

## Gramáticas Distintas e seu Papel no Desenvolvimento da Interlíngua

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### Distinct Grammars and their Role in Interlanguage Development

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**ABSTRACT:** The expression of temporality encompasses the concepts of tense and aspect, typically conveyed by lexical and inflectional morphemes that usually vary from language to language. This kind of cross-linguistic distinctions often affects L2 learning. In this paper I discuss the role of the Portuguese grammar in the acquisition of the English present perfect tense by eighteen Brazilian EFL learners. I compared patterns found in interlanguage data to L2 patterns, and, as expected, L1 phonology affected learners' production of regular past tenses, especially in early interlanguage. As for form-function mappings, besides L2 patterns, learners created two major meaning categories of current relevance, based on persisting / non-persisting situations, which were systematically conveyed by forms that resembled their L1 grammar. Durative events and states (imperfective situations) persisting into the present were expressed by present tenses, while all aspectual categories of concluded (perfective) situations were encoded by past tenses. Specific adverbials were used in each category.

**KEYWORDS:** Interlanguage – language transfer – acquisition of temporality.

### 1. Introduction

The expression of time involves the concepts of tense and aspect, which native speakers typically convey by means of grammatical morphemes, verb intrinsic meaning, and adverbials. And as Slobin (1987, p.435) states, “each language provides a limited set of options for the grammatical encoding of the characteristics of objects and events”. Consequently, it is only natural that languages vary on the number of features and kinds of temporal meaning they convey both lexically and grammatically.

One such example of variation can be found between the grammars of Portuguese and English, which I assume to be a potential cause of Brazilian learners' struggle to acquire the *meaning* of English present perfect tense, which is apparently more difficult for them than its *form*. That assumption does not mean denying that phenomena other than diverse grammars – social, individual, and training-related factors – also influence interlanguage (IL) development (for a definition of this term, see next section). Still, this paper focuses on learners' linguistic data to identify the moments when the knowledge of their native language (L1) may influence their expression of events in the target language (L2), as suggested by some of the form-meaning associations they make in discourse. My hypothesis is that, for some time, the Brazilian learners

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investigated bring to their IL some of the associations they have learned to make in their L1, especially because, in terms of form, although the two languages present some similarities in their past time morphology, these morphemes do not always serve the same function.

According to Walker (1997, p.17), the semantics of the present perfect may impose great difficulty to learners with various linguistic backgrounds, which generally leads to alternative IL form-function mappings, very often with the *past simple* or *continuous*<sup>2</sup> and the *present simple*. The study showed this may be the case with speakers of Portuguese as their L1. In doing so, I sought distinctions and similarities between the Portuguese and the English tense-aspect systems, and, marginally, distinctions between the two phonological systems that may be the source of morphological problems. As functionalist researchers argue, the knowledge about an L2 and its use are inseparable, and, for that reason, I carried out a corpus-based form-function analysis of learners' oral and written production.

In the next sections I present a brief theoretical background on L2 acquisition and the expression of temporality, which may be useful to English teachers as well as new researchers in the field. Along these parts of the text, I use **bold face** whenever I introduce a new term and its definition. Then I discuss my findings in the study.

## 2. Cognitivist and functionalist approaches to language acquisition

The word **interlanguage** (SELINKER, 1972) refers both to a set of internal systems of the L2 a learner develops, as well as to each one of these systems at a given time. By focusing on the latter half of this definition, I was able to take a synchronic approach to the acquisition of the linguistic feature chosen by considering each learner individually, and a pseudo-longitudinal perspective on the group as a whole. By the time the term interlanguage was coined it stood for a self-restructuring continuum from an L1 to an L2, a position I do not share. Instead, I assume that the acquisition of an L2 can be seen as a hypothesis creating process (SCHACHTER, 1994) wherein **variability** is largely expected. Ellis (1999) argues that learners' hypotheses about the L2 emerge from their experiencing different discourse modalities, which gives them a chance to reshape their model of the L2 at any time, according to new patterns abstracted from the input. I also believe that learners use all their background knowledge to build this new language, their hypotheses about the L2, including those about what meanings its lexicon and grammar convey.

Ellis (op. cit., p.366) further explains that, from a synchronic point of view, distinct IL patterns can compete either systematically or in **free variation**, this latter being the way new forms are first brought into an IL system. **Systematicity** usually occurs later, when patterns evaluated as unnecessary or differing from the L2 are gradually abandoned. Eventually, new form-function mappings become stable in the system, with forms serving specialized functions. Mello and Dutra (2000) argue that, when variability is higher and IL hypotheses are mostly based on L1, teaching is crucial to help learners change their cognitive strategies by remodeling their meaning schemas and thus creating adequate form-function relations.

**Form-function mappings** correspond to the relations between linguistic knowledge and its instantiation in discourse and are an integral part of functionalist and cognitive theories of language acquisition as well. Because of that, they play a major role in the understanding of IL, which means learners' language is a highly relevant source of data. Functionalist research on the acquisition of

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<sup>2</sup> Neither English nor Portuguese present a grammatical distinction between the continuous and progressive aspects. In this paper, the two terms are used interchangeably.

spatial relations, reference, and temporality has been carried out in two ways. **Form-oriented studies**, such as Long and Sato (1984) and Berretta (1995), depart from linguistic forms to find the meanings learners attribute to them. On the other hand, **meaning-oriented studies** investigate how distinct meanings are expressed in IL (once again, LONG and SATO, 1984; TRÉVISE and PORQUIER, 1986).

## 2.1 The acquisition of temporal expression

As for the acquisition of temporality, the studies mentioned in the previous paragraph revealed the existence of a typical pattern in IL. An early nominal IL stage is found wherein the learner does not use any verbs, and builds her discourse on pragmatic strategies such as scaffolded speech, implicit reference, contrasting events, and chronological order.

Later, in a second stage, the learner's lexicon is enriched with locative and temporal adverbials (*in the morning, now, then, here, there*), connectives (*and, and then*, and their German equivalent *und, und dann*), calendric terms (*Saturday*), and “default” verb forms (the English infinitive, the third person singular present in Spanish and Italian), and, sometimes, a form that only exists in the IL.

Following this lexical stage, the use of tense-aspect morphology gradually increases as the number of adverbials tends to decline. At this stage, chronological order may still be a useful strategy though. Apparently, the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology goes on in cycles which include returning to adverbial markings every time a new form and a new meaning enter the IL (BARDOVI-HARLIG, 2000). This may occur, for instance, when the learner begins to use tense morphemes to express past time reference instead of solely relying on chronological order. As new verb forms are learned, dependence on adverbials decreases again.

The learners investigated had been taught the English past tenses, and all but two were considered as being in their morphological phase of L2 acquisition. S1 and S2 were roughly beginning to use past tense forms and relied heavily on the base form of most verbs. See appendix II for a summary of these learners' performance.

