

# TEACHING PORTUGUESE GRAMMAR TO SPANISH SPEAKERS: RECOGNIZING GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCES FOR USE BY STUDENTS IN ACCELERATED PORTUGUESE COURSES

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the challenges regarding teaching Portuguese to Speakers of Spanish. That the Portuguese language is remarkably similar to Spanish presents a unique set of advantages and challenges to students and teachers. The study of this population of students has grown considerably since the 1950s and most notably since the 1990s. Many resources within this field focus on comparisons of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Much of the research seeks to identify the rates of error among students with L1 or L2 Spanish and seeks a better understanding of how students' knowledge of Spanish affects both positive and negative transfer in the acquisition of Portuguese. This paper presents an overview of the subject, a summary of specific areas of grammar that can be particularly troublesome, and a review several publications in this area of study.

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While the examination of English-Spanish-Portuguese trilingualism is not new, several factors in recent decades make this both a practical and increasingly popular area of study. As Brazil's global position as an emerging power solidifies, the demand in diverse business sectors for Portuguese speakers is expanding. Particularly for US military, civilian government sectors, business, and social and environmental organizations, the abundance of Spanish speakers outstrips those with the ability to work with counterparts in Brazil and African countries with significant Portuguese-speaking populations. Educators recognize the potential of leveraging Spanish speakers' knowledge to learn Portuguese and the need to understand challenges they experience. Similarly, Spanish-speaking students recognize the broadened set of opportunities they may have when they pursue a language closely related to one they already know. Since many Spanish speakers studying Portuguese do so with a desire to take advantage of some already acquired knowledge, it is helpful to identify what that knowledge is and what it may not be. The publications reviewed offer theories, techniques, and data to help identify how to maximize positive transfer and minimize negative transfer in the acquisition of Portuguese. This paper surveys this topic in two parts. The first discusses considerations for those teaching Portuguese to Spanish Speakers. The second looks at grammatical differences between the two languages, particularly those that are identified as the area learners experience the most confusion.

## Considerations for Teaching Portuguese to Spanish Speakers

What are the greatest advantages for Spanish speakers when learning Portuguese? A study exploring the mutual intelligibility of Spanish and Portuguese reported that listening comprehension in Portuguese among Spanish speakers with no previous knowledge of Portuguese was more than 50%.<sup>1</sup> The advantage in reading comprehension is even higher – a similar study found that native speakers of Spanish with no knowledge of Portuguese could understand up to 94% of an academic text in Portuguese.<sup>2</sup> Those who know Spanish can almost immediately jump into advanced readings of Portuguese.<sup>3</sup> These students present a demand for “accelerated Portuguese” course, which can more efficiently incorporate the students’ prior knowledge of Spanish than can more traditional Portuguese courses.<sup>4</sup>

Still, L1 or L2 Spanish presents many challenges of interference. It is valuable to identify grammatical differences between the two languages, some of which are highlighted in the following sections, as areas to concentrate this research. Also, as students acquire Portuguese vocabulary, they frequently over-rely upon their Spanish vocabulary. Further, the variations in rhythm between the two languages, the vowel instability present in Portuguese, and the variety of consonant sounds and blends not present in the Spanish inventory<sup>5</sup> cause some of this negative transfer. Across the range of native, heritage, and non-native Spanish speakers, the transfer in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar produce the *Portunhol* (code-switching between Portuguese and Spanish) that Portuguese teachers are interested in keeping to a minimum. The community of experts in teaching Portuguese to Spanish speakers calls for more research to identify and reduce tendencies of negative habit transfer.

