


NO LONGER CAMÕES' PORTUGUESE: SYNTACTIC, LEXICAL, GRAMMATICAL AND STYLISTIC TRAPS TO TRIP UP THE INTREPID TRANSLATOR OF BRAZILIAN, EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN PORTUGUESE.

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Abstract: This paper presents examples of the differences between Brazilian, European and African Portuguese, from a Brazilian perspective. The examples are separated into general types (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and some general rules (when they exist) are outlined.

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to point out some of the glaring differences between European, Brazilian and African Portuguese (as exemplified by current literature, newspaper articles and government publications). The examples are from a Brazilian viewpoint, as I live and work in Brazil.

To be a good translator, one must be well read in both target and source languages. For me, this would mean reading exclusively Brazilian Portuguese and English material — not very difficult for most Brazilians but impossible for me since I am working on a doctorate in Lusophone African Literature. Every time I read something written in European Portuguese I feel a sort of vertigo: "Is this Portuguese?" African Portuguese is somewhat more familiar. When reading texts in European or African Portuguese, I have to tell myself: "don't remember this!" European Portuguese actually seems like **Pig Latin** sometimes, since the Portuguese like to put object pronouns after the verbs whereas we like to put them in front. I seriously consider European and Brazilian Portuguese to be different target languages (and only translate into Brazilian Portuguese). 

An aside: I do not intend to discuss accents here, but suffice it to say that when studying literature at the University of São Paulo, I understood my Italian professor perfectly but it took me a good 10 minutes to understand my Portuguese professor each class (like having to warm up a car on a frosty morning) and the process had to be repeated every week. Even then, I did not catch everything he said.

The following abbreviations are used throughout the rest of the text: PT: European Portuguese, BR: Brazilian Portuguese, AF: African Portuguese, CV: Cape Verdean Portuguese, MZ: Mozimbian Portuguese and AN: Angolan Portuguese. Now, on to the examples.

2. SPELLING

As in English (UK and US), there are basic spelling changes that were not smoothed over by the 1971 spelling agreement between Brazil and Portugal. Some of the differences are due to the fact that they really pronounce things differently in Portugal, thus the different accents (*metrô* (BR)/*metro* (PT)) or extra letters (*diretor*(BR)/*director*(PT)). Other differences have no apparent

justification: (*ótimo (PT)/ótimo (BR)*). Any attempt to classify these spelling rules can become confusing: (*fato (PT) = terno(BR)*) while (*facto (PT) = fato (BR)*) and (*óptico (PT) = óptico (BR) (to do with vision)*) and (*ótico (PT) = ótico (BR) (to do with hearing)*). Many Brazilian opticians call their shop "Ótica Tal" erroneously following the rule "remove the p before the t for Brazil." Aurélio has even listed *ótica* as an alternative spelling, the error is so widespread. African spelling tends to follow European spelling.

3. VOCABULARY

I will begin this section with a European Portuguese literary passage. "Na **passadeira de peões** surgiu o desenho do homem verde...Os **automobilistas**, impacientes, com o pé no pedal da **embraigem**, mantinham em tensão os carros..."(Ref. 1) In Brazilian Portuguese this would be: "Na **faixa de pedestres** surgiu o desenho do homem verde...Os **motoristas**, impacientes, com o pé no pedal da **embreagem**, mantinham em tensão os carros..." The European Portuguese sentence is not just non-idiomatic. Depending on the level of the reader it would be nonsensical. *Passadeira* (BR) most commonly refers to a woman who irons clothes, a *peão* (BR) is a cowboy, soldier, or chess pawn, and an *automobilista* (BR) is a race-car driver.

Another example is from the new area of computers and the Internet. European Portuguese is much less accepting of foreign (English) words like (*mouse (BR) / rato (PT)*) and (*site (BR) / sítio (PT)*). I sincerely hope I will never need to translate the plural of mouse into Portuguese. The example below shows not only one difference in terminology for Internet navigation, but also the different stylistic conventions for verbs. In Brazilian Portuguese the "Você" is needed (A Brazilian reader would ask herself "who" if you eliminate it) for the sentence to be idiomatic. I will discuss verbs later.

"**Encontra-se neste momento a abandonar a** Página Oficial da Presidência da República Portuguesa." (Ref. 2) (PT) / "**Você está saindo da** Página Oficial da Presidência da República Portuguesa." (BR)

Some typical examples of differing vocabulary are:

comboio (PT): trem (BR)
autocarro (PT) : ônibus (BR)
hospedeira (PT) : aeromoça (BR)
virar (BR) (in the sense of tornar-se (PT e BR))
perceber (PT/AF) (meaning entender (BR))

Sometimes the European Portuguese word seems quaint, but other times real misunderstandings can occur

African Portuguese vocabulary tends to follow European Portuguese vocabulary, with the addition of words relating to local foods, plants, animals, and places. Angolan Portuguese, for example, has incorporated words from the local quimbundo language:

musseque (AN) /favela (BR),
quinda (AN) / cesta (BR e PT)
mona (AN) / criança, filho (BR e PT)

Mozambique and Cape Verde have also created their own words either by importing them from tribal or foreign languages or modifying Portuguese through a creolization process:

Pomporra(MZ) = petulância (PT e BR)

Morna (CV) = a type of music somewhat similar to Fado

Mamana (MZ) = mãe, senhora (PT/BR)

Grogue (CV) = aguardente (PT/BR)

I am not familiar enough with the Portuguese of São Tomé and Príncipe and Guinea-Bissau to provide examples.

