



Is Portuguese really difficult? Comparing some aspects of the normative grammar of the Portuguese language with those of other European languages

O português é realmente difícil? Comparando alguns aspectos da gramática normativa da língua portuguesa com as de outras línguas europeias

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the first stage of the research project *Comparative grammar of European languages: contrastive analysis of the standard norm of the main Western European languages (Romance and Germanic)*, whose objectives are: 1) to compare the main topics of the normative grammars of several languages of international diffusion, including Portuguese, in terms of number of grammatical rules and greater or lesser complexity of these rules; and 2) to answer, based on the comparative study carried out, the common question “is Portuguese really a difficult language?”, in view of frequent comments by both Portuguese speakers/writers and foreigners that the grammar of the Portuguese language is very complex, which has even given rise, on the part of some linguists, to proposals for simplifying the standard norm of Portuguese based on uses of contemporary oral cultured Brazilian Portuguese. In this first stage of the project, four grammatical topics are contrastively analyzed, namely, pronoun placement, inflected infinitive, future subjunctive, and cardinal and ordinal numerals, in six languages, four of which are Romance (Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian) and two are Germanic (English and German), based on consultation of renowned normative grammars of the languages under study and systematization of grammatical rules and their exceptions. It is concluded that pronoun placement in standard Portuguese is much more complex than in other languages, presenting at least 12 different rules compared to only one or two in the other five languages; that the inflected infinitive only occurs in Portuguese and, in regular verbs, is confused with the future tense of the subjunctive mood, which also only exists today in Portuguese; and that the formation of ordinal numerals occurs mainly by mere suffixation from the corresponding cardinals in all languages analyzed, with the exception of Portuguese and Spanish, which resort to borrowings from Latin ordinal numerals.

KEYWORDS: Comparative grammar. Normative grammar. Grammatical complexity. Romance languages. Germanic languages.

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RESUMO: O presente artigo apresenta a primeira etapa do projeto de pesquisa *Gramática comparada de línguas europeias: análise contrastiva da norma-padrão dos principais idiomas europeus ocidentais (românicos e germânicos)*, cujos objetivos são: 1) comparar os principais tópicos das gramáticas normativas de diversas línguas de difusão internacional, incluindo o português, em termos de número de regras gramaticais e maior ou menor complexidade dessas regras; e 2) responder, com base no estudo comparativo realizado, à pergunta corrente no senso comum “o português é realmente uma língua difícil?”, em face de comentários frequentes tanto de falantes/escreventes do português quanto de estrangeiros de que a gramática de nossa língua é muito complexa, o que tem suscitado mesmo, por parte de alguns linguistas, propostas de simplificação da norma-padrão do português com base em usos do português brasileiro contemporâneo oral culto. Nesta primeira etapa do projeto, analisam-se contrastivamente quatro tópicos gramaticais, a saber, colocação pronominal, infinitivo pessoal, futuro do subjuntivo e numerais cardinais e ordinais, em seis línguas, sendo quatro românicas (português, espanhol, francês e italiano) e duas germânicas (inglês e alemão), a partir de consulta a gramáticas normativas de renome das línguas em estudo e sistematização das regras gramaticais e suas exceções. Conclui-se que a colocação pronominal em português padrão é muito mais complexa que a das demais línguas, apresentando ao menos 12 regras diferentes, contra apenas uma ou duas das outras cinco línguas; que o infinitivo pessoal só ocorre em português e, nos verbos regulares, confunde-se com o tempo futuro do modo subjuntivo, o qual também só subsiste atualmente em português; diferente das outras línguas românicas que não apresentam essa característica e que a formação de numerais ordinais se dá majoritariamente por mera sufixação a partir dos cardinais correspondentes em todas as línguas analisadas, com exceção do português e do espanhol, que recorrem a empréstimos dos numerais ordinais latinos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gramática comparada. Gramática normativa. Complexidade gramatical. Línguas românicas. Línguas germânicas.

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1 Introduction

In his famous essay *The Awful German Language*, American writer Mark Twain, a great name in North American literature and famous for writing novels such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Prince and the Pauper*, discusses the difficulty of learning German. In his text, the author comically talks about the difficulties of German grammar, such as declensions, genders and compound words. He says: “my philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German in thirty years” (Twain, 1880, p. 2).

In a similar and equally comical way, the also American David Moser, linguist and professor of Mandarin at the University of Michigan, explains in the text *Why Chinese is so damn hard* why the tones, the ideograms, the lack of cognates with English, as well as even the cultural differences, make Mandarin more difficult than any other language. In his words:

If this were as far as I went, my statement would be a pretty empty one. *Of course* Chinese is hard for me. After all, *any* foreign language is hard for a nonnative, right? Well, sort of. Not all foreign languages are equally difficult for any learner. It depends on which language you're coming from. A French person can usually learn Italian faster than an American, and an average American could probably master German a lot faster than an average Japanese, and so on. So part of what I'm contending is that Chinese is hard compared to... well, compared to almost any other language you might care to tackle. What I mean is that Chinese is not only hard for us (English speakers), but it's also hard in absolute terms. Which means that Chinese is also hard for *them*, for Chinese people (Moser, 1992, p. 1).

So, we must ask ourselves the following questions: why are German and Mandarin difficult? Are they really difficult? How can this difficulty be measured? Many linguists claim that all languages are equally complex, a controversial idea that even contradicts common sense. If we ask lay people whether Japanese is more difficult than English, we will most likely get the answer that English is, in fact, easier. This intuitive view is something that we try to work on in this research based on linguistic description.

Thus, the present investigation is the first stage of the research project *Comparative grammar of European languages: contrastive analysis of the standard norm of the main Western European languages (Romance and Germanic)*, a broad research initiative whose objective is to comparatively study the grammar of the standard norm of Portuguese in relation to that of other European languages, notably the Romance and Germanic languages.

Therefore, our focus will be on grammar and not on the phonetics or spelling of languages, aspects that tend to cause embarrassment to all foreign language students, with rare exceptions.

