

## **Beliefs and Practices towards Teaching and Learning Grammar: A Multicase Study**

*Patrícia Santos Ferreira*  
*Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa*

Article received 8 June 2013; accepted 1 December 2014; final version 14 May 2014

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This text presents a multi-case study focused on 5th and 6th grades' (10 - 12 years-old students) teachers' beliefs and practices towards the process of teaching and learning grammar. Current practices of grammar instruction are connected to prescriptive approaches, outdated, disconnected from linguistic theory, and ineffective at improving communicative skills. Research has revealed that to promote real changes in practices it is important to act upon all the dimensions of teachers' professional knowledge, including tacit phenomena, like beliefs, by means of professional training and development. The recent modification of the Portuguese Language curriculum reflects a new paradigm in grammar teaching, based upon a constructivist approach. Therefore, it is relevant to know how teachers implement it and how what they think about teaching grammar affects their practices. Data analysis revealed inconsistencies between beliefs and practices, leading to the conclusion that teachers have difficulties facing the required adjustment to the emerging paradigm.

### **Introduction**

This text presents a multicase study, of exploratory nature, focused on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' (10 to 12 years-old students) teachers' beliefs and practices towards the process of teaching and learning grammar. The subject of teaching and learning grammar has been widely debated, and is still a prolific issue, mainly because teaching practices still don't reflect the change in paradigm observed in this field (Mohamed, 2006). This set of changes is taking place all over the western world and implies an inductive approach to grammar, recognising that students play a decisive role in their learning process through reflexion and discovery, in small steps (e.g., Camps & Zayas, 2006; Nadeau & Fisher, 2006; Tisset, 2005).

Although research has shown the lack of effectiveness in the traditional way of teaching grammar, most teachers still use strategies coherent with a deductive or expositive approach to grammar, delegating to students the role of simple receivers of rules, structures and paradigms to be incorporated by training (Mohamed, 2006). In Portugal, the situation seems to be similar. On the one hand, the results of a study on teachers' positioning towards Portuguese Language teaching (Duarte, 2008) have

revealed that most teachers declared to favour strategies of a deductive nature. On the other hand, the serious difficulties of students in exercises involving grammar knowledge or its explicitation, and their persistency through different cycles, evidenced by several studies (Delgado Martins et al., 1987 quoted in Costa, 2009; Ucha, 2007; Duarte & Rodrigues, 2008; Costa, 2008), have added ingredients to the debate on the factors which could explain this scenery.

Despite the complexity of learning and of the different influences involved in the process, the transformation of teachers' practices is definitely a relevant issue to this problem. Research has revealed the influence of deeper and tacit phenomena on teacher's behaviour, enhancing the need to discern these implicit aspects in order to make them explicit and to act upon them by means of professional training and development. These psychological and social phenomena, such as beliefs, correspond to the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe and think" (Borg, 2003, p. 81).

The study here presented was conducted taking into account the double dimension of teachers' actions (Zabalza, 1994), in which thinking and behaviour are involved. Data were collected through class observation and interviews, attempting to identify some of the Portuguese Language teachers' beliefs and practices towards teaching and learning grammar through the analysis of their actions and their speech.

In the school year that preceded data collection, a new Portuguese Language curriculum (Reis, 2009) entered into force. The metalanguage used in the present curriculum is harmonious with the *Terminological Dictionary* (TD), an official resource that defines the grammar terminology to be developed in all the levels of teaching up until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This represents an important milestone in grammar teaching in Portugal as it allows the uniformity of the terminology used in the field. In fact, the previous inexistence of a common grammar metalanguage has frequently been indicated as one of the possible justifications for the poor-quality work observed in the field of the teaching of grammar (Duarte, 2000).

In the current curriculum, the competency which integrates the development of grammar knowledge is nominated as *Explicit Language Awareness* (ELA), differently from the designation used in the previous one. This change of designations is a reflection of deeper changes that go far beyond the choice of words. Costa, Cabral, Santiago & Viegas (2011) present the main differences between both conceptions: i)

the curriculum of 1991 (DGEBS, 1991) doesn't establish a coherent relation between the implicit knowledge of students and the role of grammar teaching, while in the curriculum of 2009 this implicit knowledge is considered as the root of and the starting point for most activities; ii) in the perspective of the curriculum of 1991, the work is oriented towards the correction of errors during communication activities, while in the present curriculum the work is oriented towards the detection of regularities of the language with mobilization to several contexts after systematization; iii) in the previous curriculum the contents are organised as a result of the context of communicative use, while in the current curriculum contents are organised according to the specific situation of mobilization of grammar knowledge and to the stages of the development of linguistic knowledge.

