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EFFECT OF TASK TYPE ON THE USE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN L2 PORTUGUESE BY L1 CHINESE LEARNERS

EFEITO DO TIPO DE TAREFA SOBRE O USO DE MARCADORES DISCURSIVOS EM PORTUGUÊS COMO L2 POR APRENDENTES COM L1 CHINÊS

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In an attempt to analyze the effect of different oral tasks on the use of discourse markers (DMs) in second language (L2) Portuguese by first language (L1) Chinese speakers at different L2 proficiency levels, the current study is oriented by two research questions: (1) in what way does L2 proficiency of L1 Chinese speakers influence the use of DMs in Portuguese across tasks in terms of the frequency and variety of different DM classes? (2) how does oral task type affect the use of DMs by L1 Chinese speakers of L2 Portuguese in terms of the frequency and variety of different DM classes? Data for the present study were collected by using two oral tasks, conversation task and narrative task, conducted by 12 Chinese speakers of Portuguese at a lower and higher L2 proficiency levels. Results showed that the Chinese speakers tended to use the DMs in L2 Portuguese at a higher rate and wider variety when they were asked to perform the conversation task and the use of some DM categories seems not to stay correlated with the L2 proficiency levels across tasks.

Keywords: Discourse markers. Task type. Portuguese as L2. Chinese learners. Pragmatic competence.

Tendo como objetivo analisar o efeito das diferentes tarefas orais sobre o uso de Marcadores Discursivos (MDs) em Português como Língua Segunda (L2) por aprendentes chineses em diferentes níveis de proficiência, o presente estudo é orientado por duas questões de pesquisa: (1) de que maneira é que o nível de proficiência dos aprendentes chineses influencia o uso dos MDs em L2 português perante diferentes tarefas orais relativamente à frequência e à variedade? (2) como é que o tipo de tarefa influencia o uso dos MDs por aprendentes chineses no que diz respeito à frequência e à variedade dos MDs pertencentes às diferentes categorias? Os dados usados neste estudo foram recolhidos a partir de duas tarefas orais, conversa e narrativa, cumpridas por 12 aprendentes chineses com L2 português em diferentes níveis de proficiência. Os resultados mostraram que os aprendentes chineses tenderam a usar os MDs em L2 português com uma maior

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frequência e variedade na tarefa de conversa e parece que não há uma correlação entre o uso de algumas categorias de MD e o nível de proficiência em L2.

Palavras-chave: Marcadores discursivos. Tipo de tarefa. Português como L2. Aprendentes chineses. Competência pragmática.

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1. Introduction

According to Lopes (2016), the notion "discourse markers" (DMs) refers to a wide range of linguistic expressions that serve as devices in oral discourse, which can be divided into two subsets on the basis of their functions. "(…) Expressions belonging to the first subset are devices to manage the interaction (...) and to smooth interpersonal relations through politeness discourse strategies (...) The second set of expression (…) is to contribute to discourse coherence" (Lopes, 2016, p. 441). These linguistic expressions may have some properties in common such as different syntactical classes, a range of prosodic contours and syntactic distributions, syntactic independence, lack of semantic content, frequent use in orality and multifunctionality (Müller, 2005; Lopes, 2016). Some examples in Portuguese are *no entanto* ('however'), *portanto* ('therefore'), *em primeiro lugar* ('in the first place') and so on.

Since the use of DMs can fulfil essential functions in real communication, it has been a focus of recent work within the field of the development of pragmatic competence in second language (L2). Many associated perspectives have been explored in terms of the L2 DMs use, such as first language (L1) transfer (e.g., Liu, 2013), effect of learning contexts (e.g., Yoshimi, 2001; Ament & Parés, 2018) and teaching approaches (e.g., Rösler, 1982; Pimentel & Silva, 2013; Fuentes-Rodríguez, 2018). Apart from this, it has been widely acknowledged that different tasks can affect L2 oral production because of cognitive elements, interactional factors, individual differences and internal structures that they may include (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Robinson, 1995, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011; Qiu & Cheng, 2021) and therefore, the effect of task types on the use of L2 DMs has received considerable attention in recent years. However, to the best of our knowledge, the use of these linguistic items by L2 Portuguese speakers is still under-studied in the literature, as well as the effect of task types on its use by L2 Portuguese learners.

In response to the above, the research goal of the current study is to explore the relationship between the oral task types and the use of DMs in L2 Portuguese production by Chinese speakers. In addition, the study also sets out to examine if the L2 proficiency can be one of the potential factors that affect the use of DMs in L2 Portuguese across tasks.

To achieve these goals, the structure of the article is as follows: Section 2 is dedicated to a brief description on some crucial properties of discourse markers, as well as a brief review of the studies on task effects and on L2 DMs use. Section 3 and Section 4

will specify the research questions and describe the methodology that guided the collection of empirical data. Section 5 will present statistical evidence based on the results. A discussion is presented in Section 6. Finally, in Section 7, conclusions and directions of future research are considered.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. DM: definition, function and categorization

The term 'discourse marker' (DM) is one of the labels normally applied to "refer to a syntactically heterogeneous class of expressions which are distinguished by their function in discourse and the kind of meaning they encode" (Blakemore, 2004, p. 221). However, there is no consensual definition of DM in the linguistic community due to the multiple linguistic approaches of different theoretical frameworks (Jucker & Ziv, 1998; Lopes, 2016).

