△ D E L T A

From Initial Education to Portuguese L1 Classroom: conceptions about teaching and learning grammar

Da formação inicial à aula de Português L1: conceções sobre o ensino e a aprendizagem da gramática

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to discuss representations about grammar teaching of Portuguese L1 teachers. It draws on the exploratory study designed to identify the invariants and divergences in self-perceptions about L1 grammar teaching of trainees in different training situations: in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and bachelor's students. The study focus on student's and teacher's acknowledgment of the Portuguese L1 Curriculum (Reis et al. 2009), which conveys a clear paradigm change in Portuguese language education, assuming that grammar teaching is based upon language awareness development.

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The results show an evident gap between students and teachers in what concerns the familiarity with the Portuguese L1 Curriculum and teaching strategies. However, some puzzling convergent points are the importance attributed to grammar and poor linguistics background. The results analysis draws attention to the relationship between teacher cognition and practice, highlighting fragilities in teacher education and potential conceptual changes that may lead to effective changes in classroom practices.

Keywords: *Grammar Teaching; Explicit Knowledge of Language; Language Teacher Cognition; Portuguese L1 Teaching.*

RESUMO

Neste artigo são discutidas as representações sobre o ensino da gramática na aula de português L1, a partir dos resultados de um estudo exploratório que envolveu professores e futuros professores em diferentes situações de formação: professores do Ensino Básico, estudantes em estágio profissional e estudantes de licenciatura. O estudo centrou-se nas orientações curriculares para o ensino da gramática propostas em Reis et al. (2009), que veicularam uma clara mudança de paradigma no ensino da língua.

Embora surja um claro contraste entre professores e estudantes, no que respeita a familiaridade com as orientações curriculares e estratégias de ensino, constituem pontos convergentes a importância atribuída à gramática e a frágil formação no domínio da linguística. Os resultados da análise permitem discutir a relação entre as conceções dos professores e as suas práticas, evidenciando quer fragilidades na formação de professores quer mudanças conceptuais que podem conduzir a efetivas mudanças na prática de sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: *Ensino de Gramática; Conhecimento Explícito da Língua; Pensamento do Professor de Língua; Ensino de Português L1.*

Introduction

In Portugal, there has recently been a curricular reorientation with regard to the teaching of grammar. The Portuguese elementary school syllabus (Reis et al., 2009), which has been in force between 2011 and 2015, considers grammar to be an autonomous skill with a status

similar to the skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading[1]. This grammar skill, which in the previous syllabus was called 'language functioning' (*Funcionamento da Língua*), is called 'explicit language knowledge' (*Conhecimento Explícito da Língua*), reflecting a paradigm shift in relation to perceived classroom needs in this field. This shift is underpinned by the idea that students bring to their formal education a broad mastery of grammar in his/her mother tongue (implicit grammar). As such the school's mission should be to make this knowledge explicit by helping students discover the rules governing the language system that they use unconsciously.

In Reis et al. (2009), it is assumed that the work on explicit language knowledge should have a triple objective (see Cardoso 2008; Costa et al. 2011):

(a) To foster linguistic awareness amongst students through the observation, comparison and manipulation of data, enabling them to discover patterns in the functioning of language;

(b) To make these regularities explicit and systematize them, with or without recourse to metalanguage;

(c) To mobilize the knowledge acquired in the comprehension and production of oral and written texts. The traditional classroom approach to grammar, based on the memorization of rules and paradigms and the use of definitions, should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of an approach that gives a more active role to the student.

However, the fact that these guidelines existed for the teaching of grammar did not necessarily lead to changes in teachers' practices. Some studies on the teaching of grammar in Portugal have shown that the practices used in primary and early secondary school did not reflect these guidelines (see Ferreira et al. 2013). There are various factors that can explain this situation such as: the inadequate preparation of teachers, both academically and didactically (on the level of both initial and ongoing training) and the lack of support materials offering a coherent model of the grammar contents to be used with the students.

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1. A new Portuguese L1 Curriculum was implemented in the academic year 2015-2016 (cf. Buescu et al. 2015). This curricular reorientation is not considered in the present study because the data were collected in an earlier period.

In order to better understand this discrepancy between the normative principles in force and teaching practice, and assuming that teachers' beliefs about language teaching have a powerful impact on their teaching practice (see Borg 2003; Mohamed 2006; Basturkmen 2012; Ferreira et al. 2013), this study aims to investigate teachers' conceptions of grammar teaching, focusing upon in-service and pre-service L1 teachers operating at elementary level (6 to 12 years) in Portugal. The findings of this study will hopefully further understanding of the problem while at the same time help implement good practices in this domain.

The study is organized into five sections. Section 2 provides a brief theoretical contextualization of teachers' conceptions about teaching in general and about grammar teaching in particular. Section 3 describes the methodological framework of the study, characterizing the participants and the data gathering and processing methods used. Section 4 discusses the results, showing the aspects in which the self-perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers diverge and converge. Finally, Section 5 presents some final considerations.

