

Iterativity and habituality in L2 Portuguese

Duarte Oliveira, CEHUM, Universidade do Minho (Portugal)
dnoliveira101@gmail.com

Abstract

In this study, I follow the theoretical framework put forward by Bertinetto and Lenci (2012), which defines both habituality and iterativity in terms of verbal pluractionality. Verbal pluractionality can be determined in the event-internal domain or in the event-external domain. Habituality is always event-external (e.g., *O João nadava no lago todas as semanas* ‘John swam in the lake every week’), while iterativity can be both event-internal, when the event is semelfactive in nature and consists of the iteration of sub-events in the same situation (e.g., *O João bateu à porta durante 10 minutos* ‘John knocked at the door for 10 minutes’), and event-external, when the same event is iterated in several different situations (e.g., *O João nadou no lago três vezes na semana passada* ‘John swam in the lake three times last week’).

The focus of this study is past-tense event-external pluractionality. In Portuguese, the occurrence of certain adverbials and/or adjunct-like expressions denoting specific temporal-aspectual features will restrict the use of both *Pretérito Perfeito* (PP) and *Pretérito Imperfeito* (PI) in a sentence. While the occurrence of reiteration adverbials (e.g., *três vezes* ‘three times’) requires the use of PP, giving rise to iterative readings, habituality adverbials (e.g., *habitualmente* ‘habitually’) tend to favor the use of PI, resulting in habitual readings.

I tested 97 speakers of L2 Portuguese (with different L1s) and 28 monolingual controls. The methodology is comprised of a short sociolinguistic questionnaire, followed by an acceptability judgment task. In the acceptability task, there are three main conditions and a total of 8 subconditions. Each subcondition focuses on the (less or more acceptable) use of a particular tense (PP or PI) and presents five sentences, each with a specific situation type (activity, accomplishment, etc.). The first and second conditions focus on the occurrence of both PP and PI with reiteration (e.g., *O João foi/(#ia) ao cinema duas vezes ontem*, ‘John went to the movies three times yesterday’) and habituality adverbials (e.g., *O João ia/(#foi) habitualmente ao cinema*, ‘John used to go to the movies’), while the third condition is related to the time-frame criterium, proposed by Bertinetto and Lenci (2012), and presents situations with both vague (e.g., *Antigamente, o João ia/(#foi) ao cinema*, ‘In the past, John used to go to the movies’) and strict delimitation (e.g., *De junho a agosto deste ano, o João foi/(#ia) de férias*, ‘From June to August this year, John went on vacation’). In the task, the participants are presented with a sentence and asked to judge it in terms of its well-formedness, by means of a 7-point semantic differential scale. The results seem to show that there are relevant differences between the L2s and the controls, except for the PI interpretation in habitual and vaguely delimited contexts. This suggests that the habitual use of the PI is acquired relatively soon by L2 learners, contrary to the iterative use of the PP. The results also suggest that there may be some correlation between grammatical tense and aspectual class (or (a)telicity) in iterative/habitual contexts. Further analysis shows that the speakers’ knowledge of habituality and iterativity is strictly related to their self-assessment and acquisitional background.

Reference:

Bertinetto, P. M., & Lenci, A. (2012). Habituality, pluractionality, and imperfectivity. In R. I. Binnick (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect* (pp. 852–880). Oxford: Oxford University Press.