
John Whitlam has provided the Portuguese teaching profession with a must-have new pedagogical tool that bridges the gap between the precise structural linguistic descriptions of traditional grammar reference books and the pedagogical needs of communication-based classroom teaching to English-speaking learners. Although not comprehensive in its coverage of Portuguese grammar, it dedicates one half of the book to the functional application of the grammatical constructions presented.

The volume contains two major parts, “Structures” and “Functions”. The former outlines a grammatical sketch of Brazilian Portuguese and the latter is devoted to, as the title of the sections suggests, the functions of the language. Each part is subdivided further into chapters, twenty-eight for the first and 43 for the second part. The first part begins with a chapter on “pronunciation and spelling” and then proceeds with chapters on gender and number and their agreement, the open and closed grammatical classes (e.g., articles, nouns, etc) followed by ten chapters on verbs and their tenses and conjugations, and to conclude there 4 chapters on other grammatical elements and word order. The second part of the volume, “Functions”, is further subdivided into six subparts, which mainly treat language according to different communicative needs, namely *Social contact and communication strategies, Giving and seeking factual information, Putting events into a wider context, Expressing emotional attitudes, The language of persuasion*, and *Expression temporal relations*. These chapters are followed by five “Appendices” of verb forms, a short “Bibliography” and an “Index of words and topics”.
In his introduction, Whitlam maintains that this volume will provide a complete guide to the language “as it is spoken and written in Brazil today” (1). Topic comprehensiveness is a major strength of this work. Despite the number of grammatical structures and functional topics reviewed, it is easy to locate any particular topic, thanks to the well-organized table of contents and complete index. The organization of the book is clear, even though it may not be pedagogically logical. In addition, the last three chapters of the “Functions” part are particularly helpful for advanced students wanting to advance both their writing and speaking skills.

Compared with other grammatical treatments of Brazilian Portuguese for English-learners used in the United States and elsewhere, this book offers an innovative and distinctive approach. However, this grammar fails to acknowledge one important segment of its audience, Spanish speakers. Throughout the volume there is not any mention of how the structures and functions can be compared or related to the already existing mental grammar of these speakers. This is probably an area that should be considered for future editions of this work.

All treatments follow the same format. Each one begins with a brief description of the structure followed by semantic and/or functional description. Next appears model sentences in the form of examples. These are well-chosen for their typicality and for content that illustrates the meaning and the grammatical function of the construction in question. However, it must be noted that these examples are decontextualized and the vocabulary is not taught in the chapter, nor does the book have a vocabulary section other than the index of terms at the end. Thus, to understand the examples and the grammatical concepts throughout the manual, a dictionary is required. Lacking proper context, it is difficult to imagine how learners may be expected to retain new vocabulary.
The same issue can be observed in the accompanying workbook. Although it is true that the exercises are numerous, there is little variety; a great number of them are translations. There are very few communicative activities, and the infrequent oral exercises mostly entail asking a list of questions to a partner. In addition, although the exercises focus on the grammatical concepts covered in their respective chapters, the vocabulary is random. For example, in the chapter covering the uses of articles, in some exercises students are directed to fill in the blanks with the appropriate article. The accompanying vocabulary for those exercises range across several distinct topics, namely food, professions, hobbies, clothing, school subjects, etc, making it difficult for beginner learners to grasp the grammatical concepts. Thus, in light of these issues, this may be a valuable source for practice exercises, but it is not clear how this book could be used to improved learners’ speaking skills.

The strongest features of this book are the succinct and clear explanations and the use of English for the explanations. Organization by individual grammatical pattern makes the book a very valuable reference tool. A teacher looking for a new way to explain a certain pattern or looking for the functions connected with that particular pattern can simply flip to the relevant page and find useful explanations. The aforementioned lack of contextualization of vocabulary and acknowledgement of Spanish speakers by no means negate the value of this book. It clearly deserves not only a spot in every Portuguese educator’s shelf, but to be adopted in Portuguese language courses of intermediate to advanced level.

Agripino S. Silveira
Stanford University