The definition of the concept has been widely discussed from a large range of perspectives. For example, Discourse Analysis (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Lenk, 1995; Schiffrin, 1985) and Relevance Theory (e.g., Blakemore, 2002, 2004) are two major approaches to the functions of DMs. The cohesion framework, focusing more on the textual functions, highlights that DMs are at least partially responsible for the perceived coherence of a text, since they guide the recipient of the text in recognizing coherence relations (Taboada, 2006). Meanwhile, the relevance-theoretic approach pays much more attention to cognitive processes, indicating that DMs are the expressions that provide instructions for discourse comprehension and can "encode a constraint on pragmatic inferences" (Blakemore, 2002, p. 4), which means that the number of possible interpretations can be narrowed down by using DMs.

According to Aijmer (2002), the multifunctionality is one of the essential properties through which we can distinguish between DMs and other linguistic expressions "(…) because of the large number of pragmatic values that they can be associated with (…)" (Aijmer, 2002, p. 3). However, there are often fuzzy boundaries between these pragmatic functions (for example textual level and interpersonal level) and one certain DM may have both textual function(s) and interpersonal function(s) (Aijmer, 1997; Liu, 2017). Apart from pragmatic values, DMs are often considered to be a class of linguistic expressions composed of different syntactic classes like conjunctions, adverbs, prepositional phrases and verbs (Lopes, 2016), which usually do not offer any propositional meanings to the utterance. The syntactic position of DMs is generally not fixed and they usually occur in the utterance-initial position, although some may be used in the middle or the end of an utterance. Besides, Aijmer (1996) even considers the prosodic property (for example, normally unstressed) as one of the most important factors when defining DMs in some languages, such as in Swedish.[1]

As for the classification of DMs in Portuguese used in the present study, we chose to follow the categorizations of Fung and Carter (2007), and Ament and Parés (2018),

[1] In Aijmer (1996), the term "modal particle" is used rather than the term "discourse marker" but it should be noted that there are some differences between these two terms.

both based on the Metalanguage Theory (Maschler, 1994), in which there are four DM categories: cognitive, structural, referential, and interpersonal categories.

Cognitive DMs are assumed to provide information about the utterer's cognitive condition and lead the listener on how to build their mental representation of the discourse in progress. This category of DMs may have functions such as: revealing speaker's thinking process, self-correction, hesitation, valuation of the hearer's knowledge about the previous utterance, etc. Some examples of these DMs, in EP, are *eu acho que* ('I think'), *quero dizer que* ('I mean') and *quer dizer* ('which means').

Structural DMs present textual functions on how the flow of discourse is to be segmented. Sometimes, these DMs can indicate which statements the speaker believes to be most or least important. Other functions are opening and closing topics, sequencing topic shifts, summarizing topic shifts and continuing of or returning to topics. Examples in Portuguese are *em primeiro lugar* ('at first'), *e* ('and'), *depois* ('then', 'next') and *além disso* ('additionally').

Referential DMs are applied to indicate the causality, sequence, coordination between utterances. This category of DMs are usually conjunctions, therefore, "DMs in this category seem to be more syntactically and textually bound than the other DM categories" (Ament & Parés, 2018, p. 47). Some examples in Portuguese are *porque* ('because'), *mas* ('but'), *portanto* ('so') and *contudo* ('however').

Finally, the interpersonal DMs are used to reveal the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, "(…) to mark affective and social functions of spoken grammar, and to indicate how the speaker feels towards the discourse statement" (Ament & Parés, 2018, p. 47), showing their attitudes such as agreement, interest, or marking emotional response and backchannel feedback. Some interpersonal DMs in EP are *sim* ('yes'), *claro* ('of course'), *sem dúvida* ('really') and *certo* ('sure').

2.2. DM and communicative competence in L2

According to Bakhtine (1984, p. 285), " (…) apprendre à parler c'est apprendre à structurer des énoncés (parce que nous parlons par énoncés et non par propositions isolées et, encore moins, bien entendu, par mots isolés)". In this sense, despite of the disagreement on the definition of DMs, it is well-known that DMs are important both in first and second language acquisition, since they are constantly used in interaction by native and non-native speakers (Ament & Parés, 2018).

Taking into account many researches in SLA, it is commonly agreed that when talking about a successful acquisition of a L2, not only learning of different linguistic forms but also how they are used by L2 speakers in communication should be taken into consideration (e.g., Ellis, 1994). Regarding their importance in verbal communication, DMs are recognized as an integral part of "communicative competence", which consists of four components: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency (Hedge, 2000). Therefore, the use of DMs is considered more related to the last four.

Pragmatic competence is defined as the L2 speakers' ability to produce and comprehend the communication action at the discourse level and also to "co-construct a social

action with interlocutors during interaction" (Félix-Brasdefer & DiBartolomeo, 2021, p. 325), which includes "knowledge and understanding of speech acts (…), deixis (…) and **discourse markers** (…), production and comprehension of pragmatic routines (…), comprehension of polite and impolite behaviour, as well as comprehension of implicature (…) and ironic remarks" (*ibid*., pp. 324–325, bold letters added by the authors).

As for discourse competence, it is assumed that language learners should "become aware of how discourse works in terms of the common devices (…), need to acquire useful language for strategies such as initiating, entering, interrupting, checking and confirming in conversation" (Hedge, 2000, pp. 51–52). Therefore, that is no question that use of DMs is relevant to L2 speakers' discourse competence.