The claim that Portuguese grammar is complex and sometimes illogical is quite common both among native speakers/writers of Portuguese and among students of Portuguese as a foreign language, especially native speakers of other Romance languages or Germanic languages. The alleged complexity of our language has led some Brazilian linguists, such as Ataliba de Castilho (2018) and Mário Perini (2014), to propose — in our view, inappropriately — the simplification of the standard norm, endorsing uses that are currently exclusive to the informal oral norm of contemporary Brazilian Portuguese or found only in poorly written formal texts, that is, by users of the language with insufficient proficiency in the standard norm due to poor schooling, a condition that, nowadays, unfortunately affects even higher-level professionals, such as journalists and academics. It is worth remembering that the oral norm is defined as the speech pattern of a linguistic community. According to Pinheiro:

In this sense, Travaglia (2017) argues that the simple oralization of a written text does not make it an oral genre. Thus, it is essential to consider the genre as oral based on two characteristics: having the human voice as a support and being produced by a given community to have an oral realization, regardless of whether or not it has a written version. Thus, a scientific article, even if read aloud, will not be an oral genre, since it was not produced to be performed orally, but to exist in written form. On the other hand, oral genres can be considered those that have a written version, but are performed orally, using the voice as a support. This is the case of plays, soap operas, retellings, etc. (Pinheiro, 2019, p. 6).¹

¹ Nesse sentido, Travaglia (2017) defende que a simples oralização de um texto escrito não o torna um gênero oral. Assim, torna-se fundamental considerar o gênero como oral com base em duas características: ter como suporte a voz humana e ser produzido por dada comunidade para ter uma realização oral, independentemente de ter ou não uma versão escrita. Dessa forma, um artigo científico, mesmo que seja lido em voz alta, não será um gênero oral, já que não foi produzido para ser realizado oralmente, mas para existir na forma escrita. Por outro lado, podem ser considerados gêneros orais aqueles que têm uma versão escrita, mas que se realizam oralmente, usando a voz como suporte. É o caso das peças teatrais, telenovelas, recontos etc.

Initially, our object of study will be the main languages of these two families (Spanish, French, Italian, English and German), but, in a second stage, that is, in another article, the grammars of less spoken languages such as Catalan, Romanian, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Icelandic will also be analyzed.

The motivation for this study is to build an empirical scientific basis that substantiates and tests the perception held by many that the normative grammar of Portuguese is essentially more complex and less logical than that of other cultural languages, either to confirm or refute this perception. This analysis is important insofar as some of the Western European languages (Romance and Germanic) are among the most important in the world, Portuguese being one of them — incidentally, it is the fifth most spoken language globally, the most spoken in the Southern Hemisphere and the official language of one of the most important countries in the global South, Brazil, and is also one of the languages most used in international business transactions. From this point of view, it is worth verifying to what extent Portuguese grammar approaches or deviates from the general trend of other European languages, with which it competes in political, economic and cultural terms.

It is also worth mentioning that many criticisms are made within the scope of common sense to the normative grammar of Portuguese and that the statement that the standard language is very difficult even for its own speakers is a common voice among them. Evidently, the precariousness and low quality of education, especially in Brazil, partly explains the difficulty of the average speaker in dealing with the standard norm, that is, the norm prescribed by the normative grammar of the language, and even with the formal norm, but it is necessary to recognize that our students, who are even less exposed to English teaching than Portuguese, still consider that language easier to learn than the latter.

It is worth remembering that the standard norm, according to Pinheiro (2019, p. 4) is defined as:

the set of linguistic characteristics of the group of speakers who consider themselves educated (i.e., the ‘normal norm’ of this specific group)” (FARACO; ZILLES, 2017, p. 19). This speech community is characterized by having a certain level of education (completed higher education) and/or by knowing how to use the language of social prestige (which is close to the norms established in normative grammars) in situations in which a high degree of formality of the language is required. Thus, it is not only the norms contained in normative grammars that will serve as a reference for the language of these speakers, but also the linguistic manifestation of these subjects materialized in their daily lives or in social media. What we can observe, in this case, is that the notion of linguistic competence defended by this bias goes from the ideal to the real (Pinheiro, 2019, p. 4)².

The work consists of collecting data and information from grammars and language teaching manuals on issues such as: processes of inflection of nouns and adjectives, number of verb conjugation paradigms, number of verb tenses and moods, rules of pronoun placement, rules of agreement and government, number of irregularities and exceptions to rules in the inflection of words and presence of grammatical characteristics exclusive to a given language, among other aspects.

Next, a comparison is made of the data obtained on each language to establish how much each of them approaches or deviates from the general trend of the group and which languages are grammatically simpler and more regular or more complex and irregular, highlighting the position of Portuguese in this classification.

This work aims to be a broad study on the issue of the grammatical complexity or not of Portuguese in relation to other languages. In this sense, the project aims to

² o conjunto das características linguísticas do grupo de falantes que se consideram cultos (ou seja, a ‘norma normal’ desse grupo específico)” (Faraco; Zilles, 2017, p. 19). Essa comunidade de fala caracteriza-se por ter um certo grau de escolarização (curso superior completo) e/ou por saber fazer uso da linguagem de prestígio social (que se aproxima das normas estabelecidas nas gramáticas normativas) nas situações em que se exige um grau alto de formalidade da língua. Assim, não são somente as normas que constam nas gramáticas normativas que servirão de referência para a linguagem desses falantes, mas também a própria manifestação linguística desses sujeitos materializada no dia a dia ou nas mídias sociais. O que podemos observar, nesse caso, é que a noção de competência linguística defendida por esse viés passa do ideal para o real.

contribute to the provision of a guide that allows the development of better grammars and the improvement of Portuguese language teaching. Furthermore, by also dealing with other important European languages, this research may be equally relevant to studies of other languages.

In this paper, four topics of normative grammar are analyzed: pronominal placement, the inflected infinitive, the future subjunctive and the formation of ordinal numbers from cardinals.

2 Theoretical premises

When comparing Portuguese with other European languages such as English, French, Spanish, Italian and German at a morphosyntactic level, some peculiar characteristics are noticeable in terms of its structure. One of them is pronoun placement, in which the rules for using oblique pronouns differ greatly from those of Spanish and Italian, for example, in which enclisis is only used in the imperative, gerund and infinitive, with proclisis being the standard for all other verb forms. In Spanish, for example, it is possible to say *¿Me puedes dar un vaso de agua?* 'Can you give me a glass of water?'. This placement of the oblique pronoun is not allowed in standard Portuguese. Another placement exclusive to Portuguese (at least in relation to European languages) is mesoclis, that is, the placement of the unstressed oblique pronoun between the root and the ending of the verb forms of the future and conditional (Oxford Portuguese Dictionary).

