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## **Brazilian Portuguese Language in the United States: Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language in Response to Students' Language Background**

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**Resumo:** Este trabalho apresenta estratégias de ensino e aprendizagem de língua portuguesa como terceira língua (L3) no sudoeste dos Estados Unidos. As estratégias empregadas em um curso de português para principiantes na University of New Mexico (UNM) são discutidas. A pesquisa baseou-se em experiência adquirida em sala de aula, usando uma abordagem colaborativa, o que permitiu melhorar o processo de ensino e de aprendizagem de língua estrangeira nos cursos elementares. O contexto de mudanças durante o processo de ensino e aprendizagem em sala de aula é discutido, mostrando a revisão da descrição e objetivos de aprendizagem do curso e, ainda, apontando a importância de considerar o perfil linguístico dos estudantes de língua portuguesa como língua estrangeira no tocante à sala de aula. Esta pesquisa representa um estudo de caso no contexto de ensino superior para aprendizes de L3 cujas línguas nativas ou L2 é espanhol ou inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** Português brasileiro nos Estados Unidos. Perfil linguístico em sala de aula de línguas estrangeiras. Ensino de L3. Língua Portuguesa na Educação Superior.

## Introduction

The importance of considering the needs of Spanish speakers in Portuguese language classrooms has been recognized in the literature (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1995; AZEVEDO, 1978; WIEDERMANN & SCARAMUCCI, 2008; MILLERET, 2008, 1992; SIMÕES, CARVALHO, & WIEDERMANN, 2004). These needs should in no way be underestimated in the teaching process due to their relevance to the improvement of both student learning and teaching strategies in the classroom. From this perspective, a revision of the curriculum design for meeting the necessities of the growing number of students of Portuguese at UNM became imperative (MILLERET & SILVEIRA, 2009). In fact, the diverse student population at most American universities and UNM reflects this trend with their large and increasing numbers of Anglo, Hispanic, Native American, and other ethnicities.

Aiming to improve its language teaching methods, the Portuguese program at UNM has developed an evaluation project that enabled the program to enter a new and fruitful phase (MILLERET & SILVEIRA, *ibid*). Among other results of this project, it became clear that taking into account the language background of the learners is pivotal for the success in achieving proficiency in the language being learned. The language background of learners has implications for instructors as well as for learners themselves and can impact the selection of materials and resources used in the classroom, thereby affecting the teaching and learning process.

This paper presents a classroom-based analysis of a teaching and learning experience of Portuguese as a foreign language in Albuquerque, the largest city in the state of New Mexico, which is in the southwestern United States. It represents a case study in a higher education context for third-language learners whose native or second language is Spanish or English. The focus of this paper is on the teaching and learning strategies used in Portuguese immersion-language courses for beginners taught at UNM. The strategies undertaken considered the linguistically responsive pedagogy of language, which considers the background of the learners. Since teaching these courses was part of the evaluation project conducted as part of the Portuguese program at UNM, some of its results are briefly outlined. The results

show a significant contribution to the teaching and learning process of Portuguese 102 courses—the second half of a first-year college-level language—and to the UNM Portuguese program as a whole. The importance of considering the linguistic background of the Portuguese language learners was confirmed through the evaluation project as well (MILLERET & SILVEIRA, 2009).

The paper is organized as follows: After this brief introduction, I begin Section 2 by distilling from the literature on L3 acquisition a small set of principles or assumptions that served as the linguistic foundation for my Portuguese language-immersion course as L3. Section 3 presents an overview of Portuguese language teaching at UNM and the creation of new elementary Portuguese languages courses in particular. It also discusses improvements made in the Portuguese 102 courses. Section 4 presents the methodology showing how the linguistic profile of the learners was taken into account in the redesign of the Portuguese 102 courses, particularly the description and learning outcomes of the courses and the teaching and learning strategies that foster learners' development of L3 language. In Section 4, conclusions are drawn.

## **2. Background: L3 Acquisition and Instruction**

Adult L3 acquisition has become of great interest to researchers and raises important theoretical and practical issues (Amaro & Flynn & Rothman, 2012). Drawing upon the study of Rivers and Golonka (2009) and those of other scholars, I briefly summarize here the main body of research that focuses on L3 acquisition, with emphasis on adult L3 acquisition and instruction.

