

# GRAMMAR TEACHING 91-19: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PORTUGUESE CURRICULA

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## Abstract

The scope of the present study is the discourse about grammar, as a curriculum component, in the syllabi and learning outcomes for Basic and Secondary Education in force in Portugal from 1991 to 2019. The corpus includes thirteen curricular documents that conveyed the prescribed curriculum for Portuguese L1. A comparative study guides the analysis of the curricular discourse, focusing on three issues: (i) the concept of Grammar, (ii) the place of Grammar among other curriculum components, namely Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading, and (iii) the degree of explicitness in grammar instruction. Three dichotomies (dependence / autonomy, prescriptivism / descriptivism, and language skills / reflective thinking), addressed in research, cross over the discourse about Grammar in the official documents. The results show different frames for Grammar conceptualizations, place and type of instruction, in a pathway from a dependent to an autonomous curricular component, and from instrumental goals to a balance between language skills enhancement and reflective activity.

Keywords: Grammar, Portuguese curriculum, L1 syllabus, Language Awareness, Explicit Knowledge

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

From 1991 to 2019, several compulsory curricular documents for Portuguese L1<sup>1</sup> were published in Portugal, reflecting a slice of the thinking about language teaching. Conceptions about grammar, embedded in these documents, are a source of information to understand the state of the art of grammar teaching in the Portuguese education system over the last 30 years. The aim of this study is, therefore, to analyse the pathway of grammar instruction in the curricular documents since 1991, the year of the approval of the syllabi from the Education System Reform,<sup>2</sup> until 2018/19, the academic year for the generalization of the recently published learning outcomes for Basic and Secondary Education. The *Student Profile by the End of Compulsory School* (DGE, 2017) and the *Essential Learning* (DGE, 2018) respond to the framework of competences for a democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2016), a supra-level of curricular decision with new challenges for language education. The *Portuguese L1 Essential Learning* (DGE, 2018) is a new milestone for Grammar teaching, conceiving it as “Grammar Competence”.

While the curricular macro-decision documents are related to trends from supra-decision levels, curricular thinking is also constrained by strands from educational research. Studies on Portuguese language pedagogy have been published to frame the vision of each syllabus in force, updating teacher’s pedagogical and content knowledge (Amor, 1993; Costa, Cabral, Santiago, & Viegas, 2011; Sim-Sim, Duarte, & Ferraz, 1997). The Portuguese Teachers Association sponsored a large-scale study on teachers’ concepts and practices at the beginning of the new millennium (Lobo, 2001; 2002). A similar

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<sup>1</sup> Portuguese is the 6th most spoken L1 in the world, with around 250 million speakers. The most spoken Portuguese variety is Brazilian Portuguese (around 190 million speakers), followed by the African varieties of Portuguese. European Portuguese, the variety ruled by the curricular documents in this study, is spoken in Portugal (around 10 million and a half speakers) and by Portuguese emigrants (around 5 million speakers) (Raposo, Nascimento, Mota, Seguro, & Mendes, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The law ruling the basis of the Portuguese Educational System, after the rise of the democracy and with influence in the system structure until today, is from 1986 (Law 46/86, October 14<sup>th</sup>). At the time, compulsory education ended at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The Law 85/2009, August 27<sup>th</sup> extended the school attendance to twelve years (until the end of secondary school).

study on teacher conceptions and practices, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, was conducted some years later, to prepare a new reform (Duarte, 2009b). One of the pedagogical issues for grammar teaching was the lack of terminological coherence. For that reason, in 2002, the Linguistic Terminology for Basic and Secondary Education was published, and upgraded to become the Online Terminological Dictionary, in 2008. On the language intended curriculum in the Portuguese education system, there are two major studies: Duarte's (2009a) diachronic review of Portuguese L1 syllabi from 1921 to 2001, and Rodrigues's (2017), a comprehensive study on Portuguese teaching in the first decades of the 21st century. The present study fills the gap concerning the Grammar component within the L1 curricula.

In the title of the paper, the word "curriculum" appears in the plural form, which seems more suitable in a twofold sense. First, the legal framework for language teaching reflects the two main education stages in the Portuguese system: Basic Education (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, ages 6 to 14) and Secondary Education (from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, ages 15 to 17). Secondly, while explaining the curricular conceptualizations of grammar teaching, we will need to recall data from its real implementation. Consequently, two different types of curricula will be conflicting: the side of the ideological prescriptions, aiming at the change of the contexts and practices, and the side where the prescribed curriculum is mediated and reconstructed by teachers' conceptions, the learning process, and other field constraints.

Nonetheless, the analysis will be focused mainly on one of the levels considered in the curriculum, which is the macro-decision level. At this level, mandatory documents, applying to the universe of an education system, embody the policies and ideology in a given moment (Zabalza, 2000). In some curricular typologies, this level of decision is regarded as the "prescribed curriculum" (Pacheco, 2001; Roldão, 1999), or the "intended curriculum", which is the overt curriculum based on the political vision, as well as on the intentions specified in curriculum documents and materials (Van den Akker, 2003; Van den Akker, Fasoglio, & Mulder, 2008). As we have mentioned, it contrasts with the decision level of the actual teaching and learning, which are the so-called "implemented curriculum" and the "real/attained curriculum".

### *1.1 Dichotomies for the characterization of grammar in the L1 curriculum*

The debate around grammar teaching has been spread internationally for the last decades. In many cases, it may be described as a “battle” or the “grammar wars” (Myhill & Watson, 2014, p. 41). For each education system, there is a particular history for Grammar in the curricula. This narrative is drawn by the specificity of educational systems, academic power from dominating linguistic theories in teacher training institutions, language policy, as well as teachers’ conceptions and real practices (Boivin, 2018; Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Dolz & Simard, 2009; Fontich & Garcia-Folgado, 2018; Hudson, 1992; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017).

While the perspectives (and objects of concern) differ largely from theoretical backgrounds, it is possible to identify some cyclical tensions that may be reckoned as relevant dichotomies for the characterization of Grammar in the L1 curriculum: a) Dependence/Autonomy, b) Prescriptivism/Descriptivism and c) Language skills/Reflective thinking. By “cyclical tensions”, we are adopting the idea that, in the western curricular cultures, there is an “alternating movement regarding the attribution of greater emphasis”<sup>3</sup> to different dimensions in the “curricular evolution”, which may be explained by the metaphor of the “pendular oscillation” (Roldão, 1999, p. 16). For instance, the pathway from a content-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum is far from being a straight line. It is possible to highlight the tension between the value assigned to “knowledge” and the value assigned to “skills” emerging cyclically in the last decades in educational policy, although it is a false opposition (Costa & Covaneiro, 2019).