Conceptions about grammar teaching

The term 'conceptions' has been used in educational research to refer broadly to a cluster of beliefs, meanings, mental images, concepts, knowledges and preferences underlying the teacher's action and discernible in his/her discourse about teaching (Thompson 1992; Pratt 1992; Brown 2004). On this basis, teachers' conceptions involve a complex and multi-faceted framework through which the teacher apprehends, interprets, acts and interacts in a professional situation (Brown 2004). Borg (2011), for his part, calls this referential framework 'teacher cognitions' and includes in it beliefs, knowledges, implicit theories and attitudes.

In this framework, beliefs play an important role, as they effectively filter the information that teachers receive about their pupils, education and the best ways of teaching (Pajares 1992). These beliefs are difficult to change because they are based, at least in part, upon knowledge acquired through practical experience in the professional situation.

Though different definitions can be found in the literature, beliefs are here taken as 'propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change' (Borg 2011:370). The term 'beliefs', however, is used differently by different authors, which led Pajares (1992) to call it 'a messy construct'. According to him, the difficulties in studying the teacher's beliefs are due to 'definitional problems, poor conceptualization and differing understanding of beliefs and belief structures' (Pajares 1992:307).

While it is generally accepted that beliefs constitute a basis for teachers' actions and influence their curricular decisions (Borg 2011; Basturkmen 2012; Allen 2013), the literature shows that beliefs and practices do not always coincide, partly because the change of beliefs precedes changes in practices, and also because the same teacher may be acting under conflicting belief systems to which s/he attributes different levels of importance (Basturkmen 2012; Allen 2013).

One of the factors that has raised most discussion is the distinction between beliefs and knowledges, which, according to Richardson (1996), is one of the most complex challenges facing researchers working on teachers' thoughts and actions. As the teacher's knowledge is gradually constructed and reorganized through practical action and reflection about action, beliefs play an important role in structuring that knowledge.

Although professional knowledge is basically constructed from practice, it is not intrinsically opposed to academic knowledge as it arises both from the teacher's daily experience at school and in the classroom, and from the initial and ongoing training that s/he receives (Verloop et al. 2001). Though beliefs may be described as 'referring to personal values, attitudes, and ideologies, and knowledge to a teacher's more factual propositions' (Verloop et al. 2001:446), in fact beliefs and knowledges are inseparable in the way that the teacher thinks and acts.

These authors call attention to the broad scope of the concept *professional teaching knowledge*, which currently includes both conscious well-grounded opinions and unconscious routine beliefs. In fact, the concept has significantly broadened and expanded over time. In a text that analyses a cluster of articles about teachers' knowledge

published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* between 1988 and 2009, Ben-Peretz (2011) shows how there has been a shift away from a narrow notion centred on the way teachers combine their subject matter knowledge with general pedagogical principles and skills to a broader perspective that includes the way teachers integrate knowledges and experiences that they have acquired over time in different contexts.

Roldão (2007) identifies the different aspects that distinguish teachers' professional knowledge. One of the main ones is the composite nature of that knowledge, which is not constructed by adding different knowledges, but by incorporation and transformation (that is to say, it is not enough for the teacher to know the subject matter, as s/he also has to transform it into a form that is accessible to students; it is not enough for the teacher to know pedagogical theories, as s/he also has to incorporate them into a particular learning experience for specific students). Another aspect is its analytical nature, which is based upon technical capacities and even on a capacity for improvisation, though it transcends these dimensions, as it implies the conceptualization of situations, and the mobilization of theoretical and experiential knowledge in order to comprehend and organize them. A third aspect is its problematizing nature, as it requires the constant questioning of practical action, of previous experience and of formal knowledge itself, giving rise to grounded theorizations about practice and from practice. This author characterizes teachers' knowledge as theorizing, composite and interpretative – a knowledge that is organized around practice, but which should not fall into practicism.

According to Montero (2005), the most significant contributions about the teacher's knowledge have arisen from studies carried out in two specific domains: practical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

Practical knowledge is closely connected to professional practice. It was developed by authors such as Connelly and Cladinin (1985) and also (with a different orientation) by Schon (1983). Montero (2005:171) defines it as 'that which teachers extract from the lesson situations and practical dilemmas that they confront during their work'.

Pedagogical content knowledge is part of another perspective (a more formal one, according to Fenstermacher 1994), which seeks to break down and analyse the different components of professional

teaching knowledge. The term was first used by Shulman (1986) and later developed by other authors.

The notion of pedagogical content knowledge refers to the cluster of professional knowledges that is exclusive to teachers. It differs from content knowledge because it involves knowing how to lead students to learn these contents, and differs from general pedagogical knowledge because it is specific to the disciplinary areas. Shulman (1987) describes pedagogical content knowledge as 'that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding' (Shulman 1987:8).