Considering the need to implement the new curriculum, it was relevant to ascertain if teachers' practices and beliefs regarding teaching and learning grammar are coherent with the guidelines of the document. To put these guidelines into practice teachers must implement teaching and learning paths distant from traditional and expositive practices and create a structural framework of mobilization of grammar knowledge into other competencies.

### **Overview of the research and its purpose**

The work was developed through a multicase study, incorporated in the interpretive paradigm, focusing on six Portuguese, native language, teachers and on six 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grades classes, from three schools in the district of Lisbon. Data were collected in the academic year 2011 – 2012, attempting to: i) discern 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' beliefs towards the process of teaching and learning grammar; ii) perceive 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' views regarding the use of metalanguage; iii) identify 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' views regarding ELA; iv) categorise 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' practices regarding teaching and learning grammar; v) detect 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' needs for training as far as teaching and learning grammar are concerned.. These general investigation goals have guided the collection, the treatment, the analysis and the triangulation of data.

Taking the importance of studying both behaviour and thinking into account in order to understand what teachers do and why they do it (Borg, 2003; Zabalza, 1994),

the main techniques used for data collection were direct observation and interview.

According to Camps:

Las entrevistas (...) hacen emerger lo que los profesores piensan sobre sus prácticas y lo que dicen que hacen; este tipo de tareas se complementan con las observaciones del trabajo en el aula y en muchas ocasiones con la autoconfrontación, lo cual permite profundizar en el análisis de las creencias y puede incidir en la revisión de las mismas prácticas. (Camps, 2012, p. 30)

Six grammar lessons were observed in May and June 2012, of about ninety minutes each, using an open record in which an exhaustive description of the lesson was written. Data were later categorised in seven fields: i) grammar contents; ii) unit of contextualization (text, sentence, word); iii) type of activity; iv) use of metalanguage; v) interaction; vi) organization of students; and vii) resources.

Each teacher was interviewed twice. The first set of interviews was conducted immediately after the observed lessons, focusing on the specific contents, materials practices and events observed in the session, and the second was conducted approximately a month after the observation had taken place, integrating questions related to: i) the participants' past learning experiences as students; ii) their conception of learning and teaching grammar; iii) their practices as teachers; iv) their use of metalanguage and the TD; v) the curricular documents; vi) and professional development. Both sets of interviews were semi-structured, audio recorded, transcript and subject to content analysis.

In the following section we will present the results and the conclusions formulated through the crossing of the data obtained from both techniques, the supporting theory and the investigation goals initially defined.

### **Teachers' beliefs**

Considering the first goal defined, *discern 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' beliefs towards the process of teaching and learning grammar*, we conclude that all the participant teachers recognise relevance to grammar knowledge. Similarly, all the teachers have indicated the influence of this knowledge on the success on other written and oral competencies. However, none of the teachers indicated the concept of mobilization to other contexts of use, which is one of the guidelines that support the new Portuguese Language curriculum. According to the analysis of their speech, the

teachers' considerations don't seem to be informed opinions, based on the results of recent research, which evince the interdependence between metalinguistic development and other competencies (Gombert, 1990; Sim-Sim, Duarte & Ferraz, 1997, Sim-Sim, 1998). On the contrary, the interviewed teachers' considerations, highly focused on the correction of errors and on the *correct* uses of the written or spoken language, seem to represent the continuity of one of the dimensions of the traditional conception of grammar, the grammar of the written language, of prescriptive nature.

Apart from one of the participants (T1), teachers have revealed a positive link to Portuguese Language since childhood, which was evidenced by a good rapport with the subject, particularly with grammar, as students. All teachers declared their motivation to teach grammar and only one of them (T1) said that her students weren't motivated to learn it.

Apart from one of the teachers (T5), who remembers diversified strategies and resources during the course of learning grammar when she was a student, the participants declared to have been taught grammar through the presentation and the repetition of contents and exercises, in an expositive way. They also recalled the focus on a memory-based learning and declared that the teaching methods followed by their teachers were quite similar. Apart from one of the participants (T1), teachers recognised the influence of the way they have learnt grammar on the way they currently teach it.