Concerning the term "strategic competence", Müller (2005) summarizes that it "manifests itself when non-native speakers use discourse markers to express or to introduce the expression of lexical difficulties (...) or to appeal for the hearer's understanding" (Müller, 2005, p. 18). Hence, as Liu (2016) claims, use of DMs can be a filler or delaying tactic when the speaker meets the difficulty of finding the appropriate or intended expression for a later utterance.

Fluency is thought to be "(…) the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or under hesitation" (Hedge, 2000, p. 54), which includes three key components: speed or rate, silence or breakdown and repair (Michel, 2017). However, apart from fluency, many researchers recently have also begun to use the concepts "complexity" (lexical complexity and grammatical complexity) and "accuracy" (that is, more error-free utterances) as the other two aspects when measuring the L2 oral and written production. In this sense, if the three dimensions "complexity", "accuracy" and "fluency" (CAF) are taken into consideration, there is no doubt that the correct use and richness of L2 DMs will contribute to a better L2 performance.

2.3. Literature review: task type effects on L2 performance and DM use

Some previous studies have shown that different tasks can affect the oral performance of L2 learners (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999; Neary-Sundquist, 2008, 2013; Qiu & Cheng, 2021; Robinson, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011).

In the context of task-based instruction, tasks are defined as "activities that are meaning-focused and outcome-evaluated and have some sort of real-world relationship" (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 300). Given these characteristics, the concept of task has received significant attention in SLA and some researchers (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1999) have analyzed the effects of task type on the CAF of L2 oral production. Skehan and Foster (1999) considered the tasks that required more sequences of information as being more inherently structured. For example, one task in which speakers were required to tell others how to get home and turn off the oven was categorized as highly structured in this study, since the information needed by the speakers was all pre-determined and sequential (Skehan & Foster, 1999). Their studies also indicated that the degree of task structures had significant effects on L2 learner's fluency but not on accuracy nor complexity, which means that the different structured tasks could affect the speaker's performance on how to use language or emphasis meanings in their

oral production (Skehan & Foster, 1999).

Robinson (2001, 2005, 2007) also addresses that the task characteristics can affect the L2 learners' interaction and acquisition and the differentiating task complexity may have certain effect on the quality and quantity of L2 oral and writing production. In order to "(…) provide a rationale for how to sequence tasks in such a way as to lead to learning, and to different levels of L2 performance in language programs" (Robinson, 2011, p. 5), Robinson (2001, 2005, 2007) created the Cognition Hypothesis and the Triadic Componential Framework for pedagogic L2 task classification. According to this hypothesis, cognitive (cognitive demands), interactive (interactional demands) and learners' individual factors (ability requirements) are three important aspects that should be taken into account when describing the task complexity and he predicted that "(…) more cognitively complex tasks will prompt the use of more complex and accurate language to meet the increased demands they make, compared to simple counterpart tasks" (Robinson, 2011, p. 13).

Qiu & Cheng (2021) examined the effects of two types of tasks - two opinion-exchange tasks and two storytelling tasks – on L2 English learners' oral performance. These two types of tasks have been widely recommended by task-based scholars and it is believed that these two types have different levels of linguistic and cognitive demands according to the Cognitive Hypothesis mentioned before (Qiu & Cheng, 2021). Prabhu (1987) also suggested that tasks should be developed with gaps, such as reasoning gap, opinion gap or information gap. Under this perspective, storytelling task, as a kind of narrative task, can be classified as information gap task, in the meanwhile, opinion-exchange, as a kind of conversation task, can be seen as opinion gap task in which speakers are asked to exchange feeling or attitude about a certain topic. In this study (Qiu & Cheng, 2021), it was found that the L2 English learners performed better in terms of fluency and complexity on storytelling task, but the difference was not significant, otherwise, accuracy was not much affected by the types of tasks. Therefore, it may be assumed that the narrative task (e.g., a storytelling task) is more structured since it is based on a visual material (a cartoon strip), while the conversation task (opinion-exchange) task is less structured with more cognitive and interactional demands.

Regarding to the task effect on the L2 DM use, researches on relationship between task type and DMs are relatively limited and there is little consensus.

Németh and Kormos (2001) analyzed the rate of DM use and the frequency of argumentative moves on four different argumentation tasks in English and one in Hungarian, with Hungarian speakers of L2 English. The authors did not find any significant difference in the frequency of DMs across the four L2 tasks, while the use of DMs was significantly higher on task in the L1 than on those in English.[2]

[2] In this study, 24 students with L1 Hungarian were divided into three groups according to their average score on the proficiency test of L2 English (Group 1 with the upper-intermediate level, Group 2 with the intermediate level and Group 3 still with the upper-intermediate group. However, compared with Group 1, Group 3 was not only instructed with the traditional grammar translation method, but also was taught with the communicative method, which means that they were assumed to have some experience in argumentation tasks and all members of this group had a near-native level of French language). Moreover, since the authors intended to compare leaners' performance in the same type of task in L1 and L2 production, all of

Neary-Sundquist's (2008) study revealed that task type was one of the significant factors that affected L2 DMs frequency by examining the use of DMs by 17 English speakers with L2 German on different types of tasks (such as narration task and telephone task). According to the oral proficiency interviews in German, the participants were subdivided by the interviewer from the lowest proficiency level to the highest proficiency level and in this study, a drop of DMs use in the more structured task (which was a narration task) was detected as well.