## 2.2 The role of L1 in L2 acquisition

In applied linguistics, the term **language transfer** is defined as “the effect of one language in the learning of another” which can occur as positive transfer, when the knowledge of L1 happens to make learning an L2 easier, and as **negative transfer** or **interference**, in case it hinders the acquisition of an L2 (RICHARDS and SCHMIDT, 2013, p. 322-323, no highlighting in the original). One can only refer to transfer in face of systematic traces of L1 found in a learner's production, but not to an occasional occurrence of a form-meaning relation exclusive to L1, such as the single example below found in the corpus.

- (1) And it arrived **there's** four minutes. (Instead of “And it arrived four minutes ago”). (S8 – role-play)

From early behaviorism (LADO, 1957; BROOKS, 1960), through minimalism, to modern cognitive linguistics, the effects of the knowledge of L1 in L2 acquisition have been of concern to several researchers. And although Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis has long been

discredited for its behaviorist bias, concepts then proposed, such as *transfer* and *difficulty*, are very much alive in studies on L2 acquisition, although restructured in new frameworks and given different labels. For instance, the more theory-neutral term **cross-linguistic influence** proposed by Kellerman and Sharwood Smith (1986) accommodates various related phenomena such as transfer, interference, borrowing, avoidance, etc. (ELLIS, 1999, p. 301).

Even in the minimalist position which states that L1 and L2 acquisition are the same sort of creative process (as opposed to habit formation), we find scholars who admit that L1 may influence the acquisition of an L2 when L2 input is poor or when learners are forced to perform certain eliciting tasks (e.g. DULAY et al., 1982), an exception which Celaya Villanueva (1990, p.74) considers as the distinction between “acquisition and use (...) in naturalistic settings” and “in foreign language classrooms”.

More recently, cognitive linguistics has provided theoretical support to research on L2 acquisition which is beginning to seek beyond purely syntactic aspects of language. This framework assigns paramount importance to usage and construal, and thus brings conceptualization to the language acquisition scenario. Language acquisition studies in cognitive linguistics rely heavily on language typology (especially on the work of L. Talmy and D. Slobin). According to this view, some influence from L1 should be expected in the acquisition of L2 (WAARA, 2004). Slobin (1993, p. 245) also claims that adult language learning is affected by L1, since a speaker of a particular L1 is “trained [by her native language] to pay different kinds of attention to events and experiences when talking about them.”

Just as applied cognitive linguists, applied functionalists also seek to identify the way a learner’s L1 can affect the learning of an L2. According to Klein (1986), L2 learning differs from L1 learning because, in the first case, learners have already established relations with the world and know basic language functions such as temporal reference, spatial reference, and quantification, a knowledge they bring to their IL.

And because languages differ in the way they encode these notions, one step forward for learners in the acquisition of time expression is to realize how L2 differs from their L1 as far as aspect and tense are concerned.

### 3. The expression of temporality

The expression of temporality is usually discussed in terms of time and aspect. The ways these categories are encoded vary from language to language, according to which features of an event native speakers tend to select for expression. As far as verb morphology is concerned, both modern Germanic and Romance languages have shifted from a focus on the durational aspects of a process to one on the deictic relation between the event and the moment of the utterance (CÂMARA Jr., 1970, p.146). Thus, as this author remarks, a verb form such as the Portuguese *rolei* (*I rolled*) encodes a perfective (completed) process but does not reveal anything about how this event occurred, whether I rolled briefly – punctual aspect –, or I came down tumbling – iterative aspect –, or I rolled after tripping on something – resultative aspect, or still whether I lay flat on the ground after rolling down – permansive or stative aspect.

Although English verbal morphology does not convey most of these meaning distinctions either, in English a contrast between the resultative and the perfective aspects can be found in *I’ve rolled down* x *I rolled down*. The first is an example of the present perfect tense evoking some sort

of current relevance, namely the result of a past movement. The latter contains a simple-past-tense predicate that solely conveys a sense of completeness.

### 3.1 Tense

Quirk and Greenbaum (1978, p.40) define **tense** as “the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time”, and **time** as “a universal, non-linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present, and future”, although exceptions do occur, such as the use of some English [and Portuguese] tenses in hypothetical contexts. These definitions contrast with that of **aspect**, as featured in Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p.110): “aspect... has to do with the internal structure of the action occurring *at any time*. (...)” (highlighting in the original).

Tense is thus a deictic grammatical category, as its morphology establishes a connection between the time of the situation expressed and that of the utterance proper (COMRIE, 1976, p.1-2), placing the event in coincidence with or distant from the moment of speaking. Deixis can be extended to whole sentences with finite verbs, which are grounded on the elements of the event of speaking (LANGACKER, 1991, p.126-7, 489; 1987, p.249). In their simple or continuous forms, English past tenses include the past, the present perfect, and the past perfect.

### 3.2 Aspect

In the paragraph above, aspect has been defined as “different ways of viewing the internal constituency of a situation” Comrie (1976, p.3), and thus does not constitute a deictic category as tense does. One kind of aspectual distinction widely represented in world languages is that between the perfective and the imperfective. **Perfective** situations are externally conceived as bounded wholes, or completed events, and **imperfective** situations are those whose temporal internal structure the speaker explores, and are thus seen as incomplete events. A combination of lexical aspect of verbs (and their arguments), tense-aspect morphology, and other contextual elements is what usually determines if a situation has come to an end or not. Because the speaker has a role in construing (viewing) each event (LANGACKER, 1987, and elsewhere), one same situation can be expressed as either perfective or imperfective, with no risk of contradiction, depending on how the speaker intends to present it.

Reaching back to Slobin's statement above about how languages vary on the grammatical meanings they convey as well on the sets of resources they use, aspectual distinctions may be either grammaticalized or lexicalized, or both, in distinct idioms. I use the word **grammaticalization**<sup>3</sup> of **aspect** in this paper broadly to refer to inflectional aspectual morphemes, and **lexicalization of aspect** to aspectual meaning conveyed by lexical items and derivational morphemes.

In terms of inflectional (or grammatical) aspectual morphemes, English only marks the perfective–imperfective contrast, which may assume the progressive/non-progressive formal distinction, and the perfect, that does not say anything about the internal structure of the situation. Besides, a combination with the progressive *-ing* form is restricted to dynamic verbs (see definition below).

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<sup>3</sup> The reader should not mistake my use of the term *grammaticalization* in this paper for the technical term used in linguistics to mean the process in which “a lexical item or construction come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions, and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions.” (HOPPER and TRAUOGOTT, 2003, p. xv).

Aspectual distinctions conveyed by lexical items and derivational affixes have been referred to as ‘*aktionsart*’ or ‘kind of action’ (BRINTON, 1988), and ‘inherent or semantic aspect’ (COMRIE, 1976). These distinctions tend to be expressed differently in the various languages of the world, and influence the use of tense-aspect inflectional morphology.

