GRAMMAR TEACHING FOR CHINESE STUDENTS OF PLE: A PROPOSAL FOR THE IMPERATIVE MODE

ENSINO DA GRAMÁTICA PARA ALUNOS CHINESES DE PLE: UMA PROPOSTA PARA O MODO IMPERATIVO

ENSEÑANZA DE LA GRAMÁTICA PARA ESTUDIANTES CHINOS DE PLE: UNA PROPUESTA PARA EL MODO IMPERATIVO

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ABSTRACT: In this article and didactic proposal, we intend to reflect on the role of grammar in foreign language classrooms, more specifically in the case of the Portuguese as a Foreign Language class for Chinese students with L1 Mandarin. First, we will analyze the relevance of the concept of grammaring (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003) for the didactics of foreign languages. Then, we will analyze the most pertinent approaches for grammar teaching in the language classroom that don't neglect communication and that allow learners to construct their linguistic knowledge in a deductive way. To do so, we will try to propose ways to work on the imperative mode in European Portuguese (PE), justifying the choice of this grammatical item, and basing our proposal on the work of Ellis (2014) on focus on form tasks and consciousness-raising tasks.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese as a foreign language. Teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language in China. Grammaring. Consciousness-raising task. Focus on form tasks.

RESUMO: No presente artigo e proposta didática, propomo-nos a refletir sobre o papel da gramática na aula de língua estrangeira (LE), mais especificamente, na aula de Português como Língua Estrangeira (PLE) para alunos chineses com L1 Mandarim. Primeiro, analisaremos a pertinência do conceito de grammaring (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003) para a didática de LE. Partindo dessa reflexão, pretendemos analisar as abordagens mais pertinentes para um ensino da gramática na aula de língua que não descuide a comunicação e que permita que os aprendentes construam o seu conhecimento linguístico de maneira dedutiva. Para isso, tentaremos elaborar propostas de tratamento do modo imperativo em Português Europeu (PE), justificando a escolha desse item gramatical e baseando-nos no trabalho de Ellis (2014) sobre tarefas de foco na forma e tarefas de consciousness-raising.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Português língua estrangeira. Ensino de PLE na China. Grammaring. Tarefas de consciousness-raising. Tarefas de foco na forma.

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RESUMEN: En este artículo y propuesta didáctica, proponemos reflexionar sobre el papel de la gramática en la clase de lengua extranjera (LE), más específicamente, en la clase de Portugués como Lengua Extranjera (PLE) para estudiantes chinos con L1 Mandarín. Primero, analizaremos la relevancia del concepto de grammaring *(LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003) para la didáctica de las LE. A partir de esta reflexión, pretendemos analizar los enfoques más relevantes para la enseñanza de la gramática en una clase de lengua que no descuide la comunicación y permita a los alumnos construir sus conocimientos lingüísticos de forma deductiva. Para ello, intentaremos elaborar propuestas para el tratamiento del modo imperativo en Portugués Europeo (PE), justificando la elección de este ítem gramatical y basándonos en el trabajo de Ellis (2014) sobre tareas de enfoque en la forma y tareas de* consciousness-raising.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Portugués como lengua extranjera. Enseñanza de PLE en China. Grammaring. Tareas de consciousness-raising. Tareas de enfoque en la forma.

Introduction

The term *Grammar* has multiple meanings in the language didactics area, and grammar as a study object was the target for distinct theories and theoretical positions all through the last decades.

With the aims of reflecting on the grammar's role in Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE) classes for Chinese students and of analyzing the most relevant grammar teaching approaches, the current article seeks to elaborate a didactic proposal, based on an instructive model with a communicative and inductive background for teaching-learning of the Imperative mode of the European Portuguese (EP). Specifically, the article intends to focus on Mandarin native speakers.