Wei (2011) compared the performance of two group of Chinese learners of L2 English at different L2 proficiency levels on four tasks (narration, description, comparison, and apology).[3] Although it was found that the overall frequency and variety of DMs did not differ much across proficiency levels or across task types, both groups used task-specific DMs. For example, in the narration task temporal markers were commonly used to mark time or temporal sequence and in the description task, the DMs in this category occurred with a less frequency and were used to define general situation.

Neary-Sundquist (2013) established a relationship between task type and DMs by considering the later one as a subset of formulaic language. She analysed the use of DMs by L2 English speakers on four tasks that differed in degree of inherent structure: the news task and the personal task was considered less structured, while the passing information and telephone tasks were thought to be more structured. Results of this research showed that the frequency of DMs was significantly lower in the most structured task. Both studies showed that the speakers at different proficiency levels react differently across different task structures.

3. The study

Based on empirical evidence, the goal of the current research is to investigate the effect of two oral tasks (conversation task and narrative task) on the use of DMs in Portuguese by L1 Chinese speakers at different language proficiency levels. Thus, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. In what way does L2 proficiency of L1 Chinese speakers influence the use of DMs in Portuguese across tasks in terms of the frequency and variety of different DM classes?

2. How does oral task type affect the use of DMs by L1 Chinese speakers of L2 Portuguese in terms of the frequency and variety of different DM classes?

4 argumentation tasks were performed in L1 Hungarian and in L2 English, which included the following themes, extracurricular activities, class trip, social activities and decoration of the classroom.

[3] It should be noted that these 4 tasks have distinctive functions. For example, narration and description can be considered as complete communicative activities. However, in the case of the apology task, it may be thought to be only a part (one type of speech act) of certain communicative activity.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Twelve undergraduate students (n = 12) from mainland China at a Chinese university participated in this study. All of them are L1 Chinese speakers and aged between nineteen and twenty-two years old. They all studied in the Portuguese Language and Culture undergraduate program offered by the same university.

Before carrying on the current research, a sociolinguistic background questionnaire was applied to the participants and results show that, since all the participants were in the same undergraduate program, they shared the group of Portuguese language instructors (five from Mainland China, one from Portugal and one from Brazil) and the same study plan (which mainly includes courses like Writing and Speaking Portuguese, Grammar of Portuguese Language and Lusophone Culture and Literature).

Apart from this, all the Chinese speakers were asked about their social/natural contact with Portuguese outside the formal classroom settings[4] (Liu, 2016; Milroy, 2012). Results show that the participants in the present study almost did not have any extra natural exposure to Portuguese, except contact with their L1 Portuguese-speaking teachers in the classroom. Therefore, it can be assumed that there was no obvious difference in terms of the Chinese speakers' L2 learning experience and learning environment. Additionally, all the participants confessed that they were fully motivated to learn the Portuguese language and hoped to achieve a good proficiency level. In this sense, it can be considered that there existed a linguistic homogeneity with regards to the participants' sociolinguistic background (such as previous language knowledge, learning context and motivation in L2 learning).

Besides, participants were asked, at the end of the questionnaire, to evaluate their Portuguese proficiency according to the *Quadro Europeu Comum de Referência para as Línguas* (QECRL, Common European Framework of References for Languages) and they were divided into two experimental groups based on their self-evaluation: one group at A2 level (henceforth, Group 1) (n = 6, six females) and the other group at C1 level (n = 6, one male and five females).

4.2. Data collection

In order to analyze whether oral task type can influence the use of the DMs by the Chinese speakers at different levels, two instruments were adopted for the collection of oral data, a conversation task and a narrative task (storytelling).

When the two tasks were administrated, the effect of relationships between the researchers and the participants was taken into consideration (Milroy, Li & Moffatt, 1991). This means that in this study we guaranteed that the researchers were considered by the Chinese speakers as an 'insider' (for example, the two tasks were both administrated by

[4] The questions in this study were elaborated based on the bio-data questionnaire in Liu (2016).

their own language instructors and the participants in the same group were actually classmates) and therefore, they could yield the oral data based on a mutually beneficial relationship, avoiding any problems created by the "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1972).

4.2.1. Conversation task

In order to obtain natural oral data through interaction, some topics (See Appendix A) were indicated by the researchers such as opinions about the Portuguese Language undergraduate program of the participants' university and personal foreign language learning experience. Then, the Chinese speakers were asked to engage in conversation with another participant for between five to ten minutes to talk about these topics. The recording of this task was in a classroom and it should be noted that the participants were not informed about the aim of the study before.

4.2.2. Narrative task

After the conversation task, all the members of each group were required to watch the same video. The video was a three-minute fragment of American animation *Tom and Jerry*. To avoid any potential influence on participants, there was no dialogue nor narration voice in the video. After watching this animation fragment, the participants were told to retell the story within three minutes. Like the previous task, they were not told about the aim of the study. No instructions or elicitations were given by the investigator, and there was no interaction between the researcher and participant during the narrative task. The recording of the narratives also took place in a classroom where there was only one participant and one investigator at the same time.

4.3. Data analysis

The data included in total six conversations (three from Group 1 and three from Group 2) and twelve narratives (six from Group 1 and six from Group 2) and the total number of words was nearly 3914 Portuguese words (mean = 326.2). The transcription conventions in the current research follow Müller (2005) (See Appendix B) and some unrelated aspects such as vocal noises, quality and code-switching were not taken into consideration (Liu, 2013, 2017). All the DMs in the data were encoded by two researchers according to their main functions (cognitive, structural, referential and interpersonal), as mentioned above. When the researchers could not decide which function that one DM had in the data, the discrepancy was solved through discussing in order to achieve the best degree of consistency and accuracy. The following sentences extracted from two tasks show us some examples of the use of different DM classes across tasks.

