

Running Head: A DESCRIPTION OF THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE

How is the Portuguese Language?

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a linguistic description of Portuguese based on the concepts learned in the General Linguistics course. It will also be demonstrated that I have gained a thorough understanding of the variations between languages.

This paper will mainly center round the Brazilian Portuguese, which is the dialect I am acquainted with. It will be divided in nine sections: 1- locations where language is spoken and number of speakers; 2-what language family it belongs to; 3- Dialects; 4- Phonology; 5- Morphology; 6- Syntax; 6-Orthography; 7- Major differences between English and Brazilian Portuguese; 8-Teaching implications for speakers of Brazilian Portuguese learning English.

Locations where Portuguese is spoken and number of speakers

Portuguese is ranked eighth in number of speakers in the world (third amongst the western languages, after English and Spanish). It is estimated that between 170 and 210 million people speak Portuguese nowadays. Besides being the official language in Portugal (10 million speakers) and Brazil (151 million), Portuguese is used as language of administration in Angola (10,3 million), Mozambique (15,3 million), Guiné-Bissau (1 million), S. Tomé-Príncipe (126.000) and Cape Verde Islands (346.000) along with some other African dialects or Portuguese-based Creole. There are also isolated communities in Goa, East Timor, Malaysia, Macao Portuguese is used either for administrative purposes or spoken by a minority of the population.(A Lingua Portuguesa, 2004)

What language family it belongs to

Portuguese is considered a Romance Language derived from Vulgar Latin of the western Iberian Peninsula (the regions of Gallaecia and Lusitania of the Roman Empire). The Romance languages evolved from the Italic branch of Indo-European from which a great number of other European as well as Indian languages derived. (History of the Portuguese Language, 2004)

Dialects

Although Portuguese presents regional variations such as grammar, phonological features and vocabulary, comprehensibility amongst speakers is possible.

The main dialects in Portugal, as a result of the mass media, are from Lisbon and Coimbra, and in Brazil the Carioca (from Rio de Janeiro) and Paulista (from São Paulo).

However, according to Nova Gramatica do Português Contemporâneo, there are three major dialects in Portugal:

- 1- Galician;
- 2- Northern Portuguese Dialect;
- 3- Center-Meridian Portuguese Dialect.

The dialects spoken in the Açores and Madeira Islands represent an extension of the continental Portuguese dialects.

The Brazilian dialects are mainly classified in two major groups according to phonological characteristics: North (the Amazon and northeastern regions) and South (Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Minas and the southern region including São Paulo).

In Africa and Asia, there are several Portuguese variations generally termed Creole. (A Lingua Portuguesa, 2004; History of the Portuguese Language, 2004)

Phonology

Portuguese Consonant Phonemes

Position	B I L A B I A L		L A B I O D E N T A L		I N T E R D E N T A L		A L V E O L A R		P A L A T A L		V E L A R		G L O T T A L
Manner	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.	Vd.	Vi.
STOPS	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>					<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>			<i>k</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>o c c u r i n i n t e r j e c t i o n s</i> 5
AFFRICATES	<i>occur only</i>				<i>n e v e r</i>	<i>on the phonetic level</i> ¹							
FRICATIVES			<i>f</i>	<i>v</i>		<i>s</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>ʃ</i>	<i>ʒ</i>		<i>x</i>		
NASALS		<i>m</i>					<i>n</i>		<i>ɲ</i>				
RETROFLEXES	<i>rarely occur in Portuguese</i> ²												
LATERALS					<i>o c c u r</i>		<i>ɫ</i>		<i>ɫh</i>				
FLAPS							<i>ɾ</i>						
TRILLS							<i>ʀ</i> ³						
GLIDES	<i>occur only on the phonetic level</i> ⁴												

¹ Ex: *leite* ['leytʃi].

² A retroflex /ɣ/ occurs in areas of São Paulo state, in free variation with the trilled /R/ and the velar fricative /x/.

³ Portuguese trilled /R/ occurs only in southern Brazil. It is in free variation with the velar fricative /x/, which predominates in the other dialects of Brazil.

⁴ Ex: *veado* ['vyadu], *coelho* ['kwêlhu].

⁵ Ex: *Ha! Ha! Ha!* (as when imitating laughing)

Source: <http://www.sk.com.br/sk-conso.html>

Stops: The voiceless stops are unaspirated and the voiced alveolar /d/ are dental, as opposed to alveolar in English, depending on the dialect.

Affricatives: when the dental stops /t/ and /d/ precede /i:/, they are realized as [tʃ] and [dʒ] respectively. E.g.: 'tio', 'uncle' [tʃiyuw] and 'dia' 'day' [dʒiya].