To achieve these goals, we start by delimiting an outlook of PLE teaching in China, pointing out, probably, problematic areas. Then, we will reflect on the definition of grammar as a language usage component, according to Larsen-Freeman's (2003) perspective and also to the term *grammaring*. After that, we will be able to think about how we want the teaching-learning process to happen when applied to Chinese learners who speak Mandarin as L1. First, we are going to introduce the grammatical topic of the Imperative mode with a contrastive analysis between the European Portuguese and Mandarin, under Larsen-Freeman's (2003) tridimensional perspective, as an attempt to justify its relevance as an important topic to be talked about in PLE classes for speakers of Mandarin as an L1. Subsequently, we are going to present the theoretical assumptions that will guide the elaboration of our didactic proposal, called, focus on form tasks (based on *input* or *output*), and *Consciousness-raising* (CR) tasks (ELLIS, 2014). Finally, we are going to present the

proposal to approach the Imperative mode in a PLE classroom with Chinese students whose L1 is Mandarin, as an attempt to justify why these proposals are appropriate to grammar teaching in these contexts.

PLE teaching in China: an outlook and new possibilities

Since the creation of the first Portuguese course in the 60's and 70's of last century, PLE teaching has been developed in a quick way in continental China, which has led to a notable growth of Portuguese courses not only in Higher Education but also in private schools (YAN, 2019). However, the teaching and learning procedures of foreign languages, specifically grammar studies, are a pretty controversial topic in China.

Just like many authors defend (GONÇALVES, 2016; JIAN, 2019), the grammar-based approaches (e.g. *Presentation-Practice-Production Models*) play an important role in Portuguese courses in almost every Chinese university, a reality that is caused by factors like a traditional bias, PLE teachers limitations, learning contexts, among others (JIANG, 2019; ZHANG, 2019). In this regard, there is no doubt that the PLE Chinese learners are more used to the deductive approach dedicated to explicit knowledge and "the learning of Portuguese as an L2 occurs in a linguistic context of non-immersion in China […] mainly, in formal context" (ZHANG, 2019, p. 323-324, our translation), which creates a restrict contact with the Portuguese language (GROSSO, 2007), and the students normally have difficulties when participating in communicative contexts.

Because of this scenario, different approaches have been elaborated to develop the communicative competence of PLE Chinese students (e.g. GONÇALVES, 2016; JIANG, 2019). Nonetheless, the studies already mentioned are not focused on grammar teaching, and they also don't present the implementation process of these methods, including the didactic unit planning, the analysis and elaboration of didactic materials, and the relation between different approaches (e.g. focus on form(s) e focus on meaning).

Elaborating a teaching-learning proposal about the Imperative mode to Chinese students

The term *grammar* evokes, until nowadays, the idea of a theoretical field, composed of strict rules and that dictate what is right or wrong in the language. Although we consider grammar as a language usage component, this vision justifies the importance of its maintenance in foreign language (LE) classes.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) proposes the term *grammaring*, to replace *grammar*, suggesting a whole new perception of grammar as competence or a dynamic process, a fifth competence to be included among the well-known oral and written comprehension, and oral and written production, which allow us to use language with precision, significantly, and appropriately. We realize, under this perspective, that grammar is selectable and it can be used, it works to act. Grammar is something that we *do*, not something we just *know*.

The author presents, as well, a tridimensional model of language (cf. Image 1) that can be useful to prepare language classes. That model divides the analysis element into essential and complementary components: the dimension of form, which answers the question "How is it formed?"; the dimension of meaning, which answers the question "What does it mean?"; and the dimension of use, which answers the questions "When and how is it used?".

