

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

LANGUAGE POLICY AND PORTUGUESE TEACHING IN TIMOR- LESTE: WHAT WRITTEN TEXTS REVEAL

Rogério de Oliveira Júnior

PhD student in Linguistics. Master of Arts
from the Postgraduate Program in Languages
- UFPE

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Abstract: Timor-Leste is a multilingual country, in which the penetration of Portuguese and Portuguese-based creoles in the 20th century was temporarily interrupted. Since its independence, however, the revival of Portuguese has been present on the island, which has been established as the official language. (HULL, 2001; ALBUQUERQUE, 2011; MARTINS, 2016) As a result of a linguistic policy aimed at the country's development, the Timorese have learned and used Portuguese, understood as a language of international relevance, especially in official and academic contexts. Cooperation agreements with Brazil and Portugal, over the last two decades, have boosted the role of Portuguese as L2/FL in Timor. This work provides a general overview of the situation of Portuguese in Timor-Leste and presents how the Portuguese grammatical system is difficult to understand for the Timorese, which raises the discussion about how learning Portuguese takes place in this multilingual context and how this variety of Portuguese has developed. (OLIVEIRA JUNIOR, 2021) From the perspective of learning Portuguese, I assume partial access to Universal Grammar (UG), according to the Principles and Parameters model. (CHOMSKY, 1981) In this context, texts written by Timorese who completed basic education contain constructions with verbs in infinite form, which highlights different stages in the acquisition of the Null Subject Parameter marking and the inflectional paradigm of verbs.

Keywords: Timor-Leste Portuguese, Language Contact, Language Policy.

INTRODUCTION

The island of Timor is located in the Southeast Asian Sea and is a multilingual territory that, during the 15th and 16th centuries, was a point of intense navigation and trade routes that linked Europe to Asia (HULL, 2001b). The languages cataloged there (around sixteen) seem to come from at least two families: Austronesian and Papuan (ALBUQUERQUE, 2011). Macau Portuguese Creole, Malacca Portuguese Creole and Bidau Portuguese Creole were spoken in so-called Portuguese Timor from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Due to the small number of Portuguese residents in Timor, Creoles, more than the Portuguese language, influenced and gave several loans to the island's languages. Tetum, the local and currently official lingua franca of Timor-Leste, was greatly influenced by Portuguese-based creoles, especially Bidau Portuguese Creole, spoken in the capital, Dili, from the 18th century onwards.

More recently, the eastern part of the island of Timor has suffered from new foreign invasions. First, Japan occupied the island during World War II. After that, in 1975, Indonesia occupied the part that until then was known as Portuguese Timor, in an attempt to annex it to its territory. During this period, which lasted until 1999, Indonesia discouraged Tetum and banned the teaching and use of Portuguese, establishing the Indonesian language as mandatory. According to Albuquerque (2011, p. 35):

In the linguistic area, Indonesian domination adopted a linguistic policy of Indonesianization of the Timorese population, just as Indonesian linguistic planning proved to be extremely efficient. In the twenty-four years in Timorese territory, Indonesia managed to: reduce what little was left of the use of the Portuguese language by the Timorese population by completely banning its use, being used only by revolutionaries as a language of resistance;

the Tetun language, as it has a cultural and identity character for the Timorese nation, has slowly reduced its use in the population's daily life; Bahasa Indonesia (the official and national language of Indonesia) was intensively implemented through a large flow of teachers and teaching materials, as well as the import of various items of Indonesian material culture such as books, magazines, music, radio programs and television, consumer products in general, among others.

Only in 2002, when it was recognized as a nation, did the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste take the initiative to revive Tetum (in the variety best known by the population) as the national and official language and Portuguese as the country's official language, promoting its teaching and wide use. To this end, the Timorese government made use of cooperation agreements with countries such as Brazil and Portugal, which send teachers, teaching materials and other professionals from the most diverse areas, as well as training Timorese to work as Portuguese language teachers in Timor, following the example of which takes place at UNILAB, located in the states of Ceará and Bahia (CARIOCA, 2016). Albuquerque (2011, p. 38) states that:

the only language planning initiative is in relation to Portuguese language teaching at the pre-secondary level of the public education network in Timor-Leste. There is a political concern about implementing the Portuguese language in the first years of educational teaching.

