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Rethinking Grammar Teaching: Dynamic Approach in Portuguese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This text critically examines traditional methodologies for teaching grammar in the context of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL). It proposes an alternative, eclectic approach, which can be used in any foreign language. Drawing on evidence from research and pedagogical practices, it highlights areas for improvement in current approaches, such as the decontextualization of linguistic structures and insufficient gradual progression in exercises. The paper suggests a teaching framework based on Motivating-Grammaring-Applying (MGA), aiming to embed grammar learning in meaningful, communicative contexts and develop grammatical proficiency beyond mere rule memorization. The MGA model foregrounds the importance of authentic texts, student-centric discovery learning, and the application of learned structures in diverse communicative tasks. The paper further emphasizes the potential of digital tools and the importance of integrating grammar learning with other linguistic and cultural skills. Ultimately, this study encourages PFL teachers to diversify their pedagogical strategies and reconsider the role of grammar teaching in language learning, aiming at empowering students for effective communication in real-world contexts.

Keywords: *Portuguese as a Foreign Language, Grammar, Active Learning, Discovery Approach*

Introduction

Language is a vibrant and dynamic cultural system because of its dynamic, emergent nature based on biological and social complexity. Consequently, grammar should not be viewed merely as a static set of rules, norms, parts of speech, or verbal paradigms but as part of this active cultural system. Language teaching and learning, therefore, should be a dynamic progression from “grammar to grammaring,” in line with Larsen-Freeman's perspective (2003). The scholar contends, “Grammar is much more about our humanness than some static list of rules and exceptions suggests. Grammar allows us to choose how we present ourselves

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to the world” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 142). From this viewpoint, grammar is an ongoing process – something we actively do rather than passively know.

Grammar teaching in first-language classrooms has spurred some reflection, primarily emphasizing the study of grammar as an active construction of knowledge. Numerous studies from the 20th century illustrate how children learn and acquire language, prompting a shift in the perception of grammar teaching.

In 1982, Bates and MacWhinney proposed three interconnected claims: first, communicative function drives language evolution across generations; second, it shapes language acquisition in children; and third, it determines language form in real-time conversations. These assertions underscore the importance of communicative contexts. However, an approach to grammar teaching cannot be solely based on communicative interaction with the language.

In Larsen-Freeman’s footsteps, certain shortcomings of the communicative approach have indicated a necessity to revisit grammar studies, seeing grammar teaching as a means to an end rather than as an end to language learning. Consequently, explicit teaching methods can also be beneficial, as long as they are not implemented in a traditional, memory-based manner nor simply as a means to build automatism. Instead, these methods should be utilized to explore novel pathways.

The reflections I will elaborate upon in this paper draw from the work of Larsen-Freeman and other scholars who have focused on grammar teaching. I will also consider my own experience teaching grammar to undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as to teachers (both native and non-native language speakers). This paper is also based on my own conclusions previously published (Xavier, 2012, 2013, 2021).

When considering studies conducted on teaching and learning Portuguese in China (Santos, 2014; Silva, 2014; for instance), we find that, generally, understanding grammar poses some of the most significant challenges. Conversely, according to Santos (2014), Chinese students of PLF believe that grasping grammar necessitates understanding primarily metalanguage and rules of use – factors they value more than practicing the language through communicative tasks. While it is true that success in communicative tasks is impossible without knowledge of usage rules, understanding the metalanguage does not directly contribute to language use success, which is, in the final analysis, the ultimate goal of language learning.

Given this, what can be done to improve the achievement of this linguistic communication goal through teaching grammar in Portuguese as a Foreign Language? Undeniably, studying grammar is a critical step in learning a foreign language; one must comprehend the rules that govern the language. However, these rules are remembered with regular practice via grammar activities and written and oral language use. As Vigner (2004, p. 101) asserts: “On ne peut produire spontanément des formes correctes dans une langue sans l’acquisition des règles qui en organisent la production” [We cannot spontaneously produce correct forms in a language without acquiring the rules that organize its production].

With this in mind and considering the recommendations of various linguistic methods, I propose an eclectic use of approaches. This strategy emphasizes specific rules that contribute to the linguistic proficiency of foreign language learners by enhancing their understanding of grammatical structures.

Background: Grammar Teaching and its Shortcomings

The traditional method of translation and grammar teaching still garners support. As a legacy of classical language teaching, this is a traditional, deductive approach wherein the teacher provides expository grammar lessons or works with students on translations. This method positions the teacher, rather than the student, at the center of teaching and learning, with the expectation primarily being that students memorize rules.

