

SOUSA GALITO, Maria (2008). Portuguese Language: Common Legacy with World Potential. CI-CPRI, AO, N°5, pp. 1-6.

**AO: Artigo de Opinião
Opinion Article**



Portuguese Language: Common Legacy with World Potential

1. Portuguese Language

Portuguese is a neo-Latin language born in Portugal and by this country globally projected. Lusofonia engages all peoples and cultures expressing in Portuguese language around the world. It includes speakers from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, S. Tome and Príncipe, and East-Timor; but also from Macau (China); Goa, Damão, Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli (India), where Portuguese is a *language of use*; also embraces the so called Diaspora (Portuguese language natives and its descendents who work or live abroad).

This form of verbal communication is considered a cultural and social skill, a working tool, with market potential as well as a strategic instrument of power. States benefit from it domestically and internationally.

For peoples (locally, nationally, and internationally) is an opportunity used at home, at work, on the Internet, in the media, in scientific papers and forums, and in all fields *information* related.

The Portuguese Language was the first to become global, and has everything to continue worldwide important in the XXI century.

In spite of its financial constraints, Portugal is trying to defend the language overseas, individually or throughout CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries) and its IILP (Portuguese Language International Institute), given the importance of *language diplomacy and promotion*. Governmental actions have been complemented with social society activities, and beyond-border measures of non-governmental organizations.

We must understand that in a globalized and highly competitive language market, there are no guaranties. The Portuguese language will keep having the international power and projection that its speakers ultimately will give her.

2. Portuguese as a Future UN's Official Language?

United Nations was founded in 1945 after World War II. It became a strong platform for dialogue and cooperation between countries, to encourage peace and human rights under international law and security. The UN promotes social and economic progress and makes use of six official languages in intergovernmental meetings and documents. These are English, French, Spanish (castellan) and Chinese (Mandarin), Russian and Arabic. This means that the potential of the Portuguese language has not yet been fully understood by this international institution. Its effort in the area doesn't go much further than having some sites in Portuguese.

CPLP already accomplished the hardest in 1996, which was gathering its eight countries: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, and East Timor (in 2002). Today they discuss mutual interests rather than fighting (colonial war ended in 1974) grudging or maintaining a resentful position towards the future. Member States are trying to dialogue over past errors to build a better future to each other, now as independent countries.

Critics say that CPLP doesn't do much of tangible, but peace and communication are not small achievements. And bigger efforts can make the difference in upcoming years. For now, these countries have a goal: lift up their mother language's international prestige, as an official UN language. This claim may have a fair possibility. This verbal communication is spoken by almost 250 million people in all continents.

July 25 2008 set the date for the beginning of Portugal's CPLP Presidency. Lisbon summit was the *VII Conference of Heads of State and Government of CPLP*, lead by the subject: *Portuguese language: Common Patrimony, Global Future*. Next summit will be in 2010, in Luanda (Angola).

The President of Portugal, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, claimed that CPLP had a "positive balance" in its twelve years of existence, and that "the presence in this summit of a large number of States and organizations, with which CPLP has especial relations of cooperation, is the best display of its success". That growing cooperation and diplomatic teamwork in several areas of common interest, and coordination in international activities have reached "excellent results", "in spite of the much we still haven't achieved"¹.

The official statement of this VII Summit of Heads of State and Government of CPLP referred to a "(...) joined action compromise towards an effective globalization of the

¹ CAVACO SILVA, Aníbal (2008). *Alocação do Presidente da República na abertura da VII Conferência de Chefes de Estado e de Governo da CPLP*. Centro Cultural de Belém, 25 de Julho. URL <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=22&idi=18872>>

Portuguese Language through concrete and verifiable measures (...)”², mainly to maintain Portuguese language alive and useful, and to introduce her in more international and regional organizations and specialized agencies. The referred statement also claimed the relevance of the IILP; praised the creation, by the Portuguese government, of the *Portuguese Language Found.* S. Tome and Príncipe was congratulated for ratifying the *Orthographic Agreement* and its Modified settlements.

The VII Summit of Heads of State and Government of CPLP signed the *Declaration of Lisbon* (25/07/08), which is an strategic compromise of cooperation among states wanting to project themselves internationally all the way through CPLP.

The *Declaration of Lisbon* asserts a reinforced devotion to Democracy, social justice and human rights, rule of law, peace and security in the course of diplomatic and political exchange of ideas, enhancing its worldwide reflection by strengthening its relations with the United Nations and its specialized agencies that also need to invigorate their system (particularly the Security Council).