The dichotomy *dependence/autonomy* is present in different grammar pedagogy studies. For instance, the tension between dependent or embedded grammar against an autonomous place for grammar reflection has been represented by the positions defending an “epilinguistic approach” (Amor, 1993) versus approaches under which grammar should have its own space in the classroom. In this regard, Hudson (1992) claims: “In my opinion, the best solution is to devote a large proportion of class time to the study of the children’s own language” (p. 43).

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<sup>3</sup> *Translations and underlines of the quotations are ours.*

The prescriptivism/descriptivism dichotomy is well known from linguistic theories which influenced grammar pedagogy. The opposition between a purely instrumental view, in which grammar responds to the needs for normative correction and communicative skills, and a humanistic or cultural view of grammar knowledge might be characterized in terms of prescriptivism versus descriptivism, as it is proposed in Van Rijt and Coppen (2017). As the authors state, the communicative paradigm, which dominated the curricula in the second half of the last century, had, as a consequence, the strengthening of “the already firm association between traditional grammar and prescriptivism” (p. 3). The identification between prescriptive grammar and traditional grammar has consequences at two levels: in the methodology for grammar teaching and in the object of learning. Regarding methodological issues, the reference to traditional grammar is frequently associated with the transmission model, centred in declarative knowledge that students must learn by heart, conceptualized in lists of terms and concepts, taught out of discourse contexts. A significant part of this body of knowledge is supported by “rules of thumb” (Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017) that hardly describe language as it is used by the speakers / students. As far as the object of study is concerned, traditional grammar is also known to be exclusively focused on a single linguistic variety, the standard variety, different from the oral language that children use, their implicit knowledge, and linguistic intuitions (Hudson, 1992). In order to bring together grammar learning at school and language spontaneous knowledge, a descriptive approach to Grammar teaching ought to rely on the attention to linguistic varieties and registers beyond the standard dialect (Duarte, 1998; Hudson, 1992). According to Duarte (2008), “to make all children access to standard Portuguese does not mean eradicate from school other social or geographic varieties since the exposure to the variation typical of living languages is a unique learning opportunity” (p. 10).

The *language skills/reflective thinking* binomial does not stand for a sharp dichotomy. It explains the hierarchy assigned to the reasons and goals for grammar teaching. While in a communicative approach the analysis of the language functioning aims at the improvement of communicative skills, in Grammar, as a process from language awareness to explicit knowledge, the capacity of reasoning consciously about language is a major issue (Duarte, 2008; Hudson, 1992; O’Neil, 2010). Among grammar teaching approaches,

the pendulum oscillates from improving language skills to metalinguistic reasons. Besides, Grammar as a reflective activity, fostering the unique capacity for the human species to refer to and explain one's own language, seems to be a common strand of grammar teaching research (Boivin, 2018; Camps, 2014; Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018; Hudson, 1992; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017).

The comparative analysis of the curricular discourse aims at answering the following research questions:

- RQ1: What concepts of grammar and what grammar teaching goals are drawn from the discourse of each curricular document?
- RQ2: What is the place dedicated to Grammar among the other L1 curricular components (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing)?
- RQ3: How explicitly should grammar be taught?

Regarding RQ1 (*What concepts of grammar and what grammar teaching goals are drawn from the discourse of each curricular guideline?*), we draw on Zabalza (2000), who characterizes the official syllabi as the translation of a "common structure of a culture". The author identifies "objectives", "contents", "strategies/methodologies," and "evaluation/assessment" as essential elements in the curricular documents, including syllabi and teaching plans. The majority of the curricular documents under analysis comprise a similar organization, with the same four elements (section 2). The answer to the first question will be drawn from the explicit definitions of "grammar", in the introductory texts, inferred from the objectives of grammar teaching, and related to the labels given to the grammar component in each document.

An approach to the discursive construal of the concept of "grammar" implies the recognition of its plurisignification at least at two levels. First, "grammar" may refer to the implicit knowledge of the language that any child achieves spontaneously. Secondly, "grammar", at school, may be interpreted as the explicit knowledge of the language, mainly dependent on instruction. Following Camps (2019), these two concepts of grammar may be distinguished as "implicit knowledge of how the language works and as a model that explains this knowledge, and that is reflected on the objectives of grammar teaching." (p. 11).

From a different perspective, the Portuguese *Terminological Dictionary* (DGE, 2008) defines "metalinguistic competence" as "the ability a speaker

has to manipulate and reflect on units, processes, and rules of the grammar of her/his own language. The full development of the metalinguistic competence depends, to a large extent, on explicit and formal instruction". While the definition of "metalinguistic competence" coincides with the notion of "explicit knowledge", the term "grammar" accounts for the "implicit knowledge" of the language<sup>4</sup>.

From a developmental perspective, it is possible to explain the pathway from natural language acquisition to sophisticated linguistic reflection, integrating the idea of implicit/explicit linguistic knowledge as continuous and recalling the contribution of different theories to the study of human linguistic knowledge. Karmiloff-Smith (1996) states that "one can attribute various innate predispositions to the human neonate, without negating the roles of the physical and sociocultural environments and without jeopardizing the deep-seated conviction that we are special—creative, cognitively flexible, and capable of conscious reflection, novel invention, and occasional inordinate stupidity" (p.1). Karmiloff-Smith's Representational Redescription Model includes four levels at which knowledge is represented and re-represented, from the implicit knowledge to three levels of explicit knowledge. The explicit knowledge is associated with conscious access and capacity of verbalizing references to language through language itself. Early verbalizations about language are made using everyday language. Then, high levels of explicit knowledge require learning a metalanguage, and depend on schooling. Section 3 will be focused on the RQ1 and the conceptualization of grammar, as an intended curriculum component, in the curricular discourse.

As regards RQ2 (*What is the place dedicated to Grammar among the other L1 curricular components?*), we will consider the status of grammar contents in comparison to other L1 components. Methodological orientations and the articulation among components will also be taken into account. This second research question will bring into the debate Grammar as an autonomous curricular component, alongside with Listening, Speaking, Reading, and

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive revision on the implicit and explicit knowledge debate among linguistic theories, see Rebuschat (2015); for a revision in the field of grammar pedagogy, see Camps & Fontich (2019) and Costa (2019).

Writing. The weight of Grammar as knowledge relevant *per se* will be considered according to the average time prescribed in each syllabus, the amount of explicit declarative or procedural contents, or the deepening of a given content on each linguistic matter. Analysing the relationship between Grammar and the other curriculum components will be the goal of section 4.