Another striking difference between Portuguese and other languages is the existence of the inflected infinitive of verbs, which, in addition to Portuguese, is only found in Galician, Welsh and Hungarian — with Galician being considered the parent language of Portuguese (Venâncio, 2024). Thus, in a sentence such as *Vou comprar o bolo para as crianças comerem*, the inflection of the verb in the infinitive is difficult for foreign speakers to understand. Such a sentence in English, for example, would be I

will buy the cake for the children to eat. It is therefore clear that the verb *to eat* does not inflect in this case.

As for ordinal numerals, most languages simply add a suffix that transforms a cardinal numeral into an ordinal. In French, for example, this suffix is *-ième*: *deux* ‘two’ → *deuxième* ‘second’; *trois* ‘three’ → *troisième* ‘third’, and so on. In Portuguese, on the other hand, ordinal numerals above 19 are not words derived from their respective cardinals, but rather formal borrowings from Latin, which explains why they are rarely used in informal/colloquial speech. Thus, while in French the ordinal 50th, *cinquantième*, derives directly from the cardinal *cinquante*, in Portuguese we have *quingéssimo* and not **cinquentésimo*, as would be more natural.

The third aspect discussed here that seems to distinguish Portuguese from other Romance languages is the future subjunctive, a verb tense that, apart from Portuguese, is only found in Galician and Spanish, unless we are mistaken. In Spanish, however, this verb tense is ultra-formal, has been falling into disuse and is already considered an archaism, so much so that its frequency even in formal texts is very low (RAE, n.d.). And Galician, although structurally closer to Portuguese than to Spanish, is heavily influenced by the latter, which leads it to also omit this verb tense (Galipedia, n.d.).

In this way, the sentence in Portuguese *Quando eu for à escola, fale comigo* ‘When I go to school, talk to me’ has the presence of the future subjunctive **for**, while in Spanish it would be said simply *Cuando vaya a la escuela, háblame*, therefore using the present subjunctive (examples from the authors).

In fact, two phenomena that can be seen even in the writing of well-educated people are the hypercorrect use of the inflected infinitive where it would not fit (“*Nós podemos esperar mais um pouco e voltarmos daqui a uma hora*” ‘We can wait a little longer and come back in an hour’) and its confusion with the future subjunctive (“*Nós sairemos depois que o sol se pôr*” ‘We will leave after the sun sets’)

So, the question arises: is Portuguese more complex than other Western European languages, especially Romance and Germanic languages? To answer, we

must first define what complex is. Would it be possible to measure the complexity of a language in some way?

To understand this issue, we can draw an analogy with biology. Would a mammal be more complex than a fish? Regarding the structure of the brain, yes, but, on the other hand, regarding its tegumentary histology, fish, in general, are more complex than any other mammal (Ruse, 1995, p. 30).

The idea that some languages are more complex and others are simpler is quite controversial. Some argue that all languages are equally complex, given that all children learn their native language with the same ease and at the same age, and that the difficulty of learning a foreign language depends solely on the native language of the learner in question. Thus, Mandarin is quite difficult for Westerners, but easy for Cantonese speakers, for example. Similarly, Spanish is quite easy for Italian speakers, but difficult for Turkish speakers.

According to Miestamo, Sinnemäki and Karlsson (2008), the complexity of a language can be measured in two different ways: in relative and absolute terms. Relative complexity can be defined as linguistic features that are difficult for learners to acquire as L2. Absolute complexity is a property of the system itself, regardless of its use.

Dixon discusses the possibility of language evaluation. According to the author:

Then there is the charged question of evaluation. It is an accepted procedure to evaluate the worth of different economic or political systems. We have outgrown the mistaken colonialist idea that some languages are significantly more “primitive” than others. All languages are roughly equal in terms of overall complexity. But surely they are not all of precisely the same value. Might not some languages be better than others, for certain purposes? Is one language easier to learn than another? Does one language provide a superior framework for deep discussion of kinship relationships, or of subtleties of taste, or for assessing the worth of cattle herds, or for sports commentary, or for philosophical introspection?

The matter of evaluation has been scarcely aired by linguists; indeed, some consider it offensive to raise the topic. But within the context of

linguistics as a natural science, such questions must be mooted (Dixon, 2010, p. 5)

The author discusses the possibility of comparing languages from the point of view of their grammatical structures. He mentions the different ways in which different languages use possessive pronouns, such as in Amele, spoken in Papua New Guinea, where there are two different possessives, one for 'mother' and 'foot' and another for 'knife'. In Dyirbal, spoken in Australia, there is one possessive form for 'mother' and 'knife' and another for 'foot'. There is a third case in which there is one possessive form for 'knife' and 'foot' and another for 'mother'.

Thus, absolute complexity can be understood as the number of rules in its grammar, the number of irregular verbs, among others, while relative complexity would be known, for example, as the ease with which German speakers learn the phonemes of Arabic or the alphabets of Japanese.

In fact, the mother tongue influences the learning of a second language, and all children learn their native language with equal ease. Even so, would it be possible to measure the complexity of a language from an objective point of view and not simply from a subjective or biased one?

This paper seeks to demonstrate that it is possible to measure the complexity of a language in terms of the number of rules and exceptions or irregularities in each aspect of its grammar, emphasizing that here we are analyzing and comparing normative grammar and, therefore, the standard norm of each language. Evidently, the informal-colloquial standard tends to be simpler — although, in certain cases, it may contain greater irregularities than the standard norm —, which makes it easier for a foreigner to learn a language who only needs to converse and not write formal documents. In Arabic, for example, there is a very large gap between the standard form *fusha* and the dialects spoken in everyday life, a situation that occurs to a lesser extent in Japanese, Italian, Mandarin and German. However, Portuguese language teaching, both for native speakers and foreigners, includes the formal standard (language

teaching to native speakers focuses, by the way, only on this standard, the only one that students do not master).

In this sense, even though the distance between the mother tongue and the second language has an influence, there are purely linguistic aspects that make learning more or less difficult. For example, Spanish is quite similar to Portuguese, but certain aspects of its morphology and syntax can cause embarrassment to Portuguese speakers.

Similarly, Japanese and Indonesian are both distant languages for Western speakers. However, the former will, according to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), be on average much more difficult to learn than the latter, since the writing system involves thousands of ideograms, two alphabets and a complex system of honorifics, while the latter uses our alphabet and has a fairly simple grammar.

Furthermore, German and Russian, both Western languages, are, on average, the same distance for a Portuguese speaker. Even so, the first is, on average, easier than the second because it has a “simpler” grammar, since its most difficult and peculiar aspect, the declensions of nouns, has few rules and no exceptions, according to the same institute.

