

# Adapting MAIN to European Portuguese

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This paper presents the adaptation and translation of the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN) to European Portuguese, addressing the need for linguistically and culturally relevant assessment tools in Portuguese-speaking contexts. Following an overview of European Portuguese and its unique linguistic features, we examine key distinctions from Brazilian Portuguese, to which MAIN had previously been adapted. We outline the adaptation process, which involved translation and expert review to ensure the instrument reads naturally for European Portuguese speakers and resonates with familiar linguistic patterns. This adaptation is essential for accurately assessing language abilities in multilingual and heritage language settings, where linguistic diversity can impact children's comprehension and engagement. Finally, we discuss the implications of providing separate European and Brazilian Portuguese versions of MAIN, emphasizing the importance of tailored language assessments that respect the distinct identities and linguistic experiences of Portuguese-speaking children.

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## 1 Introduction

Portuguese is a Romance language spoken on four continents – Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. European Portuguese (EP) is to be distinguished from Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and other varieties such as Portuguese spoken in Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor, and Macau, which each represent their own language community due to their distant geographical location, surrounding contact languages and contemporary history. Portuguese is thus understood as a pluricentric language. However, it has two ‘normative centres’ – Brazil and Portugal (Endruschat & Schmidt-Radefeldt, 2006, p. 232). The Portuguese language spoken in African and Asian countries is more closely aligned

with European Portuguese than with Brazilian Portuguese. This is partly due to Brazil's earlier emancipation, accompanied by formal independence since 1822. Thus, the direct influence of European Portuguese was present in the former colonies for almost 150 years longer. But there are efforts of unification: In 2009, the orthographic reform, which was already drafted in 1990, was ratified (with modifications) in all Portuguese-speaking countries (apart from Angola) with the aim of standardizing spelling. Fiorin (2009) argues that this reform was politically motivated. It was an attempt to bind the Portuguese-speaking countries together and to strengthen their political, cultural and linguistic identity. (Among other things, because this is not possible in any other form, for example in the areas of migration and economy, due to the different supranational alliances to which the various countries belong). In this respect, the spelling reform as a convention is the only linguistic means of binding the countries. The linguistic autonomy of the countries is not called into question by this. This is because phonology, grammar and lexis are determined by the specific composition of the populations and therefore cannot be standardised. This is why we consider it so important to adapt MAIN to European Portuguese, as we will try to demonstrate in Sections 3 and 4 (where we compare the Brazilian version with our proposal), after a short description of the most important traits of European Portuguese (Section 2).

## 2 A short description of European Portuguese

The 10.1 million inhabitants of Portugal represent only a fraction of a total of over 280 million speakers with Portuguese as their first or second language. Within Portugal, although European Portuguese (EP) is the predominant variety, there are also speakers of other Portuguese varieties, largely due to immigration from countries where Portuguese is an official language. The linguistic landscape thus includes not only EP but also shows influences from other Portuguese-speaking communities, such as those from Brazil, Angola, and Cape Verde. This diversity highlights a complex dynamic in which speakers may adopt elements of EP when in public settings, although the degree of linguistic adaptation may vary. In linguistic terms, EP is largely homogeneous (Holtus, 1999, p. 45) – encompassing regional dialects and accents which differ from each other especially regarding phonology and lexic. A distinction is made between the dialects in the northern part of the country (*setentrionais* 'septentrional') and other dialects that are geographically located centrally around the Coimbra area and further south (*centro-meridionais* 'central meridional'). Different dialects also exist in the Azores and Madeira (*insulares* 'insular').

Portuguese is an inflectional language: nouns, verbs, adjectives, articles, and pronouns are inflected for declination, conjugation and comparison (Endruschat & Schmidt-Radefeldt, 2006, p. 104). Two peculiarities are particularly interesting. The first concerns the subjunctive future tense, which is not only used in conditional sentences (e.g., *Se for possível, venho amanhã* 'If it should be possible, I will come tomorrow'), but also after conjunctions that concern the future, such as *quando* (e.g., *Quando eu chegar a casa tomo logo um duche* 'As soon as I get home, I will take a shower', and *como* (e.g., *Faz como quiseres* 'Do as you like'). It can also be used in relative clauses in which statements are made about the future (e.g., *Podemos ir para onde quisermos* 'We can go wherever we want').

