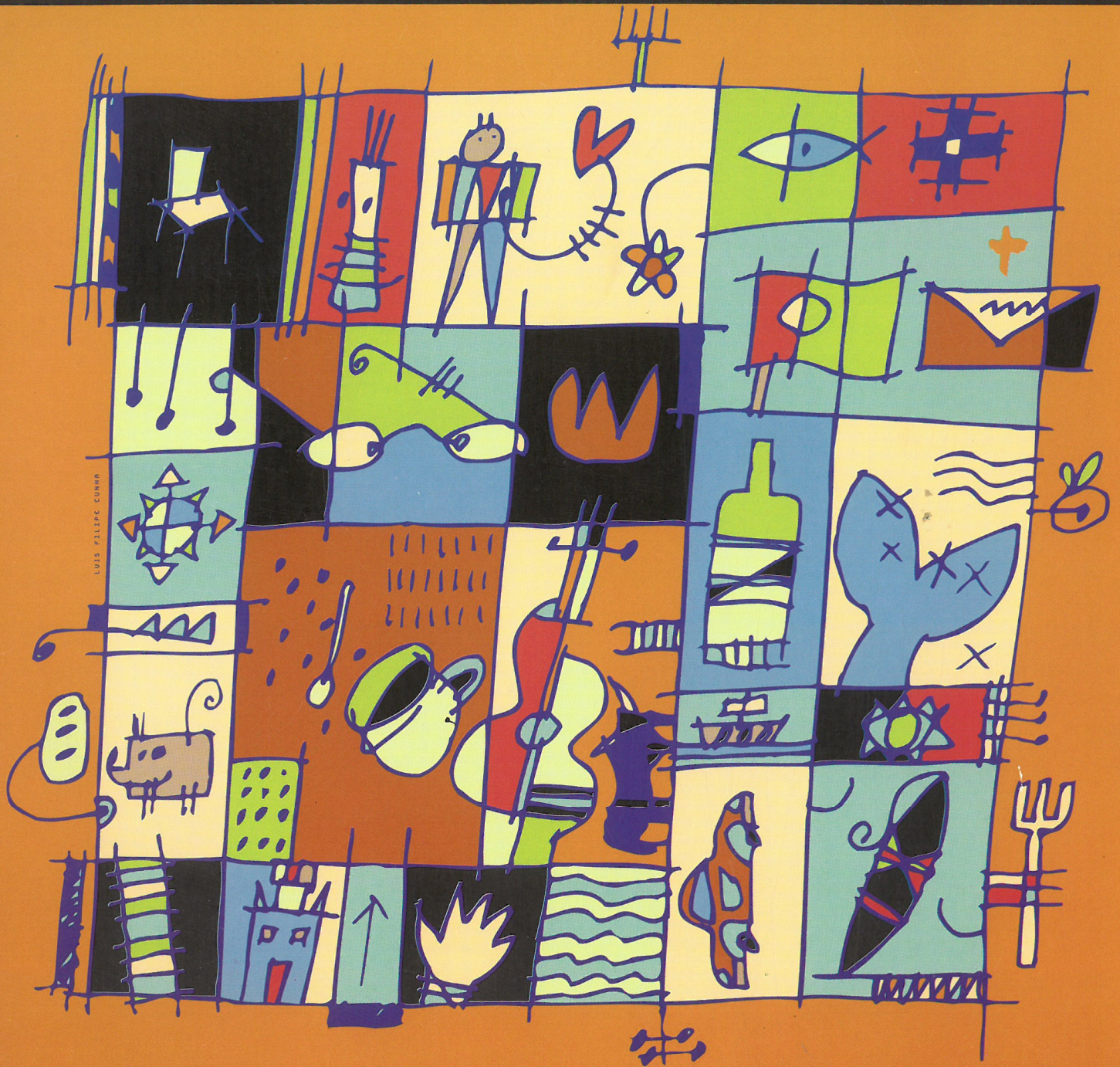


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LUIS FILIPE CUNHA

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Profiles, surveys, debates

Portuguese, Portughesi, Portugais...

Margarida Ribeiro looks at new developments in Portuguese language-learning, and provides a guide to the best teach-yourself programmes

An encounter with a language is also an encounter with the people who speak it, with their geography and culture, mores and beliefs, history and fictions. 'The sea beckons from my language', said the writer Vergílio Ferreira, evoking the spread of the Portuguese language from Brazil to India, and Cabo Verde to China, initiated by the Portuguese discoveries in the fifteenth century.

