

Interference in the portuguese-spanish linguistic pair: the case of inflection¹

Interferência no par linguístico português-espanhol: o caso da flexão

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the interference present in essays written by Venezuelan Portuguese learners. Weinreich (1974 [1953]) defines *interference* as the influence of a language A on a language B, which results in structures that do not belong to the grammatical system of any of the languages involved. Data collection took place between 2015 and 2017 in a Portuguese as a foreign language course at the Brazil/Venezuela border. The corpus was composed of 47 essays written by 23 Venezuelan students. From the linguistic point of view, inflectional interference is the most recurrent, with 92 occurrences.

Keywords: Linguistic contact; Language interference; Portuguese as a foreign language

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é analisar as interferências presentes em redações escritas por venezuelanos aprendizes de português. Weinreich (1974 [1953]) define interferência como a influência de uma língua A sobre uma língua B, que resulta em estruturas que não pertencem ao sistema gramatical de nenhuma das línguas envolvidas. A coleta de dados ocorreu entre 2015 e 2017 em um curso de português como língua estrangeira na fronteira Brasil/Venezuela. O corpus foi composto por 47 redações escritas por 23 estudantes venezuelanos. Do ponto de vista linguístico, a interferência flexional é a mais recorrente, com 92 ocorrências.

Palavras-chave: Contato linguístico; Interferência linguística; Português como língua estrangeira

Introduction

Throughout the history of Brazil, Portuguese has been in contact with indigenous, African and immigrant languages. The focus of the present research was the contact of Venezuelan Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese in the Brazil-Venezuela border.

Brazil borders ten South American countries, eight of which are speakers of Spanish, one of English and one of French. In many of these regions, there is the presence of Indigenous and creole

¹ This paper is an excerpt from Mota (2020b).

languages², enabling linguistic contact in a multilingual environment³. The border scenario is the most prototypical place of contact, where we may clearly observe speakers of distinct languages.

Since 2015, the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL) has grown considerably in the state of Roraima. With the intensification of the Venezuelan migratory flow, mainly between 2016 and 2017, the State University of Roraima (UERR) and the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR) saw an increase in demand for this type of course.

By interference, we understand the influence of a language A on a language B, often resulting in agrammatical structures, i.e., structures that do not belong to the grammatical system of any of the languages involved. Although this influence between languages produces structures that do not fit into said systems, interference is not considered the result of insufficient linguistic knowledge.

The general purpose of this paper is to analyze the interference present in textual productions of Venezuelan Portuguese learners; more specifically, it intends to: (1) identify, classify and describe inflectional interference; (2) identify the sociolinguistic profile of the Venezuelan PFL student; and (3) relate the interference data with informants' sociodemographic profile.

Geographical context: the cities of Pacaraima and Santa Elena

On one side of the border, there is Pacaraima (Roraima, Brazil), a city in northernmost Brazil, and, on the other, Santa Elena de Uairén (Gran Sabana, Venezuela), in southernmost Venezuela. Since 2015, the border between these countries has become the scene of numerous conflicts, including armed ones, due to the economic and, consequently, migratory crisis in Venezuela. However, the ties that unite these two cities go beyond legal, political or geographical issues, since there is no delimitation between linguistic borders.

Throughout the history of Brazil, several treaties of limits and borders have been drafted and celebrated. It is not necessary to list them here. However, for the purposes of the present paper, we transcribe paragraph 3, article 2, of the *Tratado de limites e navegação fluvial* [Treaty on limits and river navigation] celebrated between Brazil and Venezuela in 1859, available on the page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴ (MRE):

The dividing line shall follow through the peak of Sierra Parima, up until the angle that it makes with Sierra Pacaraima, and all the waters that flow to the Branco River shall be considered to be within Brazilian territory, and all the waters that flow to the Orinoco River shall be considered to be within Venezuelan territory; the line shall follow by the most elevated peaks of the aforesaid Sierra Pacaraima, so that the waters that flow to the Branco River shall belong, as previously said, to Brazil, and those that flow to Essequibo, Cuyuni and Coroni shall belong to Venezuela, as far as the territories of both nations extend in their eastern regions.

² According to Bagno (2017, p.70), creole is a community's new first language, after having previously resorted to a pidgin as its lingua franca. Bagno also states that creole languages were believed to be considerably developed versions of a pidgin (a rudimentary second language) into a first language without an available target language. We also suggest consulting Couto (1996).

³ According to Bagno (2017, p.297), multilingualism is characterized by the existence of different linguistic communities within the same territory (its political independence notwithstanding). This is, in fact, the most common situation in all human societies.

⁴ Available at: https://sistemas.mre.gov.br/kitweb/datafiles/Pcdl/pt-br/file/Fronteiras/Venezuela/4_1%20-%20Tratado%20de%20Limites.pdf

As stated in the treaty, the dividing lines cross the mountain chains of Parima and Pacaraima in the city of Pacaraima, where we conducted our research. Photo 1 shows Brazil on the left and Venezuela on the right. The border landmark (painted in white) may be seen between the two flags.

Figure 1 – Brazil/Venezuela Border



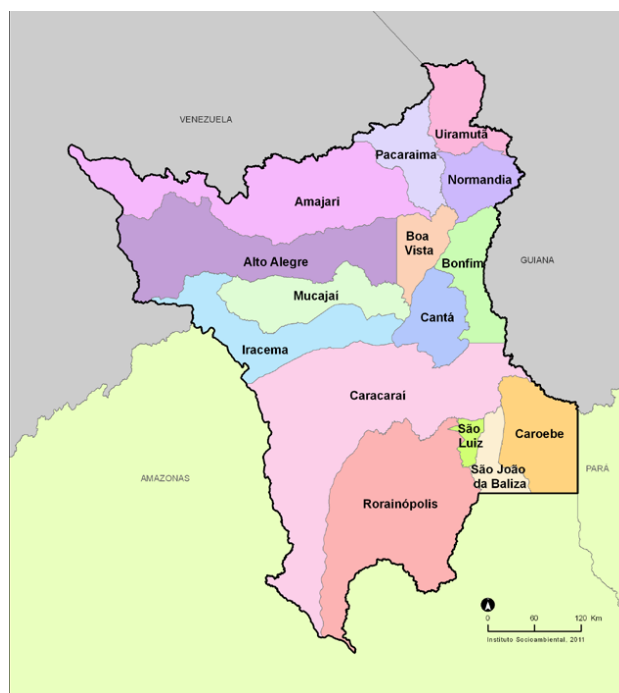
Source: Personal archive (2012)

According to the Permanent Commission for the Development and Integration of the Border Region⁵ (*Comissão Permanente para o Desenvolvimento e Integração da Faixa de Fronteira – CDIF*), Pacaraima and Santa Elena are considered Twin Cities, because the municipalities territories border their neighboring country, their city halls are located at the international limit, and there may or may not be conurbation or semi-conurbation with a locality of the neighboring country. There is approximately a 15 km distance between the two cities, their limits being considered a *dry* border, as there are no bodies of water, such as rivers and lakes, dividing the two cities.