Portuguese examples are the verbs *partir* (to leave) and *chegar* (to arrive) that can respectively express the inceptive (that begins) and the cessative (that ends) aspects; the suffix *-itar* in *saltitar* (to jig about) expresses the iterative (that repeats) aspect together with a notion of diminutive (CÂMARA Jr., 1970, p.142). The inflected forms *partiu* and *chegou* refer to perfective events in the past, while *partia* (and *chegava*) and *estava partindo* (and *estava chegando*) convey distinct types of the past imperfective. Only the first pair of imperfective forms can evoke the iterative or habitual aspect, though.

English verbs such as *adorn*, *construct*, *bring out* indicate a final objective, while *kill* and *catch* are momentary or punctual actions; still particles such as *up*, *down*, *over*, *out*, *through* and *away* in phrasal verbs convey the idea of a goal or the ending point of a situation (BRINTON, 1988, p.27, 163). As far as combining lexical and grammatical aspect, certain English verbs behave differently from their counterparts in Portuguese, or from their near synonyms. A well-known example is the pair of verbs *like/enjoy* [*gostar*]. *Like* is a state verb, while *enjoy* is an activity verb. In English, this semantic contrast affects the possibility of these verbs to occur in a continuous form. In Portuguese, on the other hand, the verb *gostar* can have an *activity* reading (5) as well as a *stative* reading (6). In this latter, the present tense (*presente do indicativo*) increases the atemporal nature of this second reading of *gostar*, which renders the last sentence rather odd, to say the least, due the boundedness of the complement *a viagem* [the trip] in contrast with the atemporal nature of *essa sua ideia* [that idea of yours] and *viajar* [to travel].

- (2) \*I'm liking that idea of yours.
- (3) I like that idea of yours.
- (4) I'm enjoying the trip.
- (5) *Estou gostando dessa sua ideia / da viagem.*
- (6) *Gosto dessa sua ideia / de viajar / \*Gosto da viagem.*

A well-known verbal typology of lexical aspect is that of Vendler's (1967). He classified predicates as activities (e.g. *run*, *walk*, *swim*, *live*, *study*), accomplishments (e.g. *paint (a picture)*, *make (a chair)*, *build (a house)*, *write (a novel)*, *grow up*), achievements (punctual situations such as *recognize (something)*, *realize (something)*, *lose (something)*, *find (something)*, *win the race*), or states (*have*, *contain*, *seem*, *want*, *like*).<sup>4</sup> These aspectual types were analyzed by Brinton (1988) and Comrie (1976) in terms of three oppositions: state vs. dynamic, punctual vs. durative, and telic vs. atelic (situations that have/ do not have a conclusion).

**Dynamic predicates** imply a change of state and include activities, accomplishments, and achievements. The first two kinds have duration, the difference between them being the fact that activities are seen as on-going situations, and accomplishments include an end-point (**telic**). An achievement also has a well-defined end-point, but has no duration, and is thus called **punctual**. An accomplishment cannot be expressed if it is terminated before its conclusion, and, in English, these predicates are usually followed by “in” phrases, such as *I cooked dinner in half an hour*. An activity verb, on the other hand, takes a “for” adverbial phrase, as in *I walked in the park for half an hour*.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of verbs taken from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p.119).

In contrast with durative predicates, achievements depict a general idea of iterativeness (or repetition) if combined with the progressive, while durative verbs (activities and accomplishments) express on-going situations.

**States** are inherently durative, homogenous, unbounded, and agentless, which means that these situations remain indefinitely unchanged until some dynamic process affects them (BRINTON, 1988, p.24): verbs of cognition or of mental perception – *know, believe, think, understand, mean, doubt* –; of inert or sensory perception – *smell, see, hear, taste, feel* –; of possession – *possess, have, own, belong* –; of emotions, attitudes, and opinions – *like, love, hate, dislike, want, desire, need, prefer, appreciate, doubt, feel, wish* –; of measurement – *equal, measure, weigh, cost* –; of relationship – *contain, entail, consist of* –; and of description – *be, sound, resemble, appear, seem, look* (CELCE-MURCIA and LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999, p.120). These verbs do not usually take the progressive form, in which case they would assume a different meaning (See example (2) above).

### 3.3 Current relevance in English and Portuguese

The English present perfect has often been treated as a separate grammatical category because it does not express a deictic relation in the same way as other tenses, and because it does not elaborate the internal temporality of a situation as other aspects do either. Instead, the **present perfect** “expresses a relation between two points in time: on the one hand, the time of the state resulting from a prior situation, and, on the other, the time of that prior situation” (COMRIE, 1976, p.52). The *perfect* construction *per se* expresses a notion of ‘prior’ (CELCE-MURCIA and LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999) and ‘current relevance’ (LANGACKER, 1991). In some languages, English included, the perfect can combine with other aspectual categories, which then provide information about the situation itself, as in the English progressive ‘*John has been working in Manhattan.*’

Depending on the context, this relation to the moment of speaking is said to manifest itself in four different meanings, according to Comrie (1976, p.56-60):

- Experiential perfect: Bill has been to America.
- Perfect of current result: I've found my glasses (and that is why I can work on this paper).
- Perfect of recent past: I have recently learned that the match has been postponed.
- Perfect of persistent situation: He has lived in Argentina for five years now. <sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, only the example of persistent situation above is imperfective. In Portuguese, one way the perfect aspect is grammaticalized is via the ‘*pretérito perfeito composto*’ [compound preterite] (*ter* or *haver* + past participle), which despite morphologically similar to the present

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<sup>5</sup> The present perfect of current result and of recent past has been abandoned in American English, and replaced by the past simple (CELCE-MURCIA and LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999, p.123; COMRIE, 1976, p.53, n.2), as in the sample below, from informal written A.E.:

“...Well, I think that catches you up on all our news. I **just finished** a letter to answer Rikka's and want to write to Beth...” (personal mail)

perfect, can only express part of the meaning of that tense, namely its imperfective use to express a situation begun in the past and lasting (or repeating itself) up to the moment of speaking.<sup>6</sup>

- (7) - *Você sumiu. Por onde **tem andado**?* [I haven't seen you lately. Where have you been?]  
 (8) - *Ah, eu **tenho trabalhado** na minha dissertação e não **tenho tido** muito tempo livre.* [I have worked on my dissertation and haven't had much spare time.]  
 (9) *A chuva, nos últimos dias, **tem causado** muitos estragos nas rodovias do país.* [Rain has caused a lot of damage to the country's roads lately.]  
 (10) - *A senhora **tem tomado** seus remédios regularmente?* [Have you taken your medicine regularly, Madam?]