L3 acquisition brings up theoretical issues in many areas of inquiry, such as linguistic transfer, typology, and “linguistic distance”; Universal Grammar (UG) and the Interlanguage Structural Conformity Hypothesis (ISCH); metacognition and metalinguistic awareness; and learner autonomy.

Among the special topics that researchers have focused on in relation to linguistic transfer are the concepts of cross-linguistic influence, including aspects of phonetic, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic transfer.

A large body of research has been conducted on foreign language instruction, but with L3 adult instruction, one must consider using special methods to effectively assist the learner. An agenda for research on Portuguese L3 acquisition and the challenges related to accommodating the needs of adult learners in the United States have been highlighted by CARVALHO (2002, 2006) and MILLERET (2008).

In this paper, I address the following questions: (a) How can the linguistic profiles of L3 learners be taken into account in the classroom? (b) How can these linguistic profiles influence instructors' teaching for the benefit of the student?

The teaching of Brazilian Portuguese as a foreign language for Spanish speakers has increased considerably in the United States and South America in the past few years (CARVALHO, 2002; WIEDERMANN & SCARAMUCCI, 2008; SIMÕES, CARVALHO & WIEDERMANN, 2004; MILLERET, 2012; SANTOS & SILVA, 2004). Additionally, due to its emergent economy, Brazil is seen as having a potential for business and partnerships in many areas. The status of Portuguese in the United States has expanded from that of a less-taught language to that of a critical language.

The language teaching strategies developed and applied in Portuguese 102 referred to in this paper were based on research resulting from experience in the classroom. They relied on assumptions relevant to teaching the Portuguese language as L3, and they considered the linguistic profiles of the learners.

The language learners in this course were fluent in two languages, one of which is considered to be very similar to Portuguese. When language learners are fluent in a language that is typologically similar to the target language, it is common for these learners to transfer to the new language (KECSKES & PAPP, 2000; CARVALHO, 2006). Such learners have a strong perception of the similarities of languages (L1 and L2 or L3) that are typologically close to each other (KELLERMAN, 1983). Many similarities exist in both features and lexicon in Spanish and Portuguese (ULSH, 1971; GREEN, 1988; KOIKE & PALMIERE, 2011). In fact, oral and written materials in Portuguese can be comprehended easily by most speakers of Spanish (JENSEN, 1989; HENRIQUES, 2000). This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the learners of Portuguese.

### 3. Teaching Portuguese at UNM

The teaching experience reported here is embedded in the Portuguese program at UNM. The university's enrollment data include information on the number of students with characteristics of race and ethnicity, which shows the diversity of the student population. This pattern also reflects the diverse population of students in the Portuguese courses.

The data cover the growth of enrollment for the spring semesters of 2011, 2012, and 2013. Looking at the enrollment for the three years, there is a significant number of Hispanic students that represents a larger number of minority students, but the majority of the student population is White. When one observes the number of Hispanics, one sees a growth in enrollment for the Hispanics over the three years, from 2011 to 2013: 35.61% of UNM's total enrollment in 2011, 36.79% in 2012, and 38.22% in 2013. For Whites, the enrollment percentages decline: 43.94% in 2011, 42.71% in 2012, and 40.92% in 2013. TABLE 1 shows enrollment numbers at UNM.

TABLE 1 Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2013), Source: The University of New Mexico Official Enrollment Report, spring 2013.

	Spring 2011		Spring 2012		Spring 2013	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Hispanics	9,722	35.61	10,035	36.79	10,395	38.22
African American	745	2.73	704	2.58	670	2.46
American Indian	1,527	5.59	1,482	5.43	1,523	5.60
Asian	896	3.28	892	3.27	878	3.23
Native Hawaiian	43	0.16	53	0.19	53	0.19
White	11,999	43.94	11,651	42.71	11,128	40.92
Foreign	912	3.34	945	3.46	988	3.63
No response	1,045	3.83	939	3.44	857	3.15
Two or more	416	1.52	577	2.12	705	2.59
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,305</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27,278</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27,197</b>	<b>100</b>

The process of designing and teaching two new elementary courses in the Portuguese language program at UNM led to the consideration of how important it is that course-learning outcomes consider the linguistic profile of the learners as experienced in designing and teaching the courses, and how they respond effectively

to teaching. The courses had different learning outcomes. Portuguese 102 was designed to meet Spanish speakers' needs.

