

## Copular constructions in Portuguese as a second language (PL2) by Chinese learners: Do typological differences matter? <sup>1</sup>

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**Introduction.** Languages differ with respect to the occurrence of a copula in predication structures. Languages like European Portuguese (EP) require the copula to be always overt (1), other languages like Mandarin Chinese (MC) do not express the copula in certain contexts. Specifically, in Chinese if the main predicate is an AP, the copular verb *shì* ‘be’ is usually not required (2a) and when used it triggers a contrastive (Huang et al. 2009) reading (2b). Notice that the copular verb may be omitted even in the context of negative clauses (3). However, if the main predicate is an NP or a PP, the copular verb generally occurs (4).

(1) a. A Maria *é/está* feliz.

DET Maria be happy  
‘Mary is happy.’

b. \*A Maria  $\emptyset$  feliz.

(2) a. Zhang san gao-xìng le.  
Name Name high-excite CRS  
‘Zhang San is (now) happy.’

b. Zhang san *shì* gao-xìng le.  
Name Name be high-excite CRS  
‘Zhang San is (now truly) happy.’

(3) Zhang san bú gao-xìng le.  
Name Name NEG high-excite CRS  
‘Zhang San is (now truly) unhappy.’ ((2-3) from Sun 2006:151)

(4) Mulan shì yì-ge yanyuan.  
Mulan be one-CL actress  
‘Mulan is an actress.’ (Wu 2011:851)

The contrast between EP and Chinese is particularly interesting in the context of L2 acquisition. In fact, although the same kind of predication is involved in the two languages, the way they syntactically encode it varies, which may be problematic for MC speakers learning EP. In this talk we analyze the production of predicative copular constructions by MC speakers learning EP. The data is part of the Learner Corpus of Portuguese FL/L2 (COPL2), an ongoing project of the University of Lisbon. The subcorpus under study comprises 323 written productions of 129 adult Chinese native speakers from two learning levels (elementary and intermediate).

The goal of the talk is twofold: (i) to observe at what extent the properties of the L1 influence the L2 productions of the informants; (ii) to present a comparative analysis between EP and MC that accounts for the above mentioned contrast and for the way adult MC speakers acquire the predicative copular construction in EP. Regarding the first issue, we will show that the construction under study is problematic for our informants in case MC and EP differ; as for the second goal, we will claim that the difference between the two languages rely on the feature specifications of the functional category *Pred* (Adger & Ramchand 2003).

**The hypotheses.** In this talk we are capitalizing on a theory of L2 acquisition that assumes that adult L2 learners fail to set the value for some functional features in the L2 when they differ

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from their L1 (Smith & Tsimpli 1995, ap. Hawkins & Chao 1997), i.e. beyond the critical period L2 learners cannot access to the underspecified functional features of the L1 and therefore they cannot construct a near-native grammar of the L2 (see the failed functional feature hypothesis - FFFH, Hawkins & Chao 1997). During the acquisition of the L2, learners are constrained by the specifications in their L1s and restructure their grammars towards the L2 (Hawkins & Chan 1997, Lardiere 2008, a.o.). Where functional feature specifications in MC and EP are different, EP-L2 Chinese learners fail to set the value for the functional formal feature in the L2 and their syntactic representations are closer to the L1, as in (5), from intermediate level Chinese EP-L2 learners; (ii) when they are similar, EP-L2 Chinese learners approximate closely in their syntactic representations to those of native speakers, as we observe in (6), with native-like productions of Chinese EP-L2 speakers even in the elementary learning level.

(5) A praia  $\emptyset$  é [AP *fatástica*], ondas  $\emptyset$  são [AP *boas*] e pessoas  $\emptyset$  são [AP *alegres e simpáticas*].  
 the beach fantastic waves good and people cheerful and nice  
 ‘The beach is fantastic, the waves are good and the people are cheerful and nice.’  
 (zh001CVMTD)

(6) a. Lisboa é [DP um cidade lindissimo].  
 Lisboa be a city beautiful.very  
 ‘Lisbon is a beautiful city.’ (zh023CAETF)  
 b. Agora eu **estou** [PP em Lisboa].  
 now 1sg be in Lisboa  
 ‘Now I am in Lisbon.’ (zh029CAETF1)

**The discussion.** Following Adger & Ramchand (2003:325), we assume that “a clause consists of a predicational core where thematic relations are licensed, and which is delimited by a head, Pred”; this head is the syntactic edge of the predicational core. The structure of the predicative copular clauses is represented in (7):

(7) [TP [T' [T [PredP [Pred' Pred [XP]]]]]]

The differences in the structure of EP and MC predicative copular constructions follow if we assume that these two languages differ in the value of the feature [V] on Pred. In EP, Pred bears interpretable (Pesetsky & Torrego 2004) V features ([iV]), which forces the Merge of the copular verb in Pred; the copula may be seen as a syntactic manifestation of the Pred head (Adger & Ramchand 2003). In MC, on the contrary, Pred bears an uninterpretable V feature ([uV]); [uV] acts as a probe seeking a goal in its domain, a goal that also bears [V] features. If this is correct, in MC the features on Pred may be valued by an adjectival head (assuming it to be [iV]), by local Agree. When XP in (7) corresponds to a PP or an NP, the [V] feature on Pred cannot be valued and the derivation crashes; the only way to save it is by late merge of the copula in Pred, satisfying its [V] feature. In order to account for the fact that the copula occurs in contrastive contexts, we claim that it is inserted before the intended focus, in a Foc head between Pred and XP in (7), which prevents the Agree relation between Pred and A to occur. Again, the copula is late merged in Pred to value the [V] features of this head.

**Predictions.** Given the properties of copular constructions in EP and MC (1-4), and assuming the FFFH, we expect Chinese EP-L2 learners to omit the copula *ser* ‘be’ with adjectival predicates (5), and to spell it out with noun or prepositional predicates (6), as in the target grammar, even in the initial stages of PL2 acquisition.

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