Pacaraima occupies a total area of 8,063 km², of which 7,920 km² belong to two Indigenous lands, namely: São Marcos and Raposa Serra do Sol. The former was created in 1992, and the latter in 2005. The administration of the municipality is located in a non-indigenous territory. Pacaraima borders the city of Santa Elena de Uairén (Venezuela) to the north, with Boa Vista and Amajari to the south, Normandia and Uiramutã to the east and Amajari to the east, as shown on Map 1.

⁵ Available at: <https://www.gov.br/mdr/pt-br/assuntos/desenvolvimento-regional/comissao-permanente-para-o-desenvolvimento-e-a-integracao-da-faixa-de-fronteira>

Figure 2 – Map of Roraima



Source: <https://www.socioambiental.org/sites/blog.socioambiental.org/files/publicacoes/10403.pdf>

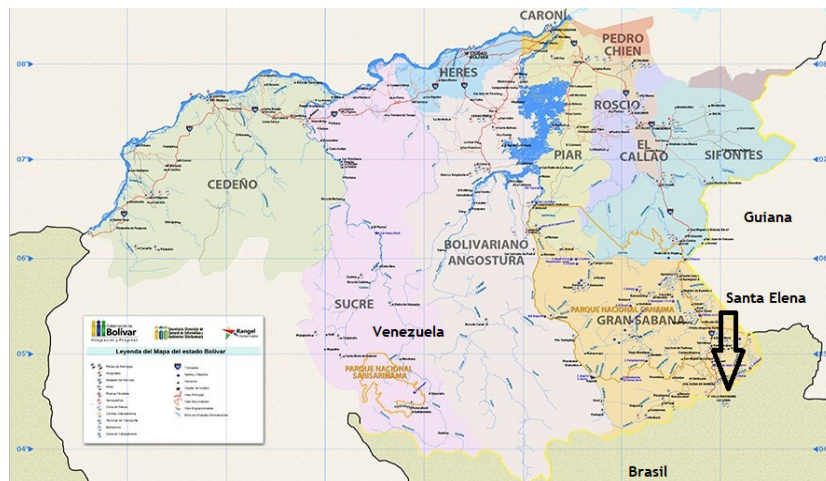
According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2021), its population is estimated in 18,913 people. In the 2010 census, there were 10,433 inhabitants, 5,919 in the rural area and 4,514 in the urban area. The population increase took place due to the political and economic crisis that began in Venezuela in 2015. Pacaraima became the gateway for many Venezuelans in Brazil.

The municipality is located in a region bordering another country, Venezuela, and two indigenous territories. The (socio)linguistic scenario is complex, because, in addition to Portuguese as an official language, Spanish and a number of indigenous languages (Taurepang, Makuxi, Arekuná and Wapixana) are spoken.

Saint Helena of Uairén is one of the 11 municipalities of state of Bolívar (Map 2), southeasternmost Venezuela, and is bordered by Sifontes and Piar to the north, Pacaraima to the south, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to the east and Bolivariano Angostura to the west. The town, which grew out of a mining settlement, was founded by Lucas Fernández Peña in 1923. However, its status was formalized by the Bolívar Legislative Assembly only in 1990.

The city of Santa Elena has an area of 32,990 km² and had a population of 39,396 inhabitants, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) (2011). However, in 2015, this population dropped to 31,734 inhabitants, that is, there was a shrinking of 7,662 inhabitants in four years. These numbers may be much higher, given the country's current serious crisis. Indigenous peoples make up 7.54% of the state of Bolívar's population.

Figure 3 – Political map of the state of Bolívar



Source: Adapted from <http://www.e-bolivar.gob.ve/geografia>

Prior to the economic crisis, Santa Elena was commonly overflowed with Brazilian tourists. In the central zone, Portuguese is the predominant language. It is spoken especially by local merchants, and shows traits of the Roraima accent. On the other hand, the presence of Portuguese decreases as one moves away from the trade center, and Spanish and indigenous languages become more commonly heard.

Studies on language interference

Weinreich (1974 [1953]) defines interference as a deviation from the norm in one of the languages, from the point of view of bilingual speech. Such a deviation may occur due to familiarity with more than one language, that is, as a result of linguistic contact. For Weinreich, the term interference

implies the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domain of a language, such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of morphology and syntax, and some areas of the vocabulary [...]. In the more loosely patterned domains of a language – some of the syntax, or vocabulary of an incidental nature – “borrowing” might more properly be spoken of when the transfer of an element as such is to be stressed. But even there the possibility of ensuing rearrangements in the patterns, or interference, cannot be excluded (1974 [1953], p. 1).

For Weinreich (1974 [1953]), the greater the difference between the systems, the greater the difficulties in learning an L2 and the larger the amount of interference. On the other hand, in this work, we observe interference between Portuguese and Spanish (genetically close languages) in written texts. Their closeness may cause individuals to become so involved with (false) similarities, for example, that they do not notice the specific structures of both languages.

In his work, Weinreich cites the common intelligibility criterion employed by Voegelin and Harris (1951) with Swedish and Danish. Speakers of the latter understand the former, but the

opposite is not true. The relation between Portuguese and Spanish is very similar. In general, Brazilians understand Spanish speakers, but the opposite does not necessarily occur. The fact that Portuguese has more vowels than Spanish, for example, would make it easier for a Portuguese speaker to at least understand a Spanish speaker⁶.

In our research scenario, this information is important, because Venezuelans move from Santa Elena to Pacaraima in order to study Portuguese. In several visits to Santa Elena, we were never able to locate PFL courses being offered. Portuguese is learned in Santa Elena through contact with Brazilians or the Pacaraima PFL course, for example. The 15 km that separate the two cities mark only a geographical division established throughout the history of the two countries.

Since 2015, the migratory flow of Venezuelans to Brazil has grown significantly, and the border's multilingual or plurilingual features were intensified. Spanish speakers⁷ are not the only ones to cross the border; there are also indigenous, Chinese and Haitians, among other groups.

For Weinreich (1974 [1953]), interference may be analyzed by descriptive linguistics through linguistic methods, such as the comparison of the phonetic and grammatical systems of the languages involved. In this sense, the objective of this research was to show the extent to which interference is determined by the structure of two languages in contact, as opposed to non-linguistic factors in the sociocultural context of language contact. He lists 12 extralinguistic factors, namely (1974 [1953], p. 3-4):

- a. The speaker's facility of verbal expression in general and his ability to keep two languages apart;
- b. Relative proficiency in each language;
- c. Specialization in the use of each language by topics and interlocutors;
- d. Manner of learning each language;
- e. Attitudes toward each language, whether idiosyncratic or stereotyped.
- f. Size of bilingual group and its social cultural homogeneity or differentiation; breakdown into groups using one or the other language as their mother tongue; demographic facts; social and political relations between these subgroups;
- g. Prevalence of bilingual individuals with given characteristics of speech behavior [...] in the several subgroups;
- h. Stereotyped attitudes toward each language ("prestige"); indigenous or immigrant status of the language concerned;
- i. Attitudes toward the culture of each language community;
- j. Attitudes toward bilingualism as such;
- k. Tolerance or intolerance with regard to mixing languages and to incorrect speech in each language;
- l. Relation between the bilingual group and each of the two language communities of which it is a marginal segment.