During the development of the evaluation project, the Portuguese program at UNM launched a discussion about the importance of making changes in the curriculum of courses offered for beginners. A new phase came about, especially in 2007.

The Portuguese language program took a new direction after an analysis of the student population's interest in learning Portuguese through focus groups and a student survey to discover what students' needs might be.

I believe this survey to be significantly representative of the momentum of the new courses as these courses were in their experimental phase. It was a time to revise the methodology and selection of teaching materials and resources for teaching Portuguese while building on the linguistic background of the learners for guiding the learning and teaching process. We, as instructors, became engaged and were supportive of the idea of an evaluation/survey. We gave inputs from our teaching practices directly from the classroom. We also supported the survey by informing and reminding our students of the dates they were to meet with the researcher in charge of this part of the evaluation project. The survey had the following goals:

- Determine how to increase enrollments.
- Improve student satisfaction.
- Promote program growth.

The survey was conducted at the end of the semester in Portuguese classes selected in the survey at UNM. In fact, conducting surveys "is a useful practice that provides both instructors and students with the opportunity to reflect on the program and, when appropriate, engage in making meaningful changes" (MILLERET, 2008:1).

As an instructor of Portuguese courses at UNM, I became engaged and committed to adjusting the curriculum of elementary Portuguese to meet students' needs as part of the design of the learning outcome of the course, with supervision

from Dr. Margo Milleret. I participated in the pioneering phase of creation and teaching of the two elementary courses, Portuguese 101 and Portuguese 102. This was a great opportunity for me to reflect on the role of the instructor in the process of teaching Portuguese in such a diverse U.S. context and also on to what extent the instructor's pedagogy can be challenged in ways such as:

- Proposing meaningful ways for adjusting the goals and the learning outcomes of the courses.
- Selecting instructional materials for reaching adequate learning outcomes.
- Developing teaching activities to effective learning.

This paper focuses on the meaningful ways we pursued during teaching and learning process in two semesters of elementary Portuguese courses so that course goals and the learning outcomes could be adjusted to fit a properly elementary Portuguese courses tailored for the student population they were designed for.

A timeline of the Portuguese program shows its trajectory and the positive impact of the evaluation project in the Portuguese program at UNM. The results of the survey unveil elements that were responsible for bringing significant changes to the program (See MILLERET & SILVEIRA, 2009 for a detailed account of the survey). As the new elementary courses were proposed, the program enhanced the status of Portuguese among the foreign language courses offered at UNM as part of the core curriculum. In addition, increased importance was given to the linguistic profiles of the learners of Portuguese in the classroom of the elementary courses and to how the identification of such profiles can be intrinsically related to the appropriate design of course outcomes. These changes are correlated with attempts to provide pedagogical interventions for third-language learners.

As a result of the evaluation, UNM's elementary Portuguese courses now are offered on a regular basis and have been part of the Portuguese program since then. Additionally, the lessons learned from the survey became part of the ongoing practice of the Portuguese program. As pointed out by MILLERET & SILVEIRA (2009:73), "[a]s new students and new graduate teaching assistants enter the program they are



introduced to the culture of evaluation and curriculum development.” It is envisioned the possibility of going beyond the beginning language classes and applying the tools and techniques learned through this evaluation project in order to develop new graduate-level courses in the Portuguese program. The researchers’ words on the survey results emphasize that

[f]rom the standpoint of the evaluation team, this endeavor has been successful in moving the program into a more visible and active whole within the area of Latin American Studies. For the first time in some years, Portuguese has been able to generate greater interest in its courses, higher enrollments, and a sense of accomplishment in regard to the quality of instruction and learning in the classroom” (MILLERET & SILVEIRA, 2009, p.73).