The second is the personal/inflected infinitive. Herget and Proschwitz (2009) consider this phenomenon to be a paradox, at least for German native speakers, since according to the use of basic grammatical terms, a verb form is either in the infinitive or conjugated. They claim that both at the same time are not possible, neither in the Germanic languages nor in the other Romance languages (ibid.). Endruschat and Schmidt-Radefeldt (2006, p. 107) highlight that when using the inflected infinitive, regular verbs are conjugated in the same way as the future subjunctive, but irregular ones are not. The inflected infinitive is used to clarify syntactic connections and to emphasize the personal facet of the utterance when for example a subordinate clause with a conjunction is omitted, as in *É importante estudarmos para o exame* ‘It is important for us to study for the exam’ vs. *É importante estudar para o exame* ‘It is important to study for the exam’.

Portuguese also uses grammatical gender extensively, with nouns and pronouns classified as either masculine or feminine. Adjectives and articles agree with the gender of the nouns they modify, adding an extra layer of grammatical inflection. For instance, *o livro* ‘the book’ (masculine) contrasts with *a casa* ‘the house’ (feminine), and this gender distinction affects the form of both definite (*o, a*) and indefinite (*um, uma*) articles. Pluralization also impacts article-noun agreement, as in *os livros* ‘the books’ and *as casas* ‘the houses’.

In terms of sentence structure, Portuguese is generally an SVO language, although rearrangements of the clauses are common in cases of negation or interrogative pronouns. As a pro-drop language, Portuguese allows for one-word sentences that imply an unstated subject, as seen in *Chove* ‘It is raining’ and *Acabou* ‘It is over’ (Endruschat & Schmidt-Radefeldt, 2006, p. 112). Because Portuguese is a null-subject language, subjectless utterances such as *Canta* ‘He sings’ can also be considered grammatically complete sentences (ibid., p. 117).

### 3 Why translate MAIN to European Portuguese?

Firstly, and according to official statistics, more than 5 million Portuguese have emigrated in the last 60 years and are living in another country, most of them in European countries, such as Germany, France, and Spain (Gabinete do Secretário de Estado das Comunidades Portuguesas, 2021). The Portuguese-speaking children living in a host country may represent first generation emigrants (who have recently migrated), second generation emigrants (sons or daughters of people that have migrated) or third generation ones (grandsons or granddaughters of migrants). For the children in the second and third generation, the Portuguese language assumes the status of a heritage language (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2023), with significant influences from the host country’s language. These children often are educated in multicultural settings, growing up with several languages in contact (idem).

There are few existing studies on European Portuguese usage as a Heritage Language in European primary school children, and these focus on specific phenomena: Rinke, Flores and Barbosa (2018) analysed null objects, Flores and Barbosa (2014) concentrated on the acquisition of clitics and Santos and Flores (2013) on verb phrase ellipsis. A comprehensive study of narrative skills in primary school children, as elaborated by the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN; Gagarina et al., 2019) (observing the linguistic

phenomena (use of macro- and microstructures, transfer etc.) in plurilingual children while story telling) does not yet exist.

However, and taking into account both the Brazilian diaspora living and being educated in Europe and the similarity between EP and BP, it is fundamental to capacitate teachers, researchers and pupils regarding the unique features of each language, in order to: a) value the cultural and linguistic background of the learners, b) raise awareness towards that differences and c) respect the linguistic and cultural diversity in educational contexts.

#### **4 Adapting MAIN to European Portuguese and differences to Brazilian Portuguese**

The adaptation of MAIN to European Portuguese was based on the revised version (Gagarina et al., 2019). To ensure linguistic and cultural relevance, this adaptation process closely followed the structure and principles established in previous adaptations, particularly the Brazilian Portuguese version. The German version of MAIN was also consulted to facilitate cross-linguistic consistency. The adaptation process involved several stages, including translation, and expert review. Native European Portuguese speakers with expertise in child language acquisition translated the instrument, with a focus on creating a text that reads naturally for European Portuguese speakers. Special attention was given to idiomatic expressions and formulations that would resonate with children and feel authentic to native speakers, ensuring the text feels like an EP original that recalls familiar linguistic patterns from childhood. A panel of linguists and educators then reviewed the adapted materials to assess their cultural and linguistic authenticity, addressing any ambiguities or inconsistencies through iterative feedback sessions. This methodology aligns with the approaches used in recent adaptations (see *ZAS Papers in Linguistics*, Vols. 64 and 65).