As perfective situations are not expressed by this Portuguese tense, a past simple form (*pretérito perfeito*) is used instead. One should notice that the singular complement in (11) renders the sentence unacceptable, and the plural generic complement in (13) creates an imperfective context of repetition.

- (11) \**João **tem comprado** um livro.*  
 (12) *João **comprou** um livro.* [João (has) bought a book.]  
 (13) *João **tem comprado** livros.* [João has bought books.]

On the other hand, Portuguese present tenses (*presente* and *presente contínuo* of the indicative mood) can be used to convey past imperfective situations reaching out into the present (Corôa, 1985). As in English, the distinction between the examples below is that the simple form in (14) expresses a sense of permanence which is not represented by the progressive form in (15).

- (14) *Ele **trabalha** na Petrobras desde 2013.* [He's worked for Petrobras since 2013.]  
 (15) *Ele **está trabalhando** na Petrobras desde 2013.* [He's been working for Petrobras since 2013]

Besides the adverbial *desde 2013* (since 2013), another way to express a relation between present and past in Portuguese is the adverbial construction *há* (there is) + *period of time*. This might be a source of errors made by EFL learners such as (1) above.

- (16) (1) And it arrived **there's** four minutes. (S8 – role-play)

As for perfective situations, the English tense sometimes highlights the result rather than the event itself. In Portuguese, however, the existence of a resulting state meaning is provided by the context. Thus, a same form is used in both examples below and only the second expresses a current result in the underlined part. Portuguese verb tenses tend to foreground temporal meanings rather than aspectual meanings. Together with mood and time, [and hypothetical meaning],

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<sup>6</sup> Another way to translate the perfect of continuation into Portuguese is with the periphrasis *vir* [PRES. INDICATIVE] + *V*[PRESENT PARTICIPLE]. I am thankful to Prof. Mário Perini for the following example: *A inflação **vem aumentando**.* [Inflation has been increasing.] However, no uses similar to this form were found in the interlanguage data.

Portuguese past time tenses only express the aspectual distinction between the *perfective* (the *perfeito* – or perfect preterite) and the *imperfective* (the *imperfeito* – or imperfect preterite).

(17) *Foi na semana passada que o Zeca bateu o carro.* [It was last week that Zeca crashed his car.]

(18) *Eles não vão mais viajar porque o Zeca bateu o carro.* [They are no longer going to travel because Zeca (has) crashed his car.]

In Portuguese, the result of an action or its current relevance is sometimes lexicalized in the adverb *já* as well.

Finally, a recently finished event, often encoded in English as *just* + present perfect, is often lexicalized in Portuguese with an aspectual adverbial (*Chegamos nesse instante* - We've just arrived.) or as the periphrastic form *acabar de*+V<sub>[INFINITIVE]</sub> - *Acabamos de chegar.* (CASTILHO, 2012).

## 4. The study

### 4.1 Participants and method

I elicited oral and written data from eighteen Brazilian EFL learners (fifteen teenagers and three adults) who had formally volunteered to take part in the investigation. At the time of the data collection, they attended different private language institutes, and were classified as intermediate level students (five), upper intermediate level (seven) and advanced level students (six) according to each school's criteria.

Oral data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews (NUNAN, 1994) about the participant's learning experience, and five role-plays involving ordinary activities<sup>7</sup> where the roles were randomly assigned. The participants also wrote a composition on a current topic of their choice and used 30-45 minutes to complete this particular task<sup>8</sup>.

In the analysis, I compared the emergence of the present perfect tense with other past tenses in terms of form and meaning<sup>9</sup>. After excluding from the data all those uses whose meaning was not clear, I ended up with 212 present-perfect contexts, which provided 162 types. This kind of **conservative analysis** (BARDOVI-HARLIG, 2000, p.51, 91, n.15) in which two or more occurrences of a same verb form in a same context are considered as a type prevented overestimating a learner's production due to a very high concentration of *was*, for example, but very few instances of other verb forms.

A form-function analysis (ELLIS, 1999, p.703) of the transcriptions was carried out in two stages. First, a form-oriented analysis identified those uses in which the association between verb form and function resembled the target language and those of **overuse**, i.e. when the present-perfect form was used in an inappropriate context. This type of analysis reveals only the morphological state of IL. I then conducted a meaning-oriented analysis to find alternative forms used by learners to express the same meaning English tenses are canonically assigned.

<sup>7</sup> For a synthesis of the role-plays, the reader should refer to appendix I, which also contains a sample from the corpus and suggested L2 forms.

<sup>8</sup> For all the tasks, one sample of each participant's production was discarded.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix II.

## 4.2 Results

Five categories were found, four of which existed both in the L2 and in the IL data. Perfective situations included perfective experience, resultative perfect, and current state; and imperfective situations included continuation and imperfective experience. This latter category resulted from the distinctive way learners conveyed this particular context as compared to the L2 and occurred only in IL. IL categories differ from L2 categories when the participant focuses on *the continuation of a situation in the present, not so much on its current relevance*. For all L2 categories, instances of target-like use were found. Still, I focus on systematic ways L1 may have influenced IL.

### 4.2.1 Situations still holding at the moment of speaking: continuation in IL

Three specific meanings – habituality, iteration, and duration – are grouped by Bauer (1970) and McCoard (1978) under the heading ‘continuation’. In English, this category of current relevance is marked with verbal morphology, while the presence of an adverb is used to distinguish between the perfect of continuation and the experiential perfect.

- (19) He has not lived there **since the outbreak of the war**. (continuation)  
 (20) He has lived in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (experiential perfect)

I found 54 types of continuation in the corpus. In early IL, all instances of continuation were expressed either with a present simple or a progressive form, most often in conjunction with a durative adverbial (20/25 tokens), as seen below where imperfective activities and states were marked by a present tense form and an adverbial.

The sentences numbered from (21a), (22a) ... to (28a) represent my suggestions to express the same content as that in (21) to (28), with L2 forms. The same holds for other sentences labeled the same way<sup>10</sup>.

- (21) I **live** [PERSISTING ACTIVITY] here...eh... since eight years ago. (S2 – role-play)  
 (21a) I've lived here for eight years.  
 (22) To be a movie actor **is** [PERSISTING STATE] my... my dream since I was a child. (S2 – role-play)  
 (22a) Being a movie actor has been my dream since I was a kid.  
 (23) She's **traveling** [PERSISTING ACTIVITY] ... since... one week ago. (S12 – role-play)  
 (23a) She's been traveling for a week.  
 (24) As **you're my friend** [PERSISTING STATE] for a long time... (S14 – role-play)  
 (24a) Since you've been my friend for a long time...  
 (25) He... he's **living** [PERSISTING ACTIVITY] here... eh... since two years ago. (S2 – role-play)  
 (25a) He's been living/'s lived here for two years.  
 (26) The one I'll vote for, **is doing really great** [PERSISTING STATE] until now (S1 – written)  
 (26a) The one I'll vote has been doing really great so far.  
 (27) Since that... that time **I'm trying** [PERSISTING HABITUAL ACTIVITY] to learn English. (S4 – interview)  
 (27a) Since that time I've been trying to learn English.  
 (28) I think she... she **study** [PERSISTING HABITUAL ACTIVITY] English for about six years or so. (S4 – interview)  
 (28a) I think she's been studying English for about six years or so.