This type of knowledge involves: i) an understanding of how to structure knowledge to enable students to learn; ii) an understanding of the conceptions, inaccuracies and difficulties that students encounter in the learning of a particular subject matter; iii) an understanding of specific strategies that could be used to respond to students' needs in specific contents (Verloop et al. 2001).

In recent years, various studies have appeared about the concepts and beliefs of language teachers (L1 and L2). Some of these focus on the origins of the beliefs of future teachers, looking at how those beliefs (which are based on their own experience as students) develop over time. Borg (2003) concludes that initial training moulds the classroom behaviour of future L2 teachers, but does not affect the beliefs that they bring to the course, which are based on their own experiences as students.

Other authors have studied the relationship between beliefs and practices in language teaching. Basturkmen (2012) reviewed various studies that focused on this relationship and concluded that there is a discernible congruence between beliefs and practices particularly amongst experienced teachers. Similarly, Hindman and Wasik (2008), in their study of nursery school teachers, found that it was the most experienced teachers that revealed the greatest correspondence between beliefs and the results of research into oral language development practices and the emergence of reading.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and grammar teaching is another research field that has expanded significantly since the 1990s.

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In 1998, Borg analysed the decisions of an experienced L2 teacher in the teaching of grammar, relating them to his conceptions, which he called his *personal pedagogical system* (a set of beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions and attitudes). He concluded that the teacher revealed conflicting beliefs about different dimensions, not only L2 grammar teaching but also about teaching in general. Thus, despite believing that formal grammar work probably did not help develop the students' communicative capacity, he nevertheless included it in his practices because, amongst other reasons, he could see the students' motivation for the study of grammar based upon their own mistakes and the challenge that lay in the inductive approach to it. In a later work, the same author (2011) showed that a programme of ongoing training that aims to make teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching conscious and explicit helped create a better congruence between those beliefs and their classroom practices.

Budak (2014) studied an instrumental case in two public middle schools with a heterogeneous population in order to find out how teachers understand grammar and what factors determine their teaching options. He concluded that experienced teachers' beliefs about the place of grammar in language teaching strongly affected their style of teaching. These findings are consistent with those presented by Borg (2003), Mohamed (2006), Basturkmen (2012) and Ferreira et al. (2013), amongst others.

Of the two teachers studied by Budak (2014), one believed that grammar teaching should occur in a meaningful context, while the other thought that it should be dealt with in isolation. Thus, the first teacher approached grammar work as a continuation or part of a particular content, while the other dealt with it in specific situations. As the first teacher believed in the contextual approach to grammar, she provided more explicit feedback to the students about their mistakes, while the teacher that opted for a more isolated approach to grammar gave more attention to the use of the correct linguistic terminology.

Despite these differences, the teachers' pedagogical decisions in both cases were influenced not only by their beliefs about grammar teaching, but also by the perceptions of the students' level of proficiency and difficulties. According to Budack (2014), they could change the teaching strategies in which they believed if the situations so required.

There are only a few studies that deal pedagogical content knowledge amongst language teachers (unlike mathematics or science teachers) and these centre above all on L2 teaching (Liu 2013). Andrews (2003) relates teaching language awareness with pedagogical content knowledge and mentions Tsui's (2003) study, which demonstrates that in language this later concept may be broken down into four dimensions: knowledge of the language; knowledge of language teaching and learning; knowledge of how teaching should be organized; knowledge of the curriculum, and knowledge of students' interests. Andrews (2003) concludes that teachers combine knowledge and beliefs about language with knowledge about the students, particularly about the way they appropriate linguistic knowledge, giving rise to a specific form of pedagogical content knowledge that is eminently linguistic.

In short, by resorting to the concept of pedagogical content knowledge it is possible not only to overcome the dichotomy between each subject and its respective didactics, but also to place content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge on the same footing. It also bridges the gap with other types of knowledge, such as general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of the students and knowledge of the curriculum (Montero 2005).

Method

This study aims to understand the conceptions of in-service and pre-service elementary school teachers about grammar teaching, including in the term 'conceptions' the beliefs, knowledges, attitudes and preferences that arise both from their experience, and from their training as teachers and as students (Thompson 1992; Pratt 1992; Borg 2003; Brown 2004).

Participants

In-service and pre-service teachers of elementary education (6 to 12 years) participated in this study. Considering that, in Portugal today, teacher training requires a broad Bachelor's degree, followed by a vocational Master's, the group of future teachers was subdivided into two in accordance with their level. Hence, this study involved:

17 in-service elementary education teachers, 13 Masters students and 12 Bachelors students (these were possible candidates for the Masters course that would give access to the teaching profession).

The data was collected over the course of a semester during the academic year 2012-2013. The questionnaires were administered at the start of the training programmes, both as a means of avoiding bias in the response and also to ensure that the training provided was appropriate to the trainees' needs.