Teachers pointed out the existence of modifications on their scientific approach to grammar during their professional activity, mainly due to the observation of students' responses, to a long-term teacher professional development programme (National Program for Teaching Portuguese Language) and to professional experience.

Two teachers positioned themselves towards the role of memorisation in the learning process, valued by one of them (T6), while the other affirmed that this skill plays a minor role on learning grammar (T1). Memorisation is, surely, necessary for the apprehension of certain rules and paradigms and plays an important role on any learning process. Nevertheless, as Duarte (2000, p. 56, our translation) affirms, "(...) reflecting on the linguistic structure and organisation isn't a simple task of presenting labels and rules one expects students to memorise. On the contrary, it's an organised

and progressive work of observation and systematisation of major paradigms and regularities of language.”

It is possible to conclude that, for the interviewees, the way their teachers taught them grammar as students is influential on how they teach it as teachers. This realisation can be considered as an alert to teacher education, as it evinces the need to deconstruct one’s learning processes before any approach to the didactic of language.

### **Teachers’ views regarding the use of metalanguage**

As far as the second goal of the research is concerned, *discern 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades’ Portuguese Language teachers’ views regarding the use of metalanguage*, the participants indicated the importance of using metalinguistic terms, having all of them declared to use the new grammar terminology. However, it was only possible to confirm the use of the metalanguage accordingly to the TD in four of the observed lessons (T1, 2, 3, 5) and there was terminological and scientific accuracy in just one of them (T2). These considerations enhance the existence of difficulties in the use of the new terminological guidelines, as well as some failures in their scientific background, particularly regarding the morphological, the syntactic, and the word class levels. In fact, three teachers (T1, 5, 6) declared their insecurity in using the new terminology.

Regarding the use of TD, three teachers declared to use it to clarify some contents (T1, 2, 4), one said she uses it indirectly when she reads the new curriculum (T1), other considers unnecessary to use it (T3) and other declared not to use it and explicitly affirmed her resistance to the new terminology (T6).

As far as the sections of the TD are concerned, three teachers declared that most of them are easily understood (T1, 5, 6). The areas qualified by the participants as the least difficult are morphology, the phrase and the word classes.

On the other hand, syntax is the area of difficulty most indicated by teachers, particularly the syntactic functions, followed by coordinate/ subordinate clauses and connective adverbs.

Other conclusion is the coexistence of two grammar terminologies in the same level of teaching in the school year 2011 – 2012. Teachers declared to have been instructed to use the previous terminology and curriculum when working with 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and the terminology and the curriculum in force when working with 5<sup>th</sup> grades. In fact, it was possible to confirm the

use of previous curricular and terminological guidelines with a teacher working with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade class. This situation can be confusing, as it was, in fact, indicated by four teachers (T1, 2, 4, 5).

It seems possible to conclude that the interviewees value the new grammar terminology, but evidence difficulties in properly using it in lessons.

### **Teachers' views regarding *Explicit Language Awareness***

Considering the third goal of research, *identify 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' views regarding ELA*, the first realisation was the use of the Portuguese Language curriculum of 1991 with 6<sup>th</sup> grades' classes and the use of the curriculum of 2009 with 5<sup>th</sup> grades' students in the school year of 2011 – 2012. Four participants (T1, 2, 4, 5) admitted thinking that the current curriculum is more suitable for teaching grammar than the previous one. On the contrary, two participants said that the 1991 curriculum is more useful.

Regarding the use of the designation *Explicit Language Awareness*, the opinions of the participants are divided. On the one hand, three teachers consider it appropriate (T2, 4, 5). On the other hand, a teacher indicated that there has only been a switch in labels (T1), other finds it inappropriate (T6) and another declared she doesn't understand why that designation was chosen (T3).

As far as the relevance of ELA is concerned, four teachers attribute the same importance to the five Portuguese Language nuclear competencies. On the contrary, two teachers (T3, 6) declare that some competencies are more important than others, highlighting Reading and Writing. It's relevant to point out that one of them (T3) declares that ELA is the least important competency. This information, although coherent with the results of the questionnaire applied to teachers in one of the preliminary studies which based the construction of the new curriculum (Duarte, 2008) is, to some extent, surprising, because early in 2001, the *National Curriculum for Basic Education – Essential Competencies* (DEB, 2001) recognised the status of nuclear competency to ELA, on equal terms with the others, status reinforced by the current curriculum. We could expect that the levelling of the five nuclear competencies had already been incorporated by those who promote their teaching and learning.