In this sense, an objective way of measuring the complexity of a language is to list all the topics of its grammar (nominal and verbal morphology, placement, agreement and government syntax etc.) and, for each of them, quantify the rules and their exceptions based on the comparison between normative grammars of different languages. Furthermore, it can be considered that a language is more complex the more different forms it presents in relation to others. Thus, the German case system makes it more complex than languages that do not have case declension. Likewise, verbal conjugation in Swedish, which presents a single form for all persons, is objectively simpler than that of Portuguese, in which there is a different conjugated form for each person in the singular and plural.

From this perspective, it is worth mentioning that a language can be complex in one aspect, but simple in another. Mandarin, for example, has a very simple grammar, without verb conjugations, declensions, articles, gender or number, but, on the other hand, it has a very complex phonology and writing system. In Spanish, the opposite is true: its phonology and spelling are quite simple, but it has several verb tenses and a huge variety in its conjugations.

Of course, the concept of complexity refers to the structure and not to the value of a language. No language is better than another, and all languages can express whatever their speakers want to say in a given society and culture. It is necessary to make it clear, therefore, that the simple is neither better nor worse than the complex. Just as humans are not superior to other animal species, a supposedly “simple” language is not inferior to a “complex” language, so that here we are dealing only with the linguistic system. This is the danger of misinterpreting, for example, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which has often served as a justification for racism and xenophobia.

Somehow, the perception that some languages are more complex than others is something that is quite ingrained in the popular imagination, but, on the other hand, it is not widely accepted by linguists precisely because of the lack of an objective criterion for measuring it. For example, FSI³ aims to prepare diplomats and other professionals in foreign relations in the United States to work in other countries and carry out missions abroad. This institute has developed a classification in terms of the easiest or most difficult languages to learn.

In category I, for native English speakers, are languages such as Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Dutch, Swedish, Afrikaans, Norwegian and Danish. In category II, is German; in category III, is Malay-Indonesian; in category IV, are Russian, Hindi, Polish, Persian, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, Vietnamese, Greek,

³ <https://www.state.gov/bureausoffices/under-secretary-for-management/foreign-service-institute>

Hebrew and Finnish. Finally, in the last category, V, are Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Cantonese and Arabic.

For category I languages, 24 weeks of study or 600 hours are required. For category II, 30 weeks or 750 hours. For category III, 36 weeks or 900 hours. For category IV, 44 weeks or 1,100 hours. Finally, for category V, 88 weeks or 2,200 hours are required.

In this simple classification, which, of course, has a more pedagogical than scientific purpose, it may come as a surprise to Brazilians that Portuguese is considered an easy language. Not so surprising is the fact that East Asian languages are in the most difficult category. It is also interesting to note that German is more difficult than other Germanic languages, and Malay-Indonesian is easier than other Asian languages. This is due to the complexity of the first and the simplicity of the second, although the distance is the same.

Thus, the lack of verb inflections in Indonesian makes it easier for Americans, while German's declensions make it more difficult for native English speakers. Thus, an American who is just starting to learn a foreign language is likely to make more grammatical errors in German than in Indonesian.

Basically, through the analysis of five European languages (English, German, French, Italian and Spanish) in four grammatical aspects, this article seeks to compare the similarities and differences in their structures in relation to Portuguese. The aim is to answer extremely relevant questions such as:

- 1) In objective terms, are there simpler and more complex languages?
- 2) How can this complexity be measured?
- 3) How can this complexity influence the learning of a second language by adults regardless of their native language?

It is worth mentioning the importance of linguistic contact in the formation of the complexity of languages. It is a known fact in linguistics that contact often changes languages as they are spoken.

According to Bentz and Verkerk (2008), regarding morphology, it is common for languages spoken by fewer people to tend to have a more complex morphology than those with many more speakers. The authors state that different types of contact bring different results depending on the type of acquisition. As the authors say: “Contact involving adult L2 learners is expected to engender simplification via imperfect learning, while child bilingualism is hypothesized to lead to complexification via morpheme borrowing.” (Bentz; Verkerk, 2008, p. 4).

To this end, the authors give the example of the Faroese language, which has seven different inflections for the word corresponding to ‘day’: *dagur, dags, degi, dag, dagar, daga, døgum*. In German, on the other hand, this is reduced to four (*Tag, Tages, Tage, Tagen*) and in English, to two (*day, days*).

Of course, it is notable that Faroese has around 80,000 speakers, German has 130 million, and English has 1.4 billion. In this way, it is possible to recognize the relationship between the acquisition of a language by adults and the simplification of its morphology. In this sense, the authors contribute to the theory that the typology of languages is related to the typology of the societies in which they are spoken.

3 Methodology

In this first stage of the research, four topics of normative grammar were selected — namely, pronoun placement, the inflected infinitive, the future subjunctive and the formation of ordinal numerals from cardinals — from six languages, four Romance (Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian) and two Germanic (English and German).

The grammatical rules relating to the topics in question were surveyed and systematized in the standard norm of the languages that are the subject of this study, based on consultation of grammars of recognized importance in each of the languages.

Next, these rules were compared in terms of their quantity (the more rules and exceptions to them in relation to each topic, the more complex the language is regarding that topic).

Finally, the results obtained were systematized.

4 Results

4.1 Pronoun placement

Pronoun placement is considered a part of traditional Portuguese grammar that differs significantly from the language spoken in everyday life. This is not new. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, during the modernist period, Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade wrote the following poem:

Dê-me um cigarro
Diz a gramática
Do professor e do aluno
E do mulato sabido
Mas o bom negro e o bom branco
Da Nação Brasileira
Dizem todos os dias
Deixa disso camarada
Me dá um cigarro (Andrade, 1972, p. 25)

This poem represents the distance between traditional grammar and the language spoken in everyday life, which is even more accentuated in the theme of pronoun placement and which significantly marks the difference between Brazilian and European Portuguese.

However, in Spanish, there are only two rules for pronoun placement: the oblique pronoun is placed after the verb in the infinitive, gerund and positive imperative; in other cases, proclisis is always used (Alarcos Llorach, 2000; Masip, 2010; Milani, 2007; Pérez Edo, 2011, Bregstein, 2019; Burgos; Regueiro, 2016):

- (1) *Quisiera amarla como ella me ama.* (I'd like to lover **her** like she loves **me**.)
 (2) *Estaba pidiéndome ayuda.* (He/she was asking **me** for help.)
 (3) *Vete de aquí ahora mismo.* (Go away from here right now.) (Souza, 2024, our emphasis).

