



PORTUGUESE

A PROFILE

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PORTUGUESE

BACKGROUND

Portuguese (*português* is an Indo-European language of the Romance branch. It originated in what is today Galicia (in Spain) and northern Portugal. It is the official language of Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe, co-official with Chinese in the Chinese S.A.R. of Macau, and co-official with Tetum in East Timor.

Portuguese is ranked sixth among the world's languages in number of native speakers (over 200 million), and first in South America (186 million, over 51% of the population). It is also a major lingua franca in Africa. It spread worldwide in the 15th and 16th century as Portugal set up a vast colonial and commercial empire (1415–1999), spanning from Brazil in the Americas to Macau in China. In that colonial period, many Portuguese creoles appeared around the world, especially in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

Portuguese is often nicknamed *The language of Camões*, after the author of the Portuguese national epic *The Lusads*; *The last flower of Latium* (Olavo Bilac); and *The sweet language* by Cervantes.

DIALECTS

There are two main groups of dialects, those of Brazil and those of the Old World. For historical reasons, the dialects of Africa and Asia are generally closer to those of Portugal than the Brazilian dialects, although in some aspects of their phonology, especially the pronunciation of unstressed vowels, they resemble Brazilian Portuguese more than European Portuguese. They have not been studied as exhaustively as European and Brazilian Portuguese. In various parts of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, Portuguese creoles are spoken, but they are independent languages which should not be confused with Portuguese itself.

Within the two major varieties of Portuguese, most differences between dialects concern pronunciation and vocabulary. Below are some examples:

words for *bus*

Angola & Mozambique: *machimbombo*

Brazil: *ônibus*

Portugal: *autocarro*

words for *slum quarter*

Angola: *musseque*

Brazil: *favela*

Portugal: *bairro de lata* or *ilha*

slang terms for *to go away*

Angola: *bazar* - from Kimbundu *kubaza* - to break, leave with rush

Brazil: *vazar* - from Portuguese "to leak"

Portugal: *bazar* - from Kimbundu *kubaza* - to break, leave with rush

Between Brazilian Portuguese, particularly in its most informal varieties, and European Portuguese, there can be considerable differences in grammar, as well. The most prominent ones concern the placement of clitic pronouns, and the use of subject pronouns as objects in the third person. Non-standard inflections are also common in colloquial Brazilian Portuguese.

	European Portuguese	Brazilian Portuguese
placement of clitic pronouns	Eu amo-te. <i>I love you.</i>	Eu te amo. lit. <i>I you love.</i>
	Responde-me! <i>Answer me!</i>	Me responde! lit. <i>Me answer!</i>
use of personal pronouns	Eu vi-a. <i>I saw her.</i>	Eu vi ela. lit. <i>I saw she.</i>
inflection of nouns, adjectives and verbs	As moças ¹ voltaram ontem. <i>The girls came back yesterday.</i>	As moça voltou ontem. lit. <i>The [plural] girl came back [singular] yesterday.</i>

¹Although the word *moças* is not often used in modern European Portuguese, the intent here is to compare the morphology.

The examples in the table are in increasing degree of informality. The word order in the first Brazilian example is actually frequent in European Portuguese, too, for example in subordinate clauses like *Sabes **que eu te amo*** (You know *that I love you*), but not in simple sentences like "I love you." But in Portugal an object pronoun would never be placed at the start of a sentence, like in the second example. The example in the bottom row of the table, with its deletion of "redundant" inflections, however, isn't gramatically correct. It is still widely heard, however, in the most informal conversations, and is often seen as a sign of bad knowledge of the portuguese language. The correct sentence would be the same as in Portugal.

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VOCABULARY

Almost 90% of the lexicon of Portuguese is derived from Latin. Nevertheless, thanks to the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages, and to the participation of Portugal in the Age of Discovery, it has adopted loanwords from all over the world.

Very few Portuguese words can be traced to the pre-Roman inhabitants of Portugal, which included the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Iberians, Lusitanians, and Celts. Some notable examples are *abóbora* "pumpkin" and *bezerro* "year-old calf", from Iberian languages; *cerveja* "beer", from Celtic; *saco* "bag", from Phoenician; and *cachorro* "dog, puppy", from Basque.