<sup>10</sup> I am most thankful to the anonymous reviewer for her/his suggestion to include L2 patterns parallel to IL samples.

Learners’ knowledge of L1 may be at play here, as these learners probably based their choices on the atemporal nature of the present simple and the durative character of the progressive, and established a connection between past and present times by using adverbials such as *since...*, *for...*, *how long* and IL forms *\*how much time*, *\*how many years*. This condition is summarized in the picture below, the dashed ellipsis representing covert back-grounded content and bold ellipsis representing overt foregrounded content. The use of a present tense highlights the fact that the situation still holds. The arrows stand for the perspective taken by the speaker regarding the connection between the two moments.

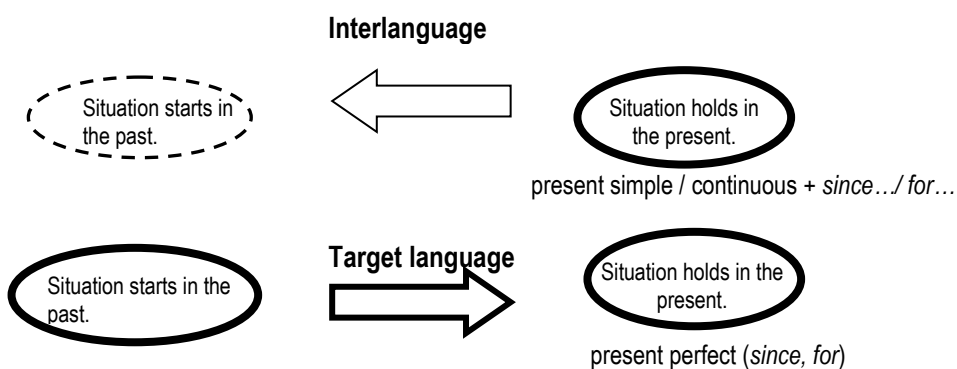


Figure 1 – A schematic representation of the category ‘continuation’.

Despite the intensive use of present tense forms in early IL (23/35 types among learners who produced less than 60% adequate types of use of the present perfect for all categories), continuation contexts achieved the highest levels (86%) of target-like use of the present perfect. Combination with time adverbials seems to have played a major role in the adequate use of the present perfect because they emphasize the aspectual relation. Besides, this is the case when the link between past and present becomes clearer.

#### 4.2.2 Situations taking place before the moment of speaking

The categories discussed below reflect a different perspective on events or situations in which the time span considered seems to end just before the moment of speaking. They include ‘imperfective experience’, ‘perfective experience’, ‘current results’, and ‘recent events’.

##### Imperfective experiences

Examples (21) to (28) above summarize the fact that only when ‘continuation’ referred to a state or habitual activity *persisting into present* did the learners use present tenses + durative adverbials in present perfect contexts. However, this specific IL mapping was not found in the data to express habitual or repeated (iterative) activities, accomplishments, or achievements, and even states, when these were seen as perfective (completed wholes). Instead, these were encoded by past tense forms accompanied by adverbials such as *all my life*, *never*, *always*, *until now*, etc., especially in early-IL data. I call them ‘imperfective experiences’ as distinguished from other instances of ‘continuation’ conveyed almost exclusively by present forms in early IL, and from ‘perfective

experience' presented next, which represent completed events that took place just once or a few times in the past.

Although some sort of duration was always present, (29) to (31) do not evoke a type of 'perfect' continuation because, by using the *past tense*, the participant says nothing about the situation now: no current relevance, no guarantee it still holds at the moment he speaks. In fact, the past simple is used in the same way it is employed to express past accomplishments and achievements that may or not have some connection with the present.

- (29) The terrorism **was always used** [REPEATED ACTIVITY] in the world to make people pay attention in the problems of a place. (S6 – written)  
 (29a) Terrorism has always been used worldwide to call people's attention to the problems...  
 (30) [So far] There were... **there was** a lot ... a lot of progress...[STATE] (S9 – interview)  
 (30a) So far, there has been a lot of progress.  
 (31) I start studying five years ago and... I **saw a lot of fil...** MOVIES [REPEATED ACTIVITY]. (S8 – interview)  
 (31a) I started studying English five years ago and I've seen a lot of movies...

Despite the small number of these contexts, they follow the general perfective/imperfective tendency found in the data that may signal interference from L1, since Portuguese encodes this meaning with simple past forms in association with adverbials, while the two distinct English forms – the present perfect and the past simple – evoke two separate meanings: the first, an ongoing period of time; the second, a closed period of time.

- (32) *Ele sempre foi um bom garoto.* [He's **always been/ was always** a good boy.]  
 (33) *Meu pai sempre trouxe frutos do mato na volta de suas caçadas.* [My father **has always brought/ always brought** wild fruit when coming home from his hunting trips.]

Besides, in these cases, the adverbials usually employed evoke 'frequency', rather than the aspectual meaning of 'prior to the moment of speaking' or a length of time. The end of the situation may well take place before the moment of speaking then (dashed vertical line in Fig. 2). This latter, by the way, may eventually appear lexicalized (*not yet, until now*).

### Perfective experiences

A distinction between perfective and imperfective experiences was made here to explain the unique way the L2 categories continuation and experience have been construed in IL. As a matter of fact, one cannot speak of a morphological contrast (found in the data) between what I call 'imperfective' and 'perfective' experiences. What 'imperfective experiences' and 'continuation' share is their durative/iterative/habitual character. As seen above, only unbounded durative situations *which persist to the moment of speaking* are sometimes represented by present forms in the corpus. Durative situations apparently not persisting during or after this moment are represented in terms of a past situation.

Mostly in early IL, the past simple was also used for the expression of individual occurrences of a state or activity no longer holding, and past accomplishments or achievements taking place only occasionally or perhaps never. These correspond to L2 category 'perfect of experience' and are usually explained in classroom contexts as events that may happen again in the

future. According to Fig. 2, the events reported in (34) to (41) take place sometime inside a time frame considered to end before the moment of speaking.