As we have just seen, Weinreich deals with linguistic contact and interference. In the second chapter of his work, the longest and most important, he focusses on the mechanisms and structural causes of interference, dividing it into two parts: theoretical preliminaries and types of interferences, which are classified into three types: phonic, grammatical and lexical. Such linguistic categories are independent of the modality (oral/written) in which the text materializes.

⁶ We suggest PEREYRON, Leticia; ALVES, Ubiratã Kickhöfel (2016).

⁷ In addition to Venezuelans, it is possible to find Colombians, Peruvians and Argentines residing in the Brazil-Venezuela border region.

Regarding the theoretical framework, the author lists two types of manifestations of interference: in the first, the elements that do not belong to the language⁸ may be separated as borrowed or transferred elements; in the second, there would be no categorical transfer of these elements. Weinreich tells us that interlinguistic identification may be observed under phonic, syntactic and semantic bias.

From a phonetic point of view, Weinreich presents the difference between /p/ in Russian and English. One of the traits of /p/ in Russian is the lack of palatalization /p'/, whereas in English there is no such restriction. However, speakers of both languages identify and pronounce [p] similarly, as in Russian /t'ip/ (type) and English /tip/ (tip). In this sense, bilingual speakers do not notice the peculiarities of each language.

Similar examples may be drawn from the context of the present research. Within the scope of speech, we may cite the difficulties Brazilians face when in contact with Spanish. For didactic reasons, take as an example the phoneme /b/ which, in Spanish, is occlusive, bilabial, voiced in word-initial position, after a pause or preceded by consonants *n* or *m*. Phonetically, it is represented by /b/ and orthographically by *b* or *v*, for example, *vessel* ['baso], *boat* ['bote], *man* ['ombre] e *a good trip* ['um 'bwen 'bjaxe]. Its allophone, the phoneme /β/, is characterized as fricative, bilabial, unvoiced preceded by vowel or consonant that is not *n* or *m*. Orthographically, it is represented by *b* or *v*, as in *abanico* [aβa'niko], *ese barco* ['ese 'βarko], *alba* ['alβa] e *wolf* ['loβo].

According to Masip (2010), Brazilians tend to pronounce both phonemes as /b/, that is, with lips closed, and to insert a short *i* after the sound *b* when the consonant is locking the syllable, which results in a restructuring of the word, such as *ab[i]surdo* and *ob[i]soleto*.

In writing (and still using letters *b* and *v* as examples), Spanish speakers are prone to spelling Portuguese words with *v* by substituting it with a *b*, especially in indicative imperfect verbs. Portuguese consistently spells such verbs with a *v*, whereas Spanish uses *b*. In our corpus, we found eight such occurrences, as in *moraba*, *trabalhaba* and *choraban*.

Weinreich (1974 [1953]) proposes three types of grammatical interference from a language A to B and vice-versa. The first refers to the use of A's morphemes when speaking or writing in B; for example, the contact between Recto-Romanesque and Swiss-German caused bilingual children to replace the Recto-Romanesque feminine indefinite article *in* (variant of *ina*, used between vowels), by *ina-n*, Swiss-German model. That is, they replaced *in'ura* (one hour) by *ina-n-ura*.

The second concerns the application of the grammatical relation of language A to the morphemes of B in the speech of B, or the omission of a relation in B that does not originate in A. The author exemplifies with *He comes tomorrow home*. This sentence applies standard German word order (*Er kommt morgen Hause*) to English morphemes. In English, adverbs may be positioned at the beginning or the end of sentences⁹: *He comes home tomorrow* or *Tomorrow he comes home* (emphases added). However, the adverb is in position 3, *He comes tomorrow home*, following the German standard¹⁰. In other words, the sentence is written in English, but the order of its elements follows the German pattern.

⁸ Weinreich follows a structuralist concept of language.

⁹ On adverb position in English, we suggest Understanding English Grammar (Payne, 2011).

¹⁰ On adverb position in German, we suggest Duden Grammar (Drosdowski; Eisenberg, 2009).

The third and last type of grammatical interference occurs by identifying a given morpheme B with a given morpheme A. This may extend or reduce morpheme B's functions, based on language A's grammatical model. For the author, a bilingual speaker perceives the Yiddish morpheme *ver* as English *who*. They may say, for example, *der mentš ver iz do* (the man who is here) instead of *der mentš vos iz do*, using the English standard.

Mota (2020a) found 36 occurrences of grammatical interference, classifying them into two types: morphophonological, regarding the morphology of the word, i.e., informants wrote using part of the Portuguese and/or Spanish morpheme; and syntactic ones, in which the informants' syntactic combinations followed partly English and partly Spanish. We cite only one example of each.

Altamirano Robles (2016) counts 149 occurrences of syntactic interference in her corpus. They are all syntactic, for example: *Quando de pronto se lhe acercaram umas senhoras que levavam seus filhos à escola* (emphasis in original) (when suddenly a few women who were taking their children to school approached). According to the Altamirano Robles, the oblique pronoun *lhe* was used inappropriately, as it concerns the person; *Cuidemos o meio ambiente*. (emphasis in original) (Let's take care of the environment). She believes the omission of the preposition *de* happened because the student made a literal translation from his mother language.

She concludes that, in cases of syntactic interference, informants tend to follow Spanish word order and maintain agreement; they add, change or omit prepositions and omit contractions.

With regard to semantics, Weinreich (1974 [1953]) mentions that in English there is the difference between the semantemes *foot* and *leg*, respectively equivalent in Portuguese to *pé* and *perna*. In Russian, this distinction is divided into three semantemes, *nožka* (table leg), *nogá* (the entire paw of an animal) and *fut* (twelve-inch measure unit). In a situation of contact between speakers of these languages, the similarity between *foot* and *nogá* suggests an interlinguistic identification between the two.

Similarly, Mota (2020a) listed 14 lexical interferences, involving semantic issues, but in written texts. We cite only one case to illustrate: *A liberação das femeas é uma afronta para os masculinos entorpecidos pelo seu afã de ter o controle de tudo* (emphasis in original) (female liberation is an affront to the masculine ones blinded by their eagerness to control everything). Despite an initial strangeness, the author believes the reader would soon understand the text to be addressing *women's liberation*. Spanish *hembra* may mean both *woman* and *any female animal* (RAE, online).¹¹ In Portuguese, there are two forms: *fêmea* (female animal) and *mulher* (woman) (AULETE, online)¹². However, the intention to use *fêmea* causes the word to be inadequately used.

