Mood Swings: Effects of Verb Regularity on Heritage Speakers’ Knowledge of Subjunctive Morphology in Spanish

David Giancaspro¹, Silvia Perez-Cortes² & Joshua Higdon¹
¹University of Richmond  ²Rutgers University, Camden

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HSs’ Acquisition of Mood

Research Questions and hypotheses

1. Variability in mood selection
   A) HSs exhibit high degrees of variability with mood morphology.
   Relative to Spanish-dominant speakers (e.g., first-generation immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries), HSs display:

   - Lower rates of subjunctive production in expected subjunctive contexts and increased use of innovative morphopragmatic variants, e.g., “non-native” indicative.

   - Proficiencies: Higher levels of proficiency with “target” mood selection.

   See: Giancaspro, 2010a; Perez-Cortes, Putnam & Sanchez, 2019.

   Frequency of HS use: HSs who use their HL more frequently tend to exhibit less morphological variability.


2. What factors appear to be driving HSs’ variability?

   These factors shed some light on interspeaker variability (e.g., why some HSs are more variable than others), but do not explain intraspeaker variability (e.g., why a single speaker is more likely to produce subjunctive in some items/situations vs. others).

   See: Giancaspro, 2010b; Perez-Cortes, Putnam & Sanchez, 2019.

3. Investigating the effects of morphological regularity
   One within-group factor that might partially explain HSs’ variability with mood morphology is regularity, a known factor to favor acquisition/maintenance of subjunctive for monolinguals (Gudmestad, 2010), L2 learners (e.g., Collentine, 1997; Gudmestad, 2012/2014, and HSs (Perez-Cortes, in press).

RQ1. Do HSs differ between subjunctive and indicative mood in production and preference?

RQ2. Are HSs’ production and preference of subjunctive affected by the regularity of the subordinate verb?

Methodology

Participants:
   - Data was collected in two research sites: Richmond, VA and Camden, NJ.
   - 18 Advanced HS of Spanish (M=12.92; 50 DELE score; SD=2.93)
   - 17 Intermediate HS of Spanish (M=35.12/50 DELE score; SD=2.27)

Design:
   - The same 20 verbs (all -er/-ir) appeared two times in both tasks, creating a “within-verbs” design. (This allowed us to see if participants differentiated between subj/indic, with each verb tested.)

To avoid a potential confound with lexical frequency, we ensured that the average lexicometric frequency ranking (cumulative frequency of all possible forms of an inflectional paradigm; Davies, 2006) was not different for regular verbs (M = 1227.5, SD = 1312.15) and irregular verbs (M = 1039.7, SD = 1299.33), (t(19) = .34, p > .7).

Tasks and Results

Task 1: Oral elicited production task

Participants completed sentences orally using 2 fragments on screen, to communicate their beliefs about behaviors of good male/female bosses.

Condition 1: Subjective Expected (k = 20)
   These items always began with quiero (‘I want that’), triggering subjunctive.

Condition 2: Indicative Expected (k = 20)
   These items always began with un buen jefe (‘a good boss’), meaning that indicative mood was expected.

All verbs were used in Conditions 1 and 2.

RQ1. Graph 1. % of subjunctive production by Expected Mood

RQ2. Graph 2. % of subjunctive mood by Expected Mood, Regularity

Task 2: Mood preference task

Participants listened to sentences from Juan and Maria—always minimal pairs—and decided whose sentence sounded better.

Condition 1: Subject. Expected (k = 20)
   These items began with quiero, meaning that participants should prefer subjunctive mood items.

Condition 2: Indic. Expected (k = 20)
   These items began with un buen jefe, meaning that participants should prefer indicative mood items.

All verbs were used in Cond. 1 and 2.

RQ1. Graph 3. % of subjunctive mood by Expected Mood

RQ2. Graph 4. % of subjunctive mood by Expected Mood, Regularity

Analysis and discussion

RQ1. Do HSs differ between subjunctive and indicative mood in production and preference?

Yes: Participants both produced/preferred subjunctive at higher rates when indicative is expected than when indicative is not.

RQ2. Are HSs’ preferences and production of subjunctive affected by the regularity of the subordinate verb?

Yes: Regularity affected the AdvHSs in both tasks and the IntHSs in the Auditory Preference Task.

Conclusions

The effects of regularity on mood are not unprecedented in bilingual (e.g., Poplack, Leon & Dion, 2013) or even monolingual populations (Poplack et al, 2018).

Together, the results of the present study indicate that Spanish HSs can maintain knowledge of a particular morphological distinction (e.g., indicative/subjunctive) with specific sub-sets of their lexicon.

Selected References