The structuralist view of linguistics steered language study towards the observation of linguistic phenomena. From this perspective, teachers impart language and do not instruct about language, meaning that metalinguistic knowledge, the ability to discuss language, is undervalued. Conversely, the audiolingual methods of the 1950s and 1960s prioritized speaking and listening skills, and later, reading and writing. The emphasis was on memorizing dialogues or texts to facilitate the creation of linguistic pattern automatisms.

Chomsky's introduction of generative grammar, after the 1960s, shifted attention toward a comprehension-based linguistic approach. However, it was particularly from the 1970s onwards, with the rise of communicative methods, that grammar teaching came under significant scrutiny. With the advent of the communicative approach, the learning focus shifted towards meaning and interaction between subjects. Language is a tool for the expression of meanings; interaction and communication are its main goals, and these goals are reflected in the way that languages are designed. Along with its grammatical and structural features, language also consists of categories of functional and communicative meaning.

Language lessons, therefore, became organized around topics, tasks, projects, semantic notions, or pragmatic functions, but not centered on grammar. The skills prioritized included writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

Drawing from research on first language acquisition, Krashen (1985) contends that grammar has no place in a second language classroom, asserting that studying the formal aspects of language could inhibit the development of communicative competence. Krashen and his adherents propose that it's enough for learners to engage in extensive oral and written comprehension activities in a rich and diverse environment. Thus, reading and listening are emphasized. In the initial phase, learners take a passive role, merely exposed to this environment. Accordingly, Krashen and his followers suggest that one doesn't need to learn grammar to become proficient in a second language. They argue that grammar exercises in the classroom deter learners from authentic communication. By focusing on language structures, the significance of communication is relegated. In this view, teachers should avoid grammar exercises and refrain from correcting students' errors so as not to hinder their learning. In contrast, for some teachers, grammar teaching is reduced to the tiresome practice of structural exercises (Germain, 1996).

Nonetheless, research indicates that without explicit rule instruction, there's a tendency to overgeneralize rules (Germain, 1996). On the other hand, an overemphasis on content, while neglecting formal aspects, can contribute to linguistic fossilization. In other words, linguistic deviations or errors continue to exist and contribute to the reinforcement of incorrect linguistic forms, if they are not corrected.

Krashen's contributions facilitated a reassessment of how second languages are acquired. In alignment with Krashen, Weaver (1996, p. 55) suggests, albeit less radically, that: "in

second language acquisition as well as in first language acquisition, grammatical correctness may be best achieved by focusing on fluency first, rather than on grammar itself". Weaver advocates for reading as a way to develop fluency and extend the understanding and usage of grammatical structures. In terms of the development of grammatical skills, Weaver emphasizes writing: "engage students in writing, writing, and more writing" (Weaver, 1996, p. 141). This focus on writing competency is due to its benefits such as helping to develop sentences, use punctuation correctly, ensure concordance, utilize discourse connectors, comprehend differences in language registers, and enrich vocabulary through synonyms.

Weaver (1996, p. 146) further suggests "learning seems to be most enduring when the learners perceive it as useful or interesting to them personally, in the here and now". Thus, for language development, it's essential to: expose students to good, syntactically and lexically challenging literature; facilitate reading and listening to literature, which promotes the acquisition of reading, writing, and speaking structures; teach students grammatical aspects that can enhance their writing within contexts they've produced; provide terminology that is only absolutely necessary; explain grammatical aspects that help improve texts, for instance, structures that enable sentence combining or expansion.

This communication-focused approach can be contrasted with systematic grammar teaching, which necessitates an analytical-reflexive analysis of language. Here, the teacher's role involves elucidating the rules and regularities of the target language, significant structures, and the systematic relationships that connect them (Germain, 1996, p. 434). However, adhering to these principles doesn't necessarily imply a reversion to the grammar-translation method. I do not advocate for a form of grammar teaching that is in itself, out of context, and separated from language use and meaningful communicative situations. Therefore, "pour un maximum d'efficacité, il semble bien que l'enseignement doive être autant centré sur le message et sur les emplois de la langue que sur la forme linguistique" [for maximum effectiveness, teaching should focus as much on the message and the uses of the language as on the linguistic form] (Germain, 1996, p. 434).

Indeed, systematic grammar teaching should ideally be coupled with communicative activities and the application of previously acquired knowledge. A balance should be struck between exposure to communicative activities and opportunities to practice acquired knowledge.