Even so, in Milton Azevedo’s writings on Spanish interference in Portuguese acquisition, he offers that while avoiding *Portunhol* is important, starting from scratch in teaching Portuguese to Spanish speakers would neglect the valuable knowledge they possess, and it would not prevent the natural phenomenon of negative habit transfer.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jensen, John B. “On the Mutual Intelligibility of Spanish and Portuguese.” *Hispania*, Volume 72, Number 4, 848-852. December 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Carvalho, Ana Maria and Antonio José Bacelar da Silva. “Cross-Linguistic Influence in Third Language Acquisition: The Case of Spanish-English Bilinguals’ Acquisition of Portuguese.” *Foreign Language Annals*, Volume 39, Number 2, 187. Summer 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Readers should note that while this paper focuses on speakers of Spanish, the reference is most specifically to Spanish-English bilinguals. While there is an important distinction between native, heritage, and nonnative speakers of Spanish, and research shows that the rates of error differ between these three categories, this current literature review does not seek to focus specifically or separately on these subgroups. Johnson (2004) finds that native speakers of English who acquired Spanish later in their lives may apply more metalinguistic awareness during acquisition of Portuguese than native speakers of Spanish. L1 speakers living in the United States are usually early bilinguals, while English L1 speakers are clearly adult learners of L2 Spanish, a fact responsible for greater consciousness of L2 structure, and more advanced self-awareness during L3 acquisition. Carvalho and Silva (2006), 198, state that errors by native English speakers are often not due to transfer from any other previously learned language and that errors produced by native speakers of Spanish are often traced to their L1 Spanish.

<sup>4</sup> Though normally designed for L1 and L2 Spanish speakers, “accelerated Portuguese” courses can benefit speakers of other Romance or “cognate” languages.

<sup>5</sup> Simões, Antônio Roberto Monteiro, *Pois Não: Brazilian Portuguese Course for Spanish Speakers*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Azevedo, Milton M. “Identifying Spanish Interference in the Speech of Learners of Portuguese.” *The Modern Language Journal*, Volume 62, Number 1/2, 19. January – February 1978.

## A Look at Grammatical Differences between Spanish and Portuguese

In an effort to list the areas of divergence between Spanish and Portuguese, Appendix A presents topics that a teacher or student may find useful when attempting to contrast the languages. Some of areas of particular interest are chosen for discussion here.

*Articles and contractions:* Articles are used as in Spanish (with minor exceptions).<sup>7</sup> Portuguese uses contractions when articles follow the prepositions *de* and *em*, for example:<sup>8</sup>

	Prep. + Article	Prep. + Pronoun	Prep. + Others
de	do, da, dum	desta, daquêle, dessas, dêle	dágua, doutro
em (Spanish en)	nas, no, numas	nêsse, nelas, nesta, nêle	nágua, noutro

*Pluralization:* While, in Spanish, the formation of the plural of nouns and adjectives has only two rules 1) after atonic vowels add *-s* and 2) after tonic vowels or consonants add *-es/*, the pattern in Portuguese has more complexity:

Words that...	normally...	Example:
end in vowel or diphthong	add <i>/s/</i>	livro → livros pai → pais
ending in consonant other than <i>/l/</i>	and <i>-es/</i>	mulher → mulheres
nouns and adjectives ending in <i>/l/</i>	keep the preceding vowel, stress the vowel, and add <i>-is/</i>	difícil → difíceis
(most) ending in stressed <i>-ão</i>	change to <i>-ões</i>	avião → aviões

*Ser/Estar:* There are three main differences in uses for *ser* and *estar* in Spanish and Portuguese. The English-Spanish speaker may find them logical. In Spanish, *estar* (or alternatively, *quedar*) will always be used for location (the exception being when referring to locations of events). Portuguese, on the other hand uses *estar* when the location is temporary or considered changeable (e.g. location of people or objects). *Ser* or *ficar* will be used in Portuguese when the location is considered permanent. (Pt. *Está quente hoje* / Sp. *Hace calor hoy* / En. It's hot today.) Finally, Portuguese uses both *estar* and *ter*, in what in Spanish would be *tener* expressions (Pt. *Estou com fome* or *Tenho fome* / Sp. *Tengo hambre* / En. I'm hungry)<sup>9</sup>

*Stem-changing verbs:* Unlike Spanish, which has many stem-changing verbs (*poder*, *doler*, *volar*...), Portuguese has few and only occur in the third conjugation, changing "e" or "o"

<sup>7</sup> Holton, James S. "Portuguese for Spanish Speakers." *Hispania*, Volume 37, No. 4., 448. December 1954. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971, 12-20.