#### **4. Methodology**

New beginners’ courses were created and began in the fall of 2007–Portuguese 101 and Portuguese 102. Here, I focus on the classroom environment of Portuguese 102 course I taught to show a critical component for teaching and learning processes inside and outside the classroom, which are the linguistic profiles of language learners. In this particular case, Portuguese learners in this classroom were L3 learners and they were Spanish speakers as first-language and/or second-language learners. The courses goal and learning outcomes, along with the methods developed and applied incorporated this linguistic profile, considering Spanish language for the benefit of the students’ learning experience of Portuguese.

The first time Portuguese 102 was offered at UNM; it served as a core curriculum course and was designed for beginners. It was not taught using Spanish explicitly in the classroom but included fast-paced time instruction for three hours a week. The course was inspired by the design of Portuguese 275. The difference between Portuguese 275 and Portuguese 102 was basically about content and time length. Portuguese 102 covered the same content but in a shorter time, on a more intensive basis. Because Portuguese 102 was a pilot project within the Portuguese program, the result of the survey points to a need to improve the learning outcomes of the course, because the learners did not perceive the relationship between the



learning outcomes and the amount of teaching and learning materials they experienced in the classroom; these students nevertheless believed the course taught them a lot and that it was the right one for them. The second time Portuguese 102 was offered, in the fall of 2008, comparisons with Spanish were made explicit as part of the teaching-learning experience. Spanish was explicit in the goals, learning outcomes, and the quantity of teaching and learning materials the students experienced in the classroom; these students nevertheless believed the course taught them a lot and that it was the right one for them. The midterm evaluation that I prepared, administered, and collected represented a great opportunity for the course for engaging the students more. The questionnaire asked the student to comment and express their perspectives on the course for the betterment of teaching and learning. The students responded to an anonymous format midterm evaluation.

The instructor was conscious of the Portuguese language learners' language background and considered the relevance of responding to this particularity of the classroom: the awareness of the instructor about the teaching and learning process to be suitable to the language background of the students. It was recognized how the metalinguistic awareness of the learners could impact positively the teaching and learning process.

Learning could benefit by the students taking seriously how the building process of learners takes place during their experience in a language classroom setting. Moreover, engaging and challenging students in their own learning process through a collaborative approach allows students to improve their achievement. In the following, I present the language background of the learners in Portuguese 102 class.

#### **4.1. Linguistic Profile of the Portuguese learners for Portuguese 102**

The Portuguese 102 courses at UNM can be characterized as manifesting a classroom setting where a linguistic profile of the student population showed that 99% of the students as speakers of English as a native language and of Spanish as a second language. Some of these students had been exposed to Portuguese

previously or had studied the language. Also, there were few native speakers of Spanish from other Latin American countries, and these speakers were highly proficient in English. The TABLE 2 below shows a summary of the profiles of the students in the Portuguese classes.

TABLE 2: Linguistic Profile – Portuguese 102

<b>Language (s) informed by the Portuguese learners</b>	<b>%</b>
High proficiency in Spanish (L2); English (L1)	3
Spanish as heritage language (L2); English (L1)	94
Spanish as native (L1), speakers of Mexico; English (L2)	1
Low proficiency of Spanish (L2); English (L1)	2
Total	100

#### **4.2. From implicit to explicit use of Spanish in the Portuguese immersion courses**

The notion of implicit referring to the lack of considering the Spanish language as part of the Portuguese immersion course can be understood here as equated with the notion of an implicit curriculum as defined by Eisner (2002). Implicit curriculum also is understood as a latent curriculum, a covert curriculum, or a hidden curriculum. All three show that there are ideas and attitudes that are communicated in teaching in a latent way or in a subtle way inside or outside the classroom. These transmitted ideas can play an important role as the explicit curriculum or teaching activities.

Because the implicit curriculum plays an important role, we considered Spanish in both courses—as implicit and as explicit in the learning outcomes—since this language seemed to influence the performance of students in their process of pursuing proficiency in Portuguese. The overt presence of Spanish in the learning outcomes represented progress toward relying upon this language for benefitting the teaching and learning process.

Spanish appears as an explicit curriculum in Portuguese 102 the second time it was offered. From implicit to explicit curriculum, Portuguese 102 became supplemented by materials that aimed at enriching the course and expanding the learning experience of Portuguese as L3 learners. Spanish became explicit in the classroom to strengthen the metalinguistic awareness of the learners. Since Portuguese 102 is an immersed course, the practice of Portuguese was encouraged. The benefit of speaking Spanish seemed to correlate to a high level of metalinguistic awareness.

