

Reconciling Franchi's creativity-based approach with Chomsky's linguistic framework: a path to redrawing grammar teaching?

Reconciliando a abordagem baseada na criatividade de Franchi com a estrutura linguística de Chomsky: um caminho para redesenhar o ensino de gramática?

Conciliar el enfoque basado en la creatividad de Franchi con el marco lingüístico de Chomsky: ¿un camino para rediseñar la enseñanza de la gramática?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the conceptual intersection between Carlos Franchi's notion of vertical creativity and Noam Chomsky's hierarchical model of generative grammar, aiming to articulate perspectives from Brazilian interactional linguistics and cognitive-generative linguistics. Based on bibliographic and documentary research, the study argues that the cognitive and expressive potential present in Chomskyan recursion significantly aligns with Franchi's view of linguistic creativity as a vertical, contextual, and innovative process. By analyzing how recursion not only generates syntactic complexity but also enables original linguistic expression, the study proposes a synthesis between creativity and formal structure. Methodologically, a theoretical and analytical approach is adopted, combining interpretive readings of foundational texts with selected linguistic examples. Special attention is given to Franchi's reflections in his 1991 and 1992 articles, particularly episodes involving Father Matos, which illustrate

language as a creative act rooted in cultural and dialogical contexts. These are examined in light of the cognitive perspective developed by Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002), who position recursion as the core of the faculty of language. The results suggest that Chomsky's theory of hierarchical recursion provides a strong foundation for understanding how linguistic creativity operates. Syntactic operations are shown not to be merely mechanical but deeply linked to semantic and pragmatic processes. Therefore, creative grammar teaching should highlight the mutual constitution between form and meaning, opening new emancipatory pedagogical pathways.

Keywords: Linguistic Creativity. Transformational Generative Grammar. Chomskyan Hierarchy. Context-Driven Instruction.

RESUMO

Este artigo explora a interseção conceitual entre a noção de criatividade vertical de Carlos Franchi e o modelo hierárquico de gramática gerativa de Noam Chomsky, com o objetivo de articular perspectivas da linguística da interação brasileira e da linguística cognitivo-gerativa. Com base em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, o estudo argumenta que o potencial cognitivo e expressivo presente na recursividade chomskiana se alinha significativamente à visão de Franchi sobre a criatividade linguística como um processo vertical, contextual e inovador. Ao analisar como a recursividade não apenas gera complexidade sintática, mas também possibilita a expressão linguística original, propõe-se uma síntese entre criatividade e estrutura formal. Metodologicamente, adota-se uma abordagem teórica e analítica, com leituras interpretativas de textos fundamentais e exemplos linguísticos selecionados. Dá-se especial atenção às reflexões de Franchi em seus artigos de 1991 e 1992, particularmente aos episódios com o Padre Matos, que ilustram a linguagem como um ato criativo enraizado em contextos culturais e dialógicos. Esses episódios são examinados à luz da perspectiva cognitiva desenvolvida por Hauser, Chomsky e Fitch (2002), que situam a recursividade como núcleo da faculdade da linguagem. Os resultados sugerem que a teoria chomskiana da recursividade hierárquica oferece uma base sólida para compreender como funciona a criatividade linguística. As operações sintáticas não são mecânicas, mas estão profundamente ligadas a processos semânticos e pragmáticos. Assim, o ensino criativo da gramática deve ressaltar a constituição mútua entre forma e sentido, abrindo novas vias pedagógicas emancipadoras.

Palavras-chave: Criatividade Linguística. Gramática Gerativa Transformacional. Hierarquia Chomskiana. Instrução Orientada por Contexto.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la intersección conceptual entre la noción de creatividad vertical de Carlos Franchi y el modelo jerárquico de gramática generativa de Noam Chomsky, con el objetivo de articular perspectivas de la lingüística de la interacción brasileña y la lingüística cognitivo-generativa. Basado en investigación bibliográfica y documental, el estudio sostiene que el potencial cognitivo y expresivo presente en la recursividad chomskiana se alinea significativamente

con la visión de Franchi sobre la creatividad lingüística como un proceso vertical, contextual e innovador. Al analizar cómo la recursividad no solo genera complejidad sintáctica, sino que también posibilita la expresión lingüística original, se propone una síntesis entre creatividad y estructura formal. Metodológicamente, se adopta un enfoque teórico y analítico, con lecturas interpretativas de textos fundamentales y ejemplos lingüísticos seleccionados. Se presta especial atención a las reflexiones de Franchi en sus artículos de 1991 y 1992, en particular a los episodios con el Padre Matos, que ilustran el lenguaje como acto creativo arraigado en contextos culturales y dialógicos. Estos se examinan a la luz de la perspectiva cognitiva desarrollada por Hauser, Chomsky y Fitch (2002), quienes sitúan la recursividad como núcleo de la facultad del lenguaje. Los resultados sugieren que la teoría chomskiana de la recursividad jerárquica ofrece una base sólida para comprender cómo funciona la creatividad lingüística. Las operaciones sintácticas no son mecánicas, sino que se vinculan a procesos semánticos y pragmáticos. Así, la enseñanza gramatical creativa debe resaltar la constitución mutua entre forma y significado, abriendo nuevas vías pedagógicas emancipadoras.