Given the unique linguistic characteristics of European and Brazilian Portuguese, having separate versions of MAIN is essential for ensuring accurate and meaningful assessments. Although it may appear redundant to create two Portuguese versions, each variety exhibits distinctive phonological, syntactic, and lexical traits that impact children's comprehension and response to language tasks. This distinction is particularly important in Portugal, where a significant Brazilian immigrant population contributes to the linguistic diversity of the Portuguese-speaking community. According to the SEF – Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (now renamed to AIMA – Portuguese Agency for Integration Migration and Asylum), over 230,000 Brazilian citizens reside in Portugal, making Brazilian Portuguese the most common foreign variety of Portuguese spoken in the country.

Providing MAIN in both European and Brazilian Portuguese not only respects these linguistic differences but also fosters an inclusive assessment environment. By offering the instrument in a familiar language variety, children—especially those at early developmental stages with limited vocabulary—are more likely to engage confidently and understand the assessment tasks fully. Familiar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures reduce potential confusion, ensuring that the narrative tasks elicit a child's natural linguistic abilities rather than a performance affected by unfamiliar language input. This approach enhances the reliability of the data collected on children's morphosyntax, lexical diversity, and

narrative structure, as it reflects their true linguistic competence without interference from linguistic variation.

Taking these aspects into account, a comparison between the two versions reveals significant differences between EP and BP.<sup>1</sup> The most relevant syntactic, morphosyntactic and lexical differences are mentioned here:

1. Forms of address – *Você* vs. *tu* ‘you’: Starting with the choice of how to address the child in an informal way, the use of *você* would be the correct choice in the BP text. However, it is very common that *você* coexists with the use of the 2nd person singular *te* ‘you’: *Primeiro olhe a estória toda. Você está pronto/a? Eu vou te contar a estória e depois você pode me contar novamente.* ‘First look at the whole story. Are you ready? I am going to tell you the story and then you can tell it to me again’. With respect to EP, while the 3rd person singular form and the corresponding verb form are still used, the same level of informality is only possible using *tu*, the second person: *Primeiro olha para a história toda. (pausa) Estás pronto/a? Vou contar-te a história e depois podes contá-la novamente.* ‘First look at the whole story. Are you ready? I am going to tell you the story and then you can tell it to me again’. In EP, *você* has a meaning that is not entirely clear, but in everyday language, the form might be understood as impolite at least in some regions of Portugal.
2. Clitics: The clitic system of EP and BP differs. In EP, it is possible for clitic pronouns to appear in both preverbal and postverbal positions and to show clear morphophonological differences depending on their position in relation to the verb linked with a hyphen (in enclitic position), e.g., *conta-me* ‘tell me’, whereas in BP, clitic pronouns are only found preverbally (*me conte* ‘tell me’) if they are not omitted or replaced altogether (Luís & Kaiser 2016). An example is *Me conte o que está acontecendo.* vs. *Diz-me o que está a acontecer* ‘Tell me what is happening’.
3. Imperative: In EP, the imperative is used in the 2nd person of the singular, the 2nd person of the plural or the formal 3rd person of the singular. In BP, the imperative is normally used in the *você*-form, as in *Me diga quando você tiver terminado* (BP) vs. *Avisa-me quando tiveres acabado* (EP) ‘Tell me when you are finished.’<sup>2</sup>
4. Existential constructions with *ter* vs. *haver*: While BP favours the use of these kind of constructions with the verb *ter* ‘to have’ (e.g., *Olhe, aqui temos 3 envelopes. Tem uma estória diferente em cada envelope, escolha um e então você pode me contar uma estória.* ‘Look, here are 3 envelopes. There is a different story in each envelope. Choose one and then I will tell you the story’), in EP the correct verb to use is *haver* ‘to be’ (e.g., *Olha, aqui estão 3 envelopes. Há uma história diferente em cada envelope. Escolhe um e depois eu*

<sup>1</sup> There are also less obvious differences, associated with the EP being a pro-drop language and the BP being considered a partial pro-drop (Barbosa et al., 2001, Sheehan, 2009). Also, there are differences in phonology and pronunciation – One of the biggest differences lies in the pronunciation between EP and BP. Although both include oral and nasal vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs, the pronunciation in BP is more open and the EP more close-mid. In BP, the “L” turns often into a “U” at the end of the word (mil), whereas it is pronounced as a “U” in EP. Those differences were not taken into account as we are working with a written text, but they are of course relevant to conducting the study orally.