Box 1 Description of Portuguese 102 – 002 Elementary Portuguese II (3 credit hours)

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Portuguese 102 is designed to introduce the Portuguese language and develop elementary language skills in listening/speaking and reading/writing for speaker of Spanish (heritage/native or second learners). **The class utilizes knowledge of Spanish for comparison of similarities and differences between the Spanish and Portuguese in order to build Portuguese language skills in everyday situations.** In this course the students will be able to develop their abilities to communicate in Portuguese in an interactive class with engaging ‘hands-on’ activities. This course will also focus on the culture of Portuguese-speaking countries, especially Brazil, and how it relates to that of the students’. The course requires regular classroom participation and approximately two hours of outside preparation for every hour of class. This is an immersion-based Portuguese class – conducted mostly in Portuguese through the practice of communicative activities and use of grammar in real-world scenarios.

The course was redesigned: Spanish language played a new role, from implicit to explicit, in the course description and the learning outcomes in the course offered for the second time. Although both were taught as immersion Portuguese courses, having Spanish more explicit seemed to help students develop more awareness of the learning process, improve students’ performance in the classroom, and to help

them to overcome their tendency to assume the similarities between languages to be straightforward; this can mislead them to take for granted the meaning of words, clauses, and/or sentences pronounced similarly but not the same, because even the same words and related meanings have a contextual basis. The outcomes of Portuguese 102 included Spanish, as can be seen in Box 2.

Box 2 Outcomes of Portuguese 102 – 002 Elementary Portuguese II (3 credit hours)

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At the end of the course, students will be able to:

1-Describe persons, animals, objects and places involving a variety of cultural contexts and grammar in real-world scenarios (e.g., university, friendship, entertaining, family, housing, sports, shopping, and traditions) of the Portuguese-speaking world, especially Brazil.

2- Express preferences and opinions about university, housing, sports and shopping through real-world scenarios in context of Brazil for enhancing appreciation and respect for diverse cultures.

3- Construct questions and answers for communicating and acting in real-world scenarios

4- **Compare Spanish and Portuguese in their similarities and differences for**

In summary, the first time Portuguese 102 was offered at UNM; it served the core curriculum, was the continuation of Portuguese 101, and was intensive. Spanish was implicit in the course description and learning outcomes. The second time it was offered, Spanish was made explicit both in the course description and the learning outcomes. Portuguese 102 was an immersion Portuguese language course that considered the linguistic profile of the learners. By the second time, there was a change in relation to how to treat Spanish language in the teaching and learning processes: making Spanish not only explicit in the course description and learning outcomes but also to teach students strategies that could foster their learning process, matching it to the lesson plans, and activities assigned in the classroom and outside it.

## **4.2 Some strategies developed in the classroom**

Having described the relevance that the Spanish language use had in the course description and learning outcomes, now I will move to describe what I did in the classroom that benefitted the students' learning.

The learning experience was enriched by the collaborative approach held by the instructor. The instructor encouraged the students to make efforts toward developing their metalinguistic awareness to play a critical part on the students' reflection of their own learning process. Throughout the Portuguese practice in classroom, the students were encourage to pay attention in their own process of practicing Portuguese in their assigned activities.

The students and teachers agreed to practice monitoring in relation to the transfer from Spanish to the target language: Portuguese. The students were interested in performing good Portuguese and wanted to make efforts toward high performance inside and outside of the classroom. Because the classroom was a collaborative scenario, students became comfortable with being monitored by the instructor and monitoring themselves. In the class, we agreed that the peers shall monitor so that undesirable linguistic behavior can be avoided. The students believe that some tendencies they observed in their linguistic behavior could not be repeated if they were "errors."

The course had an interactive and dialogic format that helped its dynamic development. The students were offered materials beyond the rich textbook to which they already were exposed. Other materials were selected to give the opportunity to students to not only intensively practice Portuguese in the class but also to have an opportunity to develop learning skills that promoted their previous linguistic knowledge in a typologically similar language to the target language. Materials about accessible texts comparing Spanish and Portuguese were made available as an electronic resource.