Palabras clave: Creatividad Lingüística. Gramática Generativa Transformacional. Jerarquía Chomskiana. Instrucción Basada en el Contexto.

1 INTRODUCTION

Doubt lies at the heart of scientific inquiry, as Socrates famously observed—the more we learn, the more we become aware of the vast expanse of the unknown. This paradox is particularly evident in the study of complex phenomena such as language and creativity. In this context, we will examine the perspectives advanced by Carlos Franchi (1991; 1992) and those proposed by Noam Chomsky during the 2000s to determine whether these approaches might be complementary and whether their convergence could yield significant implications for grammar teaching.

Franchi's knowledge of Chomsky's work occurred in the 60s, 70s and 80s and, therefore, the Brazilian linguist was familiar with Chomsky's initial studies on creativity (Franchi, 1991; 1992). In his critique, the Brazilian linguist argues that recursion in generative grammar is merely a mechanical and "*horizontal*" extension of the structure, without the interpretative and metaphorical depth that characterizes human language. Opposing the rigidity aspects of the aforementioned Chomskyan theory, Franchi considers that language should be

seen as a fluid and transformative process, that is, constitutive of human subjectivity – an idea that recalls Humboldt's notion of language as a continuous act of “giving form”. Although his initial criticism reflected Franchi's disapproval of some aspects of Chomsky's theory, it is plausible that, if Franchi came to know Chomsky's theories in the 2000s, he would see in them the dynamism and adaptability inherent to the generative model and, with that, he would see Chomsky's defense of vertical creativity (Paes & Silva, 2021).

In *Creativity and Grammar (Criatividade e Gramática)* (Franchi, 1991), he asserts that creativity in language does not lie solely in producing something entirely new but, also, in reconfiguring existing elements in infinite ways. He criticizes traditional, prescriptive approaches to grammar—which reduce language to a set of rigid rules – and advocates for a pedagogy that empowers learners to actively shape language according to their communicative needs. This critique is particularly relevant today, as evidenced by the prescriptive framework used in high-stakes assessments like the National High School Exam (ENEM), which reinforces narrow grammatical norms (Sousa Filho, 2021; Sousa Filho & Araújo, 2015).

Simultaneously, Chomsky's work provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the generative and recursive nature of language. In *The Faculty of Language* (Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002), he distinguishes between the Faculty of Language in the Broad Sense (FLB) – encompassing cognitive systems shared with other species – and the Faculty of Language in the Narrow Sense (FLN), which is uniquely human and facilitates recursion. This distinction reveals how humans construct and comprehend complex linguistic structures while accommodating embodied processes, such as breath control and articulation, essential for effective speech.

By examining the convergences between Franchi's and Chomsky's perspectives, this article aims to propose innovative strategies for grammar teaching that integrate structured, recursive knowledge with creative, context-sensitive expression. While Chapter 1 will offer an in-depth analysis of Franchi's contributions to understanding language and creativity, this introduction outlines the central thesis: the formal structures underlying language serve not to

constrain creativity but to enable it. Ultimately, the synthesis of these insights holds significant implications for developing pedagogical methods that nurture both precise linguistic competence and expressive fluency.

2 FRANCHI'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE AND CREATIVITY

Carlos Franchi's work provokes understanding of language by challenging the traditional view of grammar as a fixed, prescriptive system. In his seminal texts, Franchi (1991; 1992) presents language not as a static repository of rules but as a dynamic, creative process through which speakers actively construct, revise, and reshape meaning. For Franchi, language is fundamentally an act of creation – where the speaker is an agent, not merely a recipient of culture. Franchi contends that languages should be understood as “a creative process in which we organize and inform our experiences”¹. This view positions language as prior to communication itself: before serving as a vehicle for feelings or ideas, language functions as the process by which thought is constructed. As explained by Almeida (2002), Franchi proposes a “*vertical creativity*” that transcends logical, fixed patterns. He argues that language does not merely produce a predictable “think” (*pensar*) and “mean” (*significar*) but engages in an analogical mode that “supports the reverie without return of similitudes and metaphor, without fixed frameworks of values, without precisely imposed categorical limits, without the need for conclusions”² (Franchi, 1992p. 27) This perspective suggests that true linguistic creativity lies in the capacity for constant reformation – a process that does not confine itself to predetermined categories.

In contrast to models that reduce language to a stable set of rules, Franchi criticizes the early Chomskyan approach for operating on “principles, stable and invariable categories” (*princípios, categorias estáveis e invariáveis*) that, by

¹“Um processo criador em que organizamos e informamos as nossas experiências” (Franchi, 1992, p. 25). [Tradução nossa].

²“suporta o devaneio sem volta das similitudes e da metáfora, sem quadros fixos de valores, sem limites categoriais precisamente impostos, sem necessidade de conclusões.” (Franchi, 1992 p.27) [Tradução nossa].

reiteration, produce an unlimited set of particular acts (Almeida, 2002, p. 113). According to Franchi, while Chomsky's model describes the infinite generative potential of language through recursion, it is interpreted as if language were simply reproducing fixed forms. He contraststhiswithHumboldt'svision, notingthat:

[...] form in Humboldt designates the dynamic principles of the very act of 'giving form': it designates the universality of a process and not of the variable elements that are considered in this process as susceptible to revision and transformation. It designates a process that is not subject to a stable and permanent set of categories, as it responds to the provocation of the imagination; that constitutes, but is not established; that does not fix itself, but resumes and renews itself³ (Franchi, 1992, p. 31).