Finally, concerning RQ3 (*How explicitly should grammar be taught?*), the analysis will be focused on the pedagogical strategies for grammar teaching, prescribed in the curricular documents. The degree of instruction explicitness is a pedagogical issue that applies to any subject. In the case of grammar teaching, what is being examined is the type of instruction displayed, including the degree of guidance in a task, the amount of specific metalinguistic terms required, the degree of awareness, and intentional manipulation expected. Examples of teaching strategies proposed in the syllabi will be the subject of analysis in section 5.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 *Corpus*

The corpus includes thirteen curricular documents, approved by the Portuguese Ministry of Education from 1991 to 2019: eight for Basic Education and five for Secondary Education. In Table 1, the documents considered in the analysis are presented in chronologic order. The departments within the Ministry of Education responsible for each document and their implementation are identified in the second column. These departments supervised the work of the teams of teachers and researchers that authored the curricular documents. The column on the right indicates the genre in which each curricular guideline is presented: Syllabus or Learning Outcomes. By “syllabus” (in Portuguese, “programa”), we are implying the curricular documents prescribing goals, contents, strategies, and assessment/evaluation (Zabalza, 2000). The “learning outcomes” describe the levels of proficiency to be achieved at the end of the learning process. In both cases, these curricular documents include general orientations for each curricular component in introductory texts.



Table 1 - Corpus

Year	Directorate of the Ministry of Education <sup>5</sup>	Document	Genre
1991	Directorate General for Basic and Secondary Education (DGEBS)	a) <i>Programa de Língua Portuguesa. 1.º Ciclo</i> b) <i>Programa de Língua Portuguesa. 2.º Ciclo</i> c) <i>Programa de Língua Portuguesa. 3.º Ciclo</i> d) <i>Português – Organização curricular e programa. Ensino Secundário</i>	Syllabus
1997	Department of Secondary Education (DES)	<i>Português A e B. Programas. 10.º, 11.º e 12.º anos</i>	
1997	Department of Basic Education (DEB)	<i>A língua materna na educação básica</i> <sup>6</sup>	Learning outcomes
2001	DEB	<i>Currículo nacional do ensino básico – competências essenciais. Língua Portuguesa</i>	Learning outcomes
2001-2002	DES	<i>Programa de Língua Portuguesa 10.º, 11.º e 12.º anos. Cursos gerais e cursos tecnológicos</i>	Syllabus
2009	Directorate General for Curricular Development and Innovation (DGIDC)	<i>Programas de Português do ensino básico</i>	Syllabus
2014		<i>Programa e metas curriculares de Português. Ensino secundário</i>	Syllabus & Learning outcomes
2015	Directorate General for Education (DGE)	<i>Programa e metas curriculares de Português do ensino básico</i>	Syllabus & Learning outcomes
2018		a) <i>Aprendizagens essenciais. Ensino básico.</i> b) <i>Aprendizagens essenciais. Ensino secundário.</i>	Learning outcomes Learning outcomes

All the syllabi and learning outcomes were authored by multidisciplinary teams integrated by specialists from different theoretical frameworks, as

<sup>5</sup> The organization of the directorates of the Ministry of Education depends on each Government organic structure.

<sup>6</sup> *A Língua Materna na Educação Básica. Competências nucleares e níveis de desempenho. [First language in Basic Education. Nuclear competences and performance levels]* is a study by three specialists in Portuguese teaching referred in the National Curriculum for Basic Education (DEB, 2001) as the guideline for L1 learning outcomes. For that reason, and following the criteria established by Duarte (2009a), it was included in the corpus.

well as by Basic and Secondary Education teachers, to create consensual views around the curriculum and to avoid an allegiance to specific linguistic theories (which is why only in some cases the authors' names figured in the publication). Nonetheless, referring to such an eclectic policy Roldão (1999) comments that "the process of incorporating diverse theoretical perspectives in the curricula was a bit chaotic" (p.19). For each new syllabus or learning outcome, the departments of the Ministry of Education produced didactic materials for schools and promoted in-service teacher training programs. Those materials and programs are out of the scope of the present study.

## *2.2 A framework for analysing grammar in the language curricula*

The analysis was conducted following a model of "comparative analysis", as in other curriculum analysis studies,<sup>7</sup> two of them focusing on the Portuguese L1 intended curriculum (Duarte, 2009a; Rodrigues, 2017). Under a qualitative-interpretative approach, a content-analysis process was followed, considering categories and units previously established upon a hypothetical theoretical functioning (Bardin, 1977, p. 119). Being a subject-specific study, it aims at unpacking components of the grammar curriculum, within the L1 curriculum, comparing the conceptualization of three units in the documents:

- The concept of grammar and grammar teaching goals, attending explicit or inferred definitions, and the label assigned to this curriculum component.
- The space occupied by grammar, contrasting the weight of grammar contents and its position among the other components (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing).

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, in *OECD strategy Future for Education and Skills 2030, studies on curricular comparative analysis support curriculum policies (design and implementation)*. See reference to projects at <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/curriculum-analysis/>

- The degree of explicitness in grammar instruction, considering types of teaching strategies or methodological orientations for language reflection in the classroom.

These units, responding to the research questions raised in the Introduction, will be analysed regarding the interplay they establish with the three categories identified as relevant strands in the research on grammar pedagogy: a) dependence/autonomy, b) prescriptivism/descriptivism, and c) language skills/reflective thinking.

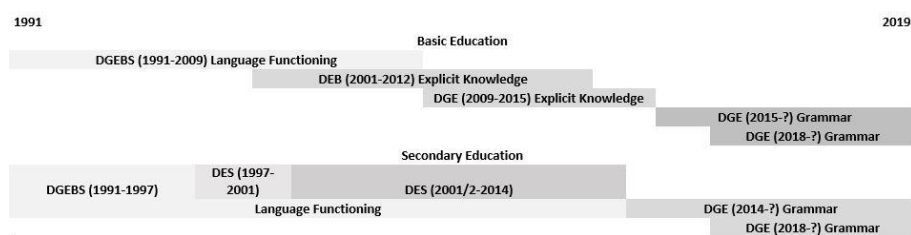
### 3. THE CONCEPT OF GRAMMAR

To analyse the concept of “grammar” in the curricular discourse, we have first searched for the label assigned to the grammar component in each document. Secondly, we have looked for explicit definitions of grammar, usually present in the introductory texts, and for definitions inferred from the general goals (in Portuguese “finalidades”) and objectives for grammar teaching.

