

Learning Spanish as a Second Language: Using Infinitives as Verbal Complements

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Abstract : This study examines Spanish textbook explanations of infinitival complements and how they can affect a learner's second-language acquisition process. Verbs taking infinitival complements are commonly found in the mandate, volition, and emotion verbs, both for Spanish and English. However, while some English verbs take gerunds (María avoids eating/*to eat meat), in Spanish a gerund never functions as the complement of a verb (María evita comer/*comiendo carne). Because of these differences, English learners of Spanish often have difficulty acquiring infinitival complement constructions in Spanish. Specifically, they may employ English-like complement structures, producing such ungrammatical utterances as *Odio comiendo tacos 'I hate eating tacos.' A compounding factor is that many Spanish textbooks do not emphasize the usages of infinitival complements and, when explanations are provided, they are often vague and insufficient. This study examines Spanish textbook explanations of infinitival complements (intermediate and advanced college-level Spanish textbooks and grammar reference books published in the United States) to determine areas that are problematic and insufficient and how they can affect learners' second-language acquisition process. In this study, alternative principle-driven explanations are proposed as a replacement.

Keywords : Spanish, teaching, second language, infinitival complement, textbook

Conference Title : ICHHSS 2017 : International Conference on Humanities, Human and Social Sciences

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 07-08, 2017