By rejecting any reduction of language to a formal, static system, Franchi emphasizes that language is an instrument for continuous revision and creative reorganization of experience.

Moreover, Franchi rejects the notion that linguistic creativity is confined to non-verbal domains. He notes that for too long, it was assumed "that creativity was only in verbal language. In gestural manifestations, body expression, free drawing, etc."⁴ (Franchi, 1991, p. 7). Instead, he asserts that language itself is a space for creative expression – a process that does not simply transmit fixed meanings but constantly transforms and renews them. As he puts it, language inherently supports a process of "review and reformulation" (*revisão e reformulação*) (Franchi, 1992, p. 32), making it capable of subverting rigid categories and generating novel grammatical, lexical, and prosodic possibilities. This creative instability is what makes natural languages so rich and adaptable, as they exist prior to any constraining formalizations and are marked by inherent semantic indeterminacy (Franchi, 1992, p. 34).

Franchi's insights are further illuminated by his recollections of the pedagogical methods of his teacher, Priest José de Matos. Franchi recalls, for

³[...] a forma em Humboldt designa os princípios dinâmicos do ato mesmo de 'dar forma': designa a universalidade de um processo e não dos elementos variáveis que se tomam neste processo como suscetíveis de revisão e transformação. Designa um processo que não está sujeito a um conjunto estável e permanente de categorias, pois responde à provocação da imaginação; que constitui, mas não se institui; que não se fixa, mas retoma e se renova (Franchi, 1992, p. 31)

⁴ "Que a criatividade estava só em que não na linguagem verbal. Nas manifestações gestuais, na expressão corporal, no desenho livre, etc." (Franchi, 1991, p. 7).

instance, how Matos encouraged students to “disassemble” (*desmanchar*) texts by canonical authors such as Eça de Queirós, challenging them to reconstruct these texts with alternative structures (Franchi, 1991, p. 27). Matos’s approach – characterized by continuous alteration of topics and perspectives, and the substitution and recomposition of linguistic elements (Franchi, 1991, p. 28)– epitomizes the very process of creative linguistic construction that Franchi advocates. This method not only emphasizes the active role of the speaker in transforming language but also mirrors the recursive, hierarchical mechanisms later elaborated by Chomsky. In essence, the pedagogical practices of Priest Matos demonstrate that structured engagement with language, far from stifling creativity, provides a catalyst for expressive innovation.

Franchi’s contributions, therefore, challenge educators to rethink grammar instruction. Rather than teaching grammar as a rigid system of pre-defined rules, he advocates for an approach that views grammar as an evolving, creative process – a tool for the continuous elaboration of thought. This perspective suggests that the limitations of prescriptive grammar, which prioritize regularization and normalization, can be overcome by embracing the inherent fluidity of language. As heremarks:

We think that language has been privileged (due to its proximity to the restricted languages of formal systems) as an instrument of regularization and normality, limiting itself to its virtuality, when one of its (essential) aspects is that it lends itself effectively to the subversion of categories and values, to the expression of ‘schizophrenia’ that creates enchanted universes, poems, theories⁵(Franchi, 1992, p. 27).

In summary, Franchi’s contributions compel us to view language as a process of continual formation and transformation. His critique of rigid grammatical models and his emphasis on the creative, unstable nature of language provide a compelling counterpoint to prescriptive approaches. This perspective remains highly relevant today, as contemporary linguistic research

⁵“Pensamos que se tem privilegiado a linguagem (por sua aproximação às linguagens restritas dos sistemas formais) como instrumento de regularização e normalidade, limitando-se a sua virtualidade, quando um de seus aspectos (essencial) é o de prestar-se eficazmente à subversão das categorias e valores, à expressão da ‘esquizofrenia’ que cria universos encantados, poemas, teorias” (Franchi, 1992, p. 27).

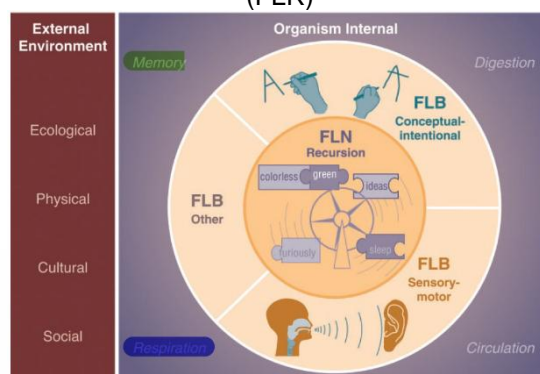
increasingly emphasizes multimodal and dynamic aspects of language learning. Furthermore, the insights discussed in this chapter set the stage for later sections, where Franchi's contributions will be examined alongside Chomsky's theories to propose innovative pedagogical applications.