As Figure 1 puts in evidence, three different labels were assigned to Grammar as a component of the L1 curricula in the thirteen documents:

- Language Functioning
- Explicit Knowledge (of the Language)
- Grammar

Figure 1. Labels of grammar



Due to changes in educational policies, syllabi and learning outcomes with different conceptual perspectives coexisted on L1 education. Consequently, teachers and students had to deal with an overlap of labels (and concepts) for Grammar. For instance, between 2001 and 2012, teachers (and their students) dealt with two labels for the grammar component, in the same grades,

“Language Functioning” and “Explicit Knowledge”. Both expressions were used in textbooks, exams, and other materials for Basic Education. The same incoherent use of labels has happened in Basic and Secondary Education between 2001 and 2014. During more than one decade, the same student would learn grammar contents calling it “Explicit Knowledge” in the early grades, and then, in secondary school, “Language Functioning.” Only from 2015 onwards, the grammar component became “Grammar”. Nevertheless, the stability of the label does not correspond to a coherent conception from one document to the other.

In Table 2, we present the definitions of grammar extracted from the curricular documents, explicitly expressed in introductory texts or inferred from general objectives.

The term “Language Functioning” is the expression inherited from the syllabi in force in the 80s, and adopted from 1991 onwards. Dominated by the communicative approach, “grammar reflection” should be oriented towards “the solution of linguistic problems” (DGEBS, 1991c, p. 48) raised by the language use. This idea is illustrated in the definition given in #1 to #4, in which the expression “situations of (language) use” is repeated. The year 1997 brought the official break with this communicative paradigm, signalling the pathway for Grammar as an autonomous component. In this updated version of the syllabus for Secondary Education (DES, 1997), the main goal for grammar teaching became a balance between a reflection “from situations of language use” and an “autonomous reflection” (see #5).

The term “Explicit Knowledge” was introduced by the study *First language in Basic Education* (Sim-Sim et al., 1997) in the *National Curriculum for Basic Education* (DEB, 2001) (see footnote 6). As we may read in Table 2, both documents stress the idea of Explicit Knowledge as a process that begins with the awareness of the implicit knowledge of the language (see #6 and #7). According to Sim-Sim et al. (1997), linguistic implicit knowledge become conscious through language games and manipulations, ranging from more spontaneous to more guided activities, in a three steps path: (i) implicit and spontaneous knowledge, (ii) language awareness, and (iii) explicit and verbalized knowledge. This concept of grammar as “Explicit Knowledge” is always dependent on “formal instruction” and associated to the “development of metacognitive processes” (see #7).

At the same time, in Secondary Education a new route to the communicative approach strengthened the concept of Language Functioning with the balance between “communicative competence” and “reflective knowledge about language”, as we may read in #5.

Table 2. Definitions of grammar in the official documents (*italics added*)

Order	Source	Definitions	Grammar conceptualization
#1	DGEBS (1991a)	“To discover fundamental aspects of the structure and functioning of the language, <i>from situations of use</i> ” (p. 138)	Language Functioning
#2	DGEBS (1991b)	“To discover fundamental aspects of the structure and functioning of the language, <i>from situations of use</i> ” (p. 41)	Language Functioning
#3	DGEBS (1991c)	“To discover fundamental aspects of the structure and functioning of the language, <i>from situations of use</i> ” (p. 49)	Language Functioning
#4	DGEBS (1991d)	“a rigorous reflection <i>from concrete situations of language use</i> ” (p. 166)	Language Functioning
#5	DES (1997)	“To develop a linguistic reflection and systematization <i>not only from situations of language use</i> , in comprehension and expression activities, <i>but also as an autonomous reflection</i> ” (p. 13)	Explicit Knowledge
#6	Sim-Sim et al. (1997)	“By ‘ <i>Explicit knowledge</i> ’ we mean the progressive awareness and systematization of the implicit knowledge in the use of the language” (p. 31)	Explicit Knowledge
#7	DEB (2001)	“It is the <i>reflective, explicit, and systematized knowledge</i> of units, rules, and grammar processes of language. This competence implies the <i>development of metacognitive processes</i> , almost always <i>dependent on formal instruction</i> . It provides the speakers’ control of the rules and selection of adequate strategies for comprehension and expression in each communicative situation.” (p. 32)	Explicit Knowledge
#8	DES (2001/2)	“To develop <i>communicative competence</i> , joining functional uses with <i>reflective knowledge about language</i> .” (p. 6) “ <i>Reflective capacity</i> to systematize the grammar units, rules and processes of the language, leading to the identification and correction of error; the explicit knowledge of the language is <i>based on formal instruction</i> and implies the <i>development of metacognitive processes</i> .” (p. 16)	Language Functioning
#9	DGIDC (2009)	“To develop linguistic and metalinguistic awareness, mobilizing it to <i>better performances in languages uses</i> .” (p. 11)	Explicit Knowledge
#10	DGE (2014)	“To <i>know standard Portuguese</i> using it properly in different oral, writing, and reading situations.” (p. 6)	Grammar
#11	DGE (2015)	“The development of <i>language awareness</i> and <i>explicit knowledge</i> of the <i>structure, rules, and uses</i> of Portuguese.” (p. 2)	Grammar
#12	DGE (2018a)	“Portuguese classes must be oriented towards the development of a (...) <i>Grammar competence</i> through a <i>gradual and systematized knowledge</i> about basic aspects from different	Grammar Competence
#13	DGE (2018b)		Grammar Competence

domains (phonological, morphological, word classes, syntactic, semantic, and textual-discursive)." (p. 3)

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In 2009, a new reform of the syllabi for the three cycles of Basic Education searched for coherence, reinforcing the concept of Explicit Knowledge. In the new syllabi (DGIDC, 2009), the grammar component appears under the label "Explicit Knowledge of the Language". Framed by the *National Curriculum*, its main goal was "to develop language awareness, turning implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge about the language" (DGIDC, 2009, p.23) (see #6, #7 and #9). The same syllabi strengthened the concept of grammar as an explicit and reflective capacity, fostering metacognitive and metalinguistic skills (see both #7 and #9). In the pendular oscillation, the side of *reflective activity* overtakes the *language skills* value.