The teachers, whose average age was around 43 years, were involved in a continuous training programme about explicit language knowledge. They worked with students aged 10-12 years and had generally between 10 and 20 years of professional service. The 2nd year Masters students were between 22 and 27 years of age, while for those doing the Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, the average age was around 19 to 20 years. The three subgroups were codified as follows:

G1: in-service elementary education teachers
G2: pre-service teachers (master students)
G3: pre-service teachers (bachelor students)

Data Collection

The study, which was descriptive and exploratory in nature, was carried out by means of a questionnaire. Questionnaires have been used in various studies to understand teachers' conceptions and (especially) beliefs about teaching, either in isolation or in conjunction with other data-gathering techniques such as interviews, diaries and lesson plans. In the review of studies about teachers' beliefs carried out by Tatto and Coupland (2003), over half the studies used questionnaires as the data-gathering technique, often applied as a pre-test and post-test. For example, to understand nursery school teachers' beliefs about literacy and the factors underlying those beliefs, Hindman and Wasik (2008) used the Preschool Teacher Literacy Beliefs Questionnaire (TBQ) and another context questionnaire. Borg (2011), for his part, used preliminary questionnaires, complemented with interviews, the analysis of lesson plans and reflections to identify the impact of a continuous training programme in language.

The questionnaire contains open response questions, which sought to capture the conceptions of teachers and future teachers in the different dimensions previously analysed:

- Future teachers' experiences and motivation for grammar learning when they themselves were students;

- General beliefs about grammar teaching: its relevance, motivation, main difficulties;

- Knowledge of the alterations in grammar teaching (Reis et al. 2009), its theoretical grounding and instruments to support the teacher's work;

- Preferences and curricular options in grammar teaching: teaching strategies, proposed activities, resources used, percentage of time attributed to grammar work.

As this was an open-response questionnaire, the data was processed using content analysis. The categories of this analysis were previously defined in the elaboration of the questionnaire, while the subcategories were constructed inductively, emerging from the responses. The analysis focuses upon a random sample of 21 responses to the questionnaires (7 per subgroup).

Results and Discussion

In what aspects do the self-perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers converge?

As regards pre-service and in-service teachers' motivation for the teaching of grammar, the data indicate that all participants feel motivated to develop activities in this regard (100%). Most of the practising teachers (G1) considered that their students were equally motivated.

In Groups 2 and 3, it was found that the motivation for grammar teaching did not necessarily arise from satisfactory personal experiences of grammar learning. In fact, 50% of the pre-service teachers considered that their own experience of grammar learning had been largely unsatisfactory, as can be seen from Excerpts 1 to 4.

Excerpt 1

As a student, I never felt very motivated for grammar because it was approached very mechanically, always using the same exercises, with no room for reflection about the words and their function in the language. (G3_2)

Excerpt 2

(...) the teaching was more expository in nature and we did few activities. (G3_5)

Excerpt 3

(...) they were merely opportunities to transmit knowledge, and consisted of copying notes from the board, and moments of practice, without any motivation. Therefore I never had the opportunity to observe and handle data or discover patterns myself. (G2_3)

Excerpt 4

(...) [grammar] was part of a 'normal' Portuguese lesson. We would read a text, answer the comprehension questions and then do the 'language functioning' exercise. (G2_1)

In these excerpts, both groups of pre-service teachers describe situations in which the approach to grammar is decontextualized and essentially expository in nature, based on memorization and on the completion of standardized exercises. This corresponds to what some authors call 'transmissive' methodologies, influenced by formal linguistics (Camps 2010:18) and others term the "traditional way of teaching grammar" (Ferreira 2014:14), clearly demarcating them from the guidelines in force (Reis et al. 2009).
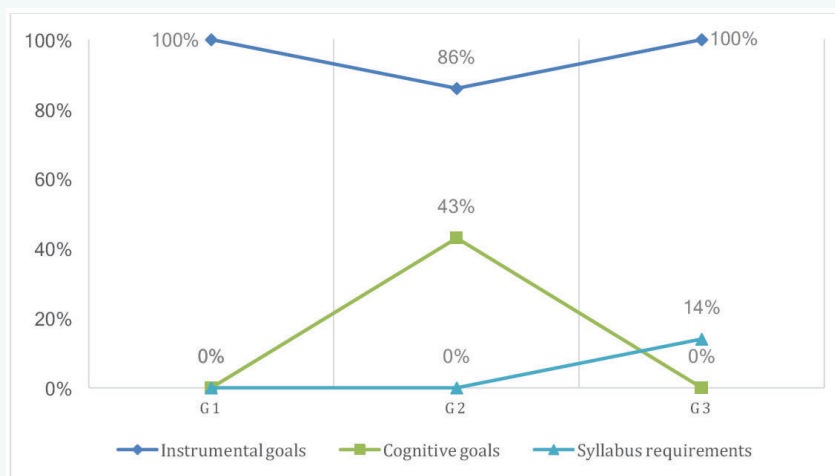

Figure 1 – Factors justifying the importance of grammar teaching.

As regards their general beliefs about grammar teaching (that is, the aims of that teaching), all the groups were unanimous in considering that grammar teaching was important (100%), essentially due to their belief in its instrumental power, that is, its role in improving the students' speaking, reading and writing skills.

