

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

Introduction In European Portuguese (EP), infinitival complements of perception verbs may vary according to (i) absence vs. presence of the preposition *a* as a progressive aspect marker ((1) vs. (2)); (ii) presence vs. absence of agreement inflection on the infinitive:

(1) *Bare Infinitive Construction (BIC)*

A mãe viu as crianças cair / caírem
the mother saw the children fall.INF / fall.INF.3PL
'Their mother saw the children fall.'

(2) *Prepositional Infinitive Construction (PIC)*

A mãe viu as crianças a cair / caírem.
the mother saw the children at fall.INF. / fall.INF.3PL
'Their mother saw the children falling.'

In the noninflected BIC, the infinitival subject gets Accusative Case:

(3) A mãe viu-as / *viu elas cair
the mother saw-3F.PL.ACC / saw 3F.PL.NOM fall.INF.

Concerning the inflected BIC, most grammatical descriptions (Gonçalves, 1999; Raposo, 1981) assume without much discussion that Nominative Case is available due to the presence of agreement inflection (in effect, in other instances of inflected infinitives, the subject is realized as Nominative). In the absence of agreement inflection, Nominative Case is unavailable, so the infinitival subject must have its Case feature valued as Accusative by matrix V (cf. (3)).

In the Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC) (2) the subject is marked with Accusative Case regardless of the presence of agreement inflection:

(5) A mãe viu-as a cair(em).
the mother saw-3F.PL.ACC at fall.INF.(3PL)

Raposo (1989) proposes that 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 (either PRO or *pro*, depending on whether the infinitive is noninflected or inflected), which is controlled by the SC subject:

(6) a. A mãe viu [_{SC} as crianças_i [_{PP} a [_{SFlex} PRO_i cair]]].
b. A mãe viu [_{SC} as crianças_i [_{PP} a [_{SFlex} pro_i caírem]]].

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 (6b) *pro* is valued as Nominative under AGREE with embedded inflection; therefore, the small clause 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 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*. Even though previous studies have mentioned this fact (Barbosa, Flores e Pereira, 2017; Hornstein, Martins & Nunes, 2008; Pereira, 2016), none have addressed the issue in a systematic way. The present study aims to fill this gap. We report on the results of two Grammaticality Judgment Tasks (GJTs) applied to a large pool of adult native speakers of EP.

The studies The first GJT was applied to 60 participants and included thirty-two experimental items with infinitival complements of the perception verbs *ver* ('to see') and *ouvir* ('to hear'). In half of the sentences, the subject was marked with Nominative Case and in the other half, with Accusative Case. The items varied as to the type of construction (BIC vs. PIC) and agreement

inflection (with vs. without agreement inflection). Only sentences with 3PL subjects were included in this first experiment. Results reveal that there is an overall preference for Accusative case, *regardless of the presence of inflection on the infinitive*. Importantly, the rate of rejection of Nominative Case in the BIC with agreement inflection is 89%. This rate is not very distant from that obtained for the PIC (91%). 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).

In the second GJT, we used 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. This test was applied to another group of 54 native adult EP speakers. Again, 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.

Discussion and analysis We start by addressing the low rates of acceptance of Nominative Case marked subjects in the presence of an inflected BIC. Even though this result is unexpected under standard assumptions concerning clause structure in EP, it actually comes 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). 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. Left-dislocated subjects in EP are assigned Nominative Case by *default*. In the case of inflected bare infinitival complements of perception verbs, the configuration obtained is the following, where the infinitival complement is not a strong phase:

(7) VPERC [FP DP ... [_T V [_T T<D:iphi>_i]] [_{VP} *pro*_i<NOM> -V ...]]

In (7), *pro* gets Nominative Case. As for the left-dislocated DP, since the infinitival complement is not a strong phase, the option of raising to object is, in principle, available. 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 preference for the operation of raising to object over the last resort operation of *default* Case assignment. This preference can be viewed as an instance of the Paninian principle *Blocking*, whereby a general, default form, is blocked by the existence of a more specific rival form. In this case, the *default* Case option is blocked by the more specific operation of raising to object.

Curiously, (7) has a structure that is very similar to that of the PIC under Raposo's 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. We argue 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.