Nasals: The phoneme [ɲ], orthographically represented by 'nh' as in 'manhã', 'morning', [ma'ɲã], is described as palato-alveolar, a Spanish equivalent of *niño*. Nasal consonants cause nasalization of preceding and following vowels, e.g. *nenhum* 'not any' [nẽũu].

Retroflexes: /ɾ/ occurs in medial or final position as in 'porta', 'door' [ˈporta].

Laterals: The lateral palatal [lh], spelled 'lh' (the same sound spelled 'll' in Spanish) is pronounced [j] in some dialects and by some non-scholarised speakers: 'filho', 'son' is pronounced ['fiju].

Flaps: Flaps occur in consonant clusters such as in 'grego', 'greek' [ˈgɾegu] and initial-syllable position as in 'para', 'to' [ˈpaɾa], but never in word-final or initial position.

Trill /R/ and Fricative /x/: In Brazilian Portuguese, 'r' is sometimes eliminated in word final position (specially in verbs): 'doutor', 'doctor', is pronounced [do'to], 'fazer', 'do', is pronounced [fa'ze], as speakers from my state would pronounce it. When it occurs syllable-final position, but not word-final, it may be pronounced as [R] or as [x], depending mainly on the dialect. Sometimes the initial 'r', the middle-vowel 'rr' and the

syllable-final ‘r’ are pronounced as [x] as in carro, ‘car’ [ˈkaxu], which is how it is pronounced in my dialect, or [ˈkaRu] in the southern regions of Brazil.

Glides: They only occur on the phonetic level in medial and final word position (except for borrowed words: ‘iate’ ‘yacht’) when [i] is followed by [a], for example, ‘veado’, ‘deer’ [ˈvyadu], and in medial word position ‘coelho’ ‘rabbit’ [ˈkwêlhu] when [u] is followed by [i] or [e]. (Schütz, 2004)

Portuguese Vowel Phonemes

Source: (Comrie, p. 236)
Monophthongs

	i	ĩ		u	ũ	High
			(ə)			
	e	ẽ		o	õ	High mid
	ɛ		(ɐ)(ɛ)	ɔ		Low mid
		a				Low

Diphthongs	Front	Central	Back
	ui		ui uĩ
	eu ei	ẽĩ	(ou)oi õĩ
	eu ei	(ɛi)	ɔi
		ai ɛĩ	au ɛũ

Note: sounds enclosed in brackets are distinct phonemes in only some varieties

“Nasal vowels are in contrastive distribution with the corresponding oral vowels in open syllables, medial and final. An example of this is ‘mudo’, ‘dum’ [ˈmudu] as opposed to ‘mundo’, ‘world’ [ˈmũdo]; ri, ‘laugh’ [Ri] and rim[Rĩ]”. (Comrie, 1990)

The non-stressed final vowels which are spelled *e* and *o* are pronounced [i] and [u] in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). For example, ‘passe’, ‘pass’ [ˈpasi] and ‘olho’, ‘eyes’ [ˈôlhu]. Also, BP neutralize the oppositions between [e] and [ɛ], [o] and [ɔ] and [a] and [ɐ] before nasal consonants.

Morphology

Nouns: Nouns in Portuguese are modified by prefixes and suffixes. E.g.: pedra (rock) pedregulho (pebble); compressão (compression) and **des**compressão (decompression). There is no use of infixes.

Plural, gender (masculine and feminine), diminutive and augmentative forms are also indicated by suffixes such as in the following respective examples where morpheme is ‘garot’: garoto ‘boy’, garotos ‘boys’; garota ‘girl’; garot**inha** ‘little girl’; garot**ona** ‘big girl’.

Allomorphic variations are quite common such as in eletric-o where the final segment is /k/ and in eletric-idade it becomes /s/. The suffix ‘s’ has the widest distribution to pluralize nouns. However, the suffix ‘es’ is placed after words ending in ‘r’ and ‘z’.

Adjectives: Since adjectives concord with the nouns in gender and number, suffixes are also used to indicate this: e.g. o menino brincalh**ão**, ‘the playful boy’ and ‘os meninos brincalh**ões**’.

Verbs: Infinitive verbs receive the suffix 'r'. A conjugated verb basically consist of a stem + tense/aspect/mood + person/number.

Articles: Like in English, articles are either definite or indefinite. However, in Portuguese, they also indicate gender and number: e.g., 'a mulher', 'as mulheres', 'the women' ; 'o homem', 'the man', 'os homens'. (Quaio, 2004)

Syntax

Portuguese is a SVO language (Subject- Verb - Object). Nonetheless, since the pronoun can be omitted, the VO order is possible: 'Comi a janta', '(I) ate dinner'; or VS such as in 'Entraram (v) dois gatos (s)', 'Two cats entered'.