Currently, the great relevance of Tetum and the persistent attempt to insert Portuguese in Timor-Leste can be seen. Even so, Portuguese is still spoken fluently by less than 10% of the population, being a foreign language (LE)¹, in the words of Paraíso (2019), since it is still learned, most of the time, after the critical period of language acquisition:

Tetun Prasa is spoken as L1 by 18% of the

1. As for the nomenclature presented here, Foreign Language (FL), it is in accordance with Paraíso (2019).

population, while 82% of the East Timorese population has some fluency in it, as it is the language that functions as a lingua franca, that is, a language of communication between the different ethnolinguistic groups that have L1 different. (...) It is worth noting that the portion of the East Timorese population that speaks Portuguese, as well as that speaks English, has been growing significantly in recent years, due to the language policy adopted by the State. (ALBUQUERQUE, 2011, p. 47-48)

LANGUAGE POLICY AND PORTUGUESE IN TIMOR-LESTE

In this brief work, I will follow, according to Spolsky (2016 [2007]) the concept that language policy is a social phenomenon on which choices are based regarding languages or language varieties that are considered predominant, especially in bilingual or multilingual. According to the author, "language policies have three interconnected but independent describable components: practices, beliefs and management." (SPOLSKY, 2016 [2007] p. 35).

Practices involve observable linguistic choices and behaviors and have to do with what people actually do as speakers. Beliefs are the values attributed to varieties, which allow or not the identification of individuals with them and, consequently, motivate their choices and interfere in their practices. Therefore, management is the efforts of authority, whether established or devised, to modify practices and beliefs about language. Spolsky points out that, among the three components, the most significant are beliefs, because they can cause a certain linguistic strategy to be prestigious or stigmatized by the dominant group.

In Timor-Leste, as already presented, there was a set of language policies evidenced by management: In the colonial period, Portugal was not concerned with the broad insertion

of Portuguese in the Timorese territory, taking as a priority the development of commercial enclaves. During the period of Indonesian occupation, there were normative and arbitrary efforts to prevent the use of Portuguese, seen as a barrier to the conquest of the new territory. In the post-independence period, the government of Timor-Leste proposes a revival of Portuguese as the language of international integration for its people.

In this context, an obstacle is observed: there is a belief in Portuguese as a relevant language, both by management and by the Timorese. However, the portion of the population that speaks Portuguese is very small compared to that which uses Tetum and even the Indonesian language. Diniz & Silva (2013) verify that, among the young population aged 15 and 24, official data from Timor-Leste in relation to knowing how to read, speak and write a language (literacy) show the following: "The [Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste] has 77.8% of the population literate in Tetum, 55.6% in Indonesian, 39.3% in Portuguese, 22.3% in English and 79.1% in any of these four languages." Therefore, a set of management actions have been taken in relation to teaching and linguistic practice in Timor-Leste in relation to Portuguese.

Costa (2005) states that Tetum is the common language, in addition to being the Mother Tongue (ML) of a considerable part of the population. Furthermore, it is also the Official Language (LO), a status it shares with Portuguese. Almeida (2008, p. 33) mentions that, according to UNESCO, LO is:

The language used within the framework of the various official activities: legislative, executive and judicial of a sovereign State. It is any language that a State defines as such, whether in the Constitution, by ordinary law, or simply through custom.