Brazil is a candidate for the Security Council membership for the biennium 2010 – 2011 and Portugal for the biennium 2011 – 2012. And has been alleged that Brazil, as an emergent strong economy (BRIC: Brazil, Russia, India and China), could/should assume a permanent membership place in the Security Council. If Portuguese was an official language of the UN, would be a strategic move.

All this preceded the 63rd UN General Assembly. Portugal, while assuming CPLP’s Presidency, assured the simultaneous translation of Portuguese-language speeches into all the other six languages of the institution.

Several social society initiatives have been created and sustained to back the cause. Example of this is the Petition circulating in the Internet in favour of Portuguese as an UN official language that in October ninth 2008 had 56,455 signatures³.

3. Portuguese Language in the US

Is the US still the superpower of the world given the pressure of emergent economies like Brazil, Russia, India and China? Its power of influence seems to be less questionable. In fact, the US has a major wing over world political affairs.

If Portuguese language had the vigour that Spanish (Castellan) has in the US, the worldwide projection of our language could be much higher. Since Brazil seems to be economically established and a neighbouring power (with a numerous Brazilian community in US), there is higher attention over the Portuguese language status in schools and universities all over the US.

² COMUNIDADE DOS PAÍSES DE LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA (2008). *VII Conferência de Chefes de Estado e de Governo – Comunicado Final*. Notícias CPLP. <URL <http://www.cplp.org/Noticias.aspx?ID=316&M=News&PID=304&NewsID=245>>

³ ELOS CLUBE INTERNACIONAL DA COMUNIDADE LUSÍADA (2005). *Petição para tornar oficial o idioma português nas Nações Unidas. 21/23 OUTUBRO 2005*, Convenção do Elos Clube Internacional, Tavira. URL <http://www.petitiononline.com/AB5555/petition.html>>

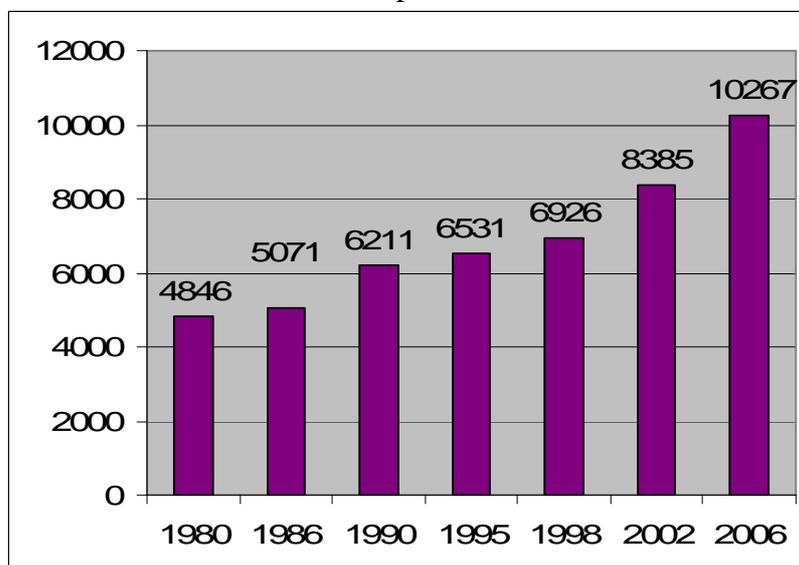
A stronger marketing strategy sponsoring Portuguese language's cultural and market values could help speeding the process, near communities that share the language, or inside the education system or in the media. Emigrants could be its informal cultural/economic ambassadors: they know the action field and the better way to broaden the *working together in Portuguese* message.

According to the *Luso-American Foundation*⁴, there are a hundred high schools having *Portuguese classes* as a choice. In the school year of 2003/04, those classes gathered over 11,000 students. Summing students of *communitarian schools*, this number could reach 14,000. That challenges pessimistic visions claiming weaker interest for Portuguese language over time.

The *Luso-American Foundation* also makes public statistics from the *Massachusetts University in Dartmouth* and from the *Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition* (CARLA), claiming that about 300 US universities are teaching Portuguese classes nowadays.

