

Portuguese translation: What clients need to know

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The relaxation of regulation barriers on imports of computer science and other products into Brazil, and the increasing importance of Portugal in Europe as a member of the European Community have resulted in an expansion of business relations between these countries and the U.S. As a consequence, the demand for translations from English into Portuguese in the American industrial/commercial environment has increased noticeably during the last few years. Translation companies and professionals are frequently faced with the question of whether it is possible to use the same translation text, or even the same translator, for Brazil and Portugal.

Not everyone is aware of the fact that the differences between Brazilian and Continental Portuguese far exceed those existing among the several varieties of English, Spanish or French. However, language specialists consistently recognize such differences. For instance, unlike the case for other languages, Portuguese-as-a-second-language primers, dictionaries and grammars invariably identify the variety of Portuguese that they contain. Furthermore, prestigious organizations such as the Foreign Service and the Center for Applied Linguistics have different tests to assess each variety of the language. Since Portuguese is the language of some 150 000 000 Brazilians and 10 000 000 Portuguese who understand each other, in general terms, the fact that two linguistic variants exist usually comes as a surprise to those unfamiliar with the field.

The reasons for the differences are primarily contextual. First, from the beginning, Brazilian Portuguese had an enduring, intimate contact with African and, to a lesser degree, Native American languages unmatched by any British, French or Spanish colony—a fact which brought changes to the language, especially, but not only, in the lexical area. Second, and more important, the rigid colonization policies of Portugal banned the existence of institutions of higher education, local newspapers or any kind of press in the colonies. Therefore, from the earliest periods of colonization, Brazil lacked some of the most powerful means available to other colonies to slow down the changing processes that languages naturally undergo, i.e. a solidification of the standard norm

through local universities and a native press. The absence of universities, newspapers and printing shops in Brazilian territory was also a deterrent to bringing to Portugal the linguistic changes that were taking place in the colony. Conversely, because universities, newspapers and printing shops were forbidden in Brazil for more than 300 years, new materials and linguistic changes taking place in Portugal were not largely disseminated among Brazilians. To a higher degree than other European colonial languages *vis a vis* the mother tongue, Brazilian Portuguese kept some forms that became obsolete in Portugal and more rapidly incorporated others unknown to speakers of continental Portuguese. It was not until the Portuguese Court and Government fled the Napoleonic invasion and temporarily transferred to Rio de Janeiro in the first decade of the XIX century, that universities and a press were finally allowed in Brazil. In comparison, universities were established as early as in the 1500 and 1600s for Spanish and English colonies. By the XIX century, Brazilian Portuguese had established traits and tendencies that were considerably different from continental Portuguese. The passage of time and Brazil's independence from Portugal strengthened the new traits in the language.

Currently, two orthographic systems exist and are accepted. Although after some unsuccessful attempts in the past, an **orthographic agreement** allowing publishers to issue the same edition of a book for marketing in both countries is now in the final stages of approval, this agreement faces strong opposition from some Portuguese-speaking areas in the world. If and when finally implemented, the agreement, while useful, would only skim the surface of the existing differences. The very flexibility of the treaty, allowing for more than one spelling, shows that the differences between the two variants are widely recognized.

Many books, articles and academic research have been written about the differences between Brazilian and Continental Portuguese. Phonetic discrepancies, although significant between the two varieties, are not relevant for the translation of written materials, although they are crucial for oral interpretation. However, morphological, syntactic and lexical contrast points are another matter, and they are extensive. For example, at the morphological level, the preferred form for the address pronoun in Brazil is *você"/"o(a) senhor(a)*" (respectively informal/formal), while in Portugal this opposition is expressed by *"tu"/"o* -pronoun, name of the person, or honorific title. *"Tu"* has virtually disappeared from most regions of Brazil as subject pronoun. In the syntactic area, two well-known examples are the continuous verbal forms (Braz. *"estar fazendo"* vs. Port. *"estar a fazer"* for *"is doing"*) and the existence of two different and complex systems of rules for the placement of object pronouns. Finally, the great differences between the two lexicons may result in miscommunication among speakers. Moreover, such differences have warranted the recent publication of contrastive dictionaries. One semantic domain, among many that exemplifies the possible confusion is that of computer terminology, where Brazil has adopted more Anglicized terms, and Portugal has opted for terms closely related to French.