Taking the articulation of the competencies into account, four teachers declared that they usually teach grammar in articulation with the other nuclear competencies, while two (T3, 6) indicated that they prefer to teach it independently. Actually, these statements reinforced the data obtained from direct observation, despite the fact that in the four accounted cases there were different tones of attempts of integration. There was no situation of real articulation procedures

which would lead to “the mobilisation of the categories of explicit knowledge (elements, classes, relations, operations, linguistic and textual structures) to deal with the problems of use, to improve performances, to explicit patterns and criteria for action” (Reis, 2009, p. 151, our translation) in any case, as we can notice in the following chart.

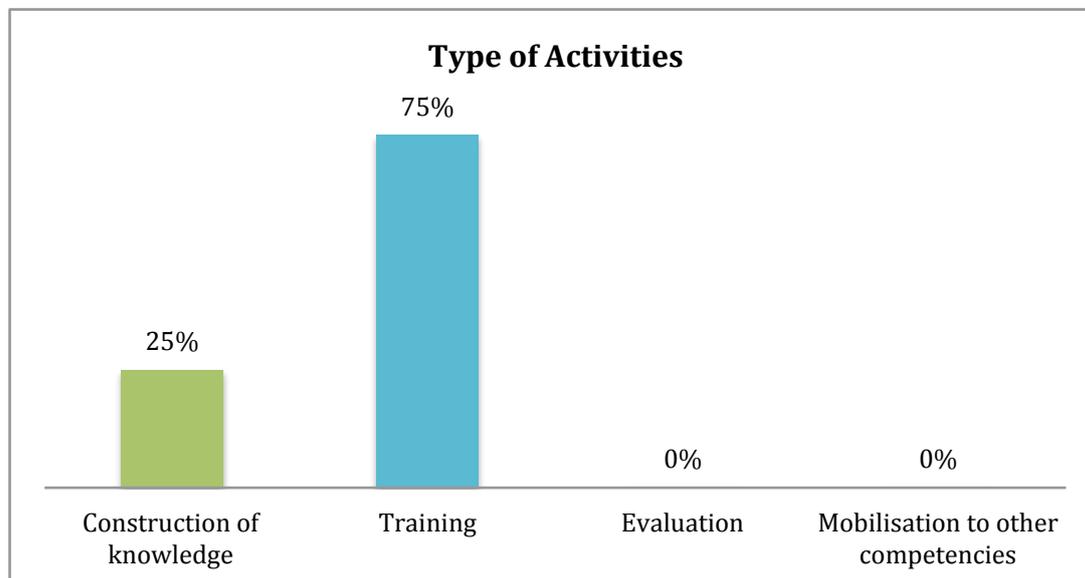


Figure 1. Type of activities observed (percentages)

The mobilisation of grammar knowledge into other competencies, one of the major keys of the new curriculum, wasn't indicated or observed in any context (cf. figure 1). Apparently, there is a widespread belief in the importance of grammar to improve speaking and writing, but it doesn't seem to reflect an informed opinion supported on the knowledge of why and how that influence takes place.

Reading and Writing were the competencies recognised by teachers as the easiest to articulate with Explicit Knowledge, followed by Speaking and Listening Comprehension.

### Teachers' practices

Considering the fourth goal of the research, *categorise 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' practices regarding teaching and learning grammar*, the most evident conclusion is that, despite the different individual beliefs and practices in this field, all the participants teach grammar. This is coherent with one of the conclusions presented by Neves (2001) in a study conducted in Brazilian schools. The author declares that teachers “maintain systematic grammar lessons as a ritual, indispensable to legitimate their role” (p. 48, our translation) although they feel “it isn't serving any purpose” (p. 47). Similarly, Sousa (2010

quoted in Pereira, 2010) and Castro (2001, *ibidem*) declare that grammar is assumed by teachers as a characterising feature of Portuguese Language teaching, as a curricular subject, and that any content can be taught provided it is recognised and legitimised as grammar. In fact, one of the participants, teacher T3, considered ELA the least important of the five nuclear competences, but she declared it is the competency to which she reserves most of the time, alleging “moral” reasons to justify this apparent incongruity, because of the presupposed emphasis on grammar on the examinations students take.