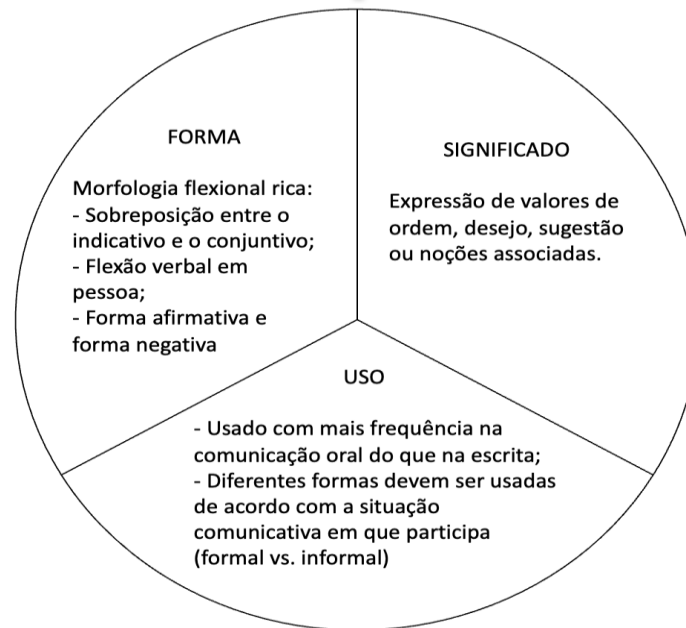**Figure 1 –** Graphic that explains the three dimensions of language
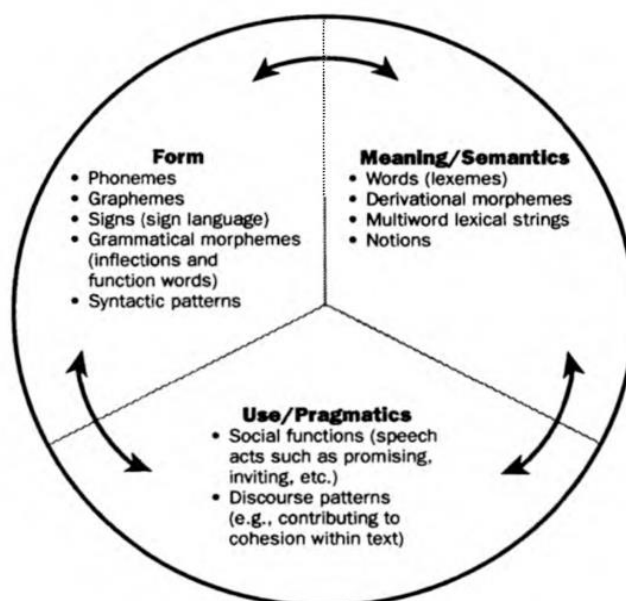
Source: Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 98)

Regarding the graphic, the author (*Idem*) notes that the three components interact e affect themselves mutually, influencing e codetermining their changes through time. Even if we concentrate on one piece of the graphic, to find the full comprehension of a grammatical unity we need to describe it from the three perspectives that correspond to the three dimensions according to the model, because only in complementary interaction we can achieve the total understanding of a language, and, just like this, we can use it, understand it, and communicate.

Thus, we proceed to an analysis of the verbal mood of the imperative in EP under the three-dimensional model (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1997; 2001; 2003), as illustrated in the following image:

Figura 2 – Imperative mode in PE analyzed under the three-dimensional model

FORMA

Morfologia flexional rica:
- Sobreposição entre o indicativo e o conjuntivo;
- Flexão verbal em pessoa;
- Forma afirmativa e forma negativa

SIGNIFICADO

Expressão de valores de ordem, desejo, sugestão ou noções associadas.

USO

- Usado com mais frequência na comunicação oral do que na escrita;
- Diferentes formas devem ser usadas de acordo com a situação comunicativa em que participa (formal vs. informal)

Source: Larsen-Freeman (2003)

By analyzing the imperative mode under the three-dimensional model (cf. Image 2), we can get a complete idea of what learners need to know to fully master the item, in all its aspects: its form, its meaning and also its use.

Imperative Mood in European Portuguese (EP) and Mandarin: contrastive analysis

The modality, as Palmer (1986, p. 16, our translation) argues, is "the grammaticalization of the speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions", which, as a general rule, can be divided into three main types: epistemic, deonic, and dynamic. In the case of the PE, several linguistic instruments contribute to this function, such as the verbal modes (OLIVEIRA, 2003). From there, it can be seen that the mode realizes in the verbal system values of the modality system.

In PE, the moods are the imperative, the indicative, the conditional, and the finitive. In this study, we focus only on the imperative mood.