Furthermore, in Spanish there is no mesoclis. See Table 1.

Table 1 – pronoun placement rules in Spanish.

Proclisis	Enclisis
1. finite verb (except positive imperative)	1. infinitive or gerund 2. negative imperative

Source: prepared by the authors.

In French, similarly to Spanish, enclisis is used in the positive imperative, as in the example below:

- (4) *Donnez-moi un crayon, s'il vous plaît.* (Give **me** a pencil, please.)

On the other hand, with the other verbal forms, proclisis is used.

- (5) *Je me suis levé aujourd'hui à 7 heures.* (I got up today at 7 o'clock.)

But, unlike Spanish, proclisis is used before the verb in the infinitive, as in the example below:

- (6) *Tu veux la pomme? Est-ce que je peux la manger?* (Do you want the apple? May I eat **it**?)

Therefore, pronoun placement in French follows the following rules (Akyüz, 2015; Delatour, 2020; Grégoire *et al.*, 2017; Lafleur, 2019);:

- 1) enclisis to the verb in the positive imperative: *excuse-moi* (excuse **me**);

- 2) proclisis to the verb in the infinitive or gerund: *il faut **le** relire* (it is necessary to read **it** again); *tu l'enleves en **le** tirant* (you remove **it** by pulling **it**);
- 3) proclisis to the finite verb, including in the negative imperative, except in verbal phrases with infinitive: *je **me** suis couché* (I went to bed); *je vais **me** coucher* (I am going to bed).

Systematizing, we have Table 2:

Table 2 – pronoun placement rules in French.

Proclisis	Enclisis
1. infinitive or gerund 2. finite verb (except positive imperative)	1. positive imperative

Source: prepared by the authors.

In Italian (Latino; Muscolino, 2013; Nocchi, 2024; Polito, 2016; Treccani, 2012; Willers, 1995), in turn, pronoun placement occurs in a very similar way to that in Spanish, with enclisis in the imperative (except in the formal imperative, that is, with the pronouns *Lei* and *Loro*), infinitive, gerund and participles (present and past), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – pronoun placement rules in Italian.

Proclisis	Enclisis
a) finite verb (except imperatives with pronouns <i>tu</i> and <i>voi</i>)	1. infinitive, gerund, present participle, past participle 2. imperative (except with pronouns <i>Lei</i> and <i>Loro</i>)

Source: prepared by the authors.

In contrast, the normative grammar of Portuguese requires the presence of enclisis at the beginning of the sentence, which does not happen in French, Spanish or Italian, as per the sentences:

(7) Port. *Chamo-me João*. (My name is John.)

(8) Fr. *Je m'appelle Jean*.

(9) Sp. *Me llamo Juan*.

(10) It. *Mi chiamo Giovanni*.

Finally, English and German, as they are Germanic languages, have a different pronoun placement from Latin languages. In English, oblique pronouns always come after the verb(s), as shown in the examples below (Aarts, 2011; Jenkins de Brito; Gregorim, 2016; Murphy, 2019):

(11) *The girl kissed me*.

(12) *I was helping her*.

In German (Camargo, 2016; Flear, 2019; Hentschel; Weydt, 2021; Hoberg; Hoberg, 2016; Zifonun *et al.*, 1997), pronouns are differentiated by case, as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4 – personal pronouns in German.

		Nominative	Accusative	Dative
Singular	1 st person	ich	mich	mir
	2 nd person	du	dich	dir
	3 rd person	er sie es	ihn sie es	ihm ihr ihm
Plural	1 st person	wir	uns	uns
	2 nd person	ihr	euch	euch
	3 rd person	sie	sie	ihnen
Formal		Sie	Sie	Ihnen

Source: prepared by the authors.

Note: The book *Gramática Alemã*, by Herbert Andreas Welker, provides more information on this subject.

As in English, oblique pronouns always come after the verb, as in the example below:

(13) *Gib mir das Buch, bitte.* (Give **me** the book, please.)

The cases in which, in German, the pronoun comes before the verb are false cases of proclisis. In fact, it is the verb that moves to the end of the sentence when it is in one of the nominal forms (infinitive or participle) or when the sentence is subordinate, as in the example below.

(14) *Morgen will ich sie besuchen, wenn sie es mir erlaubt.* (Tomorrow I want to visit **her** if she allows **me**.)

The rules of pronoun placement in the languages under study can be summarized as follows (Table 5):

Table 5 – pronoun placement rules in Spanish, Italian, French, English and German.

Language	Enclisis	Proclisis
Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfinite forms (infinitive, gerund and past participle) • Positive imperative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other contexts
Italian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfinite forms (infinitive, gerund, present participle and past participle) • Imperative (except with the formal pronouns <i>Lei</i> and <i>Loro</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal imperative • Other contexts
French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive imperative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other contexts
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never
German	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never

Source: prepared by the authors.

Unlike these languages, Portuguese has both positive (mandatory) and negative (prohibited) pronoun placement rules, according to the following list, inferred from Bechara (2010; 2019), Cegalla (2020), Chini; Caetano (2020), Cunha (2013), Paschoalin; Spadoto (2008) and Rocha Lima (2010).

1. Proclisis is not used at the beginning of a sentence, except under poetic license.
2. Proclisis is not used after a pause (comma, semicolon, colon, exclamation mark, question mark or ellipsis).
3. Proclisis is always used after attractants, which are:
 - 3.1. negative word or phrase: *não, nada, nunca, ninguém, jamais, de modo algum, de jeito nenhum, em hipótese alguma*;
 - 3.2. subordinating conjunction: *que, porque, se, quando, conforme, embora, logo que, visto que, contanto que, a fim de que, à medida que*, etc.;
 - 3.3. adverb: *aqui, já, lá, muito, talvez, sempre, realmente*, etc.;
 - 3.4. numeral or indefinite pronoun: *ambos, alguém, tudo, outros, muitos, alguns*, etc.;
 - 3.5. relative pronoun: *que, quem, qual, onde*;
 - 3.6. demonstrative pronoun: *isto, isso, aquilo* (optional attractant in Brazil, non attractant in Portugal);
 - 3.7. verb in the gerund preceded by an attractive word or the preposition *em*;
 - 3.8. interrogative, exclamatory or optative sentence: *não me dizendo, em se tratando*, etc.;
 - 3.9. additive or alternative coordinating conjunction: *não só... mas também, não só... como também, ou... ou, ora... ora, quer... quer, seja... seja*;
 - 3.10. word *só* in the sense of 'only', 'just'.

