

CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOKS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS
General Editor: Michael Swan

This is a series of practical guides for teachers of English and other languages. Illustrative examples are usually drawn from the field of English as a foreign or second language, but the ideas and techniques described can equally well be used in the teaching of any language.

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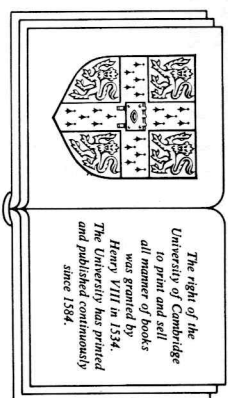
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Learner English

A teacher's guide to
interference and other problems

*Michael Swan and
Bernard Smith*



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Portuguese speakers

David Shepherd

BRAZIL, PORTUGAL, ANGOLA, MOZAMBIQUE, GUINEA, CAPE VERDE ISLANDS, GOA, MACAO.

Distribution

Introduction

Portuguese is a romance language closely related to Spanish. Educated speakers of European (or Continental) Portuguese (henceforth EP) have little trouble understanding each other, both within Portugal itself, and with people from the former empire. However, the differences between European and Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP) are very much greater than those between British, American, or Australian varieties of English, as there is relatively little cultural, linguistic or commercial interchange. The prestige dialect in Portugal is that of Lisbon, which also serves as the model for the *lingua franca* of the recently independent former colonies. It has many more Arabic words than that of BP, which has borrowed an increasingly large number of words from American English. Portuguese is the native language of approximately 97 per cent of Brazilians. Despite its size, Brazil's regional varieties of Portuguese show few variations, when compared with most European countries. The prestige variety of BP is that of Rio de Janeiro.

Phonology

General

The English and Brazilian Portuguese phonological systems are quite different. While English has twelve vowels and ten diphthongs, Portuguese has only eight and six respectively.

Among the features of Portuguese which give rise to a 'Portuguese accent' in English are:

- Pronunciation of most unstressed syllables, influenced by the syllable-stressed Portuguese.

- Strong articulation of pure vowels, with nasalisation in some contexts, e.g. *-en, -on, -un, -ing, -em*.
- The insertion of intrusive vowels between consonants: 'closis' for *clothes*; before initial consonant clusters: 'esteam' for *steam*; and after some final consonants. Few consonants can occur finally in Portuguese, and so a vowel is often added: 'parkie' for *park*; 'cabbie' for *cab*.
- Unstressed vowels, especially at the ends of words, may become almost inaudible: 'sit' for *city*; 'cough' for *coffee*; 'offs' for *office*.

Vowels

i:	ɪ	e	æ	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ
ɑ:	ɒ	ɔ:	ʊ	aʊ	əʊ	ɪə
u:	ʌ	ɜ:	ə	eə	ʊə	aɪə aʊə

Shaded phonemes have equivalents or near equivalents in Portuguese, and should therefore be perceived and articulated without great difficulty, although some confusions may still arise. Unshaded phonemes may cause problems. For detailed comments, see below.

1. /ɪ/ has a slightly shorter duration and is confused with /i/: *rich* for *reach*; *hit* for *heat*.
2. /e/ is confused with /æ/: *head* and *bad*.
3. /ɑ:/ is shortened and confused with /æ/: *ant* and *annt*; *cant* and *can't*.
4. /ɒ/ is confused with /ɔ:/: *caught* for *cot*, or *spot* for *sport*, or even with /ʌ/: *hut* for *hot*.
5. /ʊ/ is confused with /u:/: *fool* for *full*.
6. /ʌ/ may be pronounced as /æ/: *lack* for *luck*, or even, because of orthographic interference, as /u:/: *mood* for *mud*.
7. Unstressed vowels are often given their full value: 'Ann' for *an*; *thee* for *the*.

Diphthongs

There are fewer diphthongs in Portuguese than in English. The greatest problems arise with /ɪə/ and /eə/: *hear* and *hair*.