Figure 1 shows that the instrumental view of grammar teaching is given priority by all groups, in keeping with one of the aspects assumed by the Portuguese syllabus for elementary education (see Reis et al. 2009). G2 also mentioned cognitive aims (that is, grammar as an area of knowledge that is worthy of study as an end in itself), while G3 was the only one to associate the importance of grammar teaching to the curricular reorientation.

This sense of the importance of grammar teaching and the motivation for it, assumed by all participants, does not correspond to the way in which teachers and students approach the work to be done in this domain, as most mentioned that they had/would have difficulties with it (G1 and G2 – 100%; G3 – 71%). The three groups converge in their notion that this is caused mostly by lack of knowledge about the grammar of the language (57% to 71%), as can be seen in Figure 2.
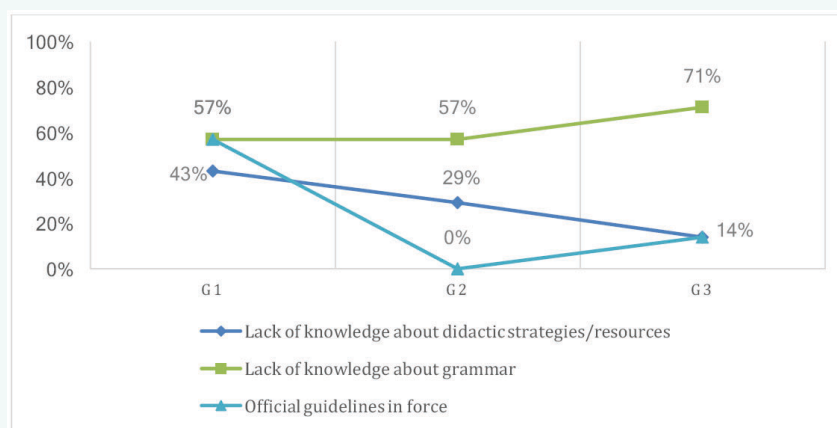
Figure 2 – Difficulties with grammar teaching.

The awareness that they are lacking in in-depth grammar knowledge as a result of deficiencies in their L1 linguistic training is common to the three groups, though made explicit in different ways. The practising teacher group (G1) refers to poor knowledge of the basic concepts, and also a lack of language analysis skills that would enable them to better explain grammatical contents, as can be seen in Excerpts 5 to 6.

Excerpt 5
(...) difficulties in academically mastering all domains of grammar and knowing the different ways of teaching it. (G1_4)
Excerpt 6
At this moment, I think that morphosyntactic analysis of sentences may create problems amongst my students, as I myself have difficulties doing such an analysis. (G1_7)

The group of Master's students (G2) shifts the focus of the problems to the academic training required to recognise the complexity of linguistic forms (see Excerpt 7), which in many cases have multiple functions. These respondents were also critical of the initial training received (see Excerpt 8).

Excerpt 7
When I am teaching grammar, doubts arise that are difficult to explain to the students, because there is not always a correct way to use particular expressions. Given the complexity of the Portuguese language, we are not always able to find the answer ourselves. (G2_7)
Excerpt 8
(...) I don't think I was properly prepared during my initial training, beyond what we did at school. The fact that we didn't deal more often with the new terminologies also generates a certain insecurity in grammar teaching. (G2_2)

These future teachers, who are in their last year of training, were clearly insecure about their L1 grammar knowledge, but unlike G1, they were aware of what they did not know. This different level of awareness concerning content knowledge will have implications for the grounding of pedagogical action and for curricular options in elementary school practices, as we will see later on.

The Bachelors students' (G3) representations reveal a contrast between the grammatical knowledge previously acquired during their school career and the construction of a new framework of references in this area (this is consistent with the fact that they are half way through their training). The knowledge acquired in the first years of school may represent an epistemological obstacle (in Camps' sense 2010:17) for the progressive learning of the complexity of grammatical concepts (see Excerpts 9 to 10).

> Excerpt 9
> The main problems that I anticipate with grammar teaching have to do with the rules and also with the ways of teaching it. For one, the grammar rules are extensive and subject to constant change, an aspect that is not often clearly explored and understood. Then, there are various methods of teaching grammar which I personally feel were never properly explored during our academic training. (G3_2)
>
> Excerpt 10
> I think that the biggest problems have to do with the fact that grammar is constantly changing, which means that it is more difficult to keep up with the new things that are constantly arising in Portuguese. (G3_7)

The reference to an instability that is particular to grammar (considering that it is 'constantly changing' and 'subject to constant change') seems to arise from the clash between these students' initial conceptions and the theoretically grounded grammatical analysis that they undertake in their teacher training courses. It is interesting to highlight the contrast between G3 and G2 and notice that G2 has surpassed the stage of having to reconceptualise their grammar knowledge (which they have already been through some years earlier).