Although this DGIDC (2009) syllabus stresses the idea of grammar as a reflective activity, it also reintroduces a traditional concept of "correction of the error." This expression illustrates the other side of the coin: the lack of coherence that accompanied the pathway of Grammar in the curriculum. Due to political pressures and public opinion, grammar had to be justified by prescriptive goals, since descriptive pedagogical strategies were (still are) associated to lack of accuracy. Simultaneously, in this syllabus, a broad descriptive approach was assumed. To begin with, language varieties, including formal and informal registers, different from standard Portuguese, were explicitly valued as an object of language reflection. For instance, in the 9<sup>th</sup>-grade syllabus, one of the goals was "to distinguish geographic and social contexts that source different varieties of the Portuguese language." (DGIDC, 2009, p. 91). Grounded by the studies for grammar in the curriculum from the early 90s (Duarte, 1992; Hudson, 1992), the introduction of the awareness of language variation did not put the access to standard Portuguese in the second plan. In fact, since the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, children should "respect the different varieties of Portuguese, and recognize standard Portuguese as the norm to be learned and used in school, as well as in other formal contexts outside school" (DGIDC, 2009, p. 27). Furthermore, with an updated linguistic description, the *Online Terminological Dictionary* (DGE, 2008) introduced levels of analysis different from the traditional focus on Morphosyntax. The way became free to inductive methodologies, like the Grammar Lab (Duarte, 2008), suggested as well in DGIDC (2009).

As a reaction to the curriculum ideology in force since 2001, which was grounded on competences, policy changes from 2012 retreated to a content-based view of education, including the L1 curriculum. The grammar component kept its space in the L1 new syllabi and learning outcomes under the label “Grammar”. While it was a more coherent term, applied to Basic as well as to Secondary grades, the new content-based approach reinforced pedagogical strategies from the transmission model, still alive in many classrooms. The pendulum moved again to the side of language skills, with grammar goals aiming at “better performances in language uses”, underpinned by the knowledge of “standard Portuguese” (see #10 and #11). Since the word “reflection” disappeared from the discourse about grammar, we may consider that these two syllabi represent a break in the curricular evolution of grammar teaching goals.

From 2017 to 2019, the curricular pendulum in the Portuguese educational system oscillated again from the side of a content-based curriculum to a competence-based one. This recent reform was grounded in a policy of curricular flexibility and autonomy for schools, motivated by supra-level curricular guidelines, as the *Competences for democratic culture. Living Together as equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies* (Council of Europe, 2016). With the publication, in Portugal, of the *Student Profile by the End of Compulsory School* (DGE, 2017), new learning outcomes for each subject and grade were published under the title of *Essential Learning* (DGE, 2018). In the *Essential Learning for Portuguese L1*, the grammar component kept the label “Grammar” but recovered a concept close to the explicit knowledge approach, underpinned by the “development of language awareness and explicit knowledge” (see #12). In this set of learning outcomes, Grammar is conceived as a competence *per se*, autonomous from the oral and written comprehension and expression components. Contrasting with the goals for grammar teaching in #10 and #11, in the new definition of Grammar, the reference to language skills is absent (see #12 and #13). This absence, however, is different from decontextualized grammar learning, since the curricular articulation guarantees an integrated view for the L1 curriculum: “it is *at the intersection of the various components* that Portuguese teaching and learning are built: production and reception of texts (oral, written, multimodal), literary education, *explicit knowledge of the language (structure and functioning)*” (DGE, 2018b, p. 1, italics added).

Concluding, there is not a direct mapping of the three labels used for the grammar component (Language Functioning, Explicit Knowledge, and Grammar) and its definitions. Going through all the thirteen official documents, we have reached a distinction of four frames for the conceptualization of Grammar as a curriculum component:

- Language Functioning
- Explicit Knowledge
- Grammar
- Grammar Competence

#### 4. THE PLACE OF GRAMMAR

We conducted the analysis of the place within the curriculum that the grammar component occupies considering the time that teachers are expected to devote to grammar contents. The rationale beyond follows what any teacher would do planning the work with the students. In some syllabi, this information is explicit (for instance, in DGEBS, 1991 or DES, 2001/02). In other documents, it is inferred from the weight of objectives or contents assigned to each curricular component (Grammar, Oral Comprehension, Oral Expression, Reading, and Writing). We also analyse the space for grammar, taking into account the methodological orientations on the relationship between grammar and the other components, which we find in the introductory texts of each document. In order to systematize the overview of the place occupied by Grammar in the L1 curricula, we have represented it in figures, following what is proposed in the methodological orientations of one set of syllabi under analysis, the ones published in 1991 (Figure 2).

The three figures are a synthesis of the information from which we have reached the three general models that represent the place of grammar and the relationship between grammar and the other components (Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Literary Education).

Figure 2 is the transcription from one of the syllabi in force between 1991 and 2009 (DGEBS, 1991c, p. 56), and it covers for the model followed by the four syllabi from DGEBS (1991).

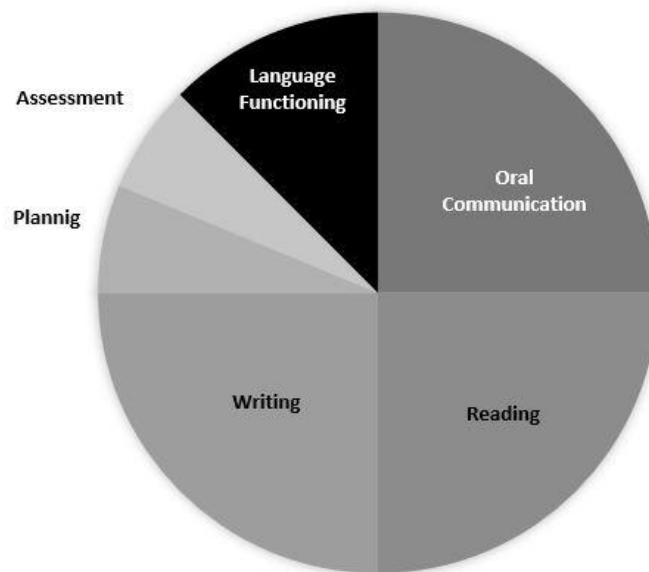
In this model, the weight attached to grammar, labelled as “Language Functioning”, is inferior to the one assigned to the communicative skills (oral communication, reading and writing). Besides, it is shared with pedagogical



procedures for active learning (planning, evaluating, and assessing). In one of the introductory texts, we may read that “grammar reflection should take place within the framework of pedagogical strategies *aimed at solving linguistic problems*” (DGEBS, 1991c, p. 48, italics added).

In the discourse of these syllabi, there is a structural difference in each curriculum component text. While for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, there is a column for declarative and procedural contents, in the Language Functioning section, there is not any information on contents. On grammar learning, there is nothing but presupposed “levels of operationalization” (e.g., pedagogical strategies) build on language skills tasks.

