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Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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Language Group Specific Information Report: Portuguese Language

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Portuguese Language

Portuguese is a romance language closely related to Spanish. Two major dialects:

- European Portuguese (that of Lisbon and Coimbra, Portugal)
- Brazilian Portuguese (that of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Between the two dialects there are differences in vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax, but between educated Brazilians and Portuguese these differences are reduced.

Other spoken varieties of Portuguese: African Portuguese, São Tomean Portuguese, Galician Portuguese

More than 230 million people speak Portuguese. It is the sixth most spoken language in the world. The Portuguese language evolved mostly from Latin and was brought to the Iberian Peninsula by the Romans.

The following countries have designated Portuguese as their official language:

- Angola
- Brazil
- Cape Verde
- East Timor
- Guinea Bissau
- Mozambique
- Portugal, including Azores and Madeira
- Sao Tome & Principe
Phonological Issues:

- Short-sound of “a” (as in *hat*) does not exist in Portuguese. Short “a” is usually substituted by short “e” in auditory discrimination, as well as, in reading and spelling (“hat” might be misspelled or misheard as “het”).
- The letter "h" is silent in Portuguese. The sound associated with "h" is often substituted in English by the Portuguese sound "rr" - "home" is read as "rome."
- The sound "ch" in Portuguese sounds like "sh" in English. It may be substituted by "sh" - "chair" is usually read or spelled as "shair."
- Letter "j" in Portuguese sounds like "measure" in English. May be substituted by Portuguese "j" in reading and spelling in English - "measure" is read or spelled as "meajure."
- The "th" sound (like "thin") does not exist in Portuguese. It may be substituted by "s" or "f" ("sin" or "fin" for "thin").
Other Phonological Issues:

- The range of consonant clusters is much wider in English than in Portuguese. This can cause the insertion of extra vowels by Portuguese speakers to ‘assist’ pronunciation of English, particularly in clusters with an initial s.
  - Consonant sounds that do not exist in Portuguese: sw (swim), str (straw), sp (splash), spr (spring), thr (three), scr (scrap)
- The following consonant diagraphs do not exist in Portuguese: ch (chair), th (thick), tch (switch), wh (white), ng (sing) (Serpa, 2005)
- Final consonant sounds that do not exist in Portuguese: b (Bob), d (bud), f (cliff), g (rug), k/ck (rock), p (top), t (cat)
- There are fewer diphthongs in Portuguese than in English. The greatest problems arise with /ai/ and /ae/ : ex. hear and hair (Swan and Smith, 2001)
Spelling Issues

- Spelling in Portuguese is predictable because there is consistency between letters and sounds, but English is more complex and has more rules.
  - For example, a long “a” could be spelled a, ai, ay, or eigh.
- Portuguese speakers have considerable amount of difficulty with English spelling. Here are some typical errors:
  1. All words ending in consonants (except l, m, s, z, and r) tend to be given a final vowel sound. This vowel is often included when writing English:
     * She is a cookie
  2. Where the phonemes /i/ occur:
     * Inglish for English
     * clined for cleaned
     * I have bin.
  3. With the diphthong /ai/
     * traying for trying
     * laying for lying
     * She is dating a nayce gay.
  4. Where words are similar in both languages, students will tend to use the Portuguese spelling (False friends) Here are a few examples:
     - discuss (discutir = to argue, or debate)
     - educated (educado = well-mannered)
     - familiar (familiar = decent, respectable)
     - library (livraria = bookshop)
     - local (local = place)
     - parents (parentes = relatives)
     - private (privada = toilet, privy)
     - real (real = royal, sure, that exists)
     - use (usar = to wear)

(Swan and Smith, 2001)
The Portuguese grammatical system has a lot in common with English, such as similar parts of speech, has regular and irregular verbs, auxiliary and model verbs, active and passive forms, and past, present, and future tenses. Here are some issues:

- In Portuguese, question forms are marked by intonation, and not by changes of word order, in all tenses:
  
  You know John? 
  He is married?

- The negative form in Portuguese is marked by placing the word não before the main or auxiliary verb, independent of tense
  
  He no would like it.

- The double negative is used in Portuguese:
  
  He doesn’t know nothing
  He doesn’t know if it isn’t the right place?