Let us then look at Table 6 below the systematization of the rules for pronoun placement in the Portuguese language:

Table 6 – pronoun placement rules in Portuguese.

Proclisis	Enclisis	Mesoclis
1. In the presence of adverbs 2. With subject noun pronoun 3. With <i>e</i> pronoun 4. With subordinating conjunctions 5. With preposition <i>em</i> followed by gerund 6. In exclamatory sentences 7. In interrogative sentences 8. In optative sentences	1. In a sentence beginning with a verb, as long as it is not in the future or conditional tense 2. In reduced infinitive or gerund sentences 3. In positive imperative	1. In the same cases as enclisis when the verb is in the future or conditional tense

Source: prepared by the authors.

As can be seen, Portuguese has at least 12 rules for pronoun placement, including mesoclis, which, of all European languages, only it has. Meanwhile, the other Romance languages have a maximum of two rules, and the Germanic languages only one.

An additional fact that complicates the issue of pronoun placement is that the third-person oblique pronouns *o*, *a*, *os* and *as* require the use of the allomorphs *-lo/-no*, *-la/-na*, *-los/-nos* and *-las/-nas* according to the termination of the verb (*r*, *s* or *m*). And, in the case of *r* and *s*, these letters (and, evidently, the phonemes that they represent) must be suppressed when receiving the enclitic or mesoclitic pronoun: *amar* + *o* = *amá_-lo*, *farei* + *o* = *fá_-lo-ei*, *vemos* + *nos* = *vemo_-nos*, *faz* + *o* = *fá_-lo*, *pus* + *a* = *pu_-la*. In one specific case, that of the verb *querer* 'to want', the *r* is not suppressed but a paragogic *e* is added: *quer* + *o* = *quere-o* and not **qué-lo*.

4.2 Inflected infinitive

Regarding the inflected infinitive, Portuguese is known for being one of the very few languages with the presence of this verbal construction. According to Drzazgowska (2014), the only Romance language other than Portuguese to have the conjugated infinitive is Galician. And in this language, the use of this verbal form is currently marginal (Saborido, 2018). According to Jansegers (2022):

The quintessential example of the inflected infinitive is the Portuguese one. However, one also finds the inflected infinitive in other Romance languages such as Galician, Mirandese, and some dialects of Sardinian. Furthermore, it is also attested in Old Neapolitan (from the 13th through the late 16th centuries) and Old Leonese. Outside the realm of Romance languages, the inflected infinitive is present in languages as diverse as Hungarian and Welsh (Jansegers, 2022).

According to the website *Old English Online* (2023),

[i]n Old English, **inflected infinitive** is a form of the infinitive used to express purpose, obligation, or that an action is expected to happen. This inflection usually follows the preposition 'to', and takes an **-enne** ending.

And it mentions the following examples with the verb *healdan* (to hold):

(15) *Hie timbrodon byrig, þæt land to healdenne*. (They built forts **to hold** the land.)

(16) *Eow mæst þearf is daglic fasten to healdenne*. (It is extremely necessary that you **hold** daily fasts.)

Other languages that had this verb form, such as Old English, some dialects of Sardinian, Neapolitan and Leonese, have lost it. In any case, they are mostly ancient languages and/or of little or no international relevance and in some cases considered by many scholars to be dialects and not cultural languages.

Thus, this verbal construction, which has been found since the 12th century in texts such as *Crônicas e memórias* and *Livro das linhagens*, is a striking and practically exclusive characteristic of the Portuguese language which, according to Drzazgowska (2014), who is Polish, surprises native Polish students.

Let us compare the sentence below in Portuguese with its counterparts in Spanish, French, Italian, English and German, respectively.

(17)Port. *Eu dei a bola para os meus filhos **brincarem**.*

(18)Sp. *Di la pelota para que **jueguen** mis hijos.*

(19)Fr. *J'ai donné la balle pour que mes enfants **jouent**.*

(20)It. *Ho dato la palla perché i miei figli **giochino**.*

(21)Eng. *I gave the ball for my children **to play** with.*

(22)Germ. *Ich habe meinen Kindern den Ball gegeben, damit sie **spielen**.*

Let us look at these sentences one by one. In Portuguese (17), as already mentioned, the inflected infinitive is used, while in Spanish (18) a final adverbial subordinate clause is used which, unlike in Portuguese, is not reduced to an infinitive. Therefore, the present subjunctive is used and not the inflected infinitive.

The same occurs in French (19), where, as in Spanish, the conjunctive phrase *pour que* 'so that' is used with the verb remaining in the subjunctive, which, in this case, is the same as the present indicative, since this verb is regular.

In Italian (20), the construction is identical to that of Spanish and French, in which there is the presence of the word *perché* 'so that' and the presence of the final adverbial subordinate clause.

In English (21), in turn, the phrase **for my children to** is used, in which the preposition **to** is notable, used to separate the noun from the verb. The presence of the preposition at the end of the sentence is also notable, which, in general, does not happen in Portuguese.

Finally, in German (22) the formation of the present perfect tense with *haben gegeben* is notable in the first sentence, a verbal phrase in which the auxiliary verb is separated from the main verb. Furthermore, the indirect object *meinen Kindern* ‘to my children’ is declined in the dative case, while the direct object *den Ball* ‘the ball’ is in the accusative. There is also the presence of the conjunction *damit*, which can be translated as ‘so that’ and, finally, the verb *spielen*, which means ‘play’ and is in the indicative mood.

Just like in the main clause, the syntactic order is different from that in Portuguese, being translated as ‘so that they may play’. In German, the verb is conjugated in the third person (which is the same as the infinitive), and there is no subjunctive.

Therefore, we can see the structural similarities between English and German, as well as between Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian, marking the difference between the Romance languages and the Germanic ones. Even so, it is undeniable that Portuguese presents a significant difference in relation to the other languages when it comes to the use of the inflected infinitive.