In the late 20th century, a more cognitive and interactive approach emerged, known as "consciousness-raising grammar tasks" (Fotos & Ellis, 1991). This method, grounded in communicative perspectives, aims to develop an awareness of how language relates to everyday activities, the ability to reflect on social relationships, and an understanding of language as a distinct phenomenon. Grammar is taught through induction, cognition, and interaction, with the goal of leading learners to discover the underlying rules of language.

This method aligns with the discovery approach (Chartrand, 1996; Lomas, 2006; Duarte, 2008), which positions the student as a "language scientist" who explores how language structures work. This approach includes several stages, such as observing phenomena, manipulating statements and formulating hypotheses, verifying hypotheses, formulating laws or rules and establishing procedures, practicing and reinforcing knowledge through exercises, and evaluating and reinvesting knowledge (Chartrand, 1996).

Instead of limiting students' learning to a few linguistic items through practice exercises, they should be given ample opportunities to discover how the language functions and to systematize their learning. Lomas (2006, p. 214) defines "discovery learning" as "learning in which students construct their knowledge autonomously and without teacher intervention. This type of learning requires an active pursuit of knowledge through inductive or hypothetical-deductive methods." Thus, learning happens through discovery, which triggers cognitive processes and fosters learner autonomy. Grammar learning, therefore, becomes inductive, rather than deductive, and less likely to be acquired by accumulating grammatical rules. This approach can be successfully applied in PFL teaching. However, the use of an eclectic method is advocated here, combining the strengths of various methods used thus far. Each method "represents a partial truth" (Filho, 1997, p. 15), and it's the teacher's responsibility to integrate them in a way that suits the pedagogical objectives at any given time.

One vital consideration is the diverse levels of language learning when teaching a foreign language. The approaches and tasks employed must be appropriate to a student's proficiency level. For instance, an A1 level beginner, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2020), should not be expected to correct errors related to more complex linguistic elements like the subjunctive mood, in Portuguese.

Studying a foreign language involves discovering the unique features of the new language, which can differ significantly from a learner's mother tongue. Learners might tend to unconsciously apply the rules of their native language or any other foreign language they know to the target language, although such direct translation and transference can be incorrect. This underscores the need for learners to be aware of the distinct differences between languages, regardless of the common linguistic features that link them. When dealing with languages as different as Portuguese and Mandarin, for instance, the task is more challenging.

The ideal scenario is for the teacher to equip learners with tools that empower them to be active participants in their learning process – to learn how to learn. As Courtyllon (2002, p. 107) states, "Apprendre une langue, c'est s'approprier un "comment faire pour" comprendre, parler ou écrire, et non pas de nouvelles connaissances (savoir faire)" [Learning a language is appropriating a 'how to' understand, speak, or write, not just acquiring new knowledge (know how)]. Consequently, students should engage in questioning and understanding the language rather than merely memorizing rules.

The role of the teacher is thus substantial, starting with the choice of materials and methodologies. A language teacher should focus on identifying language patterns, promoting their use after systematization, insisting on comprehensive descriptions of Portuguese grammar, and fostering teaching practices that leverage language regularities and manipulations. The ultimate aim should be to transform students into thoughtful, analytical, and critical individuals who can utilize grammar for communication purposes.

Teaching Materials

Despite advancements in language pedagogy, many educational resources and methods have not adapted sufficiently. Some common issues in PFL textbooks include: (i) decontextualized examples. Many textbooks and language manuals offer activities with decontextualized

examples that fail to reveal the multiple possibilities of language structure. Decontextualized examples do not provide students with an understanding of how language structures function in realistic, meaningful contexts. Another problem is (ii) lack of progression: Some exercises may be overly simplistic and lack a gradual progression that leads students from basic to more complex understanding and usage. Another issue to take into consideration is (iii) inauthentic texts. Authentic texts provide valuable context and real-world applications of language structures. However, many resources rely on inauthentic texts, depriving learners of opportunities to understand how the language is used in practical, authentic contexts. An additional characteristic of some textbooks is (iv) insufficient practice opportunities. Some textbooks may provide only a single exercise for a particular grammatical phenomenon. This limited practice may hinder the development of automaticity in language use. Also noticed in PFL textbooks is the (v) unchanged methodologies and non-monitoring development of language. Despite the passage of time and advancements in language teaching, many textbooks continue to reprint older editions without adapting their activities to reflect more effective methods of teaching grammar. Finally, (vi) the overemphasis on practice over usage is another problem of these materials. Many textbooks adopt a “presentation-practice-production” triad, focusing mainly on practice rather than activities encouraging active language use. While this traditional form may support the creation of automaticity, it doesn’t necessarily contribute to linguistic competence.

