

An abstract of the doctoral dissertation

An analysis of the mistakes made by Polish students when acquiring the Spanish subjunctive and indicative moods

Mode choice and the opposition between the indicative (IND) and subjunctive (SUBJ) moods are some of the most challenging issues for Polish students who are learning Spanish. Despite the significant differences in their linguistic systems, one of the greatest challenges in learning Polish and Spanish is the modal opposition. From the perspective of teachers themselves, one of the most complex issues is dealing with opposition, especially for non-native speakers who may find it challenging to explain the use of SUBJ and its proper application. Furthermore, the contrast between SUBJ and IND is a topic that typically arises relatively late, often beyond the A2 level. Occasionally, it may be introduced at this level, but only in a restricted manner.

The reason for selecting this research topic is the limited number of academic contrastive studies between Polish and Spanish, with a focus on Polish learners and their use of the SUBJ. Furthermore, in the future, this paper may serve as a foundation for a broader study that covers other aspects and complexities of the languages under consideration. This study can also provide a foundation for future researchers who aim to explore the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching and learning modal opposition in Spanish.

The objective of this research is twofold: first, to examine the current state of affairs, and second, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the errors made by Polish learners. In this sense, this dissertation has both a theoretical and a practical dimension, as it provides guidance for teachers who work or will work with Polish students of Spanish. On the other hand, this study employs a contrastive-descriptive approach with an analytical one. Specifically, it draws upon the latest research on language modes, as well as error analysis and didactic-pedagogical research on interlanguage (IL) and errors. This approach allows for a comprehensive description and classification of errors.

To conduct the aforementioned analysis, the following research questions were formulated along with their corresponding null and alternative hypotheses.

P1. Does the number of correct answers in the modal selection depend on the number of hours of Spanish completed (course)?

P2. Does the number of correct answers in the modal selection depend on the type of grammatical activity (selecting/completing)?

P3. Does the number of correct answers in the modal selection depend on the type of clause (noun/adverbial/adjective)?

P4. Does the number of correct answers in sentences where there is a possibility of double choice (both SUBJ and IND) depend on the number of hours of Spanish completed (course)?

To address the aforementioned questions, the paper is structured into three chapters, followed by concluding observations. Chapter 1, "Language Acquisition and Learning: Basic Concepts," is theoretical in nature and addresses the most important concepts related to language learning and acquisition. Chapter 2, "Modes in Spanish and Polish," is contrastive in nature and aims to highlight the similarities and differences between the two systems in terms of mode selection. In Chapter 3, titled "Modal selection errors in the interlanguage of Spanish learners: an experimental approach," the study's stages are presented in greater detail. The analysis of the highlighted errors, along with the variables, is conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively. "Concluding remarks," on the other hand, summarize the results and discuss other observations. Additional findings that emerged during the study, limitations, and future research directions related to the topic are also included.

The study in question was conducted on the Moodle platform in a cross-sectional and synchronous manner. This means that all participants performed the assigned exercises at the same time between April and May 2021. Two different activities, namely activity 1 and activity 2, were utilized in the development of this study. These activities were divided into four shorter parts, allowing students to solve them separately as exercises.

A total of 126 students from four year levels (C2, C3, C4 and C5) participated in the study. Statistical results were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27 package. Descriptive statistics were calculated, tests for conformity to a normal distribution were conducted, and a series of correlation analyzes as well as Kruskal-Wallis, Wilcoxon, and Friedman tests were performed. In this case, $\alpha = 0.05$ was chosen as the level of significance.

A total of 10,174 student responses were analyzed. The 2938 incorrect responses were then divided and classified into specific categories, taking into consideration the respective modes. After a detailed analysis, three cases of H_0 and one case of H_1 were rejected. H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted for P1 and P3 because the number of hours is a significant and influential factor (P1) and the number of correct answers increases with the number of hours of study and is dependent on the sentence type (P3). However, H_1 was rejected for P2 because the number of correct answers does not depend on the type of activity. For P4, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was partially accepted because the number of correct answers depends on the level of extreme vintages, specifically in C2 and C5.

