

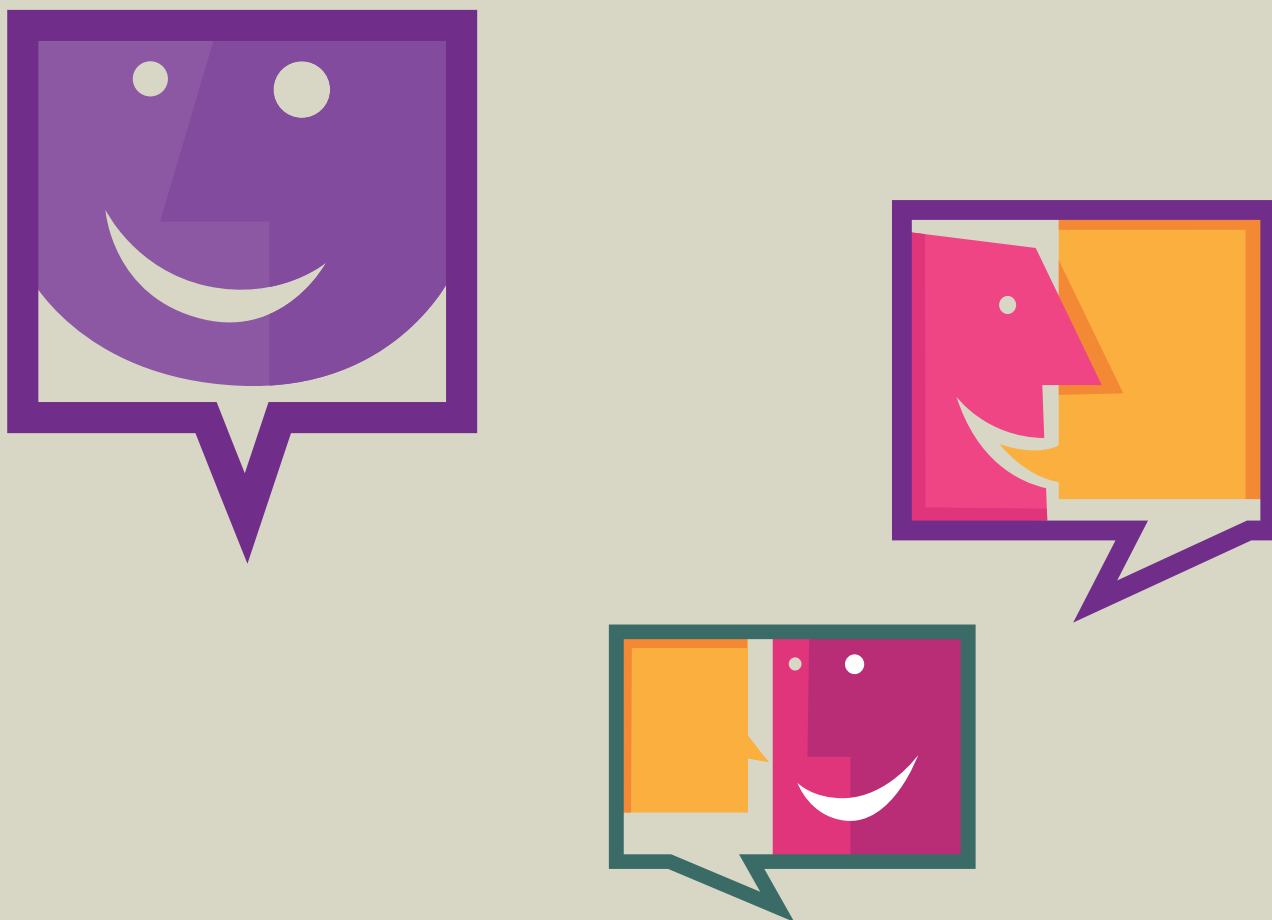


## Learning Portuguese is Fun

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Being a Chinese resident in Macao, I find that learning a foreign language, like Portuguese, is quite difficult but not unachievable. As a self-learner of the Portuguese language, I would like to share my experience of overcoming the challenges throughout the language-learning process. I will discuss what first motivated me to acquire this new language and the methods and tools I have used to build up the language skills.

***For survival.*** I enrolled in a community college in the United States during the pre-Internet era. When applying to the university of my first choice, I had to fill out an application form, listing all the schools I had attended since grade one. Not knowing the spelling of the name of my primary school, Colégio Mateus Ricci (Primary Section), I hastily wrote Lee Ma Tau, the Chinese



translation instead. My application was rejected due to the inconsistency of the school name to the real one. That was how I first came up with the idea of learning Portuguese.