On the other hand, the online materials also present several issues. While numerous online resources exist for language learning, many of them share the same problems as textbooks, including issues of decontextualization and a lack of communicative practice. Chapelle and Jamieson (2008) noted that grammar activities, for English language teachers, on many websites are limited, often focusing on recognition at the sentence level rather than meaningful production.

Addressing these challenges is critical to enhancing the effectiveness of grammar teaching and fostering more meaningful, effective language learning. This calls for a re-evaluation and redesign of current language teaching materials and methodologies, with a focus on contextual and communicative practice that reflects authentic language use, bringing grammar to life (Dean, 2007). Therefore, the main limitations in printed textbooks and online materials, especially in grammar teaching, are decontextualized exercises and inflexible linear sequences.

Many traditional language activities, such as filling in verb grids or isolated sentences, do not provide a meaningful context for learners. These decontextualized exercises often rely on students’ memorization skills rather than their understanding of how to use language structures in realistic communication scenarios. As some authors (Croovitz & Devereaux, 2016; Benjamin & Berger, 2010; Xavier, 2021) have argued, embedding grammar teaching within communicative contexts can enhance students’ understanding and retention of language structures.

Traditional textbook sequences may not adequately consider students’ individual learning needs or readiness, presenting inflexible linear sequences. As Larsen-Freeman (2003) notes, although pedagogical sequences tend to be linear, the process of learning grammar is not. Thus, there is a mismatch between the structure of some language teaching resources and the dynamic, non-linear nature of language acquisition.

Moving forward, it would be beneficial to adopt a more context-rich, flexible, and learner-centered approach to grammar teaching. This could involve using authentic texts with a clear communicative function, providing opportunities for meaningful language use, and adopting a more flexible sequencing of instruction that aligns with learners' individual needs and stages of language development. This approach would also involve recognizing and working with the non-linear, dynamic nature of language learning, allowing for revisiting and reinforcing grammar points as necessary based on students' evolving understanding and skills.

The Motivating-Grammaring-Applying (MGA) Model: An Overview

I concur with Larsen-Freeman's view (2003), where she asserts that grammar is a skill, akin to reading, writing, speaking, and listening, rather than an isolated area of knowledge. I would extend this perspective to posit that grammar is an ability that underpins the other four skills, without which they cannot develop. Accordingly, teaching cannot solely involve asking students to memorize rules, since, as Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 13) maintains, "Skill development takes practice, and learning grammar takes practice."

In a grammar class, simply explaining the rules falls short of comprehensive teaching. On one hand, grammar rules "provide students with security, something to hold onto. They provide useful guidance about how a language is structured" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 14). On the other hand, the precision provided by rules is not immediately related to the meaningfulness or appropriateness of use. Moreover, rules often have exceptions and can be fairly abstract (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Therefore, merely explaining grammar rules does not guarantee their internalization: "teaching doesn't necessarily cause learning – not in any direct way" (Thornbury, 1999, p. 153).

Three fundamental elements permeate teaching and learning process: the teacher, the student, and the teaching and learning environment (which includes, at a minimum, teaching content, pedagogical approaches, instructional materials, classroom synergies, and the physical environment itself). A "point of engagement" is essential for learning to occur, a state "when students are focused, relaxed, and attentive" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 21). Concurrently, as Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 21) emphasizes, "We will need to find a way to make grammar practice meaningful."

Studies indicate that teachers hold varied beliefs and attitudes (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Roeder et al., 2020, for instance). There appears to be a consensus regarding the importance of imparting "explicit rules, including exceptions, and giving a lot of examples" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 12). Indeed, the emphasis placed on grammatical reflection should derive from a well-structured and progressive process of observing and systematizing the language's main paradigms and patterns. The objective of this process is to enable learners to better apply their acquired knowledge to speaking, reading, and writing. Teaching grammar extends beyond just providing labels and rules for students to memorize; it requires deeper exploration and understanding.

We can take into account some integral components of grammatical reflection such as:

a) Teachers should provide well-structured data that demonstrate a pattern or behavior in the language, inviting students to discover these patterns or correlations. This approach transforms the learning experience into a journey of discovery.

b) Teachers must provide students with opportunities to apply their newly acquired knowledge in various activities. This practice allows students to reinforce and internalize what they've learned.

c) The process should culminate with an evaluation of what the students have learned. This assessment should take into account the levels of knowledge, understanding, and application.