From a pragmatic point of view, the imperative mood is related to a directive speech act, from which the speaker can express himself to exhort the interlocutor to carry out the

action, an order, an invitation, or a suggestion, according to different degrees of obligation (MARQUES, 2013).

Morphologically, the imperative of EP allows inflection in the 1st person plural (eg *nós*), in the 2nd person singular (eg *tu*) and plural (eg *vós*) and the 3rd person singular (eg *você/o senhor*) and plural (eg *vocês/os senhores*). However, the verbal morphemes dedicated to the affirmative and negative forms of the imperative are different, as exemplified in the following paradigm with the verb *to sing* (*cantar*):

(1) a. *Cantemos (nós) / canta (tu) / cantai (vós) / cantem (vocês)!*
 b. *Não cantemos (nós) / não cantes (tu) / não canteis (vós) / não cantem (vocês)!*

In these examples, for the inflection in the 2nd person singular (tu) regarding the formation of the affirmative imperative, the language uses the present tense of the indicative of the 3rd person singular (cf. *ele canta*), while the remaining forms of the imperative (cf. *(não) cantemos/ (não) cantes/não canteis/ (não) cantem* are the same as the present subjunctive, except for the affirmative form of the 2nd person plural (cf. *cantai*). In this line of thought, it can be seen, then, that there is a morphological overlap between the three modes of PE and it seems that the imperative[3] "[...] it acts as a bridge between the indicative and the subjunctive, not only because of the level of abstraction but also because it borrows verbs from both moods [...]" (AYOUN, 2013, p. 24, our translation).

In comparison with PE, in Mandarin, the term "modality" is not normally distinguished from the term "mode", since the language has no verbal inflection (CHAPPELL; PEYRAUBE, 2016). Unlike PE, Mandarin's imperative mood is typically formed with a few markers, such as the marker ba0 (cf. (2a)) and in the case of the negative imperative, it is mainly performed through the use of negation adverbs, such as the adverb bie2 (cf. (2b)).

(2) a. 快 走 吧!
Kuai4 zou3 ba0
Rapidamente andar BA
"Anda (Ande/Andai/Andemos) rapidamente!"
b. 别 说话！
Bie2 shuo1hua4
Não falar
"Não fales (fale/faleis/falemos)! "

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[3]"[...] acts as a bridge between the indicative and the subjunctive, not only because of its level of abstraction but also because it borrows verbs from both moods […]" (AYOUN, 2013, p. 24).

Although there is no consensus regarding the selection of grammatical content to teach, when we select the grammatical content, we can take into account "the inherent learning difficulty of different grammatical structures" (ELLIS, 2006, p. 88, our translation) for learners, and for this difficulty contributes the fact that the ways we intend to teach differ from those of your L1 (Idem).

Taking into account the description elaborated above, it is possible to conclude that, although the two languages present some parallelism regarding the modal value of the imperative (the "meaning" of the three-dimensional model), the linguistic mechanisms that contribute to the formation of this mode are completely different between EP (L2) and Mandarin (L1), which, according to the Challenge Principle (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2001; 2003), allows us to propose that the "form" (rich verbal morphology) and the "use" (language registers) of the imperative may be the most notable challenges for Chinese learners of PLE.

Furthermore, we believe that an additional challenge in teaching-learning of the imperative mood consists in exposing students to input from other verb tenses and moods, since, as explained above, the imperative mood is at the intersection of the indicative and subjunctive moods. Thus, it can contribute to previous and significant input, for example, in the conjunctive mood, which is normally relegated to a more advanced phase or level of learning, or the consolidation of forms of the indicative, under new paradigms of its use and meaning. This approach follows the line of Larsen-Freeman (2003) when he states that the teaching of grammatical items does not need to be concentrated, but that it can be distributed over time, appearing partially in the course of classes, in a way that a more *intensive* teaching-learning of the imperative can be combined with *extensive* teaching of other grammatical items, so it is not necessary that both approaches mutually exclude themselves (ELLIS, 2006).