Altamirano Robles (2016) researches linguistic interferences in texts written by Peruvian PFL learners in Lima, Peru. She collected 70 texts written by 50 students in two PFL courses in that city. The researcher classifies the interferences into three types, namely: semantic, syntactic and orthographic. We are here interested in the first two.

Altamirano Robles subdivides semantic interferences into proposition semantics and lexical semantics, and counts 330 occurrences. Take as an example *Nós brincávamos de carrinho e de bicicleta*

¹¹ Online consultation of the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary: www.rae.es.

¹² Online consultation of the Aulete Dictionary: www.aulete.com.br.

(emphasis in original) (we used to play with toy cars and go bike-riding); here, the informant has used *brincar de bicicleta* (to play with a bike) based on Spanish *juegos de bicicleta*. The Portuguese equivalent would be *andar de bicicleta*. Another example cited by the author is *Na atualidade as parelhas preferem ter no máximo dois* (emphasis in original) (couples today prefer to have at most two kids). Altamirano Robles (2016) believes the student used *parelha* due to its orthographic proximity to Spanish *pareja* (couple). She concludes that, in semantic interference, informants make use of the Spanish language modifying both the meaning and the morphology of the words.

Methodology

The UERR Pacaraima campus PFL course was chosen as the environment for the study of linguistic interference processes due to the researcher's familiarity with it, being an environment for Portuguese teaching and learning and taking place in a border region and in a multilingual context.

The PFL course had six semesters (a three-year long course), making up 360c/h. There were six levels, thus distributed: beginner 1 and 2; intermediate 1 (Int1) and 2 (Int2); and advanced 1 (Adv1) and 2 (Adv2). Classes were held on Saturday mornings for youth and adults at the Casimiro de Abreu Municipal School.

The questionnaire was applied to students in the second semester of 2016 and answered by 15 Int1, 12 Adv1 and 9 Adv2 students, totaling 36 students. Two reasons led to the choice of intermediate and advanced levels: first, the higher level of Portuguese formal knowledge of these students; second, there were no beginner classes, as the UERR Pacaraima Language and Literature course was being closed.

During 2016 and 2017, students dropped out of the course, and this is one of the reasons that account for the low number of questionnaires answered. According to the head of the course's report, many students would go together to Pacaraima, but the vast majority lacked the necessary means to even cross the border. As previously reported, this period corresponds to the migration of many Venezuelans to other countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia.

The community in analysis here is small, and breaking it down with the use of more specific criteria, such as number of men/women, level of education and age group, could restrict the study. This does not mean that sociodemographic factors were left aside. In this study, they complement the linguistic data and compose a multilingual scenario on the Brazil/Venezuela border.

From the sociolinguistic point of view, we selected 15 factors that involve both social and linguistic aspects, in an attempt to articulate the sociocultural context to the phenomenon of linguistic contact. In addition, we understand that this context can influence linguistic interference, helping us in some explanations.

Based on what we have collected and analyzed, we can state that UERR PFL course students:

1. Are mostly women;
2. Have higher education;
3. Are between 23 and 58 years old;
4. Live in Venezuela, where they were born, live and work, but study in Brazil;
5. Are employed in the tertiary sector;
6. Study PLF because they like the language;
7. Have family ties with Portuguese speakers;
8. Have been studying Portuguese for 2 years and speaking it for 11, on average;
9. Claim to have a good command of Portuguese;
10. Like to study Portuguese to communicate with Brazilians;
11. Speak and write in Portuguese sometimes;
12. Speak and write in social situations, especially among friends and at school;
13. Have Spanish as their mother language;
14. Have studied few foreign languages, mostly English;
15. Do not speak any indigenous languages.

The head of the course provided us with copies of the students' essays, totaling 139 texts from 77¹³ Int1, Int2, Adv1 and Adv2 students between 2015 and 2017.

Throughout this study, we had to make methodological choices due to the amount of texts collected in two years of research and the ensuing amount of data. We sought to control the data so we may better understand the phenomenon of interference in written texts. The following decisions were made:

- (1) Concerning informants: The questionnaire asked the informants' place of birth. Among informants, there was one (1) Argentinian, two (2) Colombians and 33 Venezuelans. Although all are Spanish speakers, we have chosen, for this research, to work only with the latter group. Unidentified essays were not used.
- (2) Concerning the questionnaire: We reduced the number of Venezuelan informants from 33 to 23, as we selected the students who, in addition to having answered the questionnaire, wrote at least one essay between 2015 and 2017.
- (3) Concerning the corpus: Texts containing plagiarism or rewriting, texts with no signs of interference or diverging from the theme that had been proposed, and texts written as part of a group activity were discarded. If the informant had committed plagiarism in questions with more than one item, we have chosen to disregard the entire activity.
- (4) Concerning interference: The criterion adopted is that the type of interference should preferably appear in more than one text, written by different informants. In some texts, for example, there appeared a prototypical pattern of interference (Portuguese radical + Spanish ending or Spanish radical + Portuguese ending).

¹³ We obtained six texts without identification.

- a. We used Portuguese¹⁴ and Spanish¹⁵ corpora from NOW (2012 to last month), both organized by Mark Davies. Thus we present the use frequency of certain words used by informants in their texts as showed in the corpora organized by Davies. For example, Portuguese *agrupação* appears 54 times and *agrupamento* 13,595, whereas Spanish *agrupación* has 230,077 occurrences and *agrupamiento*, 4,432.

In view of what has been presented so far, we summarize a table with the period, the level, the amount of texts and the respective themes for this work:

Table 1 – Number of texts written by semester, level and theme

<i>Semester</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Number of texts</i>	<i>Not selected</i>	<i>Theme</i>
2015.2	<i>Int1</i>	05	---	<i>A</i> ¹⁷
2016.1	<i>Int2</i>	09	01	<i>D</i> ¹⁸ , <i>E</i> ¹⁹
	<i>Adv1</i>	07	---	<i>E</i>
2016.2	<i>Int1</i>	03	---	<i>D</i>
	<i>Adv1</i>	20	03	<i>F</i> ²⁰ , <i>G</i> ²¹
2017.1	<i>Int2</i>	04	---	<i>H</i> ²²
	<i>Adv1</i>	06	03	<i>D</i> , <i>I</i> ²³
	<i>Total</i>	54	07	

Source:

As shown in Table 6, the final selection comprised 54 texts, 7 of which were not included, given the pre-established criteria. The final selection comprised 47 texts written by 23 Venezuelan informants. The *corpus* contains 7,957 words.

In summary, knowing the history of the PFL course allows us to state that certain actions have a direct impact on teaching, such as the expansion of vacancies for the community of Pacaraima and Santa Elena. The access to the students' sociodemographic profiles has yielded a more detailed account of our informants, e.g., their Portuguese-speaking relatives, time living at the border and time studying Portuguese.