We created strategies of monitoring both languages by the instructor, by each student (their own monitoring), and by the students monitoring their peers. The

material for allowing comparison of Spanish with Portuguese was made available as a PDF format. The material served to encourage students to examine their own knowledge in their previous languages. Even focusing on Spanish, the course allowed for discussion on other languages that the learners and instructor knew. By encouraging the students to inquire about the language forms and meanings, students could be called attention to observe both languages, Spanish and Portuguese. Doing this type of activities helped to demystify that a Spanish speaker can pick up anything in Portuguese, just because of so many similarities. Students were alerted that each language has its own forms and meanings in the use of the language and that their previous knowledge should be tailored properly for the students' benefits. So, students asked for clarification and compared Spanish and Portuguese, and the course was an environment for practicing Portuguese language uses in different scenarios for achieving a level of proficiency as beginners.

Comparison was done when students seemed not have understood a word or sentences. Students were encouraged to develop the comparison that could enhance their learning. One example of comparison was about "me gusta" instead of "eu gosto de." A student wanted to share that in practicing a dialogue, because everybody was monitoring when Spanish appeared in the class she felt she was improving on avoiding conjugating the verb the way and sometimes she does not even realize. Other verbal practice refer to the use of the preposition "a" of Spanish after the use of the verb "ir" as an auxiliary, such as instead of saying "vou trabalhar," this preposition is inserted and the result is "vou a trabalhar." A student commented his good progress in avoiding such linguistic behavior.

There are implications for instructors, learners, curriculum design, selection of material, and resources. The teaching and learning activities presented aimed at correlating what a class with Spanish learners can be; many aspects can be pointed out.

Speakers of Spanish can transfer their knowledge of Spanish from the first day of class. This can happen and reflects students' perception mainly of the similarities of the two languages. Spanish speakers are able to quickly understand oral and

written materials, so in this regard activities proposed and implemented enhanced all these skills.

Spanish learners have an advantage, but the transfers they make also can be “errors” that must be taken seriously in the teaching and learning process. Evidence of misunderstanding is valuable to teachers in general—not a mere mistake to be corrected. And in foreign language teaching and learning, an error is something instructors and learners deal with constantly. An error can signify an attempt and plausible but unsuccessful transfer. The challenge is to deal with such efforts on the part of the student without reinforcing the mistake or discouraging future transfer attempts. In this regard, applications in the classroom should consider pedagogical intervention of all these aspects so that students have a chance to develop a strong awareness of their own learning process and, at the same time, benefit from monitoring themselves and helping their peers.

## **Conclusion**

This paper showed the teaching and learning strategies as tools and abilities developed in a collaborative approach to Portuguese language-immersion courses for beginners at the University of New Mexico. By the description of the classroom experience, I demonstrated that linguistic profiles of L3 learners can be addressed properly for the benefit of learning process. The learners were challenged to develop metalinguistic awareness and to be engaged in activities that enhanced their previous knowledge of languages in a way that benefited learning.

The contribution of this study can be recognition of the fact that it brought experiences from the classroom to the methods and strategies employed. One of the strategies included considering the metalinguistic awareness of the learner while practicing the Portuguese language and developing a way of monitoring each one’s use of Portuguese in the classroom.

More importantly, this study demonstrated that students can be taught strategies and can practice those strategies while building their knowledge in the new



language the student is learning as L3. I also showed how linguistic profiles influence instructors' teaching for the benefit of their students.

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**Abstract:** This paper presents strategies for teaching and learning Portuguese as a third language (L3) in the United States, particularly strategies employed in a Portuguese language course for beginners at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque, NM. The research, based on experience in the classroom, used a collaborative approach that led to an improvement in the process of teaching and learning of a foreign language in elementary courses. The redesign of the course was discussed in relation to the revision of the description and learning outcomes of the course, showing the importance of considering the linguistic profile (i.e., language background) of learners in a foreign language classroom. This research represents a case study in a higher education context for L3 learners whose native or L2 language is Spanish or English.

**Key words:** Brazilian Portuguese in the United States. Linguistic profile. L3 language teaching. Portuguese language in higher education

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