The suggested approach to teaching grammar, therefore, involves analyzing the actual use of the language. Simply transmitting concepts won't address learning challenges; students must engage in personal practice and critical analysis of language. Ideally, students should start with a definition, test its validity, and determine when and why it applies to a given text. This approach encourages students to think about concepts and reinvent them based on a textual grammar centered on meaning. The textual meaning determines the criteria for applying language rules.

Within this textual perspective, contextualized and confined by a dialectical linguistic analysis, the process of the socio-historical construction of language is explored. This approach nurtures students' understanding of language as a dynamic, ever-evolving system shaped by social and historical forces, further enriching their language learning experience.

As I have consistently asserted (Xavier, 2012, 2013, 2021), an eclectic approach to grammar teaching that exposes students to various types of contexts and texts is desirable. I propose a pedagogical framework for grammar teaching, labeled as *Motivating-Grammaring-Applying* (MGA), as an alternative to the conventional model "Presentation-Practice-Production" (PPP).

1. *Motivating*:

Prioritizing meaningful content and tasks enhances students' comprehension and production abilities. The initial stage aims to stimulate an interest in linguistic phenomena through activities such as reading, writing, and listening. Students are introduced to linguistic structures in authentic contexts through various mediums like images, texts, songs, short films, etc., aligning with Weaver's (1998, p. 265) claim that "basic skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and spelling are best learned from text-based or communicative tasks". Neuroscience studies (Damásio, 1995, 1999, 2012; Mora, 2013) in recent decades have shown the importance of motivation in the learning process. This phase aims to create a platform to motivate students to learn a grammar phenomenon.

2. *Grammaring*:

Teaching, as Larsen-Freeman (2003) underscores, is a complex process that cannot be reduced to a repetitive set of procedures expecting consistent results. Regarding grammar teaching, *grammaring* represents "*one of the dynamic linguistic processes of pattern formation in language, which can be used by humans for making meaning in context-appropriate ways*" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 142 – emphasis in original). Despite comprehension, production might not be always assured. *Grammaring*, as conceptualized by Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 143), is "the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately". It emphasizes grammar as a dynamic process and skill. Students are guided to identify patterns, discern regularities, and formulate rules using

discovery-based approaches, drawing on the contextualized examples provided in the motivating phase. This learner-centric, context-based method discourages uncontextualized and mechanical learning, favoring meaningful engagement (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

3. *Applying*:

This stage calls for the application of acquired knowledge, transitioning from structural exercises to sentence and text activities. The objective is to consolidate learning through the usage of new grammatical structures in reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities. In the words of Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 118), “students must learn to make the appropriate choice according to given contextual constraints,” underscoring the significance of practice and frequency in meaningful contexts.

In agreement with MacWhinney (2000), the fundamental purpose of language is communication. MacWhinney (2000, p. 3) explains that “the comprehension and production of sentences are grounded on a process of perspective-taking that operates on five distinct levels: object perception, actions, spatio-temporal reference frames, predicate chains, and social frames”.

While these three stages might not necessitate explicit metalinguistic explanations, they should invariably inform pedagogical activities. Additionally, Larsen-Freeman’s (2003) notion of “horizontal planning” must be considered, acknowledging the nonlinearity of learning and the potential efficacy of practice spread across numerous lessons and activities.

Let’s take an example in Portuguese language. Introducing linguistic phenomena like the Imperfect Past Tense of the Indicative should start with structural exercises or isolated sentences. While rote memorization may facilitate the formation of this tense, it does not ensure its practical application, especially for Chinese students learning Portuguese. Hence, understanding contexts of use from the onset is vital. In a previous publication (Xavier, 2021), I demonstrated an application of this teaching framework for A1 students of PFL, using Kell Smith's Brazilian song, “Era uma vez,” [Once upon a time] to teach the Imperfect Past Tense of the Indicative. Leveraging the song, we can incorporate listening comprehension activities, wherein missing verb forms in the Imperfect Past Tense from the song lyrics could be identified and filled in. In addition, reading and writing exercises could be designed around a story that ties in with an animated film used in the music video, for instance.