On the other hand, the explanations given for the problems associated to the lack of knowledge of didactic strategies and resources reveal different levels of pedagogical content knowledge amongst the three groups. As shown in Figure 2, the awareness of a lack of didactic knowledge decreases progressively from G1 to G3. This fact may be related to the groups' professional experience: G1 is not familiar with the Syllabus (Reis et al. 2009), the Terminological Dictionary (TD)[2] and the new methodological approach, and so didactic knowledge

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2. The *Terminological Dictionary* (*Dicionário Terminológico*) is an official resource that defines the grammar terminology to be used at all levels of teaching up to the 12th grade.

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constituted a problem; G2 knows this approach but has had little experience of teaching (see Excerpts 11 and 12); G3 has not yet had any training centred on language teaching and learning methods.

> Excerpt 11
> I think that I will have some problems creating activities that make them reflect about grammar, as my own pre-university experience was totally transmissive and I was never asked to reflect about the language, except in recent years… the biggest problem for me will be how to go about making others think about it. (G2_5)
> Excerpt 12
> I think that I will have some problems teaching grammar as I want to use an experimentation-based methodology, something that I've not had much practice with yet, and so it will be a challenge. (G2_6)

This interpretation is in line with the weight that the three groups attribute to the official guidelines in force (Syllabus/TD), when considering the difficulties with grammar teaching. As can be seen in Figure 2, this aspect is mentioned mostly by G1 (57%) and totally absent in G2 responses. Thus, there seems to be a contrast with regard to grammar knowledge on the one hand and didactic knowledge on the other hand.

In what aspects do the self-perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers diverge?

One object of inquiry was to know if the participants had noticed any alterations in the strategies for teaching and learning grammar over the years. Although all groups admitted that there were changes, the nature of those changes are represented differently across the three groups responses. As shown in Figure 3, G1 is the only group that emphasises the introduction of communicative strategies (71%), while G2 focuses on introducing inductive strategies into grammar teaching (71%). G3, for its part, associated the alterations taking place almost exclusively to the implementation of the Syllabus/TD (57%).
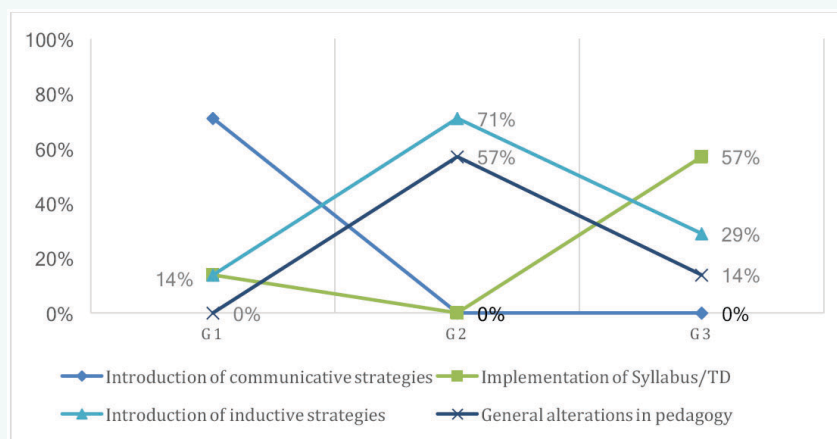
Figure 3 – Alterations in grammar teaching.

The first disparity between the groups' answers is that they don't refer to the same historical time: G1 makes reference to changes taking place over the course of the 1980s, with the gradual generalization of communicative (pragmatic-functional) models in language teaching, while G2 refers to alterations suggested in recent years.

Another aspect that differentiates the teachers' conceptions from the student groups is that teachers do not refer that there were changes operating in the pedagogical processes (in general) that influence grammar teaching (in particular): both student groups (G2 and G3) highlight changes in the educational approach, respectively 57% and 14%, in contrast with G1 responses regarding this aspect (0%).