Consonants

p	b	f	v	θ	ð	t	d
s	z	ʃ	ʒ	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
m	n	ɲ	l	r	j	w	h

Shaded phonemes have equivalents or near equivalents in Portuguese and should therefore be perceived and articulated without great difficulty, although some confusions may still arise. Unshaded phonemes may cause problems. For detailed comments, see below.

1. The 'dark' /ʌ/ in final position or before a consonant is often pronounced as a vowel similar to /u/: 'bottue' for *bottle*, and 'beoo' for *heel*.
2. /p/, /k/, and /t/ are unaspirated initially in Portuguese, and are confused with /b/, /g/, and /d/: *peg* and *beg*; *Kate* and *gate*; *tin* and *din*.
3. Initial and medial /t/ and /d/ are both pronounced quite forcefully and may be confused: *tale* and *dale*; *latter* and *ladder*. But when followed by /i/, /e/, or /ɛ/, they are often pronounced as affricates, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/: 'cheam' for *team*; 'yeam' for *dean*.
4. There is also confusion between the /t/ (a short flap) and the /r/ (a short trill): *better* and *bearer*; *beating* and *hearing*.
5. Vowels before final /m/, /n/, and /ɲ/ are nasalised, often to the point where the final consonant is inaudible.
6. An initial /r/ is an unvoiced trill or fricative and is often confused with a strong initial /h/: *red* and *head*; *right* and *height*.
7. In BP, final /s/ and /z/ are pronounced /s/: *rice* for *rise*. In EP final /s/ and /z/ are pronounced as /s/ or /ʒ/: *peace* for *peas*; *hask* for *has*.
8. /θ/ and /ð/ are realised either as /s/ and /z/, or as /t/ and /d/, confusing *thinker* and *sinker* or *tinker*; and *breathes* with *breeds* or *breezes*.
9. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are pronounced /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, confusing *chair* and *share*; *pledger* and *pleasure*.
10. Initial /h/ has no equivalent in Portuguese and is either omitted, confusing *ear* for *bear*, or inserted unnecessarily because of overcompensation: 'High ham is holdest friend' for *I am his oldest friend*.

Consonant clusters

The range of consonant clusters is much wider in English than in Portuguese, causing the insertion of extra vowels by Portuguese speakers

to 'assist' pronunciation of English, particularly in clusters with an initial *s*.

Initial clusters not occurring in Portuguese include *str*, *skr*, *spl*, *spr*.

Influence of spelling on pronunciation

Spelling and pronunciation are very closely related in Portuguese. Mistakes will be made at all levels of competence. The phoneme /ʒ/ exists in Portuguese, but is represented either by *j* (as in *caju*) or *g* (as in *gelo*). The /ʒ/ phoneme is frequently misused in English for these letters, e.g. in *jury*, *jockey*, etc.

Rhythm and stress

EP is a stress-timed language, like English, but BP is syllable-timed, like Spanish, and this leads to difficulties of the following kind:

- Giving appropriate stress in compound nouns, e.g. *a telephone 'box, a tea 'cup*.
- Giving appropriate syllable stress in long words, e.g. *political demon'strators*.
- Giving appropriate stress, or lack of stress, to auxiliary verbs, articles, conjunctions, prepositions, etc. The stressing of such words often suggests an unintended emphasis or aggressiveness:

I saw them yesterday.

They were happy.

It was his book, not his bag I wanted.

The fact that these normally unstressed syllables in English are pronounced more clearly by BP speakers also creates difficulties at all levels in perceiving meaning. Speakers of EP do have a strong/weak differentiation, unlike Brazilians, and can perceive and produce stresses.

Intonation

Declarative sentences are given a marked low fall, often making the last word inaudible.

All question tags tend to be pronounced with a rising tune, irrespective of meaning.

Juncture

There is a tendency, where there are doubled consonants, to pronounce both, and add an intrusive vowel, for example in *this stop, at that time*.