(1) Conversation task data:

a. Uh... **acho que** os professores são bons (...) (Cognitive DM)
b. **Depois**, uh... traduzo para português (...) (Structural DM)
c. (...) **Por isso**, acho que é muito giro. (Referential DM)
d. (...) eu gosto mesmo de conhecer … uh... o Brasil, **não é**? (Interpersonal DM)

(2) Narrative task data:

a. **No início**, ele está com sono. (Structural DM)
b. (…) **mas** o gato não entendeu bem (...) (Referential DM)

Regarding the data processing, the non-parametric test – the Mann-Whitney test - was carried out because of the small size of the sample, aiming at detecting any significant difference between two oral task types and between two experimental groups across different L2 proficiency levels. Furthermore, following the previous study of Ament and Parés (2018), the Cohen's *d* value was also decided to be calculated: values between 0 and 0.5, between 0.5 and 0.8 and more than 0.8 were considered to be small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively.

5. Statistical evidence on the use of DMs by Chinese speakers

5.1. Overall use of DMs

In relation to the overall use of DMs produced by the participants at different proficiency levels in both tasks, descriptive statistics (mean and standard derivation, SD), the Mann-Whitney value (U-value), p value and Cohen's d value were calculated with respect to four items: words spoken, DMs spoken, DMs frequency and DMs variety in two oral tasks.

Table 1. Descriptive and statistical data for both tasks conducted by two groups

	Group 1		Group 2				
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**U-value**	**p-value***	**Cohen's d**
Words spoken	280.7	41.3	371.7	78.0	6.5	.0784	1.5
DMs spoken	37.2	15.0	35	8.6	15	.689	0.2
DMs frequency*	12.9	3.2	9.7	2.4	4	.03078	1.1
DM variety*	4.2	0.7	3.6	0.6	8	.12852	0.9

Frequency: number of tokens per 100 words.
Variety: number of types per 100 words.
p <.05 for all the comparisons in the current study.

As Table 1 shows, Group 1(lower proficiency group) produced less words (mean = 280.7, SD = 41.3) than the Group 2 (higher proficiency group) (mean = 371.7, SD = 78.0) in both conversation task and narrative task and according to the Mann-Whitney test, there was not any significant difference in the production of words (U = 6.5, p = .0784□□□Regarding the production of DMs, however, it was the Group 1 (mean = 37.2, SD = 15) that used more DMs than the Group 2 (mean = 35, SD = 8.6) when both tasks were analyzed together, but without any significant difference (U = 15, p = .689). When the frequency of DMs was assessed, results show that Group 1 (mean = 12.9, SD = 3.2) tended to produce a significantly higher frequency of DMs than Group 2 (mean = 9.7, SD = 2.4), with a large effect size (U =4, p = .03078, d = 1.1). As for the variety of DMs, Group 1 (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.7) also produced a wider variety than Group 2 (mean

= 3.6, SD = 0.6), although when tested for significance the results were not statistical (U = 8, p= .12852).

Apart from this, evident similarities were also detected in the choice of DMs. Table 2 shows that the top five DMs produced in two oral tasks were *e*, *acho que*, *sim*, *mas* and *porque*, in exactly the same order for both proficiency levels, which outnumbered considerably the number of the other DMs.

Table 2. Top five DMs produced by two groups

Group 1			Group 2		
DM	**Token**	**Frequency**	**DM**	**Token**	**Frequency**
e	96	5.7	e	71	3.2
acho que	31	1.8	acho que	25	1.1
sim	23	1.4	sim	22	1.0
mas	17	1.0	mas	19	0.9
porque	9	0.5	porque	11	0.5

5.2. Results of conversation task

Regarding the conversation task, descriptive statistics, as in the previous section, were calculated (see Table 3) and a Mann-Whitney test was then carried out to detect if there was any statistical significance when the Chinese speakers at different language levels used L2 DMs in this type of oral task (see Table 4).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the conversation task conducted by two groups

DMs		Group 1		Group 2	
		Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Cognitive	Tokens	6.5	3.5	5.5	3.4
	Frequency	3.4	1.7	2.2	1.3
	Variety	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.5
Structural	Tokens	9.8	5.5	8.8	1.8
	Frequency	5.3	2.6	3.7	1.3
	Variety	0.9	0.3	0.8	0.5
Referential	Tokens	4.8	2.5	6.3	3.4
	Frequency	2.6	1.1	2.3	0.7
	Variety	1.5	0.4	1.5	0.4
Interpersonal	Tokens	4.1	3.4	5.5	3.6
	Frequency	2.2	1.6	2.3	1.4
	Variety	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.3

Table 4. Comparison of groups – conversation task

DMS		U-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Cognitive	Tokens	14	.57548	0.3
	Frequency	8	.12852	0.8
	Variety	12.5	.42372	0.2
Structural	Tokens	18	.93624	0.2
	Frequency	11	.29834	0.8
	Variety	11	.29834	0.2
Referential	Tokens	13	.47152	0.5
	Frequency	15	.68916	0.3
	Variety	17	.93624	0
Interpersonal	Tokens	13.5	.52218	0.4
	Frequency	17.5	1	0.1
	Variety	15.5	.74896	0.2

As we can observe, the Group 1 produced more cognitive DMs than the Group 2 in the conversation task in terms of the total number of tokens (mean = 6.5, SD = 3.5, for Group 1; mean = 5.5, SD = 3.4, for Group 2), the frequency (mean = 3.4, SD = 2.2, for Group 1; mean = 2.2, SD = 1.3, for Goup 2) and the variety (mean = 0.9, SD = 0.4, for Group 1; mean = 0.8, SD = 0.5, for Group 2). However, the results of a Mann-Whitney test show that no significant difference was detected in the cognitive marker category.