<sup>8</sup> Ellison, Fred P. *Instructor's Manual for Modern Portuguese*.

<sup>9</sup> Pletsch de García, Kati. "Portuguese for Spanish Speakers: The Usefulness of Contrastive Analysis." Purdue University. <http://tell.fil.purdue.edu/RLA-Archive/1993/Spanish-html/PletschdeGarcia,Kati.htm>.

to “i” and “u,” respectively (*sentir – sinto, sentes sente, etc.; sinta, sintas, sinta, etc., and dormir – durmo, dormes, dorme, etc.; durma durmas, durma.*)<sup>10</sup>

*Compound tenses:* While formed with *haber* in Spanish, are most commonly formed with *ter* in Portuguese. (*Haver* is used only on occasion and in literary style is used to form perfect tenses in Portuguese.) The present perfect is used for ongoing actions before and up to the present, most similar to the “have been –ing” of English and the *he estado –ando/–iendo* of Spanish. *Tenho, tens, tem, temos, tendes, têm feito muito exercício*, for example.

*Future Subjunctive:* While the future subjunctive has mostly died out in Spanish and is used today mainly in literary and legal texts, it is alive and well in Portuguese. A Spanish speaker will use the present subjunctive whether the reference is in the present or in the future. In Portuguese, after conjunctions such as *assim que, quando, logo que, depois que, and se*, and when the reference is to future time, the future subjunctive will be used. The personal infinitive form often appears.<sup>11</sup>

Spanish	Portuguese	English
Quando yo vaya, voy por avion.	Quando eu for, vou de aviao.	When I go, I'll go by plane.
Voy a decirle tan pronto como llegue.	Vou dizer-lhe logo que chegar.	I am going to tell him as soon as he arrives.
Si quieres, podemos tomar un cafe.	Se voce quiser, podemos tomar um cafe.	If you like, we can have a cup of coffee.

Spanish-Speaking learners tend to under-utilize the future subjunctive, replacing it with the present subjunctive, creating sentences like *Eu vou comprar quando receba (for receber) o salario*. “I will buy it when I receive my salary.”<sup>12</sup> Instructors may note that for stronger Spanish speakers, the errors are not in selection of mood, since these students will recognize the need for subjunctive. The challenge will more frequently be with word formation and sentence structure.<sup>13</sup>

*Personal Infinitive:* L1 or L2 Spanish interference in Portuguese is in the alternation of subjunctive forms with the personal infinitive, as in:

Spanish	Portuguese	English
Lamentamos que no hayan llegado.	Lamentamos que não hajam chegado.	We are sorry that they did not arrive
-	Lamentamos não terem chegado.	We are sorry they did not arrive

<sup>10</sup> Pletsch de García.

<sup>11</sup> Garrison, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Azevedo, Milton M., 21.

<sup>13</sup> Carvalho and Antonio José Bacelar da Silva, 194.

While the problem is not the use of the first Portuguese example, since the Spanish parallel construction will often work in Portuguese, it is the overuse of this structure. Avoidance of the personal infinitive can sometimes change the meaning in subtle, yet noticeable, ways.<sup>14</sup>

*Word order:* “I like...” Spanish has numerous “gustar-like” verbs that require use of indirect objects. “*A mí me gusta*” is often explained as “It is pleasing to me,” while in Portuguese (as with English) “I” is the subject.<sup>15</sup>

Spanish	Portuguese	English
A mí me gusta(n)...	Eu gosto de...	I like...