Examples:

<u>English</u>	<u>Brazilian Port.</u>	<u>European Port.</u>
File	Arquivo	Ficheiro
Card	Placa	Cartão
Door (as in Unit Door)	Porta	Portinhola
Software	Software	Logicial
Screen	Tela	Écran, ecrã
Etc.		

In summary, differences are pervasive at all grammatical levels, and are immediately evident to native speakers in both countries.

An equally important factor is that each variety of the language has been a vehicle for asserting each group's identity. Due to the persisting economic difficulties faced by Brazil in the last two decades, the trend of immigration, which was once predominantly from East to West, has now reversed. Taking advantage of an old agreement granting Brazilian and Portuguese citizens equal rights in either country, significant numbers of Brazilians have moved to Portugal to guarantee their prospect of working anywhere in the European Community. Newspapers and news magazines have widely documented Portuguese resentment toward the "invasion" and competition of Brazilians for the relatively small Portuguese market (e.g. a well-publicized legal battle of Portuguese against Brazilian-immigrant dentists), an attitude which coincides with that of many Brazilians toward Portuguese when the immigration trend was in the other direction. As happens with other languages in other contexts, this attitude is often expressed through criticism of the linguistic variety used by the rival group.

In the same vein, it is a documented fact that some traditional Portuguese resent the young generation's use of certain "incorrect" constructions and colloquial expressions learned from Brazilian soap operas, quite popular nowadays on Portuguese TV, or from Brazilian popular music. Lastly, Brazilian literature, although important

enough to warrant study in other countries, such as the United States, Germany, France and England, has been virtually ignored in Portuguese educational institutions. This has been a source of resentment for Brazilians, who also take exception to having their linguistic variety labeled by Europeans as "inferior" or "incorrect" for following rules different from those of Continental Portuguese, an opinion which is linguistically inaccurate but not uncommon.

It would be naive to deny that two different varieties exist, or to pretend that these differences are not a fundamental concern for companies interested in marketing their products in Brazil and in Portugal. Portuguese speakers would probably understand, with differing degrees of effort, a letter, an advertisement, or a manual written in one of the two varieties. However, one must realize that the information conveyed could carry with it a unintended connotation that the other country was the primary market for this company, or that "the company did not care enough to talk to us in our own standard variety, or to learn what is used here." This is contrary to what any sensible marketing specialist would like to convey. Thus, while theoretically possible, it is totally inadvisable to use the same translation for both markets.

It is obvious, therefore, that companies should select as their ideal translator a speaker of the standard variety of the target country. The basic reason being that although reasonably thorough descriptions of each variety exist, **it is virtually impossible for a native speaker of one variety of Portuguese to do a good translation into the other. Although there are unfortunately people who may feel, and announce themselves as capable of translating/editing for both varieties, their work usually does not pass the simplest scrutiny of a native speaker.** Unless one has lived extensively in both countries, one will not have the native speaker's feel for what is appropriate/inappropriate and this will be evident in the translation.

A final concern is whether two translations should be done from the original English, if the product is aimed at the two countries, or if it is possible to "adapt," a Brazilian Portuguese translation into continental Portuguese, and vice-versa. It would probably be more economical to do the latter. In this case, however, it would be essential that the second translator have access to the original English text, and s/he be allowed the freedom to make essential syntactic and other necessary grammatical changes along with those in the lexical area. Only then would the new translation present those traits of authenticity which lead potential buyers to identify with the message.

Brazilian and Continental Portuguese differ in phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical levels. The two linguistic variants are products of distinctive historical contexts. It is imperative that translation companies and translators be sensitive to these differences and be capable of conveying them appropriately to prospective clients.

(Reproduced from *The ATA Chronicle*, XXVII (8), Aug. 1998: 34-36)



An *elétrico* on a Lisbon street