Inflectional interference in venezuelan student's writing

There were 92 *instances* of inflectional interference (33.3% of the data) out of a total of 276 occurrences. Câmara Júnior (2000) states that inflection consists in the variation of a word so it may express a certain syntactic category. Thus, inflection consists in applying an additive morpheme, i.e., outside the radical (external inflection), or subtractive, alternating or reduplicative morphemes, i.e., inside the radical (internal inflection). Also, according to the author, in Portuguese,

¹⁴ DAVIES, Mark; BYU. Corpus do Português (NOW 2012 to last month; 1.1 billion words). Available at <<http://www.corpusdoportugues.org>>. Last Accessed: 29 jan. 2020.

¹⁵ DAVIES, Mark; BYU. Corpus del Español (NOW 2012 to last month; 5.100 million words). Available at <<https://www.corpusdelespanol.org>>. Last Accessed: 29 jan. 2020.

the grammatical mechanism of inflection is fundamentally based on appending an additive morpheme after the radical, i.e. on inflectional suffixes, or endings, in the same way as derivation is based on lexical or derivational suffixes. Complementarily, there is the internal inflection of alternation. Words subject to inflection are variable or flecional, comprising nouns (with pronouns) and verbs. Nominal endings express the categories of gender and number. Verb endings express mood-and-tense (and, complementary, aspect) and number-and-person (Câmara jr, 1986, p.117).

In our corpus, verbs were the part of speech with the highest number of interference instances, with 56 occurrences in the indicative preterite forms; 17 in the indicative present; 11 in nouns; 2 in the indicative imperfect; 2 in indefinite articles; 1 in gerunds; 1 in adjectives; 1 in adverb phrases; and 1 in verb infinitives, totaling 92 cases of *word-inflection interference*. We list below some examples:

(1) De ahí para frente não importó nada mais na vida pra mim que ficar junto a ela e realmente a minha vida **mudó** totalmente, entendí (06.Int1.15.A¹⁶)

(2) Ela moraba na Francia, ela ja faleceo, mas para aquela epoca minha avó estava muito bem de saude, conhecer ela foi muito legal porque tambem conheci “Francia” um pais muito bonito, com muita historia e monumentos; aquele ano more com minha avó dois meses e conheci muitos lugares perto donde ela moraba, tambem muito bem “Paris” e a segunda cidade em importancia na Francia que é “Lyon”, uma cidade onde meu pai **trabalho** muitos anos quando ele era mas joven. (69.Int1.15.A)

(3) Quando **chego** fin da ditadura o ativista Luis Prestes foi liberado e posso encontrar con sua filha Anita, juntos leron cartas escritas pelo Olga onde de sua ejecução. (50.Int1.16.D)

(4) Troçe como consecuencia de destruir o aparelho produtivo por que o governo nao tive as condicoes de producir, conducir o bienestar do pais, então **misturo** um governo comusta-militares e agora esta no fundo sem poder levantar a cabeça. (64.Av1.16.F)

Preterite verbs, in both languages, express actions that happened at a certain time in the past. In Brazilian Portuguese, actions that extend into the moment of utterance can be expressed both by the perfect progressive periphrasis, in disuse, and by the preterite periphrasis + adjuncts, according to Barbosa (2003, 2008). On the other hand, according to Jara (2013), in Spanish, the perfect progressive periphrasis is employed to refer to present events with aspectual perfective meaning.

The informants combined Portuguese verb radicals with Spanish tense-mood-aspect/number-person endings, with or without the acute accent (´). In Spanish, the acute accent differentiates verbs in the indicative present and preterite, for example, *trabajo* (first person singular present) vs *trabajó* (third person singular preterite).

The selection of verbs in the past is related to the type of text produced by PFL students, in general, narratives. The context is not of an action in the present, but in the past, as in (2), [...], [...] *meu pai trabalho muitos anos [...]* (emphasis added) (my father worked many years). The subordinate clause [...] *quando ele era mas jovem [...]* (when he was younger) shows that the verb must be in a past tense.

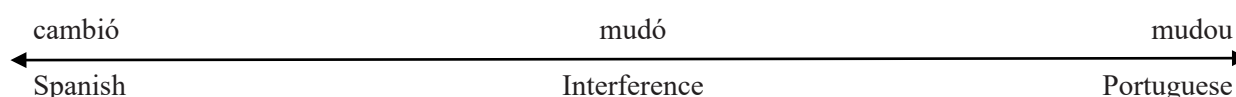
¹⁶ The number represents the informant, i.e., 06; Int1, the level, that is, Intermediate 1; 15 represents the year of 2015; and A, the writing assignment's theme.

We may think that examples (1) to (4) show the monophthongization of /ou/ to /o/, which is frequent in the speech of Brazilians in syllable-ending contexts. According to m (1999, p. 99),

the descending diphthong [ou] may be reduced to [o]: “couro” [ˈkouru]. This reduction occurs in most nouns and adjectives, except when the diphthong [ou] occurs at the end of a word (cf. *Moscou, grou*, etc). In verb forms, the reduction occurs in the middle of words and at the end of words: *dourar* [doˈrah] and *sou* [ˈso].

This work analyzes essays written by Venezuelans; comparing the past number-person endings in both languages, from a graphic point of view, we have *-ou* for Portuguese and *-ó* for Spanish. In their stage of learning at the time, informants were still alternating between both endings¹⁷. In (1), [...] *a minha vida mudó totalmente* [...] (emphasis added) (my life changed completely), the informant combines the Portuguese radical *mud-* with the Spanish first-person singular number-person ending *-ó*.

Figure 4 – Verb *cambiar/ mudar* (change) in the indicative preterite



Source:

Figure 1 shows the Spanish form *cambió* (left) and the Portuguese form *mudou* (right). In the center, the interference-coined form *mudó*. There were few cases in which the informants used the acute accent in the third person singular indicative preterite. In Spanish, the accent is important, as it stresses a change in meaning. *Cambió* is the third-person singular preterite; *cambio*, in turn, is in the first-person singular present. The informants, intermediate and advanced students, are aware that Portuguese verbs in the past take no diacritic. For this reason, most instances in the corpus are unaccented.

The verb *misturar* (6) (mix) deserves a few considerations. We consulted the Spanish Corpus and obtained the following data: *misturar*, 7 occurrences and *mezclar*, 39,607. According to the online *Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary*, *misturar* is no longer in use, which corroborates the hypothesis that it is not an instance of code switching, but of interference.