4. SYNTAX

Brazilian and European Portuguese also differ in how sentences are put together, especially in terms of the use of articles and the choice of prepositions:

todo homem é mortal (BR) / todo **o** homem é mortal (PT)

meu carro (BR) / **o** meu carro (PT)

"ambas instituições propõem-se cooperar igualmente" (Ref. 3) (AN) / "ambas **as** instituições se propõem **a** cooperar igualmente" (BR)

Unfortunately, most Brazilian dictionaries that include preposition collocation mention all possible collocations rather than just the most common or idiomatic. The Luft Dictionary is particularly good in that it sometimes mentions Brazilian/European Portuguese differences. Francisco Fernandes' *Dicionário de regimes de substantivos e adjetivos*, while very useful, does not indicate European and Brazilian usage (though examples from both countries are used) and gives all possible noun/adjective + preposition combinations. Even worse, the prepositions are listed in alphabetical order rather than in terms of which would be considered more idiomatic.

Since it is hard to find an example where only syntax or only grammar differences appear, I will present syntax examples in the next section.

5. GRAMMAR

The two largest grammatical differences between the Portugueses are the use of *estar* + gerund (BR) v. *estar a* + infinitive (PT/AF) and the position of direct and indirect object pronouns. The gerund/infinitive clash can be seen in the following example:

"Com 200 jornalistas **a trabalhar em permanência** e 80 **a colaborar numa base regular ou eventual**, em várias partes do país e do mundo, a LUSA cobre **sobre a hora** os acontecimentos relevantes e **divulga-os** no preciso momento em que estão **a ocorrer**." (Ref. 4) (PT)

"Com 200 jornalistas **trabalhando permanentemente** e 80 **colaborando regular ou eventualmente**, em várias partes do país e do mundo, a LUSA cobre **em tempo real** os acontecimentos relevantes, **divulgando-os** no preciso momento em que **estão ocorrendo**." (BR)

As for pronouns, in Brazil we are taught that certain types of words "attract" them: (1) negative words like *não* and *nem*, (2) adverbs, (3) relative pronouns like *quem*, *que*, *qual*, and (4) subjects or subject pronouns like *ele* and *eu*. In Brazil, pronouns also tend to (5) stick to the last verb (infinitive or past participle) whereas in Europe they tend to stick to the first (conjugated) verb.

The first three attractor rules also apply in Portugal, but in all other cases the tendency is to place the pronouns at the end (of the conjugated verb) with a hyphen.

The application of rules (4) and (5) in Brazilian Portuguese are shown below:

(4) João **se** levantou (BR) / João levantou-**se** (PT/CV)

(4) Acalme-se, eu **o** levo (BR) / Acalme-se, eu levo-**o** (PT)

(5) pode **me** dizer (BR) / pode-**me** dizer (PT)

(5) não tinha ainda **se** afastado (BR) / não **se** tinha ainda afastado (PT)

African Portuguese seems to be more flexible. The following sentence both follows and breaks rule (2) above:

"Pessoalmente **sentia-se** indigno da sorte que agora **lhe cabia**;" (Ref. 5) (CV)

Another example from Cape Verde is "**ficar-se-á** com uma idéia de quanto **ele me deve** mas tão mal pagou." (Ref. 6) (CV) The first construction "ficar-se-á" is grammatically correct in Brazil and Portugal, but avoided at all costs by Brazilian writers; normally a subject, any subject, is inserted to "attract" the pronoun. The second verb "ele me deve" clearly follows Brazilian rule (4).

One rule followed both in Brazil and Portugal is that a sentence may never begin with an object pronoun, though everyday speech in Brazil and Africa commonly includes this type of construction. The following example is interesting in that the object pronoun begins the sentence (which is not dialog): "**Lhe subiu** uma repentina raiva de, no passado, **se ter sentido** irmão daquelas animálias." (Ref. 7) (MZ) The second verb is also odd as in Brazil one would expect "ter se sentido" and in Portugal one would expect "ter-se sentido". On the same page, the same writer avoids beginning a sentence with an object pronoun: "**Acusavam-no** de ter morto não um bicho mas um homem transfigurado." (Ref. 8) (MZ) Extremely flexible!

6. STYLE

Punctuation and capitalization are also very different for Brazilian and non-Brazilian Portuguese. African Portuguese tends to follow European Portuguese in matters of style. The names of months are capitalized in Portugal, but not in Brazil. Words like rua, praça, etc. when used as part of a street name are not capitalized in Portugal, but are in Brazil. Titles (and their abbreviations) such as dona/d., sr. and dr. are not capitalized in Portugal, whereas they are in Brazil.

Brazilian text almost always uses "" for quotes, though for dialog the — is still appears. In European and African texts, << and >> are still used, together with the — for dialog.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Many translation clients are not aware of how different Portuguese usage is, and we who translate Portuguese should work to make them aware of the difficulties. I hope that after pondering the examples above few translators will try to translate *into* more than one variety of Portuguese (with the exception being European + African, since there is very little work into African Portuguese.) For those of you who translate *from* Portuguese, recognizing the

differences may make you a better translator, and perhaps convince you that now is the time to pick one Portuguese and stick with it.

8. REFERENCES

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