

# Portuguese Language

Portuguese language, member of the Romance group of the Italic subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages (see [Romance languages](#)). It is the mother tongue of about 170 million people, chiefly in Portugal and the Portuguese islands in the Atlantic (11 million speakers); in Brazil (154 million speakers); and in Portugal's former overseas provinces in Africa and Asia (about 5 million speakers). Although the Portuguese spoken in Portugal differs to some extent from the Portuguese current in Brazil, with reference to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, the differences are not major. A distinctive phonetic feature of Portuguese is the nasalization of certain vowels and diphthongs, which can be indicated by a *tilde* (~) placed above the appropriate vowel. The acute (´) and circumflex (^) accents serve to make clear both stress and pronunciation and also to distinguish homonyms (for example, *e* and, but *é* is). The grave accent (`) is a guide to pronunciation. It can also indicate a contraction, as in *às*, which is a combination of *a* to and *as* the (feminine plural). A *c* with a cedilla (ç) is pronounced like *c* in English *place* when used before the vowels *a*, *o*, and *u*. As in Spanish, there are two forms of the verb to be: *ser*, which denotes a comparatively permanent state and which also precedes a predicate noun, and *estar*, which denotes a comparatively temporary condition. Again like Spanish, Portuguese tends to use reflexive verbs instead of the passive voice. Historically, Portuguese, which developed from the Vulgar Latin (see [Latin language](#)) brought to the Iberian Peninsula by its Roman conquerors, could be distinguished from the parent tongue before the 11th cent. The Portuguese spoken in Lisbon and Coimbra gave rise to the Standard Portuguese of today. Although the greater part of the Portuguese vocabulary comes from Latin, a number of words have also been absorbed from Arabic, French, and Italian, and also from some of the indigenous South American and African languages.

See W. J. Entwistle, *The Spanish Language, Together with Portuguese, Catalan and Basque* (2d ed. 1962); E. B. Williams, *From Latin to Portuguese* (2d ed. 1962); M. E. de Alvelos Naar, *Colloquial Portuguese* (1968); J. M. Câmara, *The Portuguese Language* (tr. 1972).