

PORTUGUESE

Portuguese is a Romance language that originated in what is now Galicia (Spain) and northern Portugal. It is derived from the Latin spoken by the romanized Pre-Roman peoples of the Iberian Peninsula (namely the Gallaeci, the Lusitanians, the Celtici and the Conii) around 2000 years ago. It spread worldwide in the 15th and 16th centuries as Portugal established a colonial and commercial empire (1415–1999) which spanned from Brazil in the Americas to Goa and other parts of India and Macau in China. Portuguese was used as the exclusive lingua franca on the island of Sri Lanka for almost 350 years. During that time, many creole languages based on Portuguese also appeared around the world, especially in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Today it is one of the world's major languages, ranked 6th according to number of native speakers (approximately 240 million). It is the language of about half of South America, even though Brazil is the only Portuguese-speaking nation in the Americas. Miguel de Cervantes, a Spanish author once called Portuguese "the sweet language", while Brazilian writer Olavo Bilac poetically described it as *a última flor do Lácio, inculta e bela*: "the last flower of Latium, wild and beautiful".

Today, Portuguese is the official language of Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Portugal, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique. It is also one of the official languages of Equatorial Guinea (with Spanish and French), the Chinese special administrative region of Macau (with Chinese), and East Timor, (with Tetum). It is a native language of most of the population in Portugal (100%), Brazil (99%), São Tomé and Príncipe (95%) and Angola (60%), and is the most widely spoken language in Mozambique (40%), though only 6.5% are native speakers. No data is available for Cape Verde, but almost all the population is bilingual, and the monolingual population speaks Cape Verdean Creole.

In some parts of India, such as Goa and Daman and Diu Portuguese is still spoken.

There is a growing number of people in the Portuguese speaking media and the internet who are presenting the case to run a debate in the Lusophone community with the purpose of bringing forward a petition to make Portuguese an official language of the United Nations.