Questions are indicated by intonation and the SVO order is preserved: 'Você tem carro?', (lit)'You have car?'; an interrogative pronouns can be added at the beginning: 'Onde você mora?'(lit.) 'Where you live?' or 'O que matou a galinha?' 'What killed the hen?', Negation is conveyed by placing the word não before the verb: 'eu não quero', 'I don't want'. (Comrie, 1990)

Orthography

The Portuguese language has the same 26-letter alphabet as used by English, with accent marks, which are: the acute (' indicates open vowel qualities), grave (`), circumflex (^ that indicate closed vowels and stress and to distinguish monosyllables from clitics, e.g. de 'of' and dê 'give') and nasal (~ called "til") accents on the five vowels (A/a, E/e, I/i, O/o

and U/u); the diaeresis used on ü; and the tilde("cedilha") used under Ç/ç. The accent marks are not omitted on the capital letters, unlike in French.

The Portuguese orthography may pose a challenge to learners. The phoneme /s/, for instance, can be spelled in several ways:, 'ss', 'sc', 'sç', 'ç', 'x', 'xc' in medial , 'c', 's' in initial or 's', 'z' in final word position. The sound /ʃ/ can be represented with a 'x' or 'ch'. Except for words borrowed from English such as 'hobby', the 'h' is silent. The phoneme /z/ can be spelled with a 's', 'z' or 'x'. (Portuguese, 2004)

Major differences between English and Portuguese

The number of monosyllabic words in English is considerably higher . E.g.:*ball / bo-la, beer / cer-ve-ja, black / pre-to*. Even sentences tend to be shorter due to the compact structure of English. E.g: *Let's-work. / Va-mos-tra-ba-lhar*.

English rhythm is stress-timed whereas Portuguese is syllable-timed. In Portuguese, each syllable is distinctively and clearly pronounced, timing the flow of the language. In English, unstressed syllables in a row tend to be compressed and can almost disappear. Tenseness is a distinctive feature of the English vowels system that is nonexistent in Portuguese whereas nasality is widely used in Portuguese but not in English.

Another major difference is that all adjectives precede the nouns in English. In contrast, in Portuguese, the adjectives follow the nouns and verbs do not have auxiliaries. The verbs receive an inflectional affix to indicate tense and person, thus making the use of pronouns unnecessary.

Another significant difference is phrasal verbs. In Portuguese, a single verb expresses an idea that in English would require a verb and particle. For instance look up (in a dictionary) ‘olhar’ or ‘procurar’; take on (an employee) ‘contratar’.

Teaching implications for speakers of Portuguese learning English

Attention should be drawn to the difference between syllable timed and stress-timed rhythm. Portuguese speakers’ speech in English strike native speakers as being flat, which hinders comprehensibility. Teachers need to bear in mind that sentence-level stress and rhythm play an essential role in the enhancement of students’ intelligibility (Celce-Murcia, Brington, & Goodwin, 2000).

Furthermore, the teacher will need to bridge the gap between phonemes in the target language that have no counterpart in Portuguese. English has more pure vowels (12) than Brazilian Portuguese (7). Although diphthongs rarely appear to be a problem, Portuguese speakers will have a tendency to use their relatively small number of vowels in order to produce the larger English system. (Leiff, & Nunes, 1993)

A lot of practice should be provided for subject-verb/auxiliary inversion for questions as well as adjective-noun since Portuguese follows a noun-adjective order.

Moreover, since English does not have a clear sound-grapheme correspondence, it is very important that ESL teachers introduce the most common and useful spelling rules (Celce-Murcia, Brington, & Goodwin, 2000, p 286)

If students are expected to produce authentic speech, teachers should encourage them to use phrasal verbs. Portuguese speakers will tend to use a single verb that will cause them

to sound unnecessarily formal in colloquial contexts or they might resort to an inaccurate English verb. E.g. 'walk out on' would be 'abandon' (too formal) and 'run out' (the toothpaste ran out) 'The toothpaste finished'

Conclusion

Portuguese is a language spoken by over 170 million people. Despite its numerous dialects and its turbulent history, the unity of the language has remained. Portuguese is intelligible within the countries and for most part among speakers of different nationalities.

In terms of the pedagogical aspects, it is certainly true that Portuguese speaker learning English are at an advantage when they are made aware of the several differences between the two languages. L1 interference is reduced and, therefore, they can become more effective speakers.

As a teacher, I have made an attempt to relate the knowledge I have acquired in this course to my native language, Portuguese. Such knowledge will enable me to bridge the gap for my Brazilian students who are learning English as a Second or Foreign Language.

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