ABSTRACT

One of the most problematic questions in the context of Portuguese Language Teaching Methodology is that of the status of grammatical knowledge in the learning of the mother language which we discuss in this study on grammar configurations in Portuguese Language textbooks. In the context of several works on schoolbooks that started being written in Minho University, we propose to describe and analyse – in different dimensions and detail levels – a wide range of Portuguese Language books (text and grammar books) used in the third level of compulsory school from school year 2002/03.

Assuming the analysis (in order to understand it) of grammar functions in the Portuguese Language learning process as the main aim of this dissertation, we start (in Chapter I) with the definition of its object and its aims, as well as the contextualization of grammar teaching in schools.

In Chapter II, we contextualise grammar teaching and learning integrating this work in the scientific area it belongs to, that of the Portuguese Language Teaching Methodology. We also discuss the relationships between linguistic research and language teaching, thus determining the meanings (in general and specific terms) of the concept of grammar. The last section of this chapter discusses grammar teaching in schools in order to evaluate the role of grammatical knowledge in acquiring verbal competences.

Thus, accepting that schoolbooks, being the object of a new study area, positively contribute to the construction of grammar images as well as to the configuration of explicit teaching methods, we start, in Chapter III, the description of the perspectives about language teaching in the official documents. We try to identify, either in the syllabi or in the grammatical terminology an image of the conception of grammatical knowledge. However, the way grammar is conceived and thought at school emerges above all from textbooks. This is why they deserve specific theoretical discussion.

Considering that textbooks are an instance of definition of the contents and the way language and grammar are taught; taking into account that textbooks are a rather complex object that can be analysed in several dimensions, we define, in Chapter IV, the aims of the analysis of the two different corpora of textbooks: the Portuguese Language textbooks and the Grammar textbooks. Whereas the latter are analysed in a historic and descriptive perspective, the former are analysed taking into account the levels of adoption, their structure, discourses and, above all, the tasks involving grammar.

In Chapters V and VI, we present the results of the historic and descriptive study of grammar textbooks along with data concerning the analysis of grammar in the Portuguese Language textbooks. The study of the Grammar textbooks is done in specific analysis: the description of the editorial evolution of the selected publications, the comparative analysis of two Grammar textbooks, the study of the introductory discourses, the definition of school grammar functions and its characterization, the identification of the sources of Portuguese grammars and the evaluation of four “critical areas” of grammatical description. As far as Portuguese Language textbooks are concerned our study is focussed on grammar contents and tasks.

In Chapter VII, we present the conclusions of the study. We expect to reveal new data emerging from the textbooks both about the relationships between explicit grammatical knowledge and the learning of the Mother Language and the relationships between discourses and practices concerning grammar teaching at school.