Object pronouns used with an infinitive and auxiliary verb can go immediately before the infinitive in Portuguese and normally do in everyday speech, whereas in Spanish, they never appear in that order.<sup>16</sup>

Spanish	Portuguese	English
Juan va a levantarse. Juan se va a levantar.	Joao vai levantar-se. Joao vai se levantar.	John is going to get up.
Juan quiere llevarme al centro. Juan me quiere llevar al centro.	Joao quer levar-me ao centro. Joao quer me levar ao centro.	John wants to take me downtown.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Students possessing knowledge of Spanish have the potential to acquire Portuguese with a level of efficiency compared with students without this knowledge. Teachers can expect students to make errors based upon their knowledge of Spanish, but research indicates it is better to work with the knowledge that they do have and facilitate students using it to their advantage.

Since students might be overwhelmed by a detailed linguistic analysis of the two languages, instructors may find it helpful to offer an introduction to the relationships of the two languages. Making general comparisons of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar can offer insight to pique students’ interest and attention.<sup>17</sup> Instructors may find it effective to wait until after certain skills and habits are formed in Portuguese to explore these differences and elicit an awareness of how to apply such knowledge.

The annotated selections that follow will assist instructors in presenting differences between Spanish and Portuguese in a systematic manner to their students with the purpose of maximizing positive transfer and minimizing negative transfer.

While there is a significant amount of research in this area, there are many areas where further study is needed. Some questions recommended for future examination are: What are the most effective measures to address systematically the differences between Portuguese and

<sup>14</sup> Azevedo, 22. Interestingly, this structure is not found in other Romance languages. (Pletsch de García.)

<sup>15</sup> Garrison, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Garrison, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Holton, James S. “Portuguese for Spanish Speakers.” *Hispania*, Volume 37, No. 4., 446-452. December 1954.

Spanish in texts and in classrooms? How much should courses highlight the differences between the two languages? Which techniques produce improved results specific to native, heritage, non-native Spanish speakers? How do teachers minimize the common pattern of structural (grammatical) problems present early in the learning process and the pattern of lexical errors later in the process? What are effective methods of applying Contrastive Analysis in accelerated Portuguese courses? How should available research be applied to programs where an accelerated course option is not available? How should teachers address student errors in the different modes of communication?

### **Annotated Readings**

**Ellison, Fred P. Instructor's Manual for Modern Portuguese. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971., 27-55.**

This instructor's reference is one of the earlier works in the field of teaching Modern Portuguese. In the decade leading up to the publication, teachers of Portuguese observed that most Portuguese students arrived to the study of the Portuguese by way of Spanish. Ellison's book is one of the first in the field to dedicate a section to considerations for Spanish Speakers. This Portuguese for Spanish Speakers section, divided into the sections of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics is a contrastive mini-grammar. The manual, a project of Modern Language Association, was originally intended as a reference for instructors using the previously published Modern Portuguese textbook of the late 1960s. The book offers an organized comparative overview of both languages, providing side-by-side comparisons.

**Simões, Antônio Roberto Monteiro, AM Carvalho, and L. Wiedemann. Portuguese for Spanish Speakers. Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil: Pontes Editores, 2004. Ed.**

This collection of articles from the (first) Symposium on the Teaching of Portuguese for Spanish Speakers, is valuable reference for anyone studying the field of Portuguese to Spanish-English bilinguals. Keith Johnson's "What is a Spanish speaker?" presents the subgroups of Spanish speakers, highlighting distinctions between those who have learned Spanish at different ages, in different environments, and to differing levels of proficiency. Other articles address the influence of Spanish and English in Portuguese writing, the importance of the written word for pronunciation, communication difficulties, and research resources, among other useful selections.