Teaching-learning of the Imperative through the use of implicit and explicit teaching tasks

After reflecting on the case of Chinese students, we think that the best option for teaching grammar may be an approach that combines moments of implicit and explicit treatment of grammar. For this, Ellis (2014) suggests two types of tasks that, combined, we believe can be very advantageous: on the one hand, explicit grammar teaching that involves *consciousness-raising tasks* (CR tasks); on the other, implicit teaching that involves *focused tasks*.

Consciousness-raising (CR) tasks involve explicit grammar learning but in an indirect way. This is because, in its course, "[…] Students (1) receive L2 data related to a grammatical feature, (2) perform certain operations on the data to (3) reach an explicit understanding of the grammatical rule […]" (ELLIS, 2014, p. 11, our translation). This is more productive and motivating than simply providing the students with the explicit rule, as it actively involves students in discovering and building their knowledge while training them for subsequent learning and their language analytical skills; and, finally, when these CR tasks are carried out among colleagues, they can also become moments of communication in the classroom (Idem).

As for focused tasks, they allow to avoid that grammar teaching is decontextualized or unmotivated and that does not provide learners with the possibility of acquiring linguistic competence (PINTO, 2016). These tasks "aim to create contexts for the incidental acquisition of the intended functionality" (ELLIS, 2014, p. 13, our translation), so students are not informed of the target grammatical structure of the task, but attention to form arises naturally in performance. of the task (ELLIS, 2014, p. 13, our translation). Unlike more traditional methods such as PPP (presentation-practice-production), this type of task "omits the presentation and practice steps and goes straight to the production phase" (ELLIS, 2014, p. 15, our translation). Within these tasks, we can still distinguish those based on input, "[...] aim at the production of the target structure. They are best suited to helping students gain greater control over grammatical structures that they partially acquire but are not yet using with a high level of accuracy […]" (ELLIS, 2014, p. 14, our translation).

When we refer to the focus on form, we do not discard, at all, the importance of learning meaning and usage, since these, as explained by Larsen-Freeman (2003), are interdependent, as is demonstrated in Images 1 and 2. Thus, we aim to suggest a task with a focus on form, but which implicitly also focuses on the meaning and use of the item in question, allowing for a full exploration of the imperative in its three dimensions.

Didactic proposal: The use of the Imperative mood - three tasks for learners of PLE with Mandarin as LM (level A1-A2)

The proposed tasks are based on the work of Rod Ellis (2014) and put the imperative in perspective under the three-dimensional model of Larsen-Freeman (2003). They are intended for levels A1-A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001), according to the descriptors provided by the Camões PLE Reference.

TASK 1: Form focus task based on input

Task target grammar item: Imperative mood (affirmative and negative; *tu* and *você*).

Materials required for the task: Cards/List of verbs corresponding to physical actions (eg walking, running, sitting, etc.).

Task moments:

1.   The teacher gives a series of verbal instructions, using the imperative forms of the selected verbs, about physical behaviors (movements) that students should copy. The teacher can address a single student or the entire class.

2.   Students must understand the instructions and perform the corresponding actions.

Example: *The teacher gives the order "Ponham a mão na cabeça" while putting your hand on your head, students listen to the order and copy the teacher's gesture.*

Objective: Students get in touch with the verb forms of the imperative. Through the performance of the task, they associate this form with its meaning and, consequently, with its use (answering the question of what the use of the imperative is for; in this case, the function of giving an order). The teacher can write the orders on the board later to supplement with visual input.

TASK 2: Form focus task based on output

Task target grammar item: Imperative mood (affirmative and negative; *tu*).

Materials required by the task*:* Writing material, dictionary.

Task moments:

1.   Students choose a city they want to write about.

2.   Individually, they write a list of suggestions for a friend about what to do in the city, in pamphlet format. (Note as the list is made for a friend only, they should focus only on the second person singular (tu) form of the imperative mood.)

3.   Students circulate the pamphlets among themselves. Students should also comment on the pamphlets; say, for example, if they want to visit the city after having read the instructions that their colleagues have written to develop interaction between students. If there is a possibility, the pamphlets can be later displayed in the classroom.