- (34) I only **travel abroad** [ACTIVITY] three times. (S4 – interview)  
 (34a) I've only traveled abroad three times.
- (35) I **didn't have practice** [ACTIVITY] since that time. (S5 – interview)  
 (35a) I haven't practiced since then.
- (36) I never **was... in this situation** [INDIVIDUAL OCCURRENCE OF A STATE] (S2 – interview)  
 (36a) I've never been in a situation like this.
- (37) I yet **didn't have a chance** [ACHIEVEMENT], but I'd like a lot to travel to a foreign country (S1 – interview)  
 (37a) I haven't had a chance yet, but I'd really like to travel to a foreign country.
- (38) S: ... How long have you been ... this career?  
 R: In fact I ... **acted in a children's play** [ACTIVITY] ... (S14 – interview)  
 (38a) R: In fact, I've acted in a children's play.
- (39) Only one time I ... **speak** [ACTIVITY] English... out of classes (S2 – interview)  
 (39a) Only once have I spoken English out of the classroom.
- (40) I began to study English five years ago and I **stopped** [ACHIEVEMENT] several times. (S2 – interview)  
 (40a) ...and I've stopped several times.
- (41) Well, I never **met an American** [ACHIEVEMENT], a native. (S7 – interview)  
 (41a) Well, I've never met a native American.

It seems that these learners relied on adverbials – *yet*, *once*, and *never* to create a connection with the present as it happens in Portuguese – *já* (already)/ *ainda não* (not yet)/ *até hoje* (till today)/ *nunca* (never) + *pretérito perfeito*. This is even more likely if we consider that the use of these adverbial expressions with the present perfect reached its peak (87%) among the learners who only produced between 40 to 55% of target-like mappings for the present perfect, and then plunged to 37% among the most advanced learners, who had almost acquired both form and meanings (around 80% in all categories).

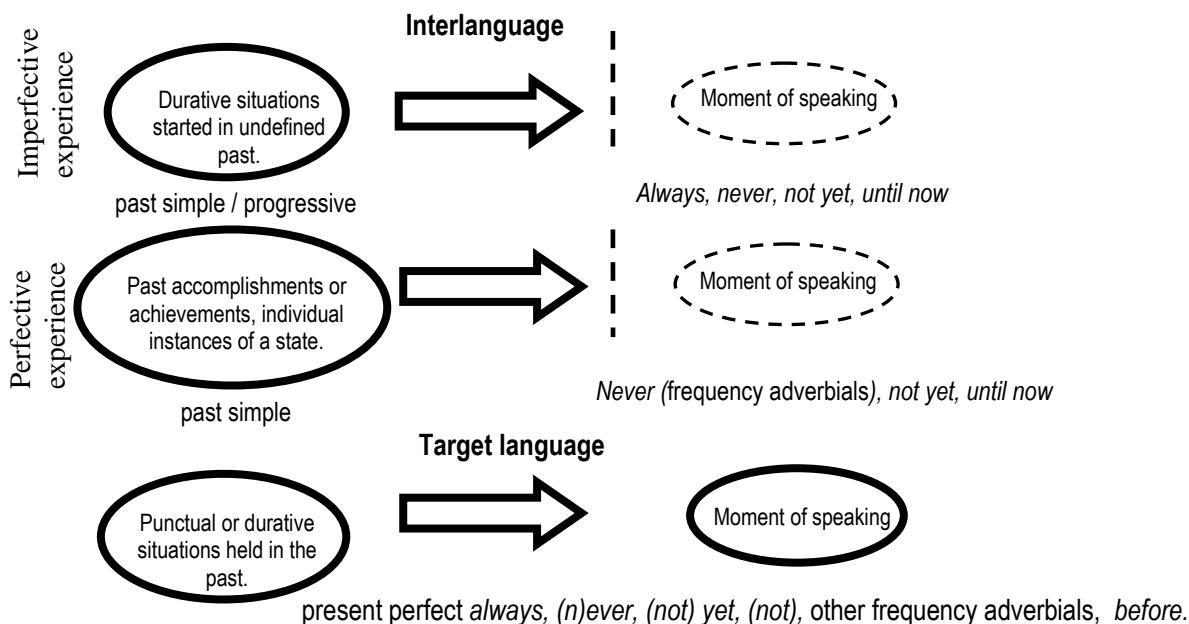


Figure 2 – A schematic representation of the categories ‘imperfective experiences’ and ‘perfective experiences’.

### Current Result

Only in about 25% of the occurrences did the participants use the present perfect to express a current result. The other instances were all produced with the past simple, but for one use of a base form, and this context tended not to present adverbials. As mentioned above, Portuguese inflectional morphology does not encode the ‘current result’ of a past situation, and this meaning is often inferred. However, two adverbials which occasionally accompany these predicates – *já* [*already, yet*] or *ainda não* [not yet] – only mean that the action or the existence of a state took / did not take place before the hearer might have predicted. These adverbials (or no accompanying adverbials) provide the contrast with the other perfective categories being discussed here. Fig. 3 summarizes this group.

- (42) I **forgot** [=left] the things. [ACHIEVEMENT] (S1 – role-play)  
 (42a) I've left your things at home.
- (43) I **left** it [ACHIEVEMENT] in... at home. (S4 – role-play)  
 (43a) I've left it at home.
- (44) People in large city is arrest in theirs own house. They **lost** freedom. [ACCOMPLISHMENT] (S10 – written)  
 (44a) In large cities, people are arrested in their own homes. They've lost their freedom.
- (45) I **gave** you my explanation. [ACCOMPLISHMENT] (S2 – role-play)  
 (45a) I've given you my explanation. / I've explained it to you.
- (46) Do you know whether the airplane has **already** landed [ACHIEVEMENT]? (S16 – role-play)  
 (46a) Do you know whether the plane has landed?

Accordingly, this may cause EFL learners to overuse the English adverb *already* as in (46), once the present perfect construction itself encodes this meaning in English, and *already* expresses emphasis (EL-DASH and BUSNARDO, 2002).

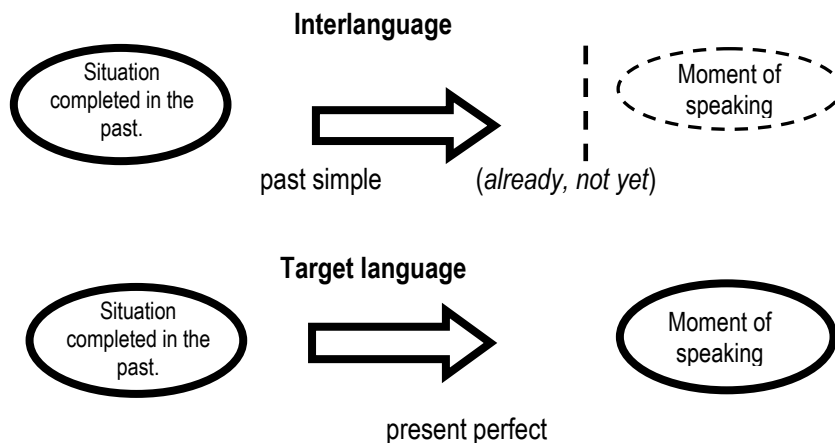


Figure 3 – A schematic representation of the category ‘current result’.