Regarding the overall results of the variables, significant differences were found in the total score of activities 1 and 2, as well as in their sum, among students from C2, C3, C4 and C5. Specifically, C5 students obtained the highest average number of correct answers ($M=60.12$), while C2 students had the lowest average ($M=39.70$). Moreover, in this case, there was a significant, positive, and moderately strong relationship between the overall score of activity 1 and activity 2. In other words, the higher the overall score of activity 1, the higher the overall score of activity 2 in the entire study group. According to the Friedman test, it was observed that students achieved the highest number of correct answers in noun sentences ($M=0.82$) and adjective sentences ($M=0.95$). However, they had the lowest number of correct answers in adverbial sentences ($M=0.66$) and double choice sentences ($M=0.48$).

After analyzing all the errors made by the participants, we established 10 main categories of error classification.

- 1) Incorrect mode: use of SUBJ instead of IND.
- 2) Incorrect mode: use of IND instead of SUBJ.
- 3) Incorrect tense.
- 4) Incorrect time IND.
- 5) Incorrect mode: use of the form in *-ría* instead of SUBJ.
- 6) Non-existent forms of the verb.
- 7) Incorrect person SUBJ.
- 8) Incorrect person IND.
- 9) Incorrect verb.
- 10) Infinitive instead of SUBJ/IND.

In the case of the philology students who participated in the study, it was observed that they more frequently use the IND mode than the SUBJ mode. They consider the former to be the default mode, which may also align with the pattern in Polish. Furthermore, it can be observed that the agreement of tenses is a rather problematic issue. It should also be mentioned that the use of the verb tense system is a complex cognitive task for language learners and certainly requires practice and more suitable tasks.

According to the results, the biggest problem for learners is the correct use of adverbial sentences and sentences with possible double selection. However, difficulty was also noted in sentences related to negation. In this perspective, three types of difficulties emerge. The first issue is related to specific sentence types, in this case, adverbial sentences. Then there is the difficulty related to double selection and negation. The first two difficulties are interlinked because in some adverbial sentences, it was also possible to observe double selection, which the learners omitted. Moreover, in numerous instances, learners applied the rule too automatically. For example, when they observed a verb like *buscar/necesitar* (to look for/need), they implicitly used SUBJ. A similar situation was observed in the case of negation in noun sentences, specifically in the negative mode with negation and the use of *por muy que* vs. *por mucho que*. In this situation, learners often use SUBJ by default. Interestingly, this situation also occurs at more advanced levels, such as C5, which is probably due to limited practice or may be one of the persistent errors. Similarly, learners at more advanced levels tend not to choose both modes when it is possible. This may be due to limited exposure and practice of these cases during practical language classes, and students may not be familiar enough with certain uses. For this reason, it is advisable to pay more attention to cases where there are two choices and to use appropriate exercises.

There were also errors related to a lack of attention during the tasks. In some cases, students did not read the entire sentence. Instead, they focused on finding a verb or a specific structure to use one of the modes automatically, without considering the meaning of the information being conveyed. This is one strategy for compensating for knowledge gaps, such as pragmatic or intercultural knowledge. Among the errors detected, we also observed incorrect or non-existent verb forms. In this case, it can be noted that in some examples, participants confused the verbs *ser* and *estar*. It can therefore be concluded that neutralization errors occurred. However, erroneous forms were also noticed in verbs that are typically considered difficult to conjugate, such as the incorrect form of *perdiar* in the verb *perder*. Mention should also be made of the incorrect use of forms in the pretérito perfecto de subjuntivo tense.

This is likely due to the fact that this tense is less commonly practiced, as indicated by textbooks that do not provide much practice in this area.

In summary, it was found that most errors could be classified as follows:

- Lack of adherence to specific rules.
- Generalization of paradigms.
- Influences from the mother tongue or other foreign languages and crossovers with other known structures (intra- and interlingual errors).
- Lack of knowledge of rules, as seen in lower proficiency levels and the predominant use of the most common mode, IND, in both Polish and Spanish.

Error analysis, although it may appear to be a well-researched topic, still leaves ample room for further investigation, particularly in collaboration with practicing teachers and developers of language teaching and learning materials.

KEYWORDS: modes, subjunctive, indicative, foreign language teaching, grammar, error analysis.