When it comes to Tetum and Portuguese, however, there is an important distinction:

Tetum is the national language of Timor-Leste, often used as a lingua franca. Portuguese, for historical and social reasons, has a much more restricted use. It is the language of the State, public administration, contracts, normative acts, official speeches and schooling. In other words, it is in formal contexts, practically outside the family sphere. Therefore, Portuguese in Timor-Leste is a Non-Mother Language (NLM) and its formal teaching context, in some cases, is similar to that of a foreign language, as the first contact that many have with the language only occurs at school. Because of this situation, Timorese experience difficulties in learning Portuguese. This is demonstrated with regard to learning the verbal inflection paradigm taught from the European standard of Portuguese:

A frequent problem that is common to practically all Portuguese language learners in Timor-Leste, which gives rise to many of the errors in interlanguage and which is presented as an example is, as Esperança (2001) identifies, the complexity of verbal conjugations. Verbs in Tetum and Bahasa do not vary in person, number, mood or aspect. In Tetum, time is marked by specific words such as *ona* (past), *``sei``* (future), *atu* (on the verge of being done or happening) ... Compound tenses in Portuguese also raise problems. (ALMEIDA, 2008, p. 49)

Portuguese teaching in Timor-Leste was, in the first decade of the 21st century, based especially on cooperation agreements with Brazil and Portugal. Roughly speaking, it can be said that, in the field of education, the variety with the greatest penetration in Timor-Leste is the European one and, therefore, it is to be expected that the PTL has more evident characteristics of this variety. For example, Albuquerque & Ramos (2020, p. 84) admit that, to a large extent, the Portuguese taught in Timor-Leste is European:

The dissemination and teaching of the Portuguese language in Timor-Leste have been the subject of multiple projects

and cooperation programs, in particular originating in Brazil and Portugal. Brazilian cooperation only operated in specific areas, with a reduced contingent and with projects that were not renewed or continued. Thus, official Brazilian actions in Timor-Leste presented some limitations, as will be explained later. Portuguese cooperation had a greater focus on the dissemination and teaching of the Portuguese language in all related areas and at all levels of education, in politics, in various sectors of East Timorese society, etc.

The authors also state that an important program in Brazilian cooperation, led by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), the Teacher Qualification and Portuguese Language Teaching Program in Timor-Leste (PQLP), created in 2005, was deactivated in 2013. Therefore, in the most diverse segments, Portuguese is taught in Timor-Leste largely through Portuguese cooperation programs, which involve the government of Portugal or Portuguese universities with the Timorese government and educational institutions. (OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR, 2021)

THE NULL SUBJECT PARAMETER AND THE PORTUGUESE OF TIMOR-LESTE

In my dissertation on the Null Subject Parameter in the PTL, where this work originated, I hypothesized that there could be difficulty for Timorese students in learning the morphosyntactic characteristics of the parameter in view of the multilingual context that puts the EP on one side, as a pro-drop language and on the other, Tetum and the other languages spoken on the island, notably non-pro-drop languages (OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR, 2021). In other words, the research question was: living in a multilingual context, how does a Timorese learn the European Portuguese (PE) pro-drop system?

As highlighted by Duarte and Kato (2014), PE is a consistent pro-drop language, as there are unrestricted null referential subjects in this variety. The authors attribute the partial nature of the Brazilian Portuguese parameter, since there are contexts in which nulls are legitimized, while, due to a weakened paradigm of verbal inflection, there is a tendency to fill in the subject position.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In my dissertation, taking into consideration, a corpus of language written by educated Timorese, I found that, on the one hand, the PTL presents a certain distance in relation to the EP with regard to the absence of quantitative difference between the production of null and full subjects, approaching the Angolan variety of Portuguese, and the absence of inversion of the S-V order. On the other hand, PTL also differs from PB due to the lack of subject duplication, the lack of expressiveness of undefined reference subjects and the absence of relevant interference from the writer's gender in the production of null subjects. (MALTA, 2019; OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR, 2021)

I understood, therefore, that, due to the fact that access to UG occurs partially in the learning of Portuguese by the Timorese, that is, by ensuring that the characteristics learned are fixed based on the parametric configuration of the LM, the morphosyntactic characteristics of the EP they are not learned with the expected success by the Timorese, so it is possible to affirm that the interference of multilingualism causes "difficult" learning, as mentioned by Batoreo (2010).