### Recent events

Recent events relate to the moment of speaking solely by virtue of their temporal proximity to the present (COMRIE, 1976, p.60), and that is why these perfective contexts may be expressed by the English present perfect. For this reason, they tend to occur in the L2 with adverbs such as *just* and *recently*. In the IL data, however, I could not find a relation between these adverbs and the

emergence of the target form. Actually, only learners in more advanced stages produced this target form-function mapping, the highest rate being around 67%. In the whole corpus, this figure was 37%, with the past simple being the preferred form.

Again, one way Portuguese expresses this temporal proximity to the present is with the periphrastic form *acabei/acabo*<sub>1PS</sub> ('finish'<sub>PRETERITE PERFECT/PRESENT</sub>) *de* + *V*<sub>INFINITIVE</sub>. Besides being alien to the L2, this construction is by far more complex than *just* or *recently* + past simple. Another reason for the reduced use of the present perfect may be L2 input, albeit scarcer in a foreign language learning context. English native speakers also tend to employ past simple forms in these contexts. According to Walker (1997, p.18), there is no semantic distinction between the past simple and the present perfect when they occur with *just* to refer to the immediate past. Fig. 4 below depicts this condition. So, I am not in a position to argue for L1 interference in this case, except for the participants' prevailing choice to mark perfective contexts in general with past simple forms.

- (47) **Did** the flight **arrive** <sub>[ACHIEVEMENT]</sub>? (S1 – role-play)  
 (47a) Alternatively: Has the flight arrived?
- (48) Did you see... **did you see** <sub>[ACHIEVEMENT]</sub> the ... the week's paper lately? (S4 – role-play)  
 (48a) Have you read this week's paper?
- (49) I started to ... **started** to study <sub>[ACHIEVEMENT]</sub> that language [German] **this year**. (S3 – interview)  
 (49a) I've started to study that language this year.
- (50) S: And **there was some change** <sub>[ACCOMPLISHMENT]</sub> recently? (S9 – role-play)  
 H: Yeap. He **bought** <sub>[ACHIEVEMENT]</sub> a new piano and starS... **started** <sub>[ACHIEVEMENT]</sub> to ...to wear expensive clothes. (S3 – role-play)  
 (50a) S: And have there been any changes recently?  
 H: Yeap. He's bought a new piano and started to wear expensive clothes.

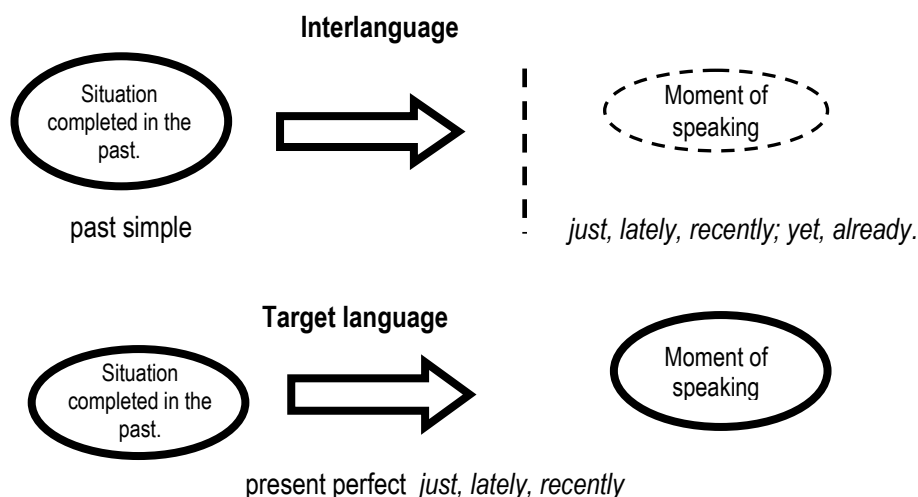


Figure 4 – A schematic representation of the category ‘recent events’.

#### 4.2.3 L1 interference in the acquisition of morphology

Formal mistakes were found in nearly 20% of the uses of the present perfect, which demonstrates that the acquisition of meaning clearly demands greater effort than the acquisition of the form. This may be the case especially because very few of these formal mistakes emerged from the morphological construction itself (*have* + *V-ed*). Instead, the majority of these formal mistakes

were incorrect participial forms, mostly due to the phonological reasons that affect the acquisition of the past simple as well.

In the learners' oral production, regular past-tense endings represented a source of difficulty which could be attributed to L1 phonology in almost all cases. As Wolfram (1984) noticed, learners whose L1 does not have consonants or consonant clusters in word-final position (as it happens to be the case with Portuguese) tend not to pronounce these in English regular past forms or, else, add a vowel between the consonants. Examples of this difficulty were seen throughout the oral corpus, and teachers should be able to approach them as a phonological issue, rather than as a delay in the acquisition of past tenses meaning or form. In the examples below, the relevant stretch of speech is in bold face. The phonetic symbols represent first, the IL data, and second, the target pronunciation.

- (51) And... anybody [nobody] **visit him**. [ˈvɪzɪθɪm] vs. [ˈvɪzɪtɪdɪm] (S1 – role-play)  
 (52) I never **traveled** for another countries. [ˈtrævlɪd] vs. [ˈtrævlɪd] (S3 – interview)  
 (53) I **interrupt it** a lot and so I... [ɪntəʁˈʌptɪt] vs. [ɪntəʁˈʌptɪdɪt] (S13 - interview)  
 (54) Have you **talk to him**? [ˈtɔktəhm] vs. [ˈtɔkttəhm] (S17 – role-play)  
 (55) Have you **notice any** changes in his routine nowadays? [ˈnəʊts `eni] vs. [ˈnəʊtst`eni] (S17 – role-play)

## 5. Final remarks

In this paper I have looked at the acquisition of the present perfect tense by Brazilian learners of English as a foreign language by using a pseudo-longitudinal approach, having attended to the form-meaning associations found in a corpus with their oral and written productions. The main goal established was to highlight the moments when the knowledge of their L1 may have influenced their IL production. Secondly, I evaluated these learners' use of past time morphology and observed two learners leaving their lexical stage and relying mostly on the base form of verbs; the other sixteen participants being in the morphological stage, having reached varied levels of adequate use of past time morphology. As far as the acquisition of the present perfect, the data revealed a continuum from zero to 80% of adequate uses of all four categories described in the literature.