(7) Em relação os tempo a pessoas da povos tem que lutar para que seu país tenha melhor político não pode ser que as pessoas ontem e hode ainda tenham tamta violencia é muito importante na coisas que **aconteceo** no país e que os governantes atuam activamente em corução. (14.Av1.16.E)

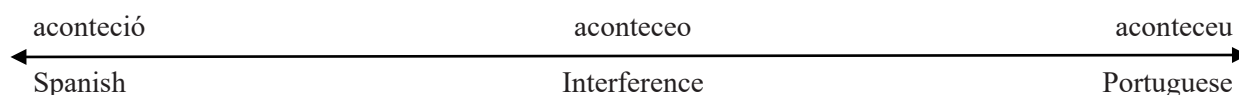
(8) Com o tempo a mãe volta sola sem o pai que **disapapareceo**. A mae pega seu filho e vai embora do país. (24.Av2.17.D)

¹⁷ In our corpus, we see this fluctuation in the same sentence: *A familia toda estaba em uma festa do povo onde estabão umos músicos cantando, seu filho deixo que queria cantar; o menino canto seu pai não gostou como menino cantou mandando-lhe a praticar*. (50.Int1.16.D (emphasis added) (the entire family was at a party where there were some musicians singing; his son wanted to sing; the boys sang, and his father didn't like it and told him to practice). The informant alternates between spelling *canto* (as in Spanish) and *cantou* (as in Portuguese), reinforcing our hypothesis that this is not a monophthongization process. This student lives in Venezuela, i.e., Portuguese is here a second language; his contact with Portuguese speakers is, often, punctual.

(9) Um dia drogado sequestro um ônibus 174 e tudo por causa de um home que por ter visto que ele tenho um revolver, **desceo** e chamo a policia, dai é o començo dessa história. (24.Av2.17.D)

Examples (7) to (9) show verbs in the indicative past perfect third-person singular. In these examples, informants have also used the Portuguese radical; however, the *ending* is *hybrid*, because the number-person endings display elements of both Portuguese (-e-) and Spanish (-o). Figure 2 illustrates the interference process:

Figure 5 – Verb acontecer (happen) in the third person singular indicative preterite



Source:

As Figure 2 shows, the Spanish number-person ending is *-ió*, whereas in Portuguese it is *-eu*. In the center, the **hybrid ending**, *-eo*, in which the number-person ending combines elements of Portuguese, *-e-*, and Spanish, *-o*. Let us compare the forms of the third-person singular indicative preterite in the *corpus*: *aconteceo* (*aconteció/aconteceu*); *disapapareceo* (*desapareció/desapareceu*) (disappear); *desceo* (*bajó / desceu*) (go down). The informants are PFL intermediate and advanced students. Thus, they know the rules of formation of the aforementioned verbs. The first two examples are graphically similar in both languages, whereas the last one is not. The informant, once again, knows how to use the vocabulary learned in his classes: *bajar* is equivalent to *descer*, whose form has suffered interference, *desceo*. In the cases mentioned, the radical and the number-person ending follow Portuguese; however, the ending is hybrid, resulting from interference.

If we could record and isolate only the number-person ending pronunciation, we would have: [eo]. In Portuguese, the preterite ending is [eʊ] *-eu*, whereas in Spanish it is [io] *-ió*. We reach this conclusion based on our teaching experience and our contact with Spanish speakers.

(10) Nesse momento **fiqué** poco ao seu lado porque tive que fazer um viagem e não volte ate depois de 2 meses. (06.Int1.15.A)

(11) Nesse momento **fiqué** poco ao seu lado porque tive que fazer um viagem e não **volte** ate depois de 2 meses. (06.Int1.15.A)

(12) Eu assistí este filme dois vezes, a primeira vez o resumo didactico pela youtube não suporté o discurso marxista lenista da protagonista e **feche** isso foi ao inicio da feiras logo transcorrido mês de julho esquecí nome do filme e assistí outro filme chamado “Amelia” não se eu acreditava que esse filme era o que debía assistir ademais muito mais agradável e interessante para mim. (50.Int1.16.D)

(13) O que acontece é que eu na etapa adolescência **fique** muito ilusionada com esse discurso romantico “revolutionario” que foi acrescentado quando pegue na Universidad (UCV) facultade ecomia, escola, trabalho social; eu participava em todas as atividades de manifestação e protestos, graças a Deus que minhas colegas da escola fizerao convite pra participar num grupo de jovens exalumnas salesianas e pouco a pouco discurso fanatico pro marxista pelo ativismo cidadão. (50.Int1.16.D)

Examples (10) to (13) show verbs in the first-person singular indicative preterite. In the examples, the informants also combine Portuguese radicals with Spanish number-person endings.

In example (10), the verb takes the acute accent, typical of Spanish preterite verbs. In, [...] *Nesse momento fiqué pouco [...]* (emphasis added) (Then I was a little...), there occurs a prototypical interference process, as the informant combines the Portuguese radical (*fiqu-*) with the Spanish number-person ending (-*é*). The verb equivalent to *ficar* (become) in Spanish is *quedar*; their conjugated forms are *fiquei* and *quedé*, respectively.

In examples (11) and (12), informants maintained the Spanish mood-tense/number-person endings, but without the acute accent. Occurrences are *volte* (go back) and *feche* (close), respectively, *voltei/volvi* and *fechei/cerré*.

The verb *voltar* is orthographically and semantically similar in both languages, whereas *fechar* and *cerrar* are not. We note that the informant combines the Portuguese radical and the Spanish number-person ending in *fechar*. This combination process results in indicative preterite interference.

According to Silva (1999), in Brazilian Portuguese, some decreasing diphthongs [ai] and [ei] may be reduced, for example, *caixa* ['kaʃə] (box), *feira* ['feɾə] (fair), *peixe* /peʃe/ (fish) and *feixe* /feʃe/ (beam). This monophthongization is frequent in the speech of Brazilians. Silva believes that

the reduction of diphthongs occurs in nouns, adjectives and verb forms (cf. *caixa*, *baixa*, *abaixar* and *feira*, *faceira*, *cheirar*). The diphthong that might be reduced cannot be at the end of a word: *sai* *['sa] e *sei* *['se]. There are, however, cases in which reduction does not occur: *gaita* *['gatə] and *seita* *['setə] (Silva, 1999, p. 98).

As we may see, the diphthongs are at the end of the word. For this reason, they would not undergo monophthongization in speech, which, upon being heard by learners, might have served as input.

In example (13), [...] *na etapa adolescência fique muito [...]* (emphasis added) (when I was a teenager I became very...), the informant does not accentuate the verb *ficar*, as in (11), which shows fluctuation regarding the conjugation of verbs in the past. The informant sometimes does and does not use the acute accent. In most cases, the informant does not use it, demonstrating knowledge of Portuguese spelling rules.

(14) **roubarom** a paz do povo (06.Int2.17.H)

(15) A força da policia entro onde tenham preços não perigoso e matarom até alguns que estavam na cela, outro preços **aproveitarom** para matar au outros. (24.Av2.17.D)

Examples (14) and (15) display the following combination of elements: Portuguese radical (*rouba-*, *aproveita-*) and hybrid ending (-*rom*). Let us compare the third-person plural indicative preterite in both languages: *robaron* (they stole) and *aproveitaram/aprovecharon* (they took advantage of); we classify the ending as hybrid, as it combines Spanish mood-tense ending -*ro-* and Portuguese number-person ending, -*m*.

The informants are PFL intermediate and advanced students. For this reason, they are aware that most Portuguese verbs in the third-person plural end with -*m*. On the other hand, in Spanish, as

mentioned earlier, only a handful of words end in *-m*. In these examples, interference stems from Portuguese radicals and number-person endings being combined with Spanish mood-tense endings.