**Simões, Antônio Roberto Monteiro, Pois Não: Brazilian Portuguese Course for Spanish Speakers. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.**

One of the most comprehensive textbooks for "Accelerated Portuguese" courses, *Pois não*, is presented in English and authored by Antonio RM Simões. Simões presents the material for a course designed to teach the material of one year of college Portuguese in one semester of Accelerated Portuguese and aims for the textbook to serve as a reference guide to Brazilian Portuguese. Very early in the textbook, he highlights the variances in the sound systems of Spanish and Portuguese. Also early on, *Pois Não* approaches the matter of false cognates with a list and a separate guide of "what not to say," which recommendations of what to say instead.<sup>18</sup> Instructions and explanations are in English.

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<sup>18</sup> Simões, 9.

**Van Den Dool, Karen and Lyris Wiedemann. Elementos de Gramática do Português do Brasil (Elements of Grammar of Brazilian Portuguese). Version two. Stanford: Stanford University Custom Printing.**

While *Pois Não* presents in English, Van Den Dool and Weidemann's textbook/workbook *Elementos de Gramática do Português do Brasil* has no introduction in English nor one in Spanish. The student is expected to use his knowledge of Spanish to comprehend lessons and apply the new material from the first page. The "Atenção falantes de espanhol" notes throughout the text (in Portuguese) highlight similarities, differences, and helpful points as students progress in their study. False cognates are addressed well after students have had the opportunity to develop their understanding and use of Portuguese.<sup>19</sup> This book starts by introducing the Portuguese alphabet and other basic skills, then proceeding with the steadily increasing difficulty of its 42 chapters. Answers are provided to the exercises in each section.

**Wiedemann, Lyris and Matilde V.R. Scaramucci, Portuguese for Spanish Speakers: Teaching and Acquisition, Selected Articles Written in Portuguese and English. Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil: Pontes Editores, 2008.**

This collection, from the second Symposium of the Teaching of Portuguese for Spanish Speakers, represents the development in this field from the time of the first conference of the same name four years prior. Contributors from the first symposium appear again here in addition to new names. This resource includes articles on noticing and transfer, the teaching of the preterite and present perfect, attitudes toward *Portunhol*, and pronunciation among the many valuable others.

**Additional Resources**

Azevedo, Milton M. "Identifying Spanish Interference in the Speech of Learners of Portuguese." *The Modern Language Journal*, Volume 62, Number 1/2, 18-23. January – February 1978.

Carvalho, Ana Maria and Antonio José Bacelar da Silva. "Cross-Linguistic Influence in Third Language Acquisition: The Case of Spanish-English Bilinguals' Acquisition of Portuguese." *Foreign Language Annals*, Volume 39, Number 2, 185-202. Summer 2006.

Garrison, David L. "Teaching the Relatedness of Spanish and Portuguese." *The Modern Language Journal*, Volume 63, Number 1/2, 8-12. January – February 1979.

Holton, James S. "Portuguese for Spanish Speakers." *Hispania*, Volume 37, No. 4., 446-452. December 1954.

Jensen, John B. "On the Mutual Intelligibility of Spanish and Portuguese." *Hispania*, Volume 72, Number 4, 848-852. December 1989.

Johnson, K. "What is a Spanish speaker?" Portuguese for Spanish Speakers Ed. A. R. M. Simões, A. M Carvalho, & L. Wiedemann. Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil: Pontes Editores, 2004.

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<sup>19</sup> Van Den Dool, Karen and Lyris Wiedemann. Elementos de Gramática do Português do Brasil (Elements of Grammar of Brazilian Portuguese). Version two. Stanford University, 260-266.

Jordan, Isolde J. "Portuguese for Spanish Speakers: A Case for Contrastive Analysis." *Hispania*, Volume 74, Number 3, 788-792. September 1991.

Pletsch de García, Kati. "Portuguese for Spanish Speakers: The Usefulness of Contrastive Analysis." Purdue University. Accessed January 17, 2013. <http://tell.fl.purdue.edu/RLA-Archive/1993/Spanish-html/PletschdeGarcia,Kati.htm>.