The emergence of differentiated profiles, as regards the pedagogical content knowledge of teachers and students, seems be consolidated by the data shown in Figure 4, concerning the factors leading to alterations in grammar teaching, and in Figure 5 concerning teaching support tools.
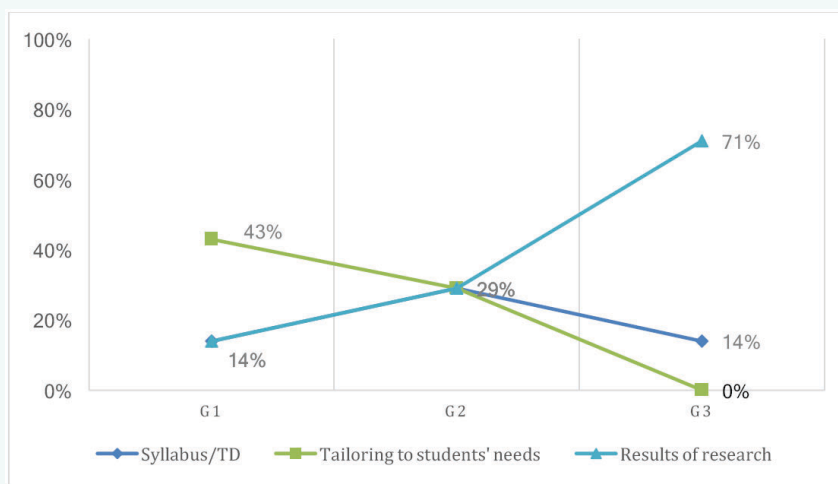
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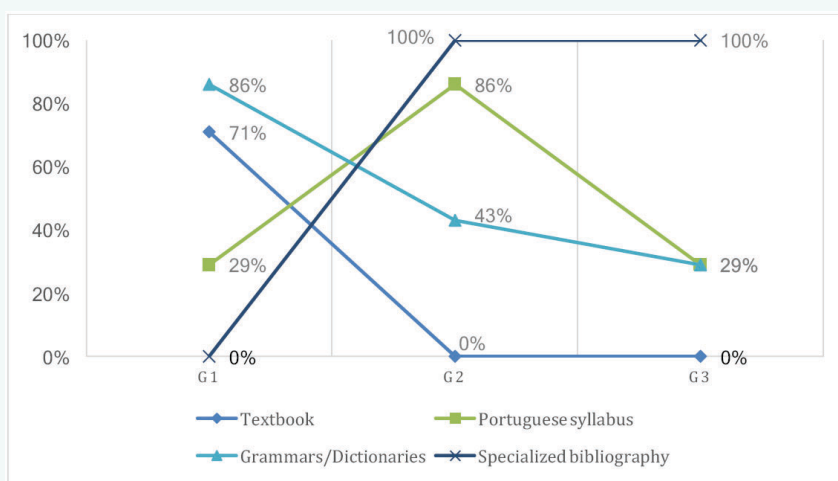**Figure 4** – Factors leading to alterations in grammar teaching.

Figure 5 – Instruments supporting teachers' work.

Figure 4 shows that G1 basically highlights the need to ensure that teaching and learning processes are tailored to suit students with differentiated profiles (such as in multilingual contexts), while G2 seems to have a more holistic understanding of the change, mentioning

various factors. In G3, the results of the research are highlighted, perhaps because this is the group that is most exposed to the theoretical component of teaching training programmes.

In keeping with this, Figure 5 shows that G1 refers essentially to the textbook and grammars or dictionaries as support tools for the teacher's work, while Groups 2 and 3 give more attention to the Syllabus and specialized bibliography, which also includes publications of a didactic nature, as well as research in the specific area.

To determine the curricular options of the groups under study in the field of grammar teaching, an objective factual question was formulated in an attempt to avoid the usual gap between 'practice' and 'discourse about practice'. G1 and G2/G3, were asked, respectively,

- To describe the exercise that they most frequently asked the students to do.
- To describe the exercise that they were most frequently asked to do as elementary and/or secondary school students.

The results, shown in Figure 6, are consistent with the claims made by G2 and G3 about the demotivating nature of the activities that they were asked to do as students.
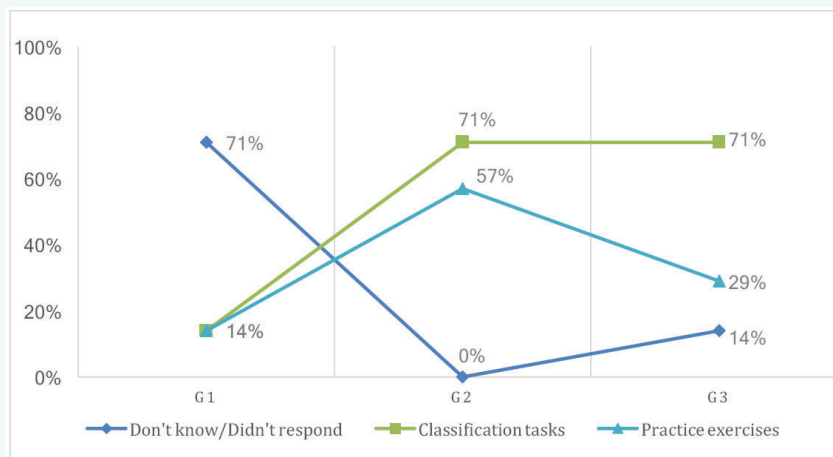
Figure 6 – Most frequent activities in grammar teaching and learning.

There is a clear contrast in Figure 6. While pre-service teachers refer unanimously to *classification tasks* as the most frequent activity, in-service teachers mentioned them only residually (14%), and the majority of them did not answer the question at all (71%). This situation is even more surprising as it is chronologically plausible that the participants of G2 and G3 could have been the students of the G1 teachers.

