
PREFACE

Portuguese is a world language with approximately 258 million speakers, of which 232 million are first language speakers. It is the official language in nine countries: Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor. According to data presented on the Statista portal in 2021, Portuguese is the ninth most spoken language in the world and the sixth most common on the internet.

The spread of Portuguese is the result of territorial and linguistic colonization, but it is also the product of linguistic and educational policies implemented by colonial and post-colonial governments in the four continents where the language evolved in different ways. One of the consequences of the above-mentioned policies is that the idealized linguistic norm in many of the regions that are called “lusophone” is the European standard norm, or, in the case of Brazil, a norm that does not have European Portuguese as a specific target, but that has been strongly influenced by a conservative view of language. Such a view tends to devalue the specific linguistic characteristics present in countless regional and social varieties, but absent from the standard European norm.

In recent decades, the study of variation has played a central role in the field of Linguistics and this has brought forward the assumption that all languages are

inherently variable, and that variation is generally systematic and orderly – both in the speech community and at the individual level (Weinreich; Labov; Herzog, 1968). Scholars nowadays understand that variation is the result of processes that can be explained by both linguistic and extralinguistic factors. At the same time, regional differences can represent diverse stages in the evolution or grammaticalization of linguistic forms. As in the case of the so-called World Englishes, researchers who focus on the study of varieties of Portuguese have been exploring the idea of a continuum – which includes a range of national, regional and social varieties, as well as second-language varieties (Álvarez & Avelar, 2018; Mesthrie; Bhatt, 2008; Schneider, 2007).

In 2019, Vanessa Meireles, associate professor at Université Paul Valéry, and Marcia dos Santos Machado Vieira, associate professor at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, initiated the international research project *VariaR – Variation in Romance Languages*, from which the present volume emerges. The project explores a range of varieties of Portuguese. The research group has already organized international colloquia and seminars with the main purpose of encouraging collaboration between researchers who have in common the objective of studying variation and change in the Portuguese-speaking world. Their research outputs contribute to the description and analysis of variable phenomena in both the phonetic-phonological and morphosyntactic levels, including the comparison of Portuguese with other Romance languages.

VariaR is an innovative project in the sense that it is situated at a crossroads between research on intralinguistic variation observed in Portuguese varieties and comparisons with other Romance languages. Furthermore, researchers articulate various branches of linguistics by describing variation based on empirical data to explain its causes at different levels of linguistic analysis. By systematically contrasting a wide range of varieties, the collaboration that has been developing within this project has the potential to encourage methodological and theoretical rigor in research. The questions addressed by the project's participants will undoubtedly contribute to shed light on specific questions about the respective varieties, but might also explore more general questions, such as: To what extent are the patterns of variation shared between the varieties of Portuguese and/or varieties of other Romance languages? Are regional differences random or can they be explained by type of variety (e.g., first *versus* second-language varieties in multilingual contexts)? We hope that the digital format and summaries in different languages will facilitate the dissemination of the project's results and further stimulate the development of collective work on a topic of high relevance, both for studies about

Portuguese – in all its varieties – as well as for understanding the mechanisms that lead to processes of linguistic variation and change in any language.

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