Although three of the participants (T1, 2, 6) couldn't easily estimate the amount of time dedicated to grammar, five indicated a high frequency of lessons focused on grammar and two declared to be the most worked competency. Only one of the teachers (T1) indicated a low frequency of lessons focused on grammar, contrarily to Reading and Writing. Surprisingly, this was not one of the teachers who undervalued grammar towards the other competencies.

Four teachers (T1, 3, 4, 6) assumed the use of methodologies consistent with a deductive or expositive approach to grammar. This was coherent with the data obtained from observation. One of the participants (T2) declared to favour strategies consistent with an inductive or reflexive approach, particularly the operationalization of grammar workshops. Again, this was, in fact, observed. Despite another teacher (T5) had declared to follow an inductive approach to grammar, it wasn't possible to confirm the use of strategies of that nature in a structured way in the observed lesson.

One of the teachers (T6) declared to rely little on the students' ability to learn through reflection and discovery. On the other hand, five participants mentioned they stimulate the discovery of grammar rules and structures by students. However, the only context where a minimally structured work of reflection on language was observed was in case 2 (teacher T2 and Class C2).

It was only possible to confirm the involvement of students in the process of decision making in case 2. Actually, the role of students in their own learning was little valued by the participants, except in this case.

Syntactic analysis and identification of the classes of words were the most frequent instructions, a realisation coherent with the data collected through observation, which evinced an importance attached to the syntactic and word class levels. It is also important to state that the

majority of the exercises involved classification, corresponding to more than 51% of the total of the tasks (cf. figure 3).

The charts presented next allow the systematisation of the results related to the type of exercises proposed by teachers:

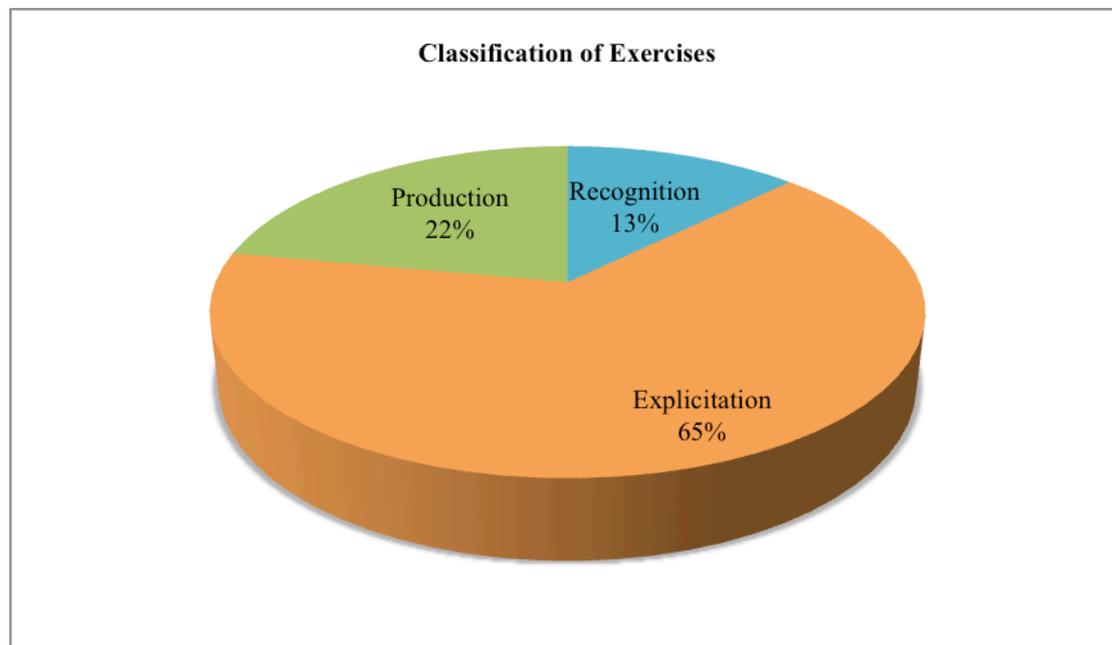


Figure 2. Classification of the exercises proposed by teachers (global percentages)