As regards the preferred teaching strategies, the information gleaned from the three groups allows us to distinguish different profiles as regards the teachers' professional knowledge. Thus, G1 mentions the use of general educational resources, such as posters, books, etc. (29%); the use of text as a pretext for the teaching of grammar (29%); the use of new technologies; increased interaction with students; the explicitation of rules and exercises, and the exploration of the potential of grammar laboratories (14%). G2, for its part, highlighted the exploration of the potential of grammar laboratories (71%), also mentioning the contextualized exploration of grammar and cooperative work (29%). Finally, for G3, contextualized grammar exploration is the most highlighted strategy (57%), and mention is also made of the exploration of the potential of grammar laboratories, practical motivating activities and the use of general educational resources (14%).

As for the didactic resources for grammar teaching, Figure 7 shows that general educational resources are highlighted by all groups at the expense of resources that are specifically suited to the teaching and learning of grammar (these are only mentioned by G2 and G3). Not wanting to specify all the general educational resources mentioned, it is worth noting that the worksheets account for 86% of occurrences in the case of G1.
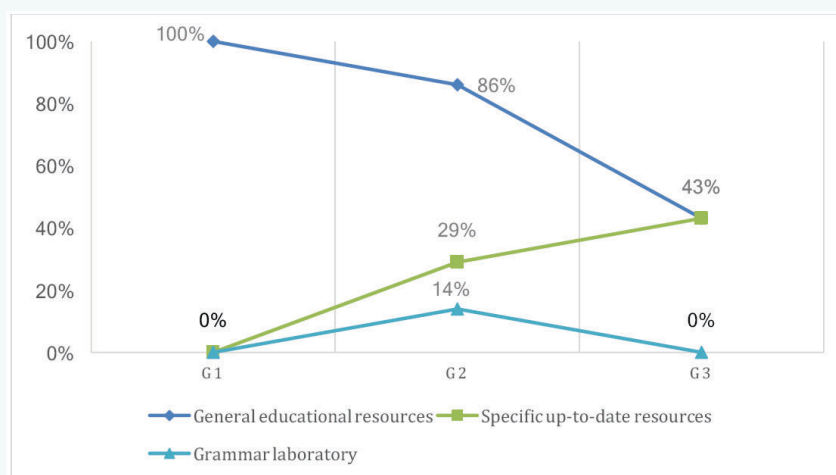
Figure 7 – Didactic resources.

Final remarks

This study offers interesting results for the area of teacher cognition from a perspective that is under-explored in the literature, namely the teaching of L1 grammar.

The results allow us to reflect on the way (in-service and pre-service) teachers' conceptions about various aspects of grammar teaching influence some dimensions of the multi-faceted knowledge that constitutes the particular knowledge of the teacher. More specifically, it is important to explore the four force lines that emerge from the results: self-perception of grammar knowledge; knowledge of the changes in the guidelines for grammar teaching; the instrumental perspective of grammar teaching; and role of experiences in grammar learning as students.

Firstly, the generalized perception that they have inadequate grammatical knowledge (though with different expression across the various groups) makes clear the existence of gaps in teachers' training in the area of linguistics. These gaps have to be filled so that teachers can effectively promote the development of linguistic and metalinguistic awareness amongst their students.

There is also a clear contrast between the teachers' and students' responses with respect to their knowledge of changes in the guidelines for grammar teaching. This contrast is obvious on different levels, and is not restricted to a simple knowledge of the Syllabus (Reis at al. 2009). On the contrary, it involves a whole series of knowledges, correlations between areas of knowledge and reflections about practice, which enable access to the reconceptualization of academic and didactic knowledge. This type of knowledge has to be constructed systematically over time, which is possible during teachers' initial training but is not compatible with the models of ongoing training to which in-service teachers have access. This is an area that requires further investigation.

The belief, shared equally by all, that grammar teaching improves linguistic performance, leading to an instrumental view of grammar teaching, does not in most cases result from knowledge of research into linguistic awareness; that is, the teachers do not know how that relationship is established or how to promote it, though they consider it to be the objective of grammar teaching.

Finally, as regards their grammar learning experiences as students, the pre-service teachers paint a picture that is very similar to what a traditional approach to grammar teaching would be, considering it not only uninteresting but also unable to promote learning in this domain. However, those experiences do not produce unidirectional effects. While they do not destroy their interest in grammar, this initial learning may constitute an obstacle to later learning.

These results allow us to understand better the way that in-service and pre-service elementary teachers think about grammar and how they teach it, constituting a fundamental starting point for helping them examine, become aware of and modify their actions in this domain. The results could contribute to improving the initial and ongoing training of teachers, as they show the need to:

- Improve content knowledge about grammar, providing both sets of teachers with consistent up-to-date knowledge about language which will boost their confidence in the classroom;

- Develop pedagogical content knowledge skills, creating situations for the analysis and discussion of beliefs relating

to grammar teaching, which lead to grounded planning and sustained experimentation with new teaching strategies, using carefully selected materials;

• Forge effective links between training institutions and educational contexts (for example, exploring the situations offered by professional traineeships), favouring the creation of connections between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, fostering debate and joint planning between experienced and novice teachers.

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