The most relevant finding in the study was the fact that, parallel to target-like mappings, the learners created two *systematic* categories of situations: those concluded in the past and those still holding in the present, which were expressed by forms found in their L1. In most of these uses, lexical resources (adverbials) were employed to convey their idea of current relevance. Thus, the notion of continuation for durative events and states and their persistence in the present was expressed by present tenses, while all categories of situations seen as completed were encoded by past forms. The latter were classified as imperfective experience, current result, and recent event, according to the accompanying adverbials and the inherent durative/non-durative nature of the predicates. In short, when not using the target-like form, the participants tended to use forms that resembled their L1.

L1 and L2 distinct phonological systems may also have been the source of difficulty some learners faced with the form, regarding the production of regular past time morphemes. This happened more often in early interlanguage, a fact to be expected according to Ervin-Tripp (1974) and Terrell et al. (1980), and that should be approached as a distinct phenomenon of IL.

Thus, while this paper does not make strong claims about the role of L1 in the acquisition of temporality in an L2, it does intend to shed some light on specific points Brazilian learners have difficulty with, which often coincide with the moments the grammars of English and Portuguese differ. For one thing, learners seem to create their hypotheses about the present perfect exclusively based on chronological time, and to ignore aspectual distinctions but the persistence of the situation into the present.

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**Appendix I - Role-plays**

| Situation 1   | Situation 2  | Situation 3   | Situation 4   | Situation 5  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| A invites B to a party and wants to know about C, a second possible guest. B knows a few facts about C (out on vacations after her recent wedding). | A is late to pick up someone at the airport, and asks B, who is at the information desk, about the flight, which is late by the way. | A is a detective investigating a robbery; B is a suspect's neighbor; A asks B questions about the suspect's routine and social relations. | A and B discuss a job offer on a newspaper and evaluate their chances of getting the job, in face of their professional experience. | A and B are close friends and room-mates. A explains to B why he did not take B's sports gears to the gym, as previously arranged. |

| Sample from IL corpus: SITUATION 4  | Suggested L2 forms   |
|---|--|
| L: Hi, Tiago. Did you see... did you see the ... the week's paper lately?<br>T: Yes, I saw it.<br>L: Did you see the ... the ad about a new director that is ... start... shooting a new movie?<br>T: Oh, yes. I read [ri:d] about it.<br>L: What do you think about?<br>T: Oh, I think it's a great idea. And I think he has a great potential... as a director.<br>L: Because he needs a... a new actors. Do you... did you see it?<br>T: Ah, yes. I... He's looking for a new actor. Are you interested?<br>L: Yes. I think so. What do you think about?<br>T: Well, I need to ... to knew more things about your job. How long are you... are you working in the cinema?<br>L: Oh... only two... twice... when I was a child... and I ... I had a role in a commercial... a TV commercial.<br>T: Yes.<br>L: It's all. | L: Hi, Tiago. Have you read this week's paper?<br>T: Yes, I have.<br>L: Have you seen the ad about this new director who is shooting a new movie?<br>T: Oh, yes. I've read [rɛd] it.<br>L: What do you think about that?<br>T: Oh, I think it's a great idea. And I think he has great potential... as a director.<br>L: He needs new actors. Did you see that?<br>T: Ah, yes. He's looking for a new actor. Are you interested?<br>L: Yes. I think so. What do you think about that?<br>T: Well, I need to learn a few things about your career as an actor. How long have you been acting?<br>L: Oh... I've acted only twice... when I was a child, and later I played a part in a commercial... a TV commercial.<br>T: Yes.<br>L: That's all. |

## Appendix II - Individual learners' performance

| Learner | Acquisition of past time inflectional morphology <sup>11</sup>                         |                        |                      | Phonological mistakes |
|---------|--|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
|         | Past simple and continuous tenses  | Use of Present Perfect |                      |                       |
|         |  | Target-like            | Alternative mappings |                       |
| S1      | Yes for most frequent verbs (did, came, had, went). Use of base forms for other verbs. | 0                      | 11                   | Yes                   |
| S2      | Yes for most frequent verbs. Use of base forms.  | 0                      | 8                    | Yes                   |
| S3      | Acquiring all past tenses simultaneously.  | 1 continuation         | 14                   | Yes                   |
| S4      | Yes for most frequent verbs. Some use of base forms.                                   | 1 continuation         | 12                   | Some                  |
| S5      | Yes for most frequent verbs. Some use of base forms.                                   | 1 continuation         | 12                   | Some                  |
| S6      | Yes for most verbs   | 1 perfective           | 7                    | No                    |
| S7      | Yes  | 1 perfective           | 6                    | No                    |
| S8      | Yes  | 1 perfective; 1 cont.  | 12                   | Some                  |
| S9      | Yes  | 1 perfective; 1 cont.  | 5                    | No                    |
| S10     | Acquiring all past tenses simultaneously.  | 1 perfective; 1 cont.  | 4                    | No                    |
| S11     | Yes  | 3 perfectives; 2 cont. | 6                    | No                    |
| S12     | Acquiring all past tenses simultaneously.  | 5 perfectives; 3 cont. | 8                    | No                    |
| S13     | Yes  | 4 perfectives; 2 cont. | 4                    | No                    |
| S14     | Yes  | 5 perfectives; 5 cont. | 2                    | No                    |
| S15     | Yes  | 4 perfectives; 7 cont. | 4                    | No                    |
| S16     | Yes  | 5 perfectives; 2 cont. | 3                    | No                    |
| S17     | Yes  | 2 perfectives; 5 cont. | 2                    | No                    |
| S18     | Yes  | 5 perfectives; 6 cont. | 2                    | No                    |

**RESUMO:** A expressão da temporalidade engloba os conceitos de tempo e aspecto, tipicamente transmitidos por morfemas lexicais e flexionais, que geralmente variam de uma língua para outra. Este tipo de diferença entre idiomas muitas vezes afeta a aprendizagem de uma L2. Neste trabalho, discute-se o papel da gramática do português na aquisição do *present perfect* do inglês por dezoito brasileiros, aprendizes de inglês como língua estrangeira. Os padrões encontrados nos dados de interlíngua foram comparados a padrões da L2. Como esperado, a fonologia da L1 afetou a produção das formas regulares do passado, especialmente entre os iniciantes. No tocante aos mapeamentos forma-função, além de padrões da L2, os aprendizes criaram duas categorias principais de relevância atual, com base no critério de situação persistindo / não persistindo no presente, as quais foram sistematicamente expressas por formas semelhantes a outras encontradas na L1. Eventos durativos e estados (situações imperfectivas) que continuam no presente foram expressas por tempos do presente, enquanto todas as categorias aspectuais de situações encerradas (perfectivas) foram codificadas por tempos do passado. Adjuntos adverbiais específicos foram empregados em cada categoria.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** interlíngua – transferência linguística – aquisição da temporalidade.

<sup>11</sup> All participants used target-like form-function mappings of present and future tenses, and of some modal verbs. Present-tense third-person marking forms a separate morphological system from that of tense and aspect, and some participants presented variability in the use/non-use of that morpheme.