<sup>2</sup> The negative forms of these verbs in EP are different (*Não leias* ‘Don’t read’).

*conto-te a história*. ‘Look, here are 3 envelopes. There is a different story in each envelope. Choose one and then I will tell you the story’).

5. Progressive form: To express a progressive event, you find the verb *estar* ‘to be’ followed by the gerund in BP, whilst the EP uses the verb *estar* followed by the preposition *a* with the infinitive, such as in *O que ele **está fazendo** aqui?* vs. “*O que **está** ele **a fazer** aqui* ‘What is he doing here?’ and *Quem **está correndo**?* vs. *Quem **está a correr**?* ‘Who is running?’.
6. Articles with possessives: Another difference lies in the use of the article before a possessive, common in EP, but not used in BP (e.g., *No final, o gato estava muito satisfeito por comer um peixe tão saboroso e o menino estava feliz por ter **sua bola** de volta.* / ***Sua vez**...* vs. *No final, o gato ficou muito satisfeito por comer um peixe tão saboroso e o rapaz ficou contente por ter a bola de volta.* / *É **a tua vez*** ‘In the end, the cat was very pleased to eat such a tasty fish and the boy was happy to have his ball back’ / Your turn’).
7. Contraction of the preposition *em* with the indefinite article *um*: While in EP it is common to use the preposition contracted with the article, in BP it is not, as in ***num** arbusto* vs. ***em um** arbusto* ‘on a bush’.
8. Lexical level: Concerning the lexical level, there are many verbs in the Brazilian text that exist in EP, but are not used in the same way (e.g., *pegar* vs. *apanhar o peixe* ‘grab the fish’; *assistir na TV* vs. *ver na TV* ‘watch on TV’; *pular* vs. *saltar* ‘jump’). Some nouns used in the BP text might be unknown to a child who grew up in an EP-speaking environment, e.g., *grama* vs. *relva* ‘grass’, *ele se machucou* vs. *ele magoou-se* ‘he hurt himself’ or *vara de pescar* vs. *cana de pesca* ‘fishing rod’.
9. Accents: In some words, the accents of the EP differ from the ones in BP, where there seems to be a higher tendency for using circumflex accents. Some words in EP are written with acute accents (e.g., *bebê* ‘baby’) and in BP with circumflex accent (*bebê* ‘baby’).

## 5 Conclusion

The adaptation of MAIN to European Portuguese underscores the importance of linguistic and cultural sensitivity in language assessment tools. By addressing the distinct phonological, syntactic, and lexical characteristics that differentiate European and Brazilian Portuguese, this project highlights the need for tailored approaches within language varieties. These adaptations are especially critical in Portugal, where a substantial Brazilian immigrant population adds to the linguistic diversity and emphasizes the relevance of providing assessments in both regional varieties. Such inclusivity not only respects cultural identities but also ensures more accurate and meaningful assessments that reflect children’s authentic linguistic abilities.

The adaptation process – comprising translation and expert review – was designed to create a version that feels familiar and accessible to European Portuguese speakers, capturing nuances essential for engaging young language users. Special attention was given to idiomatic expressions, syntax, and narrative style that resonate with children and feel true to the language used in their daily lives. The result is a tool that preserves the integrity of the original MAIN structure while effectively serving the specific linguistic and cultural needs of European Portuguese speakers. This process provides a model for future adaptations, illustrating how

narrative assessment instruments can be customized to fit different linguistic contexts without losing their foundational framework.

The implications of this adaptation extend beyond Portuguese-speaking contexts. As the global landscape becomes increasingly multilingual, the need for culturally responsive and linguistically accurate assessment tools becomes more urgent. This project demonstrates how careful adaptation can bridge linguistic differences, fostering a deeper understanding of children's language abilities in diverse educational settings. It also highlights the value of narrative-based assessments like MAIN, which provide insights into not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also into children's broader communicative and narrative competencies. Looking ahead, future research should investigate the use of MAIN among Portuguese-