3 FRANCHI'S CRITIQUE OF CHOMSKY: THE HIERARCHICAL AND GENERATIVE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY

3.1 THE MISCONCEPTION OF FIXITY IN GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

Noam Chomsky's generative grammar has profoundly shaped linguistic theory by positing that human language operates through recursive and computational mechanisms inherent to our cognitive faculties. However, Franchi(1992)critiques this model, arguing that it imposes a rigid and deterministic structure on linguistic creativity, thereby neglecting the dynamic and evolving nature of language. In contrast to Chomsky's formal approach, Franchi aligns with Wilhelm von Humboldt's notion of language as an ongoing act of "giving form," a process he considers unrestricted and fluid(Franchi, 1992, pp. 29-33). Nevertheless, this critique misrepresents the hierarchical and generative aspects of Chomsky's model. Generative grammar does not reduce creativity to mechanical reproduction but enables infinite syntactic and semantic expansion through recursion, a fundamental feature of the Faculty of Language in the Narrow Sense (FLN)(Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002, p. 1571), Figure 1.

Figure 1. Language faculty in the broad sense (FLA) and language faculty in the narrow sense (FLR)



Sources: Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002, p. 1570.

A central misunderstanding in Franchi’s critique lies in his interpretation of generative grammar as predicated on a predetermined and inflexible set of grammatical categories (Franchi, 1991, p. 18). While Chomsky’s framework does establish universal grammatical principles, it does not constrain language use to a fixed system. On the contrary, its core generative mechanism, recursion, allows linguistic elements to combine dynamically, producing novel expressions beyond pre-established patterns (Chomsky *et al.*, 2023). This principle is intrinsically connected to the distinction between the Faculty of Language in the Broad Sense (FLB) and FLN, as outlined by Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002). FLN specifically encompasses recursion as the defining property that enables hierarchical structuring and unbounded linguistic creativity.

3.1.1 Example of dynamic sentence construction

a) Base Sentence:

- Example 1 - “The cat sleeps.”

3.1.1.1 Adding Complexity Through Recursion

Using recursion, we can expand this simple sentence by embedding clauses within it:

- Example 2 - “The cat sleeps on the mat.”
- Example 3 - “The cat that chased the mouse sleeps on the mat.”
- Example 4 - “The cat that chased the mouse that stole the cheese sleeps on the mat.”
- Example 5 - “The cat that chased the mouse that stole the cheese that was kept in the kitchen sleeps on the mat.”

Each additional clause is recursively embedded within the previous clause, demonstrating how recursion allows for increasingly complex and novel

sentences by dynamically combining linguistic elements. The resulting sentences are not fixed or predetermined but generated through recursive rules.

- Example 7 - Recursive Structure: "The cat [that chased the mouse [that stole the cheese [that was kept in the kitchen]] sleeps."
- Example 8 - Syntactic Hierarchy: Ensures structurally coherent clause embedding.
- Example 9 - Semantic Integration: Maintains contextual meaning across levels.
- Example 10 -Phonological Representation: Manages prosody and intonation within the extended sentence.

Thus, generative grammar provides a framework that accounts for both structural constraints and the expansive flexibility of linguistic expression.

Paradoxically, the pedagogical approach of Padre José de Matos, whom Franchi admires, aligns closely with generative principles. Matos emphasized rigorous engagement with linguistic structures, encouraging students to reconstruct and transform textual elements, fostering recursive syntactic refinement (Franchi, 1991, pp. 27-37). His pedagogical exercises – such as the systematic recomposition of sentences by replacing elements in bold (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) demonstrate a deep understanding of the hierarchical and generative nature of syntax. Rather than contradicting generative principles, Matos' methodology reinforces the notion that structured linguistic manipulation is not a constraint but a catalyst for creativity.

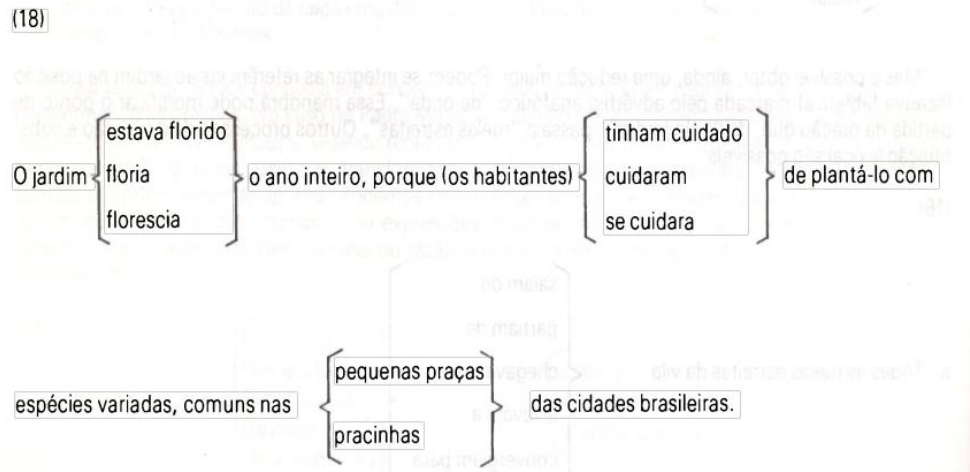
- a) It was nice to be there.
- b) There was, right in the center of the village, a beautiful garden. It was a cool and shady place, from which all the streets led. These were narrow and small.
- c) The garden was always full of flowers, because the inhabitants had taken care to ensure that the plants were trees of different types. They were no different from those common in all small squares in Brazilian cities.
- d) When it was time for each one to give their flowers, they made the garden always present different colors and perfumes⁶.