Figure 2. Grammar as language functioning (DGEBS, 1991)

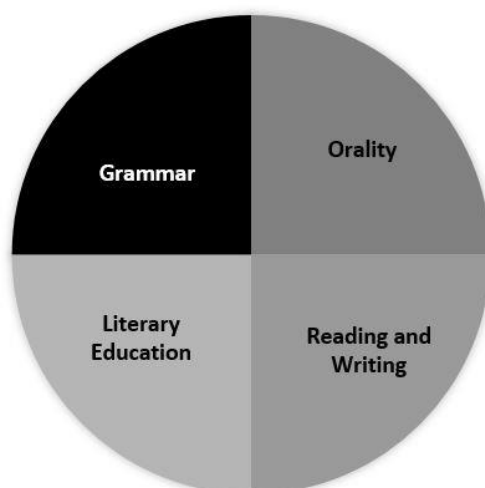


The second model represents a disruptive movement in the evolution of the L1 curriculum, as it was mentioned in section 3. A step back to a more traditional vision is implied in Figure 3, in which Literary Studies and Grammar (as Rhetoric) play a crucial role in a content-based curriculum for language education.

Grammar has the same weight as the other L1 components (Literary Education, Oral Communication, Reading and Writing), being a place for explicit

instruction, with autonomy, to which a load of declarative and prescriptive contents is attributed, aiming at a proficient use of “standard Portuguese” (DGE, 2015, p. 6). Although grammar should be taught explicitly (there are lists of terms and concepts to classify), some methodological dependence from the other components is expressed in the introductory texts: “The study of Grammar is based on the assumption that *the learning of the different domains of the syllabus* calls for a structured and rigorous work of reflection, explanation and grammatical systematization” (DGE, 2015, p. 9, italics added).

Figure 3. Grammar (DGE, 2014, 2015)



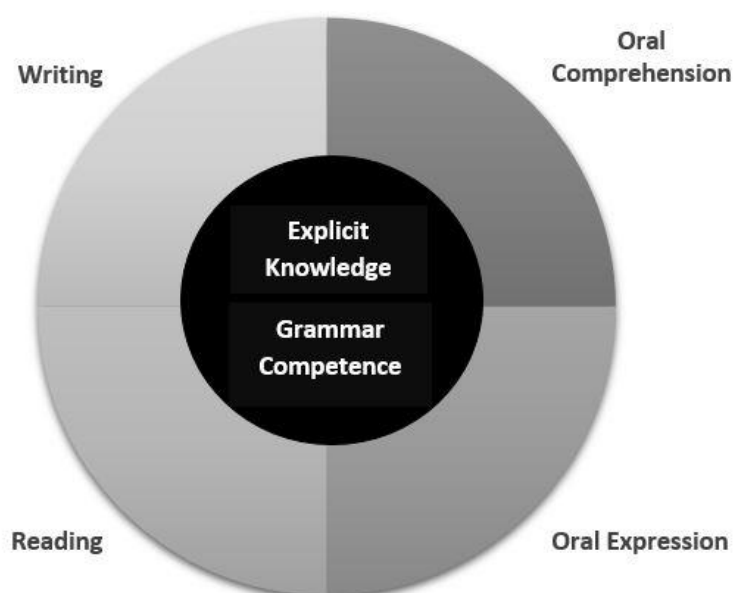
In Figure 4, the third model represents the case in which Grammar needs the same time as the other components, but, differently from the previous models, it is explicitly meant to be “central”, e.g., it is placed in the heart of the curriculum, and in intersection with all the other components.

Independently from the label assigned (Language Functioning, Explicit Knowledge, or Grammar), seven of the thirteen analysed syllabi and learning outcomes fit this model. In the two Secondary Education syllabi (DES, 1997; DES, 2001-02), Language Functioning conquered an equivalent space to the

other components. In one of them, it is stated that “learning and systematization of knowledge about the L1 structure and functioning *must be central* in the Portuguese subject.” (DES, 1997, p. 95, italics added).

The place of the grammar component in the “core curriculum” is recognized similarly in the *National Curriculum* (DEB, 2001). The Explicit Knowledge of Language is one of the five competences, the one that “*specifically feeds* each one of the other four” (Sim-Sim et al., 1997, p. 12, italics added).

Figure 4. Grammar as explicit knowledge and as grammar competence (DES, 1997; DEB, 1997; 2001;



(DES, 2001/2; DGIDC, 2009, DGE, 2018)

Grammar, as “competence”, the concept actually in force, has a similar conceptualization to the explicit knowledge approach (see section 3). The assumption of Grammar in the curricula as a *competence* – a complex cluster of capacities, knowledge, and attitudes (Council of Europe, 2016; DGE, 2017) – guarantees the centrality accomplished by grammar in the curricula. By the

end of the twelve grades of compulsory school, “students should have a secure *metalinguistic knowledge* of the structure and functioning aspects of language, *considered essential*” (DGE 2018b, p. 3, italics added).

## 5. THE DEGREE OF EXPLICITNESS IN GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

We have analysed the degree of explicitness in grammar instruction comparing pedagogical strategies and methodological orientations in the curricular documents. Except in two cases, the learning outcomes above signalled as a break in the curricular evolution (DGE, 2014; DGE, 2015), all the documents include a section on teaching strategies. These textual sections are titled differently as, for instance, “levels of operationalization” (DGEBS, 1991), “methodological orientations” (DES, 1997), or “strategical actions for teaching” (DGE, 2018). In some curricular documents, information describing tasks and learning opportunities for students is presented as, for example, “development of performance levels” (DEB, 1997; 2001) or “notes” (DGIDC, 2009). Several curricular documents include, as well, a list of bibliographic references updating teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge.

The synthesis of the methodological approaches, suggested in the curricular discourse, confirms the same three paradigms identified in the characterization of the place of Grammar (section 4). To illustrate it, Table 3 compares three examples of pedagogical strategies for grammar teaching. A classic grammar content was chosen to ensure comparability, which is the syntactic functions *subject* and *predicate* in the syllabi for the same grade, by the end of primary school.

Table 3 – Teaching and learning the subject and the predicate at primary school

Language Functioning	Grammar	Explicit Knowledge Grammar Competence
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	G4	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grade
To <u>distinguish</u> , in sentences, key elements (expanding it and reducing it). (DGEBS, 1991, p. 158)	To <u>identify</u> the following syntactic functions: subject and predicate. (DGE, 2015, p. 63)	To <u>manipulate</u> words (or groups of words in sentences): expanding, substituting, reducing, segmenting, and moving elements). To <u>make explicit</u> rules and procedures: distinguishing subject and predicate.

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To mobilize this knowledge to oral and written comprehension and expression (punctuation).