Even in cases where the other languages analyzed use the infinitive, it is always impersonal. For example:

(23) Port. *Fiz os convidados **entrarem**.*

(24) Sp. *Hice **entrar** a los invitados.*

(25) Fr. *J’ai fait **entrer** les invités.*

(26) It. *Ho fatto **entrare** gli ospiti.*

(27) Eng. *I made the guests **come in**.*

(28) Germ. *Ich machte die Gäste **einkommen**.*

One of the most difficult aspects of the use of the inflected infinitive in Portuguese is the occurrence of hyperurbanism, or hypercorrection, in which this

verbal form is used in contexts in which normative grammar does not authorize it, such as in verbal phrases with a modal verb. Example: *Amanhã devemos chegar cedo e organizarmos o escritório* 'Tomorrow we must arrive early and organize the office' (implied *devemos organizar* and not **devemos organizarmos*). Cases like this are common even in formal texts, such as journalistic and academic ones, obviously written by professionals with higher education, which reveals that not even the most literate speakers/writers escape the traps created by this verbal form.

Furthermore, the equality of the forms of the inflected infinitive and the future subjunctive in regular verbs (for example, *colocar, colocares, colocarmos, colocardes, colocarem*) ends up motivating that, by analogy, forms of the former are used in place of the latter in irregular verbs, such as *pormos* in place of *pusermos* (*se nós pormos...*). In addition, many educated speakers/writers use enclisis on the verb in the future subjunctive if it is regular — which is forbidden by normative grammar — by analogy with the inflected infinitive, which does not occur if the verb is irregular: *se eu colocá-lo... mas se eu o puser...* (e não **se eu pusé-lo...*).

A detailed study of the possible origin of the inflected infinitive, of which Portuguese is the most cited example language because it is the one in which this verbal form is most lively and productive, can be found in Harris (2013).

4.3 Future subjunctive

Let us analyze below the song *Pra você eu digo sim*, by Brazilian singer/songwriter Rita Lee.

*Se eu me apaixonar
Vê se não vai debochar
Da minha confusão
Uma vez me apaixonei
E não foi o que pensei
Estou só desde então...*

Se eu me entregar total
Meu medo é
Você pensar que eu
Sou superficial...
Se eu não fizer
Amor assim sem mais

Se você brigar
E for
Correndo atrás de alguém
Não vou suportar
A dor de ver
Que eu perdi
Mais uma vez meu amor
Uuuuh!...

Mas se eu sentir
Que nós estamos juntos
Longe ou a sós
No mundo e além
Pode crer que tudo bem
O amor só precisa de nós dois
Mais ninguém
Uuuuh!...

Se você quiser
Ser meu namoradinho
E me der o seu carinho
Sem ter fim
Pra você eu digo
Sim!... (Lee, 2024)

In this song, Rita Lee's version of a Beatles hit, there are several constructions (in italics) that are commonly learned in English classes as first conditionals, that is, conditional adverbial subordinate clauses that refer to a concrete and not imaginary possibility. Let us compare, therefore, the sentence *se você quiser ser meu namoradinho* 'if you want to be my boyfriend' in Portuguese, French, English, Spanish, German and Italian, respectively.

(29) Port. *Se você quiser ser meu namoradinho*

(30) Sp. *Si tú quieres ser mi novio*

(31) Fr. *Si tu veux être mon petit ami*

(32) It. *Se tu vuoi essere il mio ragazzo*

(33) Eng. *If you want to be my boyfriend*

(34) Germ. *Wenn du mein Freund sein willst*

In Portuguese (29), there is the presence of the verb *quiser*, which, in an irregular form, presents a different inflection from the present indicative *quer*. From a morphological point of view, it is interesting to note the presence of an allomorphy in which the root *quer-* is transformed into *quis-*.

On the other hand, in all the other languages mentioned, the verb is used in the present indicative without any significant change in form. Therefore, there is no future subjunctive. In French and Italian, it is also possible to use the future indicative in cases in which Portuguese uses the future subjunctive: Fr. *si tu pourras*, It. *se tu vorrai*.

It should be noted that the verb tense in question also exists in Spanish and Galician — which is not surprising, given the umbilical connection between that language and Portuguese. However, in these languages, this verb tense is in sharp decline, practically nonexistent even in formal texts. Only ultra-formal texts, such as the current Spanish Constitution, still use this verb tense, and in a very artificial way, which could be said to cause as much strangeness and even hilarity among Spanish speakers as mesoclisism causes to Brazilians. It is, therefore, a verb tense on the verge of total disuse, and is already considered archaic — and, why not say, an indicator of snobbery.

4.4 Numerals

Let us start by talking about cardinal numbers. In relation to them, it is worth noting that in all the languages studied, except for three cases in Portuguese and one

in Spanish, hundreds are formed by the cardinal of the unit followed by the word corresponding to the numeral ‘hundred’, agglutinated or not, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 – cardinal numerals (hundreds) in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, English and German.

Numeral	Portuguese	Spanish	French	Italian	English	German
100	cem, cento	cien, ciento	cent	cento	one hundred	einhundert
200	<i>duzentos</i>	doscientos	deux cents	duecento	two hundred	zweihundert
300	<i>trezentos</i>	trescientos	trois cents	trecento	three hundred	dreihundert
400	quatrocentos	cuatrocientos	quatre cents	quattrocento	four hundred	vierhundert
500	<i>quinhentos</i>	<i>quinientos</i>	cinq cents	cinquecento	five hundred	fünthundert
600	seiscentos	seiscientos	six cents	seicento	six hundred	sechshundert
700	setecentos	setecientos	sept cents	settecento	seven hundred	siebenhundert
800	oitocentos	ochocientos	huit cents	ottocento	eight hundred	achthundert
900	novecentos	novcientos	neuf cents	novecento	nine hundred	neunhundert

Source: prepared by the authors.

Note: in the table above, the numerals that do not result from the cardinal composition + ‘hundred’ are in italics.

The ordinal numerals in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, English and German are as follows (Table 8):

Table 8 – ordinal numerals in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, English and German.