In the *grammaring* phase, we can direct students’ attention to the verb forms initially omitted from the song lyrics. To expand the analytical *corpus*, additional texts related to the song’s theme can be introduced. Using these authentic resources, students can investigate the three verb conjugations used in the Imperfect Past Tense, thereby identifying regularities. Consequently, students are engaged in discerning Imperfect Past Tense verbs, identifying similarities and differences among forms, recognizing regularities, identifying conjugations, formulating the rule of this verb tense formation, and understanding its contextual usage.

I contend that, even in the early stages of learning Portuguese as a Foreign Language, instructional resources like songs, literary texts, multimodal texts, or, in other words, authentic texts can be utilized effectively, given their appropriateness concerning the learners’ proficiency level, text length, and syntactic and vocabulary complexity. The usage of these materials underscores the necessity for diverse linguistic tools and the viability of a

heuristic approach (Chartrand, 1996). Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 122) rightly notes that while “practice activities will not always be authentically communicative,” they should ideally “work towards authenticity.”

Finally, in the application phase, students might complete structural exercises to build automaticity. Additionally, extensive reading, speaking, and writing activities are encouraged. Considering the themes of the texts used in the previous phases, new activities based on Portuguese texts could be introduced, thematically and formally connecting aspects of Chinese culture to promote intercultural learning. Learners exhibit diverse learning rates and styles. Some students thrive with explicit language teaching, while others benefit from experiential teaching. Inductive teaching fosters active, self-directed learners. Concurrently, the grammatical content and learning objectives also shape the teaching approach to be adopted.

In one word, linguistic polyphony marks language, demanding learner awareness of language properties in their dual (typically semantic) senses. Thus, I advocate that grammar should be taught using an approach that starts from observing the target language to discovering its inherent regularities. How should this journey be embarked upon? The strategies could be diverse and combined, including games and information and communication technologies (ICT) use, with an emphasis on contextualization, linguistic reflection, and justifying the relevance of ongoing learning. The teaching and learning process of grammar would gain with the employment of methods and activities that allow for rule creation and consolidation, rooted in the discovery of regularities in Portuguese linguistic phenomena, employing authentic texts (from newspapers, internet sources, literary works, songs, etc.), and incorporating digital tools. Throughout the teaching-learning process, an effort should be made to integrate grammar with other language domains: reading, writing, speaking, sociocultural aspects, and more.

Conclusion

Traditional methods of grammar study facilitate mechanical learning, which may yield satisfactory short-term results but need to improve in enabling in-depth exploration of grammatical phenomena or fluid use of grammatical structures in communicative contexts. Until the 1970s, the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods dominated language teaching. From the 1970s onward, communicative methods started to gain traction, and grammar study was progressively sidelined. The 1990s heralded a critical perspective on communicative methods, permitting the introduction of novel approaches, such as “consciousness-raising grammar tasks” in teaching (Fotos & Ellis, 1991).


The objective in grammar teaching is not mastering the rule itself; it should naturally emerge from a set of examples where it is applied. An overly theoretical interest in grammar estranges it from its everyday applications. Hence, it is crucial to inspire teachers of Portuguese as a Foreign Language to consider multiple approaches to grammar teaching, utilizing various resources to use grammar to enhance oral and written language proficiency.

Competencies ranging from intercultural awareness to digital literacy have become essential in the 21st century. Consequently, the focus should be on the skills developed through language learning and how teaching methodologies can accommodate these. I emphasize learning grammar in a contextualized manner because, in addition to grammatical

learning, the text facilitates vocabulary acquisition, practical training, and exposure to textual organization and cultural aspects. In this way, we aim to “promote the positive association between grammar and empowerment” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 142). However, to achieve this, “we must work to change what students think grammar is” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 153).

In conclusion, teaching grammar is a complex task that calls for much more than the repetitive use of established methods. It must take into account how language use is dynamic and context-dependent. This paper has argued for a shift from the traditional, decontextualized, rule-focused approach to teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) to an eclectic approach that emphasizes grammaring, or the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. This method advocates for integrating grammar instruction with developing other language competencies, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It also combines discovery learning with purposeful tasks and activities using authentic texts as a starting point. Through the proposed Motivating-Grammaring-Appling (MGA) model, grammar teaching promotes the development of communicative proficiency rather than only rote rule memorization. Additionally, PFL teachers would benefit from using the opportunities provided by digital tools and from being aware of the necessity of combining grammar teaching with improving cultural competence. As a result, I argue for an eclectic approach that combines the best features of diverse methodologies to build a holistic, student-centered, and contextually sensitive approach to grammar education. Grammar instruction should equip students to use Portuguese (or any other foreign language) confidently and appropriately in real-world circumstances.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

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