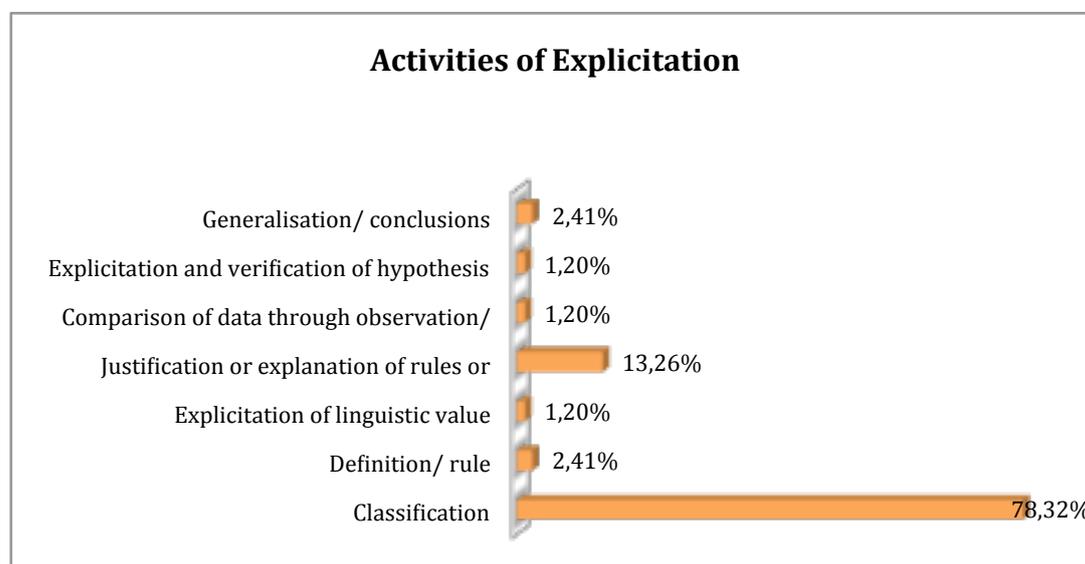


Figure 3. Classification of the exercises of explication (percentages)

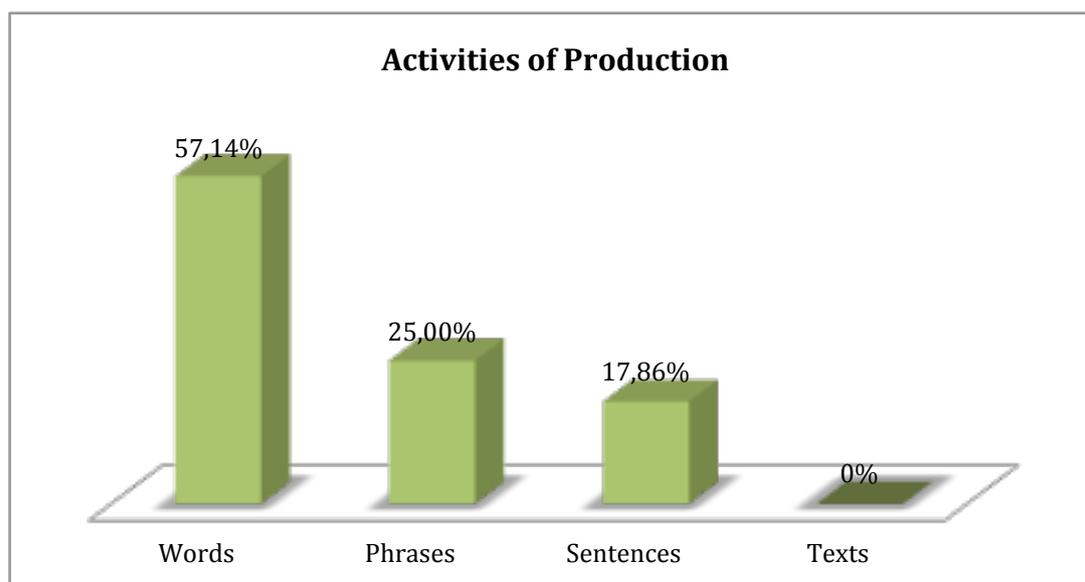


Figure 4. Classification of the exercises of production (global percentages)