⁶a) Era gostoso estar ali.

b) Havia, bem no centro da vila, um belo jardim. Era um lugar fresco e com muita sombra, de onde saíam todas as ruas. Estas eram estreitas e pequenas.

Exercise by Padre de Matos that requires students to replace elements of the text in bold, changing the sentences (Franchi, 1991, p. 28).

Figure 2. Priest Matos' methodology.



Sources: Franchi, 1991.

In Figure 2 we have the following possibilities for statement 18:

The garden [was in bloom/bloomed/was in bloom] all year round because (the inhabitants) [were careful/took care/ took responsibility] planted it with various common species in [small squares/little squares] of Brazilian cities.

Franchi himself acknowledges the significance of structured linguistic engagement, asserting that grammar should be understood as “the study of the linguistic conditions of meaning” and “a systematic and, as far as possible, explicit answer to the fundamental question: why and how (and for whom and when...) do expressions in natural languages mean everything they mean!?” (Franchi, 1991, p. 32).

Furthermore, he advocates for an educational approach that prioritizes both linguistic and epilinguistic activities in early schooling, emphasizing spontaneous verbal exchanges while refining expressive capacities through

c) O jardim estava sempre cheio de flores, porque os habitantes tinham tido o cuidado de fazer com que as plantas fossem árvores de tipos variados. Não eram diferentes das que são comuns em todas as pequenas praças das cidades brasileiras.

d) Quando era o tempo de cada uma dar suas flores, faziam o jardim apresentar sempre diferentes cores e perfumes.

“O estudo das condições linguísticas da significação” e “uma resposta sistemática e, quanto possível, explícita, à questão fundamental: por que e como (e para quem e quando...) as expressões das línguas naturais significam tudo aquilo que significam!?” (Franchi, 1991, p. 32).

structured linguistic interactions. This methodological stance mirrors Chomsky's assertion that language is not a static system of fixed forms but a generative process wherein structure and meaning interact dynamically:

All the first years of school life should be focused, primarily, on linguistic and epilinguistic activities. Linguistic activity is nothing more than the full, detailed, intentional exercise with significant intentions of language itself. It already occurs, obviously, in the everyday circumstances of communication within the family and community of our students. And it can only be reproduced, at school, if it becomes a space of rich social interaction that, more than a mere simulation of communication environments, presupposes dialogue, conversation, exchange, contradiction, reciprocal support, the constitution as real interlocutors of the teacher and their students and of the students among themselves. In other words, conditions must be created for the exercise of children's 'linguistic knowledge', this 'grammar' that they have internalized in verbal exchange with adults and their peers.

But the school cannot be just that, another little square or corner bench. The educator's actions must lead to the configuration of more specific language situations, for more specific and specific purposes, where writing, reporting, description, argumentation and all the verbal instruments of contemporary culture make sense - the newspaper, the magazine, the book, the report, literature. In other words, conditions must be created for the development of the most varied and demanding expressive resources that writing, professional practice and participation in social and cultural life entail⁸. (Franchi, 1991, p. 35)

⁸ Todas as primeiras séries da vida escolar deveriam estar voltadas, prioritariamente, para as atividades linguística e epilinguística. A atividade linguística é nada mais que o exercício pleno, circunstanciado, intencionado e com intenções significativas da própria linguagem. Ela já se dá, obviamente, nas circunstâncias cotidianas da comunicação no âmbito da família e da comunidade de nossos alunos. E somente pode reproduzir-se, na escola, se esta se tornar um espaço de rica interação social que, mais do que mera simulação de ambientes de comunicação, pressuponha o diálogo, a conversa, a permuta, a contradição, o apoio recíproco, a constituição como interlocutores reais do professor e seus alunos e dos alunos entre si. Em outros termos, há que se criarem as condições para o exercício do 'saber linguístico' das crianças, dessa "gramática" que interiorizaram no intercâmbio verbal com os adultos e seus colegas.

Mas a escola não pode ser somente isso, uma outra pracinha ou banco de esquina. A atuação do educador deve levar a configurar-se situações mais específicas de linguagem, para propósitos também mais específicos e próprios, onde faça sentido a escrita, o relato, a descrição, a argumentação e todos os instrumentos verbais da cultura contemporânea - o jornal, a revista, o livro,

3.2 HIERARCHICAL CREATIVITY VS. FRANCHI'S "VERTICAL" CREATIVITY

Franchi (Franchi, 1992, p. 27-32) contrasts what he terms Chomsky's "horizontal creativity" – which he sees as a mechanical projection of recursive structures – with a "vertical creativity" that he claims better captures the metaphorical and interpretative dimensions of human language. However, this distinction misrepresents recursion's cognitive and expressive potential.

A key issue in Franchi's critique is the assumption that recursion merely extends syntactic structures in a linear manner without contributing to deeper conceptual innovation. However, Chomsky's early work already addressed this misconception, highlighting the flexibility inherent in generative grammar. As Chomsky (1956, p. 118) explicitly addressed the flexibility within generative grammar:

The grammar can ... be simplified very greatly if we ... distinguish between obligatory rules which must be applied when we reach them in the sequence and optional rules which may or may not be applied.