As for DMs in the structural category, the Group 1 was found to produce more structural DMs (mean = 9.8, SD = 5.5) than the Group 2 (mean = 8.8, SD = 1.8) with a higher frequency (mean = 5.3, SD = 2.6, for Group 1; mean = 3.7, SD = 1.3, for Group 2) and a wider variety (mean = 0.9, SD = 0.3, for Group 1; mean = 0.8, SD = 0.5, for Group 2). Like the previous category, these results were not significant either.

The situation was totally different when we take into consideration the referential DMs. It was the Group 2 that produced more DMs of this type (mean = 4.8, SD = 2.5, for Group 1; mean = 6.3, SD = 3.4, for Group 2), but with a lower frequency (mean = 2.6, SD = 1.1, for Group 1; mean = 2.3, SD = 0.7, for Group 2) and the same variety (mean = 1.5, SD = 0.4, for Group 1; mean = 1.5, SD = 0.4, for Group 2), although the results were not statistically significant.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Group 2 used more interpersonal DMs in Portuguese (mean = 4.1, SD = 3.4, for Group 1; mean = 5.5, SD = 3.6, for Group 2) with a higher frequency (mean = 2.2, SD = 1.6, for Group 1; mean = 2.3, SD = 1.4, for Group 2), the results show that the Group 1 produced a wider variety (mean = 0.8, SD = 0.6, for Group 1; mean = 0.7, SD = 0.3, for Group 2) of interpersonal DMs in the conversation task. Nonetheless, none of these differences were not statistically significant.

5.3. Results of narrative task

Concerning the narrative task, descriptive statistics were calculated first (see Table 5) and secondly the data were analyzed statistically using the Mann-Whitney (see Table 6), like the previous analysis.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the narrative task conducted by two groups

DMs		Group 1		Group 2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Cognitive	Tokens	0	0	0	0
	Frequency	0	0	0	0
	Variety	0	0	0	0
Structural	Tokens	9.5	5.0	6.2	3.7
	Frequency	9.6	3.1	5.4	2.9
	Variety	2.9	0.6	2.1	0.4
Referential	Tokens	2.2	2.1	2.7	0.8
	Frequency	2.2	1.7	2.6	1.3
	Variety	1.1	0.5	1.8	0.9
Interpersonal	Tokens	0.17	0.4	0	0
	Frequency	0.1	0.4	0	0
	Variety	0.1	0.4	0	0

Table 6. Comparison of groups – narrative task

DMS		U-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Cognitive	Tokens	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Frequency	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Variety	n/a	n/a	n/a
Structural	Tokens	12	.37886	0.8
	Frequency	4.5	.03752	1.4
	Variety	4	.03078	1.6
Referential	Tokens	11.5	.33706	0.3
	Frequency	14	.57548	0.3
	Variety	9	.17384	1
Interpersonal	Tokens	15	.68916	1
	Frequency	15	.68916	1
	Variety	15	.68916	1

The descriptive statistics show that, during the narrative task, neither group produced cognitive DMs. As for the structural DMs, Group 1 produced more (mean = 9.5, SD = 5) than Group 2 (mean = 6.2, SD = 3.7), a difference that was not proved to be statistically significant. Besides, Group 1 was also found to produce a higher frequency (mean = 9.6,

SD = 3.1, for Group 1; mean = 5.4, SD = 2.9, for Group 2) and a wider variety (mean = 2.9, SD = 0.6, for Group 1; mean = 2.1, SD = 0.4, for Group 2) of structural DMs. Significant differences between the groups were then detected in the frequency and variety of structural DMs in the narrative task, with a large effect size (U = 4.5, p = .03752, d = 1.4, for frequency; U = 4, p = .03078, d = 1.6, for variety).

Turning to DMs in the referential category, the Group 2 showed a greater total number (mean = 2.2, SD = 2.1, for Group 1; mean = 2.7, SD = 0.8, for Group 2), a higher frequency (mean = 2.2, SD = 1.7, for Group 1; mean = 2.6, SD = 1.3, for Group 2) and a wider variety (mean = 1.1, SD = 0.5, for Group 1; mean = 1.8, SD = 0.9, for Group 2) of referential DM production than the Group 1, however, this difference failed to prove significant.

With regard to the use of interpersonal DMs in this task, only one occurrence was detected in the Group 1 and the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

5.4. Comparison of two tasks

In an attempt to address research question 2 - *How does oral task type affect the use of DMs by L1 Chinese speakers of EP in terms of the frequency and variety of different DM categories?*, descriptive statistics were calculated for the use of DMs across two different oral tasks regardless of language proficiency levels (see Table 7) and then a Mann-Whitney test was run for each DM category to detect statistical significance (see Table 8).