The number of copulative verbs found in PTL writing is significant and represents the result of PE learning, since Tetum, for example, does not contain these verbs (ALBUQUERQUE, 2011). In relation to verbal agreement, as already defended in

the generative literature, languages with rich verbal inflection morphology allow the production of null subjects, but, in PTL, with a 77.4% standard agreement with pronominal subjects, this does not occur: subjects nulls (50%) have the same percentage as pronominal subjects (50%).

The higher percentage of use of agreement in the corpus may be related to teaching issues that may focus more on standard verbal agreement than on the use of null subjects, since agreement is a more prominent morphosyntactic aspect on the textual surface, in the sense of being more susceptible to social stigmatization than the manifestation of the null subject.

Martins (2016) reached a similar conclusion when analyzing errors in learning Portuguese by Tetum-speaking Timorese. She associates the morphosyntactic characteristics of Tetum with the difficulty in internalizing the Portuguese verbal system by Timorese students and, consequently, “errors” are found in the presentation of verbs in the written texts of her research. Therefore, I consider it very important to take a careful look at the context of PTL’s development, as well as its learning by the Timorese, which takes place through formal instruction within established programs for teaching Portuguese still organized by international cooperation. These characteristics make PTL a peculiar variety of Portuguese, whose status is LNM, closer, evidently, to a foreign language, which is not observed, for example, in the Portuguese of Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde, where Portuguese is an L2. After 20 years of Timor-Leste’s independence and the resumption of Portuguese teaching, its reinsertion is still ongoing and its morphosyntax reflects characteristics of the multilingual context. Other evidence that supports this conclusion are constructions with subjects in clauses with an infinitive verb, which I found in the

corpus of the dissertation research and which I analyzed separately and regarding which I proposed the idea that the PSN is still in formation in the PTL.

CONSTRUCTIONS WITH VERBS IN THE INFINITIVE

Both Santos (2009) and Martins (2016), when working on their research with Timorese texts, observed occurrences of verbs in the infinitive. Santos did not address them in detail in his investigation, relegating the occurrences to cases of deviation from standard agreement. In her research, they represented 18% of the occurrences of what she called “badly conjugated verbs” for group 1 and 6% for group 2. (SANTOS, 2009, p. 475, 476).

Martins (2016), in turn, discusses the issue from a morphosyntactic point of view, calling them errors of “use of the infinitive instead of the present indicative” (MARTINS, 2016, p. 33), opting to “consider the hypothesis that the excessive use of the infinitive, to the detriment of the use of other appropriate forms, implies that the use of these has more difficulty in being fully learned.” (MARTINS, 2016, p. 38)

I found 33 occurrences of verbs in the infinitive, all in root clauses. Furthermore, all of them had the subject filled in, placed before the verb and without duplication. Regarding the type of verb, in 33 occurrences, 30 were transitive (90.9%), 2 copulative (6.1%) and 1 unaccusative (3%). Regarding the semantic reference of the subject, they are distributed between the first and third person singular and plural, with a greater production of subjects in the singular. Below, I list all cases of verbs in the infinitive, separated by the type of full subject, to better illustrate the data:

a) Sentences with verbs in the infinitive with subjects expressed by pronouns (12 occurrences):

(1) eu voltar no Brazil para sustentar a

- minha família
- (2) Eu fazer o curso
- (3) Eu finalizar o meu estudo
- (4) eu já acabar a minha estudo na UNILAB
- (5) Eu contribuir para desenvolver nossas nação
- (6) Eu aprender o português para implementa
- (7) eu esforçar muito a minha capacidade
- (8) eu pronto atender em uma qualquer actividades
- (9) nós comunicar com lingua portuguesa
- (10) eu aprender a lingua portuguêsa
- (11) eu atender a sua nação de Timor-Leste
- (12) Eu voltar de Brasileiro

b) Sentences with verbs in the infinitive with subjects expressed by a noun phrase (21 occurrences):