In the 5th century the Iberian Peninsula (the former Roman region of Hispania) was conquered by the Suevi, Visigoths and Alans, Germanic tribes who had been displaced from Central Europe by the Huns. As they adopted the Roman civilization and language, however, these people contributed only a few words to the lexicon, mostly related to warfare — such as *espora* "spur", *estaca* "stake", and *guerra* "war", from Gothic **spaúra*, **stakka*, and **wirro*, respectively.

Between the 9th and the 15th centuries Portuguese acquired about 1000 words from Arabic by influence of Moorish Iberia. They are often recognizable by the initial Arabic article *a(l)-*, and include many common words such as *aldeia* "village" from *aldaya*, *alface* "lettuce" from *alkhass*, *armazém* "warehouse" from *almahazan*, and *azeite* "olive oil" from *azzait*. From Arabic came also the grammatically peculiar word *oxalá* "God willing". The name of the Portuguese town of Fátima, where Virgin Mary is said to have appeared, is originally an Arabic name, the name of Muhammad's daughter. The Mozambican currency Metical was derived from the word *miāl*, an Arabic unit of weight.

Starting in the 15th century, the Portuguese maritime explorations led to the introduction of many loanwords from Asian languages. For instance, *catana* "cutlass" from Japanese *katana*; *corja* "rabble" from Malay *kórchchu*; and *chá* "tea" from Cantonese *cha*.

From the 16th to the 19th century, the role of Portugal as intermediary in the Atlantic slave trade, with the establishment of large Portuguese colonies in Angola, Mozambique, and Brazil, Portuguese got several words of African and Amerind origin, especially names for most of the animals and plants found in those territories. While those terms are mostly used in the former colonies, many became current in European Portuguese as well. From Kimbundu, for example, came *kifumate* → *cafuné* "head caress", *kusula* → *çaçula* "youngest child", *marimbondo* "wasp", and *kubungula* → *bungular* "to dance like a wizard".

From South America came *batata* "potato", from Taino; *ananás* and *abacaxi*, from Tupi-Guarani *naná* and Tupi *ibá cati*, respectively (two species of pineapple), and *tucano* "toucan" from Guarani *tucan*.

Finally, it has received a steady influx of loanwords from other European languages. For example, *melena* "hair lock", *fiambre* "ham", and *castelhano* "Castilian", from Spanish; *colchete* "crochet", *paletó* "jacket", *batom* "lipstick", and *filé* or *filete* "steak", from French *crochet*, *paletot*, *bâton*, *filet*; *macarrão* "pasta", *piloto* "pilot", *carroça* "carriage", and *barraca* "barrack", from Italian *maccherone*, *pilotto*, *carrozza*, *barracca*; and *bife* "steak", *futebol*, *revólver*, *estoque*, *folclore*, from English *football*, *beef*, *revolver*, *stock*, *folklore*.

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PHONOLOGY

There is a maximum of 9 oral monophthongs and 19 consonants, though some varieties of the language have fewer phonemes (Brazilian Portuguese has only 7 oral vowels). Five of the vowels have nasal allophones. There are also 10 oral diphthongs, 5 nasal diphthongs and 2 double nasal diphthongs.

VOWELS

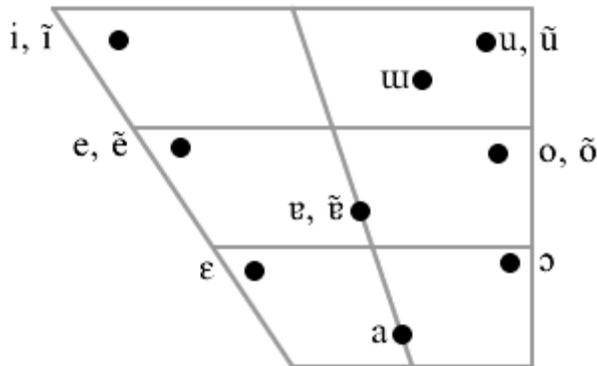


Chart of monophthongs of the Portuguese of Lisbon

To the seven vowels of Vulgar Latin European Portuguese has added two near central vowels, one of which tends to be elided in rapid speech, like the *e caduc* of French. The five nasal vowels can be regarded as allophones of oral vowels, found in special environments. The high vowels /e o/ and the low vowels / ε ɔ/ are four distinct phonemes, and they alternate in various forms of apophony. Like Catalan, Portuguese uses vowel quality to contrast stressed syllables with unstressed syllables: isolated vowels tend to be risen, and in some cases centralized, when unstressed. Nasal diphthongs exist, occurring mostly at the end of words.

CONSONANTS