(DGIDC, 2009, p. 57)

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In the case of the paradigm of Language Functioning, in the syllabus from 1991, an implicit instruction was supposed to guide the children in distinguishing key elements through sentence manipulations, which should be done in association with writing or reading. No concept at all should be introduced before the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

In the second approach (DGE, 2015), grammar knowledge of the *subject* and the *predicate* is accomplished through its “identification”. There is no information on the awareness of the criteria to understand the functioning of this grammar feature. This way, syntactic functions are seen as a declarative content to be classified in a decontextualized manner. Note that the verbs commanding the instruction (“to distinguish” and “to identify”) correspond to low-level cognitive demands.

Finally, in the third column, a quotation from the syllabus in force in 2009 exemplifies the kind of grammar instruction underpinned by both the Explicit Knowledge and the Grammar Competence model. For the learning of the concepts *subject* and *predicate*, a process, guided through steps, starts with the manipulation of linguistic elements (expanding, substituting, reducing, segmenting, and moving) based on the students' implicit judgments on well-formed sentences. This strategy promotes the awareness of the criteria to determine the *subject* and the *predicate*, which may be verbalized, in this grade, by everyday language. After these steps, the introduction of meaningful concepts and terms is possible and significant. Furthermore, in the example taken from DGIDC (2009), to stabilize the new knowledge, the mobilization of these concepts is provided in association with specific aspects of Writing, which require the identification of a *subject*, as punctuation rules. Similarly, the pedagogical strategies for the Grammar Competence component (DGE, 2018a) suggest a pathway through observation, linguistic manipulation, criteria awareness, rule verbalization, and terms and concepts mastery. In this document, Grammar’s “knowledge, skills, and attitudes” are related to the development of students’ “reflective and creative thinking” (DGE, 2018a, pp.12-13).

## 6. DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The overview of Grammar in the Portuguese L1 curricula from 1991 to 2019 mirrors the curriculum evolution in Portugal, explained by Roldão (1999) through the metaphor of a pendulum. Its oscillating movement accounts for the repetition of conceptual trends constrained by a broad curricular culture. The analysis of the concepts, place, and type of instruction in the curricular discourse uncovers some common strands within the history of Grammar in the intended curriculum of other educational systems.

Unlike some countries where grammar instruction had almost disappeared from the official curricula and from the classroom until the late 90s (Hudson, 1999; Myhill & Watson, 2014, a.o.), there has always been a place for Grammar in the Portuguese L1 curricula. “To-grammar-or-not-to-grammar” (Boivin et al., 2018, p. 5) crystallizes in the Portuguese curricula as an ongoing debate between implicit instruction, and explicit or direct instruction, demanding different degrees of intentional guidance, from language awareness to metalinguistic declarative knowledge.

Considering RQ1 (*What concepts of grammar and what grammar teaching goals are drawn from the discourse of each curricular document?*), the analysis of the curricular discourse construals identified three labels assigned to Grammar (*Language Functioning, Explicit Knowledge, and Grammar*), and four conceptual frames, which we have referred as *Language Functioning, Grammar, Explicit Knowledge, and Grammar Competence*. However, there is not a direct mapping between labels, on one side, and definitions in the curricular discourse, on the other side. The clearest example of controversial concepts, under the same label, is the conceptualization of Grammar in the content-based curricula from 2014 and 2015, recovering rhetorical purposes, and the idea of Grammar as a competence, conveying knowledge, skills, and attitudes (as linguistic inclusion), in force since 2018.

A common first trend to other curriculum cultures is the presence of the communicative paradigm and, with it, the fallacy according to which it is not worth teaching grammar because “any native speaker has an implicit knowledge of his grammar rules” (DGEBS, 1991c, p.48). The immersion in the communication contexts would be enough to foster language knowledge, which led to the idea that intentional grammar instruction was dispensable. This communicative approach dominated the Portuguese L1 syllabi in the 80s

and the early 90s. A similar frame is referred to for other countries in the same period (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018; Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017). To understand the broad adoption of this approach, one needs to account for some positive aspects that historically justify it. On the one hand, the didactic transposition of the theory of communication and text-centred linguistic theories brought into the L1 didactics tools for reflection upon texts, discourse, and pragmatics, representing an innovation in the field. On the other hand, it drove away from language education some “monsters” (Spolsky, 2008, p. 1), namely, some direct application of formal linguistic tools without the proper pedagogical transposition (Troncoso, 2020). However, in the L1 communicative approach grammar was reduced to instrumental means, which reinforced a prescriptive attitude and traditional practices in the classroom. The Portuguese situation seems to fit well with what is reported by van Rijt & Coppen (2017, p.3): “In the Netherlands, as in many other countries, this communicative paradigm gave rise to a dominant instrumental vision of language education”.

With the beginning of the new millennium, the pendulum moved from the prescriptive vision to the descriptive attitude, towards a grammar reflection nurtured by the students’ real discourse and language inner and social experiences. The balance between language skills and reflective thinking about one’s own language was introduced still under the label of Language Functioning (DES, 1997). The curricular documents from 2001 onwards (except for DGE, 2014; 2015) conceptualize grammar in the intended curriculum as Explicit Knowledge, a pathway from implicit knowledge, to language awareness, and to metalinguistic knowledge (DEB, 2001; DGIDC, 2009): “the ongoing awareness and systematization of the implicit knowledge in the language use” (Sim-Sim et al., 1997, p. 30).

As it was mentioned in the Introduction, there is not a direct relationship between the Explicit Knowledge model and any specific linguistic theory. Linguists from different theoretical backgrounds adopt this vision on grammar teaching in their works on educational matters (Duarte, 1992; 2008; Hudson, 1992; O’Neill 2010). The implicit and explicit knowledge in language learning, while having distinct theoretical assumptions, are concepts crossing theories (Camps, 2019; Karmiloff-Smith, 1996; Rebuschat, 2015). The analysis, however, distinguished four grammar teaching models that underpin grammar conceptualizations in the curricular discourse: the communicative paradigm

(DGEBS, 1991a,b,c,d; DES, 2001/02), an approach recalling rhetorical purposes (DGE, 2014; 2015), the Explicit Knowledge approach (DEB, 1997; 2001; DES, 1997; DGIDC, 2009), and Grammar Competence (DGE, 2018a,b). Still, considering grammar teaching models, it is worth noting the absence of the metalinguistic approach (Camps, 2014; Camps & Fontich, 2019; Myhill, 2011; Myhill et al., 2020), framed by Vygotskian principles, in the Portuguese curricula. While pedagogical contributions from the Geneva School, as the learning sequences for writing, are present in the Writing and Reading components, the Metalinguistic Activity for grammar learning has been kept outside the Portuguese intended curriculum history. Nonetheless, recent research on Portuguese grammar pedagogy underlines Metalinguistic Activity as a promising avenue in the debate on grammar instruction (Costa, 2019; Santos, Cardoso & Pereira, 2014).