- (13) o cidadão do Timor-Leste pegar um princípio
- (14) Timor-Leste implementar a lingua português
- (15) Timor-Leste com governo do Brazil criar um plano
- (16) os timorenses alcançar a sua independencia
- (17) os timorenses lutar para sonhar a sua independência
- (18) o Timor-Leste aumentar o seu plano
- (19) a língua portuguesa ser como uma língua falada
- (20) UNILAB entregar o poder para as pessoas
- (21) o Timor-Leste entrar no CPLP
- (22) A lingua portuguesa ajudar sobre o processo da aprendizagem
- (23) Timor-Leste já usar a lingua

- portuguesa para capacitar mais todos os professores
- (24) muitas pessoas atender o bolsheiro
- (25) algumas pessoas de Timor falar com a língua Melayu
- (26) Timor leste aprender a lingua portuguesa
- (27) O governo do Timor-leste dar as saudações
- (28) timorense utilizar a lingua portuguesa
- (29) O Governo Timor leste levar a língua portuguesa
- (30) os estudantes sempre falar a língua Tétum
- (31) os dosentes sempre usar a língua melayu
- (32) o Timor-Leste estudar a lingua português
- (33) pessoas timorenses falar a língua indonésia

A total of 21 of the 80 texts I analyzed in my research presented verbs in the infinitive and they are distributed between male and female writers. It is interesting to note that all writers who produced verb forms in the infinitive also produced finite forms. In texts that presented verbs in the infinitive, these verbs did not predominate, but occurred once, twice and, at most, four times. For example, for a given text, which presented more occurrences of verbs in the infinitive (in total, four occurrences), it also presented five occurrences of sentences with finite verbs.

Guasti (2002), addressing language acquisition, found that constructions in the infinitive are part of the acquisition process in the initial period, when the parametric value associated with the PSN has not yet been fixed. He argues that, in the speech of children between 1 and 3 years of age, what happens is that, in this period of acquisition, there is a first

stage of acquisition in all languages: subjects occur before verbs in the infinitive and, while the value parametric is not fixed, there is an alternation between null and full filling the subject position. In this sense, as discussed by Guasti (2002), the child will produce sentences that are not produced by the adult's grammar. This natural acquisition process shows that the GU parameters are being formatted and this production alternation will cease when the GU reaches its stable state. In the case of producing null subjects, the fixation of the PSN occurs between 2 and 3 years of age (GUASTI, 2002, p. 185).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In PTL occurrences, I observe that educated adults, in monitored written texts, produced, in alternation with finite verbs, constructions with infinitive verbs. This leads me to state that these Timorese have not yet fully established the value of the PSN of the target language, Portuguese, due to the interference of the multilingual context and the late learning of Portuguese, only at school. This finding, in addition to expressing difficulties in learning LNM Portuguese, also demonstrates that access to the parametric fixation of the new language in adulthood goes, evidently, through the parameters already fixed in the

UG during acquisition, in line with what is predicted by the Hypothesis of Partial Access, which establishes that, after the critical period, any language learning will occur with access to the UG based on its configuration obtained after the acquisition of the LM, a condition in which the parametric values are already fixed (SCHACHTER,1989; STROZER, 1992).

As Portuguese is the result of learning for these speakers, it may be that LM is active in the emergence of interlanguage, which would be a transitory strategy to achieve the characteristics of the target language. But, at the same time, in view of the general number of null subjects investigated in the corpus, well below that of full subjects, would the PTL really be on its way to the null subject? To allow a reflection in this sense, I recognize that a synchronic study, with control of the informants, accompanying them in their learning of Portuguese over time, would be the most appropriate measure to assess that the alternation between finite and infinite forms of verbs and the scarce production of null subjects is just a reflection of interlanguage, so these characteristics would tend to disappear over time. Still, this study could verify, just as Kato and Duarte (2014) did for BP, that there is not a change in progress, but rather a variety of Portuguese with its own characteristics.

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