The many voices throughout the world that speak Portuguese today are a thriving reflection, and a wonderfully diverse heritage, of that adventurous past: 200 million people spread from Portugal and Brazil, to far-flung Macao and East Timor, across five African

countries, Angola, Moçambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, and throughout the many Portuguese-speaking communities scattered around the world.

In Britain, 22 universities, and some secondary schools, offer courses in Portuguese that respect its heritage by covering all the different cultures sharing the Portuguese language. Besides Portuguese studies, Brazilian and African Lusophone studies have an increasing presence in universities in Britain and elsewhere. The range and quality of recently published Portuguese-learning programmes bear witness to this.

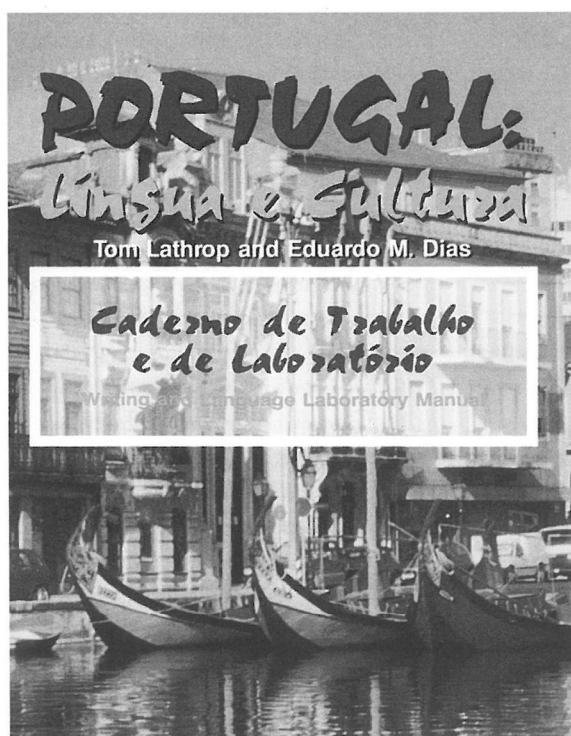
The programmes in Portuguese as a foreign language published in Portugal by Lidel, Porto Editora, Asa or Plátano and in the USA by LinguaText, emphasise a communicative approach to the language, putting the student in contact with the daily life of the country and its living language through vocabulary, expressions and grammar structures, recorded by native-speakers on audio-cassettes that accompany every programme. Consequently, these methods provide a very good integrated approach to learning the language – a balance between the skills of comprehension, reading, writing and speaking, and a wealth of cultural references. Here I hope to provide an

assessment of a variety of Portuguese language-learning programmes. I'll look at complete courses which take the student through from basic to advanced level; at beginners-only courses, including so-called 'survival kits' for holidaymakers and business people; at advanced courses; and, finally, at supplementary materials.

Complete Courses

Lusofonia – Curso Básico de Português Língua Estrangeira (Lisbon, Lidel 1991) and *Curso Avançado de Português para Estrangeiros* (Lisbon, Lidel 1996). A complete programme particularly suitable for adult students with some knowledge of Portuguese, or for students who want to teach themselves and who will spend a reasonable amount of time in Portugal. Divided into two levels, the programme offers a variety of dialogues, along with excerpts from newspapers and magazines. It provides a good synthesis of oral and writing skills, and the accompanying exercise book is excellent. The second volume puts a stress on the study of Portuguese culture, including Brazilian and Lusophone African cultures, and should leave students with a reasonably good knowledge of the Lusophone world or, in Portuguese, of the Lusofonia.

Compared to *Lusofonia, Português Sem Fronteiras* (Lisbon, Lidel 1991) is a less demanding method comprising three course books accompanied by cassettes and an instructor's manual. *Português Sem Fronteiras* has been the market leader, not only on account of





its pioneering of a communicative approach to Portuguese as a foreign language, but also because of its integrated and accessible presentation, which made it widely popular. Hence, for the more demanding, the method may prove somewhat slow and less than rigorous in its treatment of grammar. However, this is no longer the case in the following volumes, *Português sem Fronteiras 2* and *3*, and it is important to stress the socio-cultural component of the texts presented and the possibility of using the floppy disks for levels 2 and 3, allowing the student to progress interactively at his/her own rhythm.