Objective: Students produce the verb forms of the second person singular imperative (tu), at the same time they develop their written production skills. The teacher serves as a guide, being able to help students in the preparation of their pamphlets and answer questions that arise in the course of the task. The last moment of the activity allows for a reinforcement of the input and encourages interaction between students.

TASK 3: CR (consciousness-raising) task

Task target grammar item: Imperative mode

(Affirmative and negative; *tu, você e vocês*).

Materials required for the task: writing material; Sheet with questions.

Task moments:

Table 1 – Students must answer, in pairs, the following form:

1. Who are the orders addressed to? Write in front of the statement "tu", "você" ou "vocês".
   a.   Meninos, não falem alto! _____
   b.   Joana, come devagar! _____
   c.   Por favor, não decidam sem mim. _____
   d.   Sorriam! _____
   e.   Vocês vão conduzir, por isso, não bebam álcool. _____
   f.   Fala baixo, Maria! _____
   g.   Parte uma fatia do bolo para mim. _____
   h.   Escolha já a sua casa nova! _____
   i.   Cumpra sempre com as suas obrigações. _____
   j.   Senhor Joaquim, não fume mais. _____
   k.   Não comas tão depressa, filha! _____
   l.   Cuide bem da sua saúde. _____
   m.   Cuidado, não partas o telemóvel que eu te dei! _____
   n.   Alunos, estudem muito para o teste! _____
   o.   Dona Maria, não abra a porta a estranhos. _____
   p.   Não sonhes com isso! _____
   q.   Professora, não se esqueça de nos entregar os testes! _____
   r.   Para este exercício, escrevam um texto sobre vocês mesmos. _____

2. Mark the sentences from the previous exercise as *ordens* (O), *conselhos* (C) ou *pedidos* (P).

3. According to the sentences from the previous exercises, prepare the following table with your colleagues:

IMPERATIVO				
FORMA		**SIGNIFICADO**	**USO**	
AFIRMATIVO	NEGATIVO		FORMAL	INFORMAL
Cantar (___) tu!	Não (___) tu!			
(___) você!	Não (___) você!			
(___) vocês!	Não (___) vocês!			
Comer (___) tu!	Não (___) tu!			
(___) você!	Não (___) você!			
(___) vocês!	Não (___) vocês!			
Partir (___) tu!	Não (___) tu!			
(___) você!	Não (___) você!			
(___) vocês!	Não (___) vocês!			

Source: Authors's collection

Objective: Students get in touch with different examples that cover the possible forms, meanings, and uses of the imperative mood, analyzing and reflecting on them. Students will be able to work in pairs or groups, enhancing students' interaction.

Final considerations

In this work, we set out to reflect on the teaching-learning of grammar and the place it occupies in FL didactics, namely, PLE. In this way, we reflect on the specific case of grammar teaching to Chinese PLE students with L1 Mandarin, a case that is especially challenging due to the typological distance between L1 and the target language.

We conclude that there should be a place for grammar in language teaching and learning, namely because of its relevance to the acquisition of communicative skills in the language. With this in mind, we base ourselves on proposals by Ellis (2014) to exemplify the treatment of a grammatical item (the imperative mood) through a task-based approach that combines the deductive teaching of implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge.

Although there are some limitations in this work (for example, we did not verify if the didactic proposal we developed can facilitate the acquisition/learning of the use of the imperative or not), we hope that the presented reflections and the proposed tasks can be applied by colleagues, or that, at least, inspire other teachers and researchers to think about new approaches to teaching and learning grammar in the classroom, both for the case of Chinese students and for any other case in which there is still a certain attachment to the more traditionalists approaches in grammar teaching. The limitations that we have just explained

provide, in a way, clues for future work, which will surely involve implementing a pedagogical-didactic intervention project dedicated to the acquisition/learning of the imperative, to increase the article of distinct grammar teaching methods, as well as the acquisition/learning analysis of another L2 grammar items.

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