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for two tasks

DMs		Task 1		Task 2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Cognitive	Tokens	6	3.3	0	0
	Frequency	2.8	2.4	0	0
	Variety	0.9	0.4	0	0
Structural	Tokens	9.3	3.9	7.8	4.5
	Frequency	4.5	2.2	7.5	3.6
	Variety	0.8	0.4	2.5	0.6
Referential	Tokens	5.6	3	2.4	1.6
	Frequency	2.4	0.9	2.4	1.4
	Variety	1.5	0.4	1.4	0.8
Interpersonal	Tokens	4.8	3.4	0.1	0.3
	Frequency	2.2	1.5	0.1	0.2
	Variety	0.7	0.5	0.1	0.2

Table 8. Comparison of two tasks

DMS		U-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Cognitive	Tokens	0	< .00001	1
	Frequency	0	< .00001	1
	Variety	0	< .00001	1
Structural	Tokens	55.5	.35758	0.4
	Frequency	34.5	.03236	1
	Variety	0.5	< .00001	3.3
Referential	Tokens	23	.00512	1.3
	Frequency	66.5	.77183	0
	Variety	55	.34212	0.1
Interpersonal	Tokens	7	.00012	1.9
	Frequency	6.6	.00018	2
	Variety	11.5	.00054	1.6

As for the use of DMs in the cognitive category, the Chinese speakers did not produce any cognitive DM in the narrative task, while in the conversation task, the total number of cognitive DMs (mean = 6, SD = 3.3), their frequency (mean = 2.8, SD = 2.4) and variety (mean = 0.9, SD = 0.4) were obvious higher than in the narrative task. Therefore, the difference is apparently statically significant for all the variables (U =0, p <.00001, d = 1).

With respect to the use of structural DMS, the participants tended to produce more tokens in the first task (mean = 9.3, SD = 3.9) than in the second task (mean = 7.8, SD = 4.5), without any significant difference. However, they were found to use the DMs in this category with a high frequency (mean = 7.5, SD = 3.6) and a greater variety (mean = 2.5, SD = 0.6) in the narrative task than in the conversation task (mean = 4.5, SD = 2.2, for frequency; mean = 0.8, SD = 0.4, for variety). In addition, results show that there were significant differences in terms of these two variables with a large effect size (U = 34.5, p = .03236, d = 1, for frequency; U =0.5, p <.00001, d = 3.3, for variety).

Furthermore, the Chinese speakers produced significantly more referential DMs in the conversation task (mean = 5.6, SD = 3) than in the narrative task (mean = 2.4, SD = 1.6), with a large effect size (U = 23, p = .00512, d = 1.3). The frequency of this DM category remained the same (mean = 2.4, SD = 0.9, for task 1; mean = 2.4, SD =1.4, for task 2) in the two tasks, but the variety was wider in the first task (mean = 1.5, SD = 0.4) in comparison with the second task (mean = 1.4, SD = 0.8). However, results of these two variables measured were not statistically significant.

In the end, results show that, concerning the DMs in the interpersonal category, the total number, frequency and variety were all much higher in the conversation task (mean = 4.8, SD = 3.4, for tokens; mean = 2.2, SD = 1.5, for frequency; mean = 0.7, SD = 0.5, for variety) than in the narrative task (mean = 0.1, SD = 0.3, for tokens; mean = 0.1, SD = 0.2, for both frequency and variety) and the significant differences with a large effect

were detected (U = 7, p = .00012, d = 1.9, for tokens; U = 6.6, p = .00018, d = 2, for frequency; U = 11.5, p = .00054, d = 1.6, for variety).

6. Discussion

In this study, we have investigated the effect of task type on various aspects of the use of different DMs in L2 Portuguese by L1 Chinese speakers at different proficiency levels. Although there were not many statistically significant differences found between different task types or between different experimental groups, some findings are still quite worthwhile being discussed here.

Our first research question is how the Chinese speakers at different L2 Portuguese proficiency levels used the DMs across tasks. In general, the lower level L2 learners were found to produce a higher frequency and a wider variety of DMs when two different oral tasks were analyzed together. When it comes to the conversation task, the higher proficiency level learners only seemed to use more interpersonal DMs than the lower proficiency level learners in terms of the total number, frequency and variety of this DM category, although the differences are not sustained. And regarding to the narrative task, findings show that the higher proficiency level learners produced a higher number, frequency and variety of both structural and referential DMs than the lower proficiency level learners. Besides, it should be noted that the difference is proved to be statistically significant in the use of DMs in the referential category.

Therefore, the data in the current study indicate that the production of DMs, as a part of L2 pragmatic competence, is affected not only by the L2 proficiency level but also by the task type that they are asked to perform (Neary-Sundquist, 2013).

On the one hand, findings of the present research do not completely align with the claim made by many previous studies (e.g., Neary-Sundquist, 2013, 2014; Wei, 2011) that the frequency of DM "(...) increases gradually at first, increases more dramatically at the highest proficiency level and (...) the richness of these expressions increases gradually across proficiency levels (...)" (Neary-Sundquist, 2014, p. 656), for the use of some DM categories in L2 Portuguese does not stay correlated with the proficiency levels, especially when the variety of DMs is taken into account (with the significant difference detected).