Português ao Vivo (Lisbon, Lidel 1993, 1995) is a series of three books and cassettes divided in units of work. Presented in a classical style, it provides useful supplementary material, taking the student through comprehension and texts, vocabulary and grammar exercises, all aimed at achieving a balance between oral and writing skills.

Finally, from the United States, *Portugal: Língua e Cultura* (Newark, Lingua Text 1995) is a recent and

excellent programme aimed at English-speaking students who want to have explanations and examples translated into their own language. Comprising a course book, a writing and language-laboratory manual, cassettes and an instructor's book, this programme is ideal for students with some knowledge of Portuguese, and should take them up to intermediate level.

Beginners Courses

The proliferation of beginners courses attests to the increasing demand for Portuguese in Britain and throughout Europe. Basically, the academic beginners courses all follow a similar approach, with emphasis on the exploration

of communicative situations in oral and written contexts, which on the one hand provide a balanced development of oral and writing skills, and on the other acquaint the learner with the people and culture of Portugal. Bearing in mind that the programmes reviewed above can also work separately and thus be useful for beginners, here's a selection of beginners programmes, and some 'survival kits' for holidaymakers or business people.

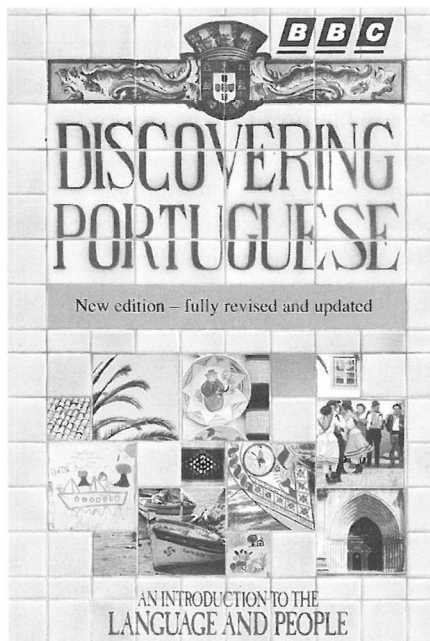
Português Coloquial para Estrangeiros (Porto, Edições Asa 1991) is a very good programme, well organised and presented. The exercise book and the 'Jogos e Actividades' from 1 to 3 provide practical exercises for self-studying and self-correcting. Also good is the course offered by *Viver em Portugal – curso básico de português para estrangeiros*, (Lisbon, Publicações Universitárias Portuguesas 1995), although the visually cramped style may put off some students.

Portuguesíssimo (Porto, Porto Editora 1996) is also a useful

programme, if a bit ambitious, offering a good selection of texts and exercises and a consistent grammatical and translated lexical appendix. The most original part of the book is a section called 'The pleasure of reading', which introduces the student to literary texts right from the start.

Método Dia-a-Dia (Lisbon, Instituto de Tecnologia Educativa/ Universidade Aberta 1988), particularly aimed at young students, offers a variety of materials to work on: a course book, exercise book, cassettes and a booklet of well-known Portuguese songs. But it is an inadequate programme, despite certain good ideas, such as using travel around Portugal as a running link. *Rumo ao Português no Mundo* (Lisbon: Plátano, 1989) now seems an old-fashioned programme, particularly in the context of all its high-quality modern competitors.

A different method of learning Portuguese is offered by the original and well-produced video-based beginners course *Ver, Ouvir e Falar Português* (Lisbon, Lidel 1995), which includes a course book of dialogues and exercises, and a two-hour video cassette. The dialogues on the video are quite well acted and filmed on location in Lisbon. The book comprises dialogues and grammatical notes accompanied by translations, in addition to vocabulary, practical exercises and answers. Unfortunately the quality of the translations leaves something to be desired. Following the same strategy of translation into English of the texts and grammar explanations and the same self-teaching study methodology, *A Practical Guide To Colloquial Portuguese 1: Conversando* (Lisbon, Espiral Publicações 1996) is a course specially designed to meet the language needs of international business. Although I have some reservations about suggesting a specialised course for people who do not have a basic knowledge of the language, *A Practical Guide To Colloquial Portuguese 1* seems an intelligent course, where



subjects are well explored. This is soon to be extended to an advanced level.