If we could record and isolate only the mood-tense ending pronunciation, we would have: [rom] *-rom*. We reach this conclusion based on our teaching experience and our contact with Spanish speakers both at the border and in other speech contexts. In Portuguese, preterite ending is [rãũ] *-ram*, with a nasal diphthong; in Spanish, it is [ron] *-ron*, with an oral vowel.

(16) Nas obras “O Auto da Compadecida” e o “Auto da Barca dos Infernos” ambos autores **concordan** na mesma temática da parte religiosa que é o julgamento das almas que morrem, o bem contro o mal, o bem contra o ruim e asim dependendo dos atos feitos na vida terrenal e a sorte que se corre de ir ao ceu ou a inferno. (69.Av1.16.G)

(17) 3= As ocorrencias do fatos a começos do seculo 19 amostra o poco desembolvimento en tecnologia, a vida e caipira no 90 pocento da população, afastando a burenesia e os representantes da igreja que sempre tiam uma posição melhor pelos ingresos economicos que a população **fornecian** nos diesmos. (71.Av1.16.G)

(18) Todos **falan** diferentes e sem gente (39.Int2.17.H)

Examples (16) to (18) have a common feature: informants use Spanish mood-tense and/or number-person endings instead of their Portuguese counterparts. It is known that all third-person plural verbs in Spanish end in *-n*; in Portuguese, they usually end in *-m*. These cases could be classified as nasalization. However, the nature of interference is different: a (language A) radical is combined with a (language B) ending.

Example (16), [...] *ambos autores concordan na mesma temática [...]* (emphasis added) (both authors agree on the same theme), displays the forms *concordam* (Portuguese) and *concuerdan* (Spanish). The informant does not realize the diphthongization of the Spanish verb, but preserves the plural mark. Many Spanish verbs show diphthongization. From the earliest PFL classes, Venezuelan students learn that this diphthongization rarely happens in Portuguese.

We should note a few things about example (17), *fornecian* (provide). First of all, we searched the Spanish Corpus and found 10 occurrences. Secondly, according to the online *Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary*, the Spanish form has fallen out of use, and *proveer* is currently the most widely used verb to express the same meaning. The highlighted verb is in the third-person plural indicative imperfect, and its conjugated forms are *forneciam* (Portuguese) and *fornecían* (Spanish). Although it is not a common word in their mother tongue, the informant uses the Spanish number-person ending *-n*, and does not use the acute accent in *fornecían*. The accent is important, as it may indicate belonging to a different part of speech, e.g., *hacia* (towards, preposition) / *hacía* (did, verb) and *se* (if, pronoun) / *sé* (I know, verb).

In (18), *Todos falan diferentes e sem gente* (emphasis added) (39. Int2. 17. H) (they all speak differently), the verb *falar/hablar* (speak) is used, which is common in both languages. Once again, the informant uses the Spanish plural spelling so the third-person plural indicative present would agree with the subject of the sentence, *Todos*.

(19) Cuando as pessoas **som** viciadas em álcool, drogas, prostituição etc as a corrupção política es a mas comentada e que mais procuram as pessoas para se enriquecer. (67.Int2.16.E)

(20) A mercede da caída do PIB e a falta de políticas de produção **estam** levando ao país a uma devacle com indicadores de inflação super elevados, falta de produtos básicos etc. (69.Av1.16.F)

Examples from (19) to (20) refer to verbs *ser* (be, permanent) and *estar* (be, transient), respectively. Occurrences are in the third-person plural indicative present. In both languages, these verbs are irregular: *são*¹⁸/*son* and *estão*/*están*. The radical is similar in both languages, that is, *s-* and *est-*. Number-person endings are different: *-o* in Portuguese and *-n* in Spanish. Informants associate them with *-m*, as it is the Portuguese regular verb paradigm, which led to interference.

(21) Ela também nos falo que “crônica” e um ponto de vista de a pessoa que **faze**. (26.Int2.16.D)

(22) A professora Carolina demonstrou domínio da história, de conhecimentos sobre temas atuais, e isso **fizo** mais dinâmica a aula. (62.Int2.16.D)

(23) Eles acham que vam-se **facer** poderosos contando com a ignorância do povo; temos muitos políticos caras de pau que não se preocupam por as doenças do povo mesmo sendo eles descobertos nas suas malandragens. (67.Int2.16.E)

Similar to Spanish, Portuguese has irregular verbs such as *fazer/hacer* (do). Examples (21) to (23) contain the following occurrences: *faze*, *fizo* and *facer*, respectively. The first case, *faze*, is in the indicative present, and the informant uses the paradigm of the Spanish verb, *hace*. In Venezuelan Spanish, the letter *z* represents unvoiced alveolar fricative [s]. In the second example, in the preterite, the informant draws upon knowledge of their mother tongue: *hizo*. Finally, there is the infinitive form, *hacer*. These three examples show hybrid forms between Portuguese and Spanish.

It should be noted that present and preterite forms are spelled with *z*, and the infinitive with *c*. In the region of Castile (Spain) and in some regions of America, both letter *z* followed by *a*, *o* and *u*, and letter *c*, followed by *e* and *i*, represent unvoiced fricative dental [θ]. In America, the production of dental [θ] is infrequent, which leads the Venezuelan informant to have difficulties in spelling words with *z*, *c* or *s*, for example.

(24) Na atualidade a corrupção está fazendo estrago no mundo inteiro, nossa sociedade ficou atrapalhada pela evolução individualista, onde a maioria das pessoas em búsqueda do progresso incorre em erros de governo para satisfazer suas necessidades básicas e sobreviver; **esqueciendo-se** da ética e dos valores morales, muitas vezes impulsados pela mesma situação económica e política atual, ainda que o fim não justifique os meios. (01.Av1.16.E)

In example (24), [...] *esqueciendo-se da ética e dos valores morales* [...] (emphasis added) (forgetting about the ethics and moral values), we find a case of present participle. The highlighted verb is spelled differently in both languages: in Portuguese, *esquecer* (forget), verb of 2nd conjugation; in Spanish, *olvidar*, 1st conjugation. As these verbs belong to different conjugation paradigms, mood-tense endings also differ: *esquecendo* and *olvidando*. The informant combines Portuguese radical *esquec-* with Spanish mood-tense ending *-iendo*. The Portuguese mood-tense ending for the 1st conjugation is *-ando*. In Spanish, *-iendo* is used with regular verbs of 2nd and 3rd conjugations. Thus, we find combination of Portuguese radical + Spanish ending.

¹⁸ Monteiro (2002) analyzes *estão* as follows: *est-* radical; *-ã-*, thematic vowel (nasal) and *-o*, number-person ending. On the other hand, in *são*, *sã-* is the radical and *-o*, the number-person-ending. We shall not discuss Portuguese Morphology in detail here, as we understand it falls out of the scope of this analysis.

