVES

- ✧ **PIC:** results are as expected;
- ✧ **BIC:** these results are unexpected in light of what we know about Case — if agreement inflection is present, Nominative Case should be available.

✧ Hornstein et al. (2008):

In complements of perception verbs with the inflected infinitive, raising to object is possible just in case the subject is **third person**.

STUDY 2

Goal : To examine the effect of **grammatical person (2SG, 1PL e 3PL)** on acceptability judgements of sentences containing **inflected infinitival complements** of perception verbs.

Participants: 54 native speakers of European Portuguese (*M age:* 24,9; *DP=* 8,4)

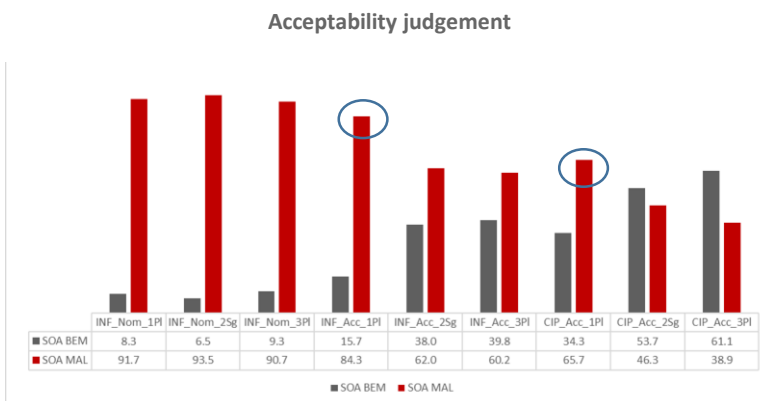
Materials

- ❖ The same structures as in Experiment 1, but this time we manipulated the **grammatical person of the infinitival complements** (1PL, 2SG, and 3PL) in three types of construction (BIC + Nominative Case; BIC + Accusative Case; and PIC + Accusative Case). All infinitival forms were **inflected**.
- ❖ 18 experimental items with infinitival complements; 36 fillers
- ❖ Design: Grammatical person (within subjects); Type of structure (between subjects)

RESULTS - Study 2

Again, the results show a clear pattern of **rejection of Nominative Case** in the inflected BIC. Concerning the Accusative Case marked conditions, there is a statistically significant difference between **1PL** and the other persons of the paradigm: in both types of structure (BIC and PIC), 1PL is the least accepted condition. There is **no statistical difference between 2SG and 3PL** in either type of structure.

Generalized linear mixed model showed significant effects for all factors (*person and type of construction*).



DISCUSSION

- ✧ These results reinforce the conclusion that **Nominative Case is consistently rejected** in the presence of agreement inflection in all persons
- ✧ They do not confirm the predictions of Hornstein et al. (2008).
- ✧ Even though these results are unexpected under standard assumptions concerning clause structure in EP, they actually come as no surprise when other alternatives are considered. We offer an analysis based on the idea that, in the consistent Null Subject Languages (NSL), the head bearing subject agreement has a nominal specification and interpretable phi-features, to the effect that it has the status of a pronominal affix/clitic on T (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998; Barbosa 1995).

ANALYSIS

(9) a. Telefonaram

b. [_{TP} [_T telefon-a [_T **ram**]] [_{Sv} **pro**_{<NOM>} ~~telefon-~~]]

- A corollary of this property is that preverbal (referential) subject constructions in the NSLs are instances of left-dislocation of the subject, where the left-dislocated DP is doubled by *pro* linked to clitic-Agr. The CLLDed topic is licensed by Predication and is assigned Nominative Case by default (in EP, Nominative is the default case).

(10) a. Eles telefonaram.

b. [_{FP} [eles] [_{FP} [_T telefon [_T **aram**]] [_{VP} **pro**_{<NOM>} ~~telefon-~~]]]

Predication

Discussão

IMPLICATIONS for BIC

- On this view, the observed preference for avoiding a Nominative subject in the presence of an inflected infinitive is no longer problematic. It reduces to the unavailability of CLLD in the complement position of perception verbs (presumably because these complements are not strong phases).
- However, the same configuration meets the description for being analysed as a **small clause** (or pseudo-relative) in a manner equivalent to the PIC in Raposo's analysis, with raising to object

(11) A Maria viu-os_i [_{TP} [v_i] [_{TP} corr-e-rem [_{VP} **pro**_{<NOM>} ~~corr-~~...]]]

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

- In fact there are striking parallelisms between the two. In particular, when the subject is a pronoun, **both constructions are sensitive to grammatical person.**
- Our hypothesis is that this effect follows from the fact that the **phi-feature set under T is interpretable.** Since both the pronoun and the phi-feature set under T are interpretable, the structure is perceived as redundant (in comparison with its counterpart with an uninflected infinitive, which is the preferred form) particularly when the set of phi-features on T is positively marked for the features [+Participant; +Author; +PI], as happens in **first person plural.**

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