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The One Source for a World of Translation Services

Portuguese - Brazilian & European

Portuguese is a Romance language predominantly spoken in Portugal, Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, Cape Verde and other African and Asian nations and is the world's sixth most frequently spoken language. Portuguese is the most widely spoken language in South America and it is also one of the major official languages in Africa. Depending on whether you are from South America or Europe, there are differences to consider.

Brazilian Portuguese is an offshoot of the language of the mother country, Portugal. With eighteen times the population of Portugal, Brazil is significantly larger than Portugal (which is approximately the size of the State of Indiana). Brazilian music is popular around the world and Portuguese speakers in many countries tune in to Brazilian soap operas (*telenovelas*), a fact that may explain why European Portuguese people have an easier time understanding spoken Brazilian than the other way around.

Actually, this is similar to the situation that exists between the United States and the United Kingdom. American English is derived from the language of the mother country, the UK. With five times the population of the UK and an area equivalent to half of South America, the US is slightly larger than Brazil, while the UK is a bit smaller than the State of Oregon in the United States. US music and films are exported worldwide, which may also explain why Britons are able to understand spoken American English better than Americans understanding some varieties of British English.

Brazilian and European Portuguese are very far apart—from spelling to the use of verb tenses and terminology. In many situations, the use of European Portuguese is unacceptable to Brazilians, and vice-versa. The choice of words can be completely different and sometimes “laughable.” This is especially true when it comes to technical texts, where even the choices of “imported” words are different.

A Brazilian person can read a book or hear an interview on the radio—but that is the extent of the use of European Portuguese in Brazil. In Portugal, Brazilian Portuguese would carry a lot of “mistakes” and awkward word choices and may often be considered an uncultured variation of the European form.

If we are talking about a couple of lines on packaging (contents or regulatory info) one translation should suffice—however, regulations vary from country to country. Portugal is part of the European Union and regulatory demands require European Portuguese on packaging to that country. If a product is targeted to a specific market niche for widespread use, there should be two versions, one Brazilian and one European. Another factor to consider is national pride — that is, the response of a consumer to a product that is obviously not directed to him/her.

The good news is that for most subject matters a text can be translated for one target country and then edited (localized/adapted) for another. The bad news is that this is not a very cost effective solution. Brazilian and European Portuguese translators would rather translate “from scratch” than edit a text translated for another market since the changes are usually very extensive and the time required for the task might be longer than the time required to do a normal editing.

The relevance of the difference between the two forms of Portuguese doesn't apply to all situations. José Saramago, for instance, is considered a great writer in many of the Portuguese speaking countries. The more formal the language, the easier to understand it in another Portuguese speaking country; but make no mistake, there is NO such thing as standard Portuguese.

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

A few examples of differences between Brazilian and European Portuguese

Vocabulary: Distance and immigration have contributed to differences between Brazilian and European Portuguese. Italians, Germans, Japanese and their Spanish-speaking neighbors have introduced new words into the language. Other words have entered through contact with foreign products and technologies. However, some experts attribute the greatest differences between the languages to the influence of Amerindian languages, such as Tupian, or Tupí-Guaraní, which was the language used by the natives to communicate with Portuguese traders, missionaries and adventurers and which continued to be used in the Amazon and Western Brazil until the 19th century. Take for example, the word for *pineapple*. In European Portuguese, it is *ananas*, similar to other European languages, but in Brazilian Portuguese it is *abacaxi*, as in Amerindian.

The Tupian influence is also found in the differences in pronunciation between European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese. The latter is more nasal and Brazilians speak more slowly, pronouncing all the vowels. On the other hand, European Portuguese has been influenced also by its neighbors, particularly Spain and France, as evidenced by words like *tejadilho* (from the Spanish *tejadillo*) used in Portugal for “roof” and *estore* (from the French *store*) used in Portugal for *roll-up curtains*.

Brazil has accepted more US technical terms into the language. Words such as *software*, *mouse* and *site* remain in English in Brazil, but in Portugal they are translated to: *logicial*, *rato* and *sítio*. On the other hand, the term for *screen* in Portugal is *écran* or *ecrã* (from the French *écran*), but in Brazil, it is *tela*.

Some differences could cause misunderstandings, such as the word *bizarre*. In European Portuguese it is translated as *galhardo*, *gentil*, *nobre* (gallant, gentle, noble), but to a Brazilian it means *bizarre*, *weird*. Also, a Brazilian would expect to find medicine in a *Drogaria*, but in Portugal one would go there in search of household items such as cleaning and painting supplies.

Spelling: Brazilian and European Portuguese words differ slightly, but the two countries have made efforts to standardize the rules of spelling so the written word is mutually intelligible. For

example, Brazilian Portuguese tends to suppress surplus letters and consonant doublings that are common in European Portuguese. The following are a few examples:

English	Portuguese (EU)	Portuguese (BR)
stockholder	accionista	acionista
fact	facto	fato
subtle	subtil	sutil
action	acção	ação
actual	actual	atual
selections	selecções	seleções
optimum	óptima	ótima

Grammatical Differences:

- a. **Use of the infinitive vs. the gerund:** In European Portuguese *I am working* is: *estou a trabalhar* and *I am writing* is: *estou a escrever*. However, in Brazilian Portuguese the gerund is used instead -- *estou trabalhando*, *estou escrevendo*. Both forms are understood in Brazil and Portugal, but while the Brazilian form is used in certain regions of Portugal and is considered correct, in some situations the European Portuguese form is not used in Brazil.
- b. **Position of object pronouns:** Brazilians use the object pronoun before the verb, even in formal writing, but the European Portuguese do not. Examples:

English	Portuguese (EU)	Portuguese (BR)
Someone told me	Alguém disse-me	Alguém me disse
Someone saw me	Alguém viu-me	Alguém me viu

Are two different versions of Portuguese a requirement?

This is one of the questions that translation companies often have to answer. Linguistically, the two written versions of Portuguese are mutually intelligible. Ideally, a translation should meet the cultural and linguistic requirements of the target market, i.e., it should sound natural to the native reader. However, the pursuit of this goal would require that websites, manuals, software, etc. be translated into every language and version thereof of the intended target audience — Canadian and European French, US and UK English, Castilian and different varieties of South American Spanish, and so on. This is not always possible from the standpoint of budget and logistics.

The selection of the language version appropriate for your requirements should take into consideration whether the overriding factor is to meet the requirements of the larger target market, or to comply with the language requirement of the European Union (EU). In the case of Portuguese, because European Portuguese is one of the languages of the EU, it might be a requisite for exporting into Europe.

Although there are more in numbers of European Portuguese people spread throughout the US, they are generally second or third generation and have a very good understanding of English. When translating Portuguese for the US market, depending on the product, Brazilian Portuguese is generally the preferred version.