On the other hand, the use of DMs is also constrained by the task type. In the narrative task, advanced L2 learners had a command of a greater variety of structural and referential DMs and tended to use them more frequently as a discourse strategy in an attempt to emphasize discourse information and help them become more fluent in L2, which actually corresponds to the findings from Müller (2005), Wei (2011) and Neary-Sunquist (2014). Nonetheless, in comparison with the narrative task, the conversation task is thought to be more complex, for it is less structured (Foster & Skehan, 1966; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Neary-Sunquist, 2013), requires more interaction between participants and cognitively more demanding according to the Cognition Hypothesis (CH) of adult second language acquisition and its related Triadic Componential Framework

(Robinson, 2001, 2005, 2007). In this case, it seemed the advanced L2 Portuguese learners obtain a better pragmatic competence only if the use of interpersonal DMs is taken into consideration (even so, no statistically significant difference is sustained).

Turning to the interpretation of the results in terms of the second research question – *how does oral task type affect the use of DMs by L1 Chinese speakers of L2 Portuguese*, the results of our study confirm the CH, which predicts that the accuracy, syntactic complexity and lexical variation of L2 oral production will increase when the complexity of a language task increase (Robinson, 1995, 2001). As we can observe, the Chinese speakers tended to use all of four different DM categories in the conversation task while in the narrative task, which is a less complex task, only two DMs classes (structural and referential) represented the vast majority in their oral production and even for the DMs in the structural and referential categories, the total number, frequency and variety were found to be lower than in the conversation task.[5]

Thus, the findings imply that there is a lack of development in L2 pragmatic competence for Chinese speakers of L2 Portuguese and even advanced learners are not fully successful in some specific tasks, such as the conversation tasks, which include more interactive and cognitive factors. These tasks seem to be one of the difficulties in all the stages of L2 development. As Félix-Brasdefer and Koike (2014) and Félix-Brasdefer (2017) indicate, L2 pragmatic competence is generally thought to be late-acquired, especially in formal context in which learners spend their time learning the target language in the classroom but are not provisioned with sufficient authentic L2 input based on real communicative needs. Moreover, the classroom setting usually does not emphasize the structured teaching of L2 pragmatics (Félix-Brasdefer & DiBartolomeo, 2021) and in the case of DMs, these linguistic expressions are often considered to be "secondary, extraneous and optional compared with the necessity of mastering categories such as verbs, nouns and prepositions" (Neary-Sundquist, 2014, p. 653).

Recently many studies have proved the effect of explicit instruction on L2 pragmatic development through the support offered by some empirical evidence (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Taguchi, 2015) and teaching strategies are designed in order to draw learner's attention to the target feature (Taguchi & Roever, 2017), maximize authentic pragmatic input (Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2014) and "incorporate elements of pragmatics that are appropriate to the students' proficiency level" (Félix-Brasdefer, 2017, p. 430). Some studies have proved that these strategies can be applied to the production and comprehension of L2 DMs (Fuentes-Rodríguez, 2018, for L2 Spanish; Yoshimi, 2001, for L2 Japanese).

However, the teaching of L2 Portuguese DMs is still under-studied (e.g., Pimentel & Silva, 2013) and the results of this study reveal the importance for L2 Portuguese teachers to ponder not only on the language proficiency level but also on different task types. As Pimentel & Silva underlined, the teaching of DMs in L2 Portuguese classroom settings can offer "(…) uma amostra autêntica das convenções socioculturais gravadas na língua

[5] However, it should be pointed that if we consider the typology of DMs in the present study, not all classes of DM have the same relevance in two tasks. For example, it can be expected that the participants would use the structural category with more frequency than the other categories when asked to perform a more structured task, narration task.

e, por outro lado, uma sensibilização ou consciencialização para a necessidade de adequação sociolinguística e domínio e uso adequado dos mecanismos reguladores do discurso conversacional" (Pimentel & Silva, 2013, p. 204). Therefore, further research could work on proposals for teaching DMs in L2 Portuguese through different pedagogical activities and test its usefulness in classroom settings.

7. Conclusion

Previous studies on SLA suggest that L2 speakers usually perform better in more complex tasks when the accuracy and complexity of L2 is taken into consideration and L2 learners at a higher proficiency level are generally thought to use DMs with a higher frequency and a wider variety than learners at a lower proficiency level in order to promote the fluency and cohesion of their L2 oral production, which can be seen as the development of pragmatic competence in L2.

However, although the current study has a relatively small sample size, the discussion of qualitative and quantitative results demonstrates that the proficiency level may only be the factor that influences the L2 oral production when the Chinese speakers of L2 Portuguese are asked to perform the narrative task. When a more complex task, the conversation task, is analysed, participants at both levels were found out to use the DMs with a higher frequency and a wider variety in comparison with their performance in the narrative task. However, under this circumstance, the L2 proficiency level seems to be an irrelevant factor.

This study aimed to shed some light on the use of DMs by L2 Portuguese speakers. However, further studies of this type should be based on a larger scale of participants (including both L1 and L2 Portuguese speakers) and more task types may be incorporated and investigated.

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Appendix A: Conversation task

1. Why did you choose to enroll in a degree program in Portuguese Language? How do you feel when studying in this graduate program in your university? What do you think of your professors, courses and study plan?
2. How is your experience in learning Portuguese language? What are the main difficulties that you have ever encountered when studying this language? Do you enjoy communicating in Portuguese?

Appendix B: Transcription conventions

Units	
Word	{space}
Truncated word	-
Speakers	
Speaker identity/turn start	:
Speech overlap	[ ]
Transitional continuity	
Final	.
Continuing	,
Appeal	?
Pauses	
Long, medium	...
Short	..
Non-word notations	
Filled pause	uh, um
Agreement (backchannel).	mhm, uh huh
Negation	nhn