(25) Quem governa é um partido de malandros nas ruas de cada cidade, a prostituição de menores de **idade** cresce cada dia mais, morrem mais pessoas que nas guerras. (24.Av1.16.F)

(26) Os venezuelanos não têm oportunidade de crescer profissionalmente, de ter um crescimento econômico, de ter uma **seguridade** na área da saúde, e sobre tudo de ter uma vida tranquila e garantias de seus direitos humanos, por exemplo encontrar comida. (62.Av1.16.F)

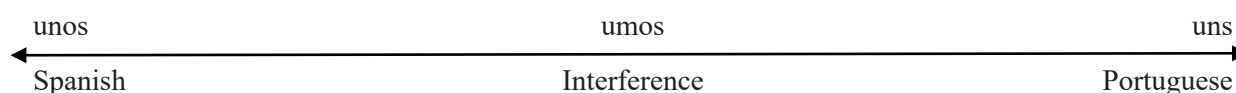
In general, the syllabic pattern in Portuguese is consonant + vowel (CV). To maintain the Portuguese pattern, informants added the vowel *-e* at the end of words that, in Spanish, end in *-dad*. Examples (25) and (26) show Spanish words with an extra vowel *-e* at the end: *edad + e* and *seguridad + e*.

(27) A família toda estava em uma festa do povo onde estavam **umos** músicos cantando, seu filho deixou que queria cantar; o menino cantou seu pai não gostou como menino cantou mandando-lhe a praticar. (50.Int1.16.D)

(28) Meu país, Venezuela, eu penso que está dividido totalmente, em duas partes, significa que tem muita raiva entre todos os venezuelanos, nascendo um rancor entre nosso mesmo, com muitas brigadeiras, temos crise de alimentos, falta de tudo, de medicamentos, **umos** culpam ao governo próprio, outros à oposição, falam sobre indústrias privadas e públicas que seria melhor as empresas privadas que as públicas, é uma coisa que escapa das mãos de venezuelano daria. (51.Av1.16.F)

Examples (27) and (28) refer to the plural of the article *um*: *uns/uns*. However, informants wrote *umos* as a plural form, as Figure 3 shows:

Figure 6 - Indefinite article unos/unos (some)



Source:

Figure 3 shows the Spanish form on the left, the Portuguese form on the right, and the form resulting from interference in the center. To reach this result, the informants carried out several analogies between languages: *unos* is the plural form of *un(o)*, and *un* is the Spanish apocope form¹⁹. In the plural, the letter *-o-* is recovered and the plural ending *-s* is added. In Portuguese, the plural of words ending in *-m* is made by adding *-ns*, i.e., *uns* is the plural of *um*. As Figure 3 shows, *-s* marks plural in both languages, which facilitates the process of teaching-learning of this content. However, masculine articles in Portuguese and Spanish have distinct features.

(29) A professora Carolina demonstrou domínio da história, de conhecimentos sobre temas **atuais**, e isso fez mais dinâmica a aula. (62.Int2.16.D)

Em (29), [...] sobre temas *atuais* [...] (emphasis added) (on current themes) we have the only occurrence with an adjective. Usually, plural adjectives are formed by *-s/-is* (Portuguese) and *-s/-es*

¹⁹ Apocope is the deletion of a letter at the end of a word. In Spanish, this is quite common, and occurs before masculine singular nouns, with words losing their last letter, a vowel: *uno* > *un*, *bueno* > *buen*, *malo* > *mal*, *alguno* > *algún*, *ninguno* > *ningún*.

(Spanish), for example, *atual* – *atuais* and *actual* – *actuales*, respectively. The informant realizes the plural in his mother tongue, while using a Portuguese radical. We may observe that the noun *temas* agrees with *actuales*, demonstrating knowledge on plural formation.

Final Remarks

Our corpus was composed of 47 essays, containing 7,957 words, written by 23 informants, all Venezuelans. Data collection took place between 2015 and 2017 in a PFL course in the city of Pacaraima, Roraima, at the Brazil/Venezuela border. The central focus of this research was to analyze interference in texts written by these students.

More specifically, for this paper, we chose to address inflectional interference. We may conclude that there was a combination of Portuguese radicals and Spanish endings (whether nouns or verbs). In both cases, there is a combination between radical and ending(s) that, in their turn, agree with other elements of the sentence, such as articles, adjectives and pronouns.

With regard to nouns, we may conclude that radicals belong to Portuguese and number endings to Spanish. Regarding verbs, we may conclude that radicals belong to Portuguese and mood-tense and number-person endings to Spanish. In both cases, there is a combination of radical and ending(s) that, in their turn, agree with other elements of the sentence, e.g., articles, adjectives, pronouns.

In general, we may conclude that interference occurred as follows: in verbs, we verify that Portuguese radicals are combined with Spanish endings; in nouns, the opposite happened, with Spanish radicals and Portuguese endings. This was the most productive combination in the corpus. Some occurrences were classified as hybrid radical or ending, that is, the informant combined elements of both Portuguese and Spanish in the radical or ending. Thus, it is interesting to observe that morphological word boundaries tend to be respected.

With respect to PFL students, we concluded that, due to the number of informants, establishing specific criteria such as age, sex, social class and level of education would be too restricting. Due to the economic crisis in Venezuela, many students dropped out of the PFL course, as they were not financially able to travel to Brazil. On the other hand, sociodemographic data helped us understand interference in a multilingual scenario on the Brazil/Venezuela border.

Degree of kinship proved relevant, as informants with Brazilian relatives showed more interference than those with no such relations. Future studies should investigate in more detail these informants' family life (e.g., do they live together?; do they only speak Portuguese to each other?). In parallel, the time spent studying Portuguese is also a variable to consider. Informants that had been attending the course for 2 to 2.5 years showed more interference in their essays than others. This reveals that this period needs greater attention from both students and teachers.

Students are primarily women; they have higher education; they are 23 to 58 years old; they live in Venezuela, where they were born, live, and work, but they study in Brazil, and are employed in the tertiary sector; they study PFL because they like the language; they have Portuguese-speaking

family ties; they had been studying Portuguese for 2 years, and speaking it for 11 years on average; they claim to have a good grasp on Portuguese; they like to study PFL in order to communicate with Brazilians; they sometimes speak and write in Portuguese; they do so socially, especially among friends and at school; Spanish is their mother language; they study a few other languages, especially English; they do not speak any indigenous languages.

The number of informants does not allow us to reach a definitive conclusion on the relationship between interference and the speakers' sociodemographic characteristics. However, it was possible to verify that the number of occurrences was higher in the group that had Brazilian relatives. Having Brazilian relatives might make them feel more confident about learning Portuguese, because they have contact with Portuguese speakers outside the formal learning environment. Not to mention that the geographical borders between countries are only abstractions, taking into account that their inhabitants are in intense contact, including family relations.

We hope that the results presented in this research can add to linguistic studies, especially Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics, in the fields of both Portuguese and Spanish as a foreign language. We also hope that the data generated may contribute to comparative studies between Portuguese and Spanish, in particular with regard to linguistic interference.

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