Portuguese	Spanish	French	Italian	English	German
primeiro	primer(o)	premier	primo	first	erste
segundo	segundo	deuxième, second	secondo	second	zweite
terceiro	tercer(o)	troisième	terzo	third	ditte
quarto	cuarto	quatrième	quarto	fourth	vierte
quinto	quinto	cinquième	quinto	fifth	fünfte

sexto	sexto	sixième	sesto	sixth	sechste
sétimo	séptimo	septième	settimo	seventh	siebente, siebte
oitavo	octavo	huitième	ottavo	eighth	achte
nono	noveno	neuvième	nono	ninth	neunte
décimo	décimo	dixième	decimo	tenth	zehnte
décimo primeiro	undécimo, onceno	onzième	undicesimo	eleventh	elfte
décimo segundo	duodécimo	douzième	dodicesimo	twelfth	zwölfte
décimo terceiro	decimotercero	treizième	tredicesimo	thirteenth	dreizehnte
décimo quarto	decimocuarto	quatorzième	quattordicesimo	fourteenth	vierzehnte
décimo quinto	decimoquinto	quinzième	quindicesimo	fifteenth	fünfzehnte
décimo sexto	decimosexto	seizième	sedicesimo	sixteenth	sechzehnte
décimo sétimo	decimoséptimo	dix-septième	diciassettesimo	seventeenth	siebzehnte
décimo oitavo	decimooctavo	dix-huitième	diciottesimo	eighteenth	achtzehnte
décimo nono	decimonoveno	dix-neuvième	diciannovesimo	nineteenth	neunzehnte
vigésimo	vigésimo	vingtième	ventesimo	twentieth	zwanzigste
vigésimo primeiro	vigésimo primero	vingt-premier	ventunesimo	twenty-first	einundzwanzigste
trigésimo	trigésimo	trentième	trentesimo	thirtieth	dreißigste
quadragésimo	cuadragésimo	quarantième	quarantesimo	fortieth	vierzigste
quingagésimo	quincuagésimo	cinquantième	cinquantesimo	fiftieth	fünfzigste
sexagésimo	sexagésimo	soixantième	sessantesimo	sixtieth	sechzigste
septuagésimo	septuagésimo	septantième, soixante-dixième	settantesimo	seventieth	siebzigste
octogésimo	octagésimo	huitantième, quatre-vingtième	ottantesimo	eightieth	achtzigste
nonagésimo	nonagésimo	nonantième, quatre-vingt-dixième	novantesimo	ninetieth	neunzigste
centésimo	centésimo	centième	centesimo	hundredth	hundertste

Source: prepared by the authors.

From Table 8, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) in French, all ordinals are formed by adding the suffix *-ième* to the corresponding cardinal;

- 2) in Italian, all ordinals from 11 onwards are formed by adding the suffix *-esimo* to the corresponding cardinal;
- 3) in English, all ordinals ending in 1, 2 or 3 are formed by replacing the unit with *first*, *second* and *third*, respectively, and the other ordinals are formed by adding the suffix *-th* to the corresponding cardinal;
- 4) in German, except for the ordinals corresponding to 1 and 3, the others are formed by adding the suffixes *-te* (up to 19) or *-ste* (from 20) to the corresponding cardinals;
- 5) In Spanish and Portuguese, ordinals do not derive directly from their respective cardinals, but are formed from the corresponding Latin ordinals.

It can be seen that, while French, Italian, English and German have quite simple and intuitive rules for forming ordinal numbers from their cardinals, Portuguese and Spanish require the speaker/writer to know the Latin ordinal numbers (for example, *quingagesimus*, *octingentesimus* etc.) or to memorize learned and irregular forms, which are therefore not at all intuitive. Incidentally, in Brazil it is common to replace the ordinal number with the corresponding cardinal, either for ease of understanding or out of mere ignorance: *trigésima quarta DP* → *trinta e quatro DP*, *octogésima nona posição* → *posição de número oitenta e nove*, and so on.

5 Conclusion

From a small initial selection of just six languages, including Portuguese, and just four topics of their normative grammars, namely, pronoun placement, inflected infinitive, future subjunctive and numerals, it was possible to note in most cases a greater complexity of Portuguese in relation to the other languages in the corpus under analysis.

Regarding pronoun placement, there are at least 12 rules in standard Portuguese, compared to only one or two in other languages. The complexity of these rules means that even the most educated speakers/writers can make mistakes,

especially with hypercorrection, in which enclisis is used, mistakenly considered more formal, in cases where it is not recommended, such as in subordinate clauses (for example, “*antes de entrar no elevador, verifique se o mesmo **encontra-se** parado neste andar*” ‘before entering the elevator, check if it is stopped on this floor’). On the other hand, contemporary informal spoken Brazilian Portuguese tends to use proclisis in all cases, in a radical simplification of pronoun placement.

It is also possible to say that both the future subjunctive and the inflected infinitive bring greater complexity to Portuguese, as these verb forms practically only exist in this language. In fact, very few languages in the world have or have had the inflected infinitive; of those that still have it, almost all are direct relatives of Portuguese, such as Galician and Mirandese. The formal similarity between the inflected infinitive and the future subjunctive in regular verbs sometimes leads to confusion between the two verb forms in the case of irregular verbs. Two classic examples of this mistake are the replacement of *puser*, *pusermos*, etc., by *pôr*, *pormos*, and so on, and of *vir*, *virem* (from the verb *ver* ‘to see’) by *ver*, *verem*, as well as of *vier*, *vierem* by *vir*, *virem*, etc.

As for cardinal numerals, it can be seen that the number of hundreds that do not result from the juxtaposition of the unit plus the composition element *-centos*, in this case three, is greater than that of Spanish (only one) and other languages (none).

As for ordinal numbers, Portuguese and Spanish require the memorization of formal Latin forms (and Latin has long since ceased to be taught in Brazilian schools), since ordinals do not derive directly from their corresponding cardinals by mere suffixation as occurs in other languages studied. This sometimes leads to doubts and confusion between forms (is the ordinal corresponding to 40 *quadragésimo* or *quadringentésimo*?)

Obviously, the conclusions reached so far are provisional, since the corpus of this first research was deliberately small in size. New research within the scope of the project *Comparative grammar of European languages: contrastive analysis of the standard*

norm of the main Western European languages (Romance and Germanic), addressing other grammatical topics in more European languages (and perhaps even from other continents) may make the judgment about the greater or lesser complexity of languages clearer and more precise. It should be emphasized that our goal is to establish objective degrees of simplicity or complexity in absolute terms and not from the relative point of view of someone learning a foreign language that is more or less related to their mother tongue.

In any case, our goal with this project is to provide an empirical and scientifically rigorous basis to confirm or refute the common sense claim that Portuguese is a “difficult” language, placing it on a scale that goes from the simplest to the most complex language. It should also be noted that some languages are simpler in certain aspects and more complex in others, so that such classification should always be based on an average complexity.

Finally, our research may contribute to improving the development of Portuguese grammars and textbooks, whether for native speakers or foreigners, as well as in contrastive studies of grammar from a multilingual perspective.

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