During my lecturership at a local higher education institute, a large proportion of my class consisted of Macanese students of Eurasian ancestry. At first, I did not even know how to pronounce their names: António, Jesus, João, Sofia, etc. I simply pronounced them as if they were English names. But I quickly realized that this could be embarrassing and disrespectful to the owners.

**Cultural understanding and enrichment.** Learning the Portuguese language can enrich my cultural experiences and arouse my awareness of the cultural differences between the East and the

West. I am fond of the subject History and Civilization with particular interest in local history. And, to do well in this subject, I need to have good Portuguese competence.

**Generating new inspirations.** Some people may think that Portuguese is a dead language in Macao, but this is not true. On the contrary, it is a beautiful language. Many non-native speakers here devote their time to promoting this language in the region and beyond, not simply for a living, but also for the wellbeing of mankind. It is the cultural qualities that attract me the most, and the language has helped inspire me especially to generate new ideas and see things from different angles.



Thus highly motivated for the learning, I am intent on overcoming the obstacles throughout the process. Without attending formal Portuguese courses, I use a mixed approach to acquire the basic knowledge of the language.

**Bilingual texts.** There are plenty of bilingual texts available in the public areas of Macao. They are in use on road signs, billboards, posters, and even in official forms. In fact, the bilingualism has greatly helped me achieve a better understanding of the city's blended culture. For instance, in Old Taipa Village, there is a short alley officially known as Travessa das Bruxas. While the word “bruxas” means witches in Portuguese, the Chinese version of the street name is literally known as “fairy maidens’ alley” (仙女巷). I have thus come to know that the same name in Portuguese may differ in meaning when expressed in Chinese.

**On television.** I often watch TV news on the Chinese channel. Having already known the news stories, I then watch a selected episode or two of the TV news on the local Portuguese channel. This comparative approach often helps me acquire some spoken words or phrases used in the Portuguese news report.

**Web resources.** In addition, there are a handful of free resources on the Web that can facilitate the acquisition of the essence of the

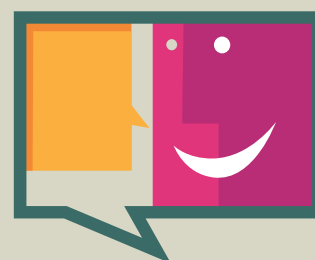


Portuguese language. Linguee is an excellent Portuguese-English online dictionary, which enables the readers to even listen to the pronunciation of all the words. Iao Dicionário, on the other hand, is a great online tool as a Chinese-Portuguese dictionary. Last but not least, Conjugate Me provides the conjugation table for all the verbs, of which the tenses are far more complicated than those of the English language.

Our knowledge of English is advantageous to Portuguese language acquisition, especially where sentence structures are concerned. The two languages, nevertheless, are dissimilar in many noticeable

ways even for beginners. Key features are compared and contrasted in a summarized table as follows:

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	REMARK
Pronunciation not easily predictable	Pronunciation highly predictable	One will be able to read unseen texts in Portuguese upon mastery of basic pronunciation rules of syllabi.
You (singular) is a second-person pronoun.	Tu is a second-person pronoun, whereas você is a third-person pronoun.	Tu – you (familiar, informal); Você – you (formal)
our show my suitcases	o nosso espectáculo as minhas malas	Extensive use of the definite articles o(s)/a(s)
It is 9:30 a.m.	São 9 horas e meia da manhã.	Plural verb “to be” used to express time
It is 1:00 p.m.	É uma hora da tarde.	Singular verb “to be” used to express time
Program, city, block, kiosk, photograph, April	Programa, cidade, bloco, quiosque, fotografia, Abril	Similarity in spellings



On the other hand, there are many false friends between the two languages. For example, the Portuguese word *parente*, which could be mistakenly interpreted as “parent” at the first glance, is actually equivalent to “relative” (noun) in English. Moreover, the phrasal verb “*assistir a*”, which is quite close in spelling to the English word *assist*, means to watch or to attend, and has nothing to do with offering help. Therefore, beginners have to learn to identify the false friends between the two languages by making use of a good dictionary.

Though a self-learner, I am not alone when I need help. I feel grateful that numerous friends and mentors provide me with guidance to gradually improve my language skills. My acquired knowledge in basic vocabulary and grammar rules has allowed me to communicate effectively in written Portuguese, from which I derive great fun. I regard myself as an advanced beginner, and there is still a long way ahead in my pursuit of good Portuguese competence.

**For the Portuguese-English dictionary with pronunciation:**

[www.linguee.pt/](http://www.linguee.pt/)

**For the Chinese-Portuguese bilingual dictionary:**

[www.iao-dicionario.com/](http://www.iao-dicionario.com/)

**For the conjugation of verbs:**

[www.conjuga-me.net](http://www.conjuga-me.net)