The most frequent unit of contextualisation in the teachers' speech and action was the sentence (cf. figure 4). In the four cases in which the work was contextualised from text, no real integration of grammar knowledge in the exploitation of the text occurred, perhaps with the exception of case 1, in which Reading Comprehension and Grammar were developed simultaneously, although there was no explicitation of the literary and textual value of the grammar contents implied. In case 2, the text was merely the motivating element and the starting point for the sequence. In cases 4 and 5, the text was the source of the linguistic data to analyse, constituting a pretext to do grammar exercises. The text as an initial context meant nothing but the source from which to collect units (sentences or words) to analyse and classify. In four of the sessions, there were also moments of contextualisation from the unit *word*, isolated from any linguistic context.

All the participants recognised the importance of training and conducted activities of this type. Except from teachers T2 and T5, the participants propose the realisation of exercises of training and application after the presentation of rules or structures by the teacher.

Summarily, the results are consistent with the *grammar tyranny* affirmed by authors like Pinto (2001; 2004), Figueiredo (2004) or Neves (2001), as all the participants teach grammar and, globally, reserve a high percentage of time to this competency. Contrarily to what might be supposed, the problem doesn't seem to lie in the little amount of time dedicated to grammar nor in the refusal to work this curricular area, but on the conceptualisation of grammar and of how the process of teaching and learning in this field should take place.

In spite of some individual differences, a prevalence of traditional and expositive methodologies, coherent with a deductive approach to grammar, was evidenced. The most favoured model of instruction was clearly one of transmission. This seems to point to some shortcomings in teacher's training and development. In fact, teachers seem not to have deviated from the more traditional grammar oriented approaches.

### **Teachers' needs for training**

Regarding the fifth goal of research, *detect 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades' Portuguese Language teachers' needs for training as far as teaching and learning grammar are concerned*, It's important to enhance the insecurity affirmed by four of the participant teachers (T1, 3, 4, 5) towards their scientific preparation. Three of those teachers present constant training as a demand of the profession (T1, 4, 5).

The teachers declared to feel the need for training, two of them (T1, 4) in order to update, four (T1, 2, 5, 6) to deepen their knowledge on the contents they teach and two (T3, 5) to strengthen their knowledge on specific didactics.

The most frequently referred fields in need for updating were the latest spelling agreement<sup>1</sup> and TD. Two teachers (T2, 6) declared to feel the need to deepen their scientific knowledge, two (T1, 5) affirmed that their professional development would benefit from a wide training action which would include both scientific and didactic knowledge, a teacher (T6) expressed her will to strengthen her scientific knowledge on syntax and another (T3) stated her need for training focused on didactic knowledge. One of the participants in the study (T5) emphasised the importance of spreading studies on teaching and learning grammar in order to support teachers' work.

Direct observation revealed the need for training regarding scientific knowledge, particularly in the types of sentences, syntactic functions, noun phrases, contraction of prepositions with determiners and the degrees of adjectives.

As far as the specific didactics is concerned, teachers evinced difficulties regarding the new curriculum, particularly the operationalization of strategies and methodologies. The principles that underlie the inductive approach were, actually, rarely enacted in the classroom.

Despite the existence of guiding documents to implement the new curriculum, aimed at supporting teachers in the work of each competency accordingly to the new curricular and

terminological propositions, none of the participants declared to use the document reserved to grammar (Costa et al., 2011) in their practice.

Considering the needs for training in specific didactics, besides the difficulties in the operationalization of activities stimulating reflection and discovery and the mobilisation of that knowledge into other competencies in a structured way, one of the participants (T6) revealed she didn't understand the differences between the processes of acquisition and learning of first language and learning foreign languages. This could explain the use of strategies to teach language as if it was something strange and external to students.

It is possible to consider that the participants are in need of training regarding their knowledge on grammar and on specific didactics. On the other hand, although they recognise the need for constant training, they do not seek it, nor do they know the guiding and supportive documents recently published.

Taking the previous considerations, specifically formulated regarding each of the investigating goals defined *a priori*, there are some transversal conclusions we can indicate.