Modern Language Association published a paper in 2006 about enrollments in Languages *other than English* in the *United States Institutions of Higher Education*. According to these study, overall enrollments in languages other than English rose by 12.9%., a total of 180,557 more language enrollments than in 2002. Analyzing the following Graphic 1, we may observe the progress of Portuguese language, from 4846 students (1980) to 10,267 students (2006)⁵:

Graphic 1



Based on MLA (2006)

⁴ VICENTE, António L. e Pimenta, Margarida (2008). *Promoção da Língua Portuguesa no Mundo, Reunião de Trabalho realizada na Fundação Luso-Americana em 5 Novembro 2007*, Textype, Março, p. 14. URL http://www.flad.pt/documentos/1216226048S9qMG0he4Yh8_7DC6.pdf

⁵ FURMAN, Nelly and Goldberg, David and Lusin, Natalia (2007). *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006*. Modern Language Association of America, 13 November, p. 11. <URL http://www.mla.org/2006_flenrollmentsurvey>

In the same study about *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education*, we can realize that enrollments in Portuguese have risen significantly: 22.4% between 2002/06.

Table 1 compares the Portuguese language course enrollments' evolution with the growth of other languages' enrollments in 2002/06 period⁶.

Table 1:
Fall 2002 and 2006 Language Course Enrollments in US Institutions of Higher Education (Languages in Descending Order of 2006 Totals)

Languages	2002	2006	% Change
Spanish	746,267	822,985	10.3
French	201,979	206,426	2.2
German	91,100	94,264	3.5
American Sign Language	60,781	78,829	29.7
Italian	63,899	78,368	22.6
Japanese	52,238	66,605	27.5
Chinese	34,153	51,582	51.0
Latin	29,841	32,191	7.9
Russian	23,921	24,845	3.9
Arabic	10,584	23,974	126.5
Greek, Ancient	20,376	22,849	12.1
Hebrew, Biblical	14,183	14,140	-0.3
Portuguese	8,385	10,267	22.4
Hebrew, Modern	8,619	9,612	11.5
Korean	5,211	7,145	37.1
Other Languages	25,716	33,728	31.2
Total	1,397,253	1,577,810	12.9

Based on MLA (2006)

Portuguese language is not in the top five languages spoken in the US, but has been facing upgrading results in recent years. There's no reason to believe that the situation will get worse and probably will get better.

Table 2 shows regional comparison of 2006 undergraduate course enrollments in Spanish and Portuguese languages⁷.

⁶ FURMAN, Nelly and Goldberg, David and Lusin, Natalia (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷ *Id. Ibid.*, p. 28.

Table 2:
Regional Comparison of 2006 Undergraduate Course
Enrollments in Spanish and Portuguese Languages

Languages	Northeast	Midwest	South Atlantic	South Central	Rocky Mountain	Pacific Coast	Natl. (Total)
Spanish	165,561	175,595	190,698	97,100	62,856	120,224	812,034
% of natl.	20,4	21,6	23,5	12,0	7,7	14,8	
Portuguese	3,183	1,267	2,284	533	1,360	1,182	9,809
% of natl.	32,4	12,9	23,3	5,4	13,9	12,1	

Based on MLA (2006)

Table 2 shows that Spanish language is much more present in undergraduate course enrollments. But in the Northeast, the % of the national enrollments is higher for the Portuguese language, and also has very good results in terms of % in South Atlantic.

The efforts of organizations like COPA (Cambridge Organization of Portuguese Americans) and SPAL (Somerville Portuguese American League), joined together in a unique organization called Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), have been complicated because of oral and written differences between the two existing frameworks: *Portuguese from Brazil* and *Portuguese from Portugal*. These difficulties will be overcome with the so called *Orthographic Agreement* already signed.

There are some contrarities in this process: Cape Verdean emigrants use increasingly more Creole instead of Portuguese. There's a strong competition from English, Spanish but also other non-European languages such as Arabic and Chinese. And US public opinion not always makes a distinction between the two Iberic languages (Portuguese and Spanish). If they new History they would never forget those differences.

Nevertheless the Portuguese Language seems to be considered a surplus in the US education System and an increasing number of students apply to Portuguese classes.

In conclusion, the Portuguese language is not one of the top five languages spoken in the US but the interest over this form of verbal and written expression is growing in the country. This language has local, national and international potential. The Portuguese is being promoted by CPLP inside the United Nations and may become, in the future, one its official languages.

Ultimately, *Portuguese is the language of poets*. It's an official language of eight countries, all Member States of CPLP. It is a global language, spoken in international negotiations. The number of speakers is growing considerably. One day it will recover its ancient glory.

Lisbon, November 7 2008