For those who want to follow a rapid self-study course for complete beginners before holidays or business travel, it is well worth considering the BBC course *Discovering Portuguese* (London, BBC Books, revised edition 1997) which, apart from language study with cassettes and course book, provides up-to-date information on Portuguese current affairs. Also useful are *Colloquial Portuguese* (London, Routledge 1995), *Teach Yourself Portuguese* and *Teach Yourself Beginner's Portuguese* (London, Hodder & Stoughton 1987, 1996). Just to get by, the elementary beginners course *Portuguese in Three Months*, (London, Hugo Language Books, 1997) or *Get By In Portuguese* (BBC Courses, 1988), are good sources of help.

Advanced

Apart from the programmes reviewed in the first section above, *Falar É Aprender* (Porto, Porto Editora 1993) takes students to a more advanced level of speaking, reading, writing and understanding Portuguese and Portuguese history and culture. The book is divided into two parts: Part I is a well-chosen selection of texts to read and discuss about Portuguese current

affairs, culture, history and literature; Part II is a very useful synthesis on Portuguese grammar followed by structural exercises. Although this division between cultural and grammar topics doesn't get my full support, *Falar É Aprender* is a sensible programme to use in the classroom or on your own.

Other material

Portuguese: An Essential Grammar (London, Routledge 1996) is an excellent and very well organised practical reference guide for all English-speakers interested in Portuguese, be they students in schools, universities and adult classes, or independent students. Divided into three parts, it presents an accessible description of the language with concise explanations on grammar and examples taken from Portuguese current usage in Part I; Part II deals with language functions; and Part III provides an essential Brazilian Portuguese grammar.

Gramática Activa 1 (Lisbon, Lidel 1995) and *Gramática Activa 2* (Lisbon, Lidel 1996), give a clear and well-illustrated explanation of Portuguese grammar followed by exercises. They are aimed at the elementary (Vol. 1) and intermediate (Vol. 2) general student and provide a very useful self-study text for those in need of a practical grammar. For the adult student who intends to follow a very classical approach to the Portuguese language with explanations and examples translated into English, *An Essential Course in Modern Portuguese*, (Nelson, 1984) still proves useful in despite (or perhaps because of) its dated severity of style.

Multimedia

Porto Editora and Texto Editora offer CD-ROM dictionaries (PC Windows) for Portuguese, Portuguese/English and English/Portuguese, making available to the PC user a wealth of definitions, examples and idiomatic expressions invaluable for translation or essay work in both languages. Porto Editora also

Useful contacts and homepages:

Porto Editora
Rua da Restauração, 365
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offers two very useful tools for those who need to produce written work in Portuguese: *FLIP 97 – Ferramentas para a Língua Portuguesa*, (two floppies for PC or Macintosh), provides a reasonably large spellchecker, a thesaurus and a text editor; *Fonografe* is an interactive multimedia application specially designed for foreign students to teach the phonologic and graphematical systems of the Portuguese language. *Caça às Letras* (Lidel, 1996) is also a good interactive tool to learn particularly difficult Portuguese orthography rules.

The department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies of King's College, London, integrated in King's College Computer Assisted Language Learning (KCCALL), has produced some pioneering software for the teaching of Portuguese grammar (with a special version for Brazilian Portuguese) particularly aimed at English-speaking students who want to improve their

Portuguese through interactive, autonomous and self-correcting work. The programme covers all grammar subjects, providing exercises and grammar notes with translated examples into English.


Culture in Multimedia

The available CD-ROMs demand a linguistic competence in Portuguese of an intermediate to advanced level. Porto Editora and Texto Editora provide two encyclopedias: *Diciopédia* and *Enciclopédia Universal Multimédia em Língua Portuguesa*, respectively. Besides their presentation of general knowledge, both give particular attention to Portuguese and Lusophone history, culture and current affairs. The first provides the better selection of information and a more comprehensive, exciting and user-friendly search system.

Luís de Camões and Fernando Pessoa have both made it on to CD-ROM. *Fernando Pessoa Multimédia*

is an excellent production of Texto Editora/Casa Fernando Pessoa. This original and well-designed CD does the poet full justice. Through excerpts of Pessoa's works, through videos, photographs and poems this multimedia encounter with Pessoa is both unsettling and exciting, presenting all the labyrinthine complexity of his thought and expression. The CD contains practically all of Pessoa's works, quotations from Pessoa scholars and attractive interactive games, besides offering a good range of search systems.

Vida e Obra de Luís de Camões, from Porto Editora offers an interactive study of the biography and complete works of the great epic poet. The 'library of images and sounds' takes users on a fascinating journey to the time of Camões, the golden age of sixteenth-century Portugal. Users will also find a critical bibliography and a series of didactic interactive games on the life and work of Camões.



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