- There is no equivalent in Portuguese for the substantival use of the –ing form (gerund)
  
  She stopped to look in the shop window (for She stopped looking...)

- The verb follows the question in indirect speech in Portuguese:
  
  I wonder where is your office. 
  I asked who was her friend.

- Adverbs usually separate a verb from its object:
  
  I like very much Samba
  He wanted a lot to go to England.

(Swan and Smith, 2001)
Other Grammar Issues

- Adverbial phrases of time can be placed between the verb and its object:
  
  *I visited on Sunday afternoon her in her house.*

- Personal pronouns may be placed before, after, or between elements of the verb:

  *He me explained the theory*
  
  *I asked what to do to him.* (for *I asked him what to do.*)

- Adjectives normally follow the noun in Portuguese:

  *That is a book very exciting*
  
  *What a city marvellous!*

- Many verbs in Portuguese take the preposition de (= of):

  *They like of the food here.*

- In Portuguese there is a single possessive pronoun for his and her, which agrees in gender with the thing possessed. When carried over into English, this can cause problems:

  *He is very fond of her wife and his brother.*

- The impersonal subject *it* does not exist in Portuguese:

  *In Brazil, when is the summer, is sunny.*

- There are no equivalents for *any* or the *an* in *another*:

  *That does not make difference*
  
  *We visited him in other town.*

(Swan and Smith, 2001)
Writing Issues:

Capitalization: The following is a comparison of the variations between Portuguese and English capitalization:

- The days of the week are not capitalized in Portuguese: segunda-feira, domingo, terça-feira, etc. whereas in English they are.
- Seasons of the year are capitalized in Portuguese: Verão, Primavera, Outono, Inverno, whereas in English they are not capitalized.
- In Portuguese, the words that designate nationality are usually not capitalized (namely portuguesa, americana) unless they are used as nouns (Portugueses, Açorianos).

In Portuguese punctuation, commas are not used to separate dates:

- 25 de Maio de 1990
- 25-5-1990 (day, month, year)
- 1990/5/25 (year, month, day)

The Portuguese alphabet has 23 letters and does not generally include the letters “K”, “W” and “Y”. This impacts the student’s performance in alphabetizing words in English, which include these three extra letters within the sequence. For example: when asked “What letter comes after “J”? A Portuguese-speaking student from Portugal, Azores or Madeira may say “L” instead of ”K”.

(Serpa, 2005)
Composition Issues

- Portuguese composition is culturally based and has its own logic.
- In written Portuguese, the sequence of thought is not linear unlike English. A topic sentence may be placed anywhere in a paragraph, from the middle to the end. Ideas are coordinated instead of subordinated and a lot more information may be provided. This style can come across to an English teacher as disorganized and including too many irrelevant details. Students may provide a lot of contextual information before a point is made.
- This indirect writing style that native speakers of Portuguese may use in written English may be mistaken for a learning/writing “problem”, because it may look disorganized and unfocused. However, it is simply organized according to different cultural framework.

[Link](http://www.ldldproject.net/languages/portuguese/written) (Serpa, 2005)
Communication Style

- The tone of voice is usually high pitched. Daily conversation is conducted in a louder voice. Volume does not indicate anger or hostility.
- Touching is common. Kissing on both cheeks is common among family members, relatives, friends and acquaintances. Handshaking, kissing, hugging, patting, embracing and holding hands are common forms of greeting.
- Personal space and physical space are not emphasized. (Example: a person will stand less than a foot away from the other when conversing. It is considered rude if one steps back)
- Direct eye-to-eye contact by children is generally considered disrespectful.
- Physical appearance and physical surroundings are important and provide visual cues as to status and tone of conversations.
Communication Style Continued

- Students usually greet teachers at the preschool and elementary level with a kiss on both cheeks.
- Children may address the teacher as Senhor/a Professor/a (Teacher! Teacher!) This is considered respectful. At the secondary level, students call their teacher stoura, short for professora.
- Taking turns to speak is not the rule. People will interrupt a conversation and many people will speak simultaneously.
- It is acceptable to be silent for longer periods when one or more people are together.
- Portuguese people often start a conversation on a personal note. Therefore, when they ask a personal question it does not mean that they want to pry, it is a sign of consideration and caring.

http://www.ldldproject.net/about/index.html (Serpa, 2005)
References

Books


Internet Sites & Images


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