This insight challenges Franchi's critique by illustrating how generative grammar accommodates both fixed structural constraints and optional operations that foster creative syntactic variation. The distinction between obligatory and optional rules aligns with the recursive flexibility that enables expressive linguistic forms, rather than reducing language to mere combinatorial patterns.

Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002, p. 1569) argue that recursion enables syntactic embedding, semantic layering, and conceptual abstraction. This recursive depth directly supports the kind of abstraction, metaphor, and nuanced reinterpretation that Franchi associates with "vertical creativity." In other words, the capacity to construct novel expressions, reinterpret meanings, and generate sophisticated metaphorical mappings is already integral to the hierarchical organization of generative grammar.

o relatório, a literatura. Em outros termos, há que se criarem as condições para o desenvolvimento dos recursos expressivos mais variados e exigentes que supõem a escrita, o exercício profissional, a participação na vida social e cultural. (Franchi, 1992, p. 35)

Franchi's mischaracterization of recursion as "horizontal" can be illustrated through his critique of transformational grammar. He suggests that recursion merely extends linear sequences (e.g., embedding clauses within a sentence) rather than fostering conceptual innovation. An example of what Franchi might classify as horizontal creativity is:

- Example 11 - "The old man sat by the river."
- Example 12 - "The old man who loved poetry sat by the river."
- Example 13 - "The old man who loved poetry and recited verses to strangers sat by the river."

This syntactic expansion appears to Franchi as a predictable mechanical extension of structure, rather than true conceptual reinvention. However, this interpretation neglects how recursion also operates at the semantic and cognitive levels, enabling abstraction, metaphor, and ambiguity resolution.

A counterexample – demonstrating the hierarchical nature of generative creativity – comes from metaphorical language:

- Example 14 - "Time is money."
- Example 15 - "She spent her afternoon wisely."
- Example 16 - "He invested his emotions in the wrong person."

These examples show how deep conceptual structuring allows words and phrases to shift meanings across contexts – something Franchi's supposed "horizontal recursion" alone cannot account for. The embedding here is not merely syntactic but conceptually transformative, reinforcing that recursion is not just syntactic repetition but an engine for cognitive expansion.

Moreover, Franchi's claim that generative grammar imposes rigid categorical constraints overlooks the dynamic nature of transformational operations. Chomsky (Chomsky, 1985, p. 51) emphasizes that language is "not a system of fixed forms but a generative process, where structure and meaning interact dynamically." Transformational rules allow deep structures to be flexibly reconfigured into surface representations, thereby facilitating sophisticated meaning construction rather than stifling creative expression.

A concrete demonstration of these principles is provided by Padre de Matos' pedagogical methods. As Franchi (Franchi, 1991, p. 29) recounts, Matos designed exercises requiring students to reconstruct and modify syntactic structures through recursive textual transformation. This practice mirrors the generative process and illustrates how structured syntactic manipulation refines both style and meaning. Additionally, Matos' multimodal approach – incorporating textual substitution, voice modulation, and syntactic variation – finds support in Cohn's research (2014; 2016; 2024) on visual languages, which shows that hierarchical structures underpin creative expression across multiple modalities.

By reconciling these perspectives, it becomes suggestive – rather than asserting definitively – that generative grammar does not merely facilitate rigid formal structures but provides the further understandings about cognitive architecture for deep linguistic creativity. The ability to manipulate linguistic structures recursively allows both syntactic complexity and conceptual innovation, bridging the apparent divide between Franchi's "vertical" creativity and Chomsky's hierarchical recursion.

3.3 THE ROLE OF INDETERMINACY AND SEMANTIC FLEXIBILITY

Chomsky (1959, p. 28) explains that linguistic competence represents a speaker's internalized knowledge of grammatical rules, while performance reflects the actual use of language in contexts where ambiguity, indeterminacy, and pragmatic nuance play essential roles. In this way, while the generative system is based on abstract rules, its application is inherently flexible, shaped by cognitive, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic factors (Chomsky, 1982). Rather than denying semantic richness, Chomsky's framework segregates core generative principles from the external factors influencing real-time communication, thereby establishing a system that underpins communicative flexibility.

Moreover, formal semantic theories – such as Katz and Fodor's (1963) interpretive semantics and Higginbotham's (1985) refinements – demonstrate that syntactic structures interact dynamically with meaning. Jackendoff (2002) further argues that syntax, semantics, and phonology are interconnected

via flexible interface rules. This perspective supports the view that meaning is not simply a by-product of syntactic form but emerges through multiple cognitive interactions. Later developments in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995), including the introduction of phase theory reinforce this dynamic by allowing cyclic, incremental interpretation where structure and meaning continuously interact.

3.3.1 Contextual recursion in everyday conversation

In everyday communication, the interpretation of pronouns offers a compelling example of how recursive, context-sensitive processes operate in real time. Consider a simple exchange: Person 1 states, “You have the keys.” and Person 2 replies, “You have it.” While the pronoun “you” grammatically designates the subject possessing the keys, its referent is not fixed. Instead, each speaker (or reader) dynamically draws on a reservoir of contextual information – prior interactions, shared experiences, and situational cues – to resolve ambiguity. In this instance, both interlocutors understand that “you” in the first utterance refers to Person 2, whereas in the second utterance the referent shifts to Person 1 as the conversational context evolves.

This example of contextual recursion is not only illustrative of Chomsky’s generative mechanisms but also has clear pedagogical implications. Recognizing and harnessing these dynamic, recursive processes can lead to more effective and creative language instruction. For instance, teachers can design classroom activities that encourage students to explore how pronouns and other context-dependent elements shift meaning in dialogue. By engaging in exercises such as role-plays or dialogue reconstruction tasks, students learn to appreciate how context, syntax, and meaning are interwoven—thereby bridging the gap between theoretical linguistic principles and practical communication skills, and fostering both expressive fluency and grammatical precision.

Moreover, while Franchi critiqued Chomsky for what he perceived as a rigid formalism, the very example of contextual recursion demonstrates that everyday language use is inherently flexible. In this regard, the concept of

epilinguistics – as endorsed by Sousa Filho (2021) – proves invaluable. Sousa Filho defines epilinguistics as an “unconscious metalinguistic activity” that reflects on the very process of verbal organization and structuring (Franchi, 1992, p. 31). In his analysis, Franchi further notes that language stimulates a “vertical” creativity, meaning that language does not operate merely within semantically uniform domains to produce actions, but rather through creative and constitutive processes that organize human experience (Franchi, 1992, p. 21). In this light, creativity is seen as “a work of reconstruction” in every moment (Franchi, 1992, p. 24), with each act of speech emerging as an act of choice among a bundle of possible expressions. This perspective reinforces the idea that recursive mechanisms are not confined to abstract structures but actively operate in natural dialogue.

To further illustrate this point, consider another example from classroom observations: during group discussions, students often use phrases like “that idea” or “this point” without explicit antecedents until the context evolves throughout the dialogue. As the conversation progresses, the intended referents become clear through a collective, recursive negotiation. This not only exemplifies the inherent flexibility of language but also reinforces the value of teaching methods that emphasize context and interaction, helping learners internalize that meaning is constructed on the fly through recursive engagement with both linguistic structures and situational cues.

3.4 RECONCILING STRUCTURALISM AND LINGUISTIC VIRTUALITY

Franchi’s final critique argues that formal models like Chomsky’s generative grammar privilege regularization and fixed categorization, thereby constraining language’s expressive potential – a view he encapsulates with the concept of “vertical creativity” (1992, p. 39). According to Franchi, language should be an evolving, transformative process that subverts static norms through metaphor, analogy, and creative reconfiguration.

Yet, this perspective does not stand in opposition to Chomsky’s framework; instead, it reveals a fundamental complementarity. Chomsky’s model

provides the structural scaffolding – through operations like Merge and the recursive dynamics of FLN –that enables both strict grammaticality and boundless expressiveness. Gallego and Chomsky (Gallego & Chomsky, 2020, p. 68) affirm that “the generative capacity of language is what allows for both rigid grammaticality and boundless expressiveness.” Without a foundational system of rules, even the most subversive linguistic expressions would lack coherence.

Furthermore, the interplay between structure and creativity extends into multimodal domains. Jackendoff (2002) challenges a purely syntactocentric view by asserting that linguistic creativity emerges from the interplay of syntax, semantics, and phonology. Similarly, Cohn (2024) demonstrates that the hierarchical principles observed in language are mirrored in visual narratives, where structured graphic vocabularies and sequential organization enable creative expression. This convergence implies that the pedagogical methods of Padre de Matos – which emphasize building complex expressive structures from simpler linguistic units – are fully compatible with the generative framework. Students learn to start with smaller objects and gradually layer complexity, a process that both adheres to FLN principles and cultivates expressive flexibility essential for effective communication.

4 POSSIBLE GRAMMAR TEACHING EXERCISES INSPIRED BY GENERATIVE AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

This chapter presents a series of structured exercises designed to foster recursive sentence construction, perspective-taking, and multimodal expression. Grounded in the insights of Chomsky’s generative grammar and Franchi’s views on linguistic creativity, these activities aim to develop both the structural foundations and the expressive capacities of language learners.

4.1 THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN GRAMMAR TEACHING

Traditional grammar instruction often emphasizes rote memorization and mechanical application of rules. In contrast, an effective approach leverages the

innate generative capacities of language learners, recognizing grammar not merely as a system of constraints but as a dynamic framework for creative production. Franchi (1991, p. 27) reminds us that language learning is rooted in meaningful social interaction, where students actively construct and deconstruct linguistic forms. Chomsky reinforces this view by stating that “the recursive nature of language allows an infinite range of expressions from a finite set of elements.” Together, these perspectives suggest that structured grammatical knowledge can empower learners to explore a wide array of expressive possibilities – a notion exemplified by the methods of Father José de Matos, whose systematic exercises in textual reconstruction encourage both precision and creativity.

4.2 RECURSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR EXERCISES

4.2.1 Perspective-taking and descriptive expansion

Objective: Enhance recursive structuring and adaptability in language use.

Exercise: Provide students with an image depicting a detailed scene (e.g., a bustling city, a natural landscape, or a fantastical setting). Ask them to:

- Example 17 - Describe the scene in a simple sentence (e.g., “There is a house.”)
- Example 18 - Recursively expand their description by embedding additional details (e.g., “There is a house that stands beside a river,” evolving into “There is a house that stands beside a river, which winds through the valley.”).
- Example 19 - Shift perspective by imagining descriptions from different viewpoints (e.g., from the house’s perspective: “The river reflects the sun’s golden rays as it flows past,” or from a bird’s-eye view: “The trees form a dense canopy, concealing the glistening river below”).

This exercise mirrors the cognitive mechanisms underlying recursive embedding and promotes the development of syntactic complexity through creative variation.

4.2.2 Generative storytelling with syntactic constraints

Objective: Encourage creativity while reinforcing grammatical structures.

Exercise: Provide students with specific syntactic guidelines (e.g., “Each sentence must include a relative clause” or “Every verb must be in the past perfect”) and ask them to collaboratively construct a story. For example:

1. Example:

- Example 20 - A woman walked through the forest.
- Example 21 - A woman, who had been searching for her lost dog, walked through the dense forest.
- Example 22 - A woman, who had been searching for her lost dog, walked through the dense forest as the wind howled through the towering trees.

This activity demonstrates that grammatical rules serve as generative scaffolds, enabling a range of expressive possibilities without stifling creativity.

4.3 MULTIMODAL AND INTERACTIVE GRAMMAR EXERCISES

4.3.1 Visual grammar: structuring narrative through images

Objective: Connect syntactic organization with conceptual structuring.

Exercise: Present a sequence of images depicting an unfolding event and ask students to:

- Example 23 - Write descriptions for each image using progressively more complex structures (e.g., “A man runs” evolving into “A man, who is wearing a blue jacket, runs across the field”).
- Example 24 - Transform these descriptions into dialogue by shifting tenses and perspectives (e.g., converting “The boy watched the man running” into dialogue: “Who is that running?” the boy asked).
- Example 25 -Reorder the images and reconstruct the narrative using alternative grammatical constructions (e.g., transforming “The dog barked

before the door opened” into “Before the door opened, the dog had already started barking”).

This exercise reflects Jackendoff’s and Cohn’s multimodal theories, underscoring that language interacts dynamically with visual and conceptual processing.

4.4 RECONCILING STRUCTURE AND EXPRESSIVENESS

The exercises outlined above illustrate that effective grammar instruction transcends the simple transmission of rules by fostering a dynamic interplay between structured knowledge and creative expression. Franchi (1991, p. 27-37) posits that language learning is rooted in meaningful social interaction, where learners actively engage in constructing and deconstructing linguistic forms. Chomsky (2006, p. 42) further supports this view, noting that the recursive nature of language allows for infinite expressive possibilities. A key element of this integrative approach is the well-established distinction between linguistic competence—the abstract, internalized knowledge of language—and performance, the practical application of that knowledge in context. Classroom exercises that progress from simple sentence construction to complex, multilayered narratives effectively develop both precision and adaptability, reinforcing the idea that structured grammatical knowledge underpins creative linguistic production.

Moreover, the incorporation of multimodal activities – where students not only write but also speak and engage with visual material – ensures that language learning is holistic. As Cohn (2016) observes, language interacts with other sensory and motor modalities, highlighting that the structured components of language facilitate not just cognitive understanding but also expressive fluency.

Finally, transformational exercises inspired by Padre José de Matos, who encouraged students to “disassemble” canonical texts further demonstrate that systematic grammatical manipulation can act as a catalyst for creative expression rather than as a constraint. In this way, the generative mechanisms that Chomsky

describes – embodied in the interplay between FLB and FLN – support the very fluidity and expressiveness that Franchi champions.

5 CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that Franchi’s and Chomsky’s perspectives on language are not mutually exclusive but deeply complementary. Franchi’s early critiques –emphasizing the limitations of rigid, “horizontal” models of grammar – reflect his commitment to a view of language as a dynamic, creative process. In contrast, Chomsky’s framework, with its emphasis on recursion and hierarchical structuring, reveals that formal grammatical systems provide the essential scaffolding for innovative language production.

Chomsky’s distinction between linguistic competence – the abstract, internalized system of grammatical rules – and performance – the actual use of language in context –underscores that while structured knowledge offers systematic organization, real-world communication is marked by significant flexibility and adaptability. This duality confirms that generative grammar facilitates creative expression rather than restricting it. The pedagogical practices of Priest José de Matos, as recounted by Franchi, exemplify this point: through exercises in textual reconstruction and syntactic transformation, students learn to navigate and innovate within established grammatical frameworks.

Further support comes from scholars such as Jackendoff, Cohn, and Gallego, who demonstrate that the generative capacity of language enables both rigid grammaticality and boundless expressiveness (Gallego & Chomsky, 2020, p. 68). These insights challenge traditional, prescriptive approaches – such as those emphasized by standardized assessments like the ENEM – and advocate for teaching strategies that integrate recursive, multimodal, and socially interactive exercises. By designing learning environments that foster both precise syntactic competence and expressive creativity, educators can better prepare students for the diverse communicative demands of contemporary society.

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