### **Final remarks**

First, we conclude that teachers are performing their tasks in a transitional time, what requires constant adjustment and updating skills, mostly due to the new spelling agreement and to the terminological and curricular guidelines, since both the TD and the new curriculum imply transformations that go beyond mere changes in the terminology and the organisation of contents. In fact, the new curriculum consists of a structured and organised manner of fulfilling real changes in teachers' practices, rooted on some principles and pre-conditions that, though they can't be called innovative, since they were enounced long ago, they haven't been systematically put into practice in most of the classrooms. Focusing on grammar, the curriculum reinforces the status of nuclear competency, recognised in 2001. The operationalization of the curriculum implies that grammar knowledge is formed by means of strategies typical of an inductive approach, recognising to students an essential role in their own learning process, and the mobilisation of grammar realisations into other written or oral competencies. In spite of the innovative guidelines, classroom teaching seems to be unaffected by theoretical and research progress.

Secondly, professional training and development are still a long distance apart from the individual needs and contexts, not only in terms of adjustment, but also due to some fragilities concerning scientific or didactic background indicated by the participants or evidenced through observation. Therefore, some questions emerge, namely on the role of teacher education in this

situation. It would be relevant to study the courses of pre service teacher education and advanced and in force training actions and programmes. Admitting the thesis defended by Lima (2007), that although beliefs are relatively stable structures, they can be altered, and in spite of the considerations stated by Borg (Birello, 2012) about the impossibility to program teachers to behave in a certain way, it would be important to study how education, initial, in force and advanced, influences the transformation of teachers' beliefs and practices in this field. It's interesting to state that teacher T2, participant in this study, declared having changed from an expositive perspective into a constructivist and inductive approach after her involvement in a long term in force education program (National Program for Teaching Portuguese Language), thus indicating a transformation in terms of thought and behaviour. According to T2, this program was little focused on grammar, but it implied a reconceptualization of the roles played by teachers,, students and students' previous knowledge and experience on the teaching and learning process, reflecting on every competency.

Third, we conclude that speech isn't always consistent, having some contradictions occurred in several moments, and that speech and practice aren't linear. In fact, the triangulation of the results led to the realisation that action and verbalization are not unequivocally related. For instance, five of the participant teachers declared to stimulate the discovery of rules and structures by students. However, while interviewed, three of them indicated to have an expositive approach to grammar, presenting paradigms and patterns first and proposing exercises afterwards and, on the other hand, it wasn't observed any activity of discovery in the lessons conducted by those teachers. Besides, despite the generalised recognition of the influence of grammar knowledge on other competencies, there was no situation of effective mobilisation. What conceptualisations and constructs can justify these incoherencies? Are the perceptions of teachers and researchers towards the promotion of activities involving discovery and the articulation between competencies so different? Are teachers truly aware of how they act? Is the assumption of a certain behaviour before others difficult, leading to *politically correct* answers? These are some of the questions future research could investigate.

The data analysis evinced a incoherency between the new paradigm of grammar teaching, the curricular (and terminological) guidelines and the teachers' practices. The lack of preparation revealed by most teachers and the transformation of beliefs and practices observed with the teacher involved in a long term in force training program may highlight the path to follow in order to change the scenery and to conceive an effective teacher-training program in the context of life long learning.

Although the study conducted had the merit of contributing to the investigation of some items related to teachers' practices and beliefs regarding grammar teaching, a subject very little investigated in Portugal, it's important to be aware of its insufficiency to the strong understanding of the equation, both due to the impossibility of generalisation of the conclusions of the study, a frequent limitation of using a convenience sample composed of few participants, and to the need of completing the results with data resulting from other studies on influential items in this scenery.

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<sup>i</sup> This document, signed by Portugal, Brazil and Cabo Verde, entered into force in the school year 2010 – 2011 and it involves changes in the orthography of the Portuguese language.

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**Author information:**

**Patrícia Santos Ferreira** is a PhD student in Education, specializing in Teacher Education, in the Instituto de Educação of the Universidade de Lisboa, and holds a Master in Teaching Portuguese Language in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles by Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa. She has developed research in initial teacher education, the construction of professional knowledge, beliefs and practices regarding teaching grammar, and has published articles in these areas. She has been teaching in Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa since 2007, in the Departamento de Educação em Línguas, Comunicação e Artes.

**Email:** [patriciaferreira@eselx.ipl.pt](mailto:patriciaferreira@eselx.ipl.pt)

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To cite this article:

Santos Ferreira, P. (2014). Beliefs and practices towards teaching and learning grammar: A multicase study. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 7(3), 14-29.