In the movement from a prescriptive view to a descriptive attitude, a second aspect may be underlined as a common path in the intended curriculum of many educational systems: the revision of the terminology for a pedagogical grammar at the beginning of the new millennium. The aim was to develop tools for language learning allowing accurate descriptions of the language actually used by the students and updated on linguistic theories. The Portuguese *Terminological Dictionary* (DGE, 2008), the terminology of the French 'Nouvelle Grammaire' (Boivin, 2018), the list of "necessary concepts for language education," in the Netherlands (Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017) or the new *Glossary of grammatical terms* by the Real Academia Española (Bosque, 2020) are examples of this milestone. In Portugal, between 2002 and 2008, a strong debate about the concepts and terms that were to be taught at school, opposing the old rhetorical school to linguists, helped grammar education strengthen its place in the language curricula. Not via the intended curriculum, but through the "washback effect" of national exams (Tapadas & Reis Jorge, 2009), understanding the 'new grammar' became an important issue for teachers, impacting their practices in a way that still needs the attention of empirical research.

Regarding RQ2 (*What is the place dedicated to Grammar among the other L1 curricular components?*), it is possible to conclude that it moved from the "periphery" to the "core curriculum" (Duarte, 1991; Duarte & Costa, 2004). From the subordination to instrumental goals for communicative reasons (DGEBS, 1991), to the balance between the mastery of language skills and



the reflection about one's own language (DES, 1997; DEB, 2001), it achieved a central place in the curricular discourse. Under the frame of Grammar Competence, the "intersection" (DGE, 2018b) with other components of the L1 curriculum (Orality, Reading, Writing, and Literary Education) is a crux of the matter for meaningful grammar teaching and learning. Furthermore, the intersection between levels of achievement for Grammar Competence and the *Student Profile by the End of Compulsory School* (DGE, 2017) highlights the role of grammar in the language curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Council of Europe, 2016). From the intended curriculum vision, Grammar Competence ensures access to the scientific culture, fosters critical and creative thinking, prepares for long-live learning, induces inclusive and flexible attitudes, in sum, it promotes learning in a humanistic base since no knowledge is more human than the knowledge of the human language itself (Costa, 2009).

Concerning RQ3 (*How explicitly should grammar be taught?*), the analysis revealed that the curricular pendulum moved straight away from implicit instruction to direct instruction. On the nature of direct instruction, however, we have distinguished low-level reasoning (with identifying and classifying goals), and the conceptualization of grammar as a "reflective activity", seen as a resource to improve "scientific reasoning" through inductive methods (Duarte, 2008). Grammar learning, thus, provides the opportunity to experience data observation, linguistic manipulations, formulating and testing hypotheses, enunciating generalizations. In the Portuguese syllabi, this type of methodology is mentioned as "laboratorial work" (Reis et al., 2009; Sim-Sim et al., 1997). The Portuguese Grammar Lab (Costa et al., 2011; Duarte, 1992; 2008; Santos & Costa, 1999) follows the same principles as the *Discovery-Learning approach to grammar* (Hudson, 1992). Similar approaches for grammar teaching are the Brazilian *Grammar Building* (Oliveira & Quarezemin, 2016), the *Linguistic Inquiries* (O'Neil, 2010; Honda, O'Neil & Pippin, 2010), and the *Heuristic Approach* (Boivin, 2018), among other. These methodological approaches, which are a third common strand in the grammar teaching field, fit well with the idea of an autonomous place for grammar reflection. Another branch of grammar teaching models that conceive grammar as a *reflective activity* is the *Metalinguistic Activity* approach, based in the child's capacity to refer language through language, fostered by intentional instruction (Camps & Milian, 1999), for instance

through *Instructional Sequences* (Camps, 2014; Camps & Fontich, 2020; Fontich, 2014; 2016). Within this perspective, the binomial language skills/reflective thinking is irrelevant, since metalinguistic reflection takes place in language activities, and “grammar knowledge may not be a condition for reflection about language, but its consequence” (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018, p.1). Also Myhill and colleagues (Myhill, 2011; Myhill & Jones, 2015; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Myhill et al., 2020) have developed the concept of *metalinguistic understanding*, considering that “a more coherent theorization of a role for grammar in the curriculum might be framed as the teaching of grammar which promotes students’ explicit metalinguistic understanding of how grammar choices shape meaning in texts and of the writing choices available to them” (Myhill & Watson, 2014, p. 52).

Finally, another strand, shared in different studies, is the gap between curricular theories and classroom practices. Studies on declared and regular practices suggest the survival of the transmission model in the real curriculum, sometimes hooded under the latest pedagogical fashion, in the Portuguese classrooms (Cardoso, Leite, Pereira & Silva, 2018; Coelho, 2018; Duarte, 2009b), as well as in other education systems (Boivin, 2018; Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018; Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017). The rupture between the intended and the implemented curriculum is even worrisome if we consider that, as we have seen, none of the curricular documents analysed claim for itself the transmission model for grammar teaching. Why does it take so long to change the practices? Among many other reasons, the overlap of perspectives in the curricular documents may have produced a Pandora box for grammar teaching, recalling what has been observed as lack of conceptual clarity, with effects on teachers’ concepts and actions towards Grammar (Camps & Fontich, 2019). Even though the intended curriculum has been crossing the pathway of grammar education research, it seems to stop at the crossroad of the real curricula paths. Far from facing it as a dead-end, may the awareness of the curricula state of the art lead to new highways of training programs, approaching the questions from teaching and learning practices.

The gap between the macro-decisions level (the intended curriculum) and the micro-decisions level (the implemented and the attained curricula), constrained by the teachers’ access and interpretation of the syllabi or the teachers’ attitudes towards curricular innovation is an issue in curricular

studies (van den Akker et al., 2008; Roldão, 1999; Zabalza, 2000). Empirical research on the real curriculum and all its complexity is, indeed, much more fruitful than a study circumscribed to curricular documents. Despite its constraints, studies on curricular evolution appear as a tool to reinforce the need for innovation at all levels of the curricular system. In the case of grammar, many studies provide scientific and pedagogic arguments for changes in L1 curricula (Duarte, 2009a; Hudson, 1992; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Van Rijt & Coppens, 2017; Rodrigues, 2017). We hope, likewise, that this study on the Portuguese Grammar intended curriculum may contribute to enlighten the interplay between national and international research on grammar pedagogy and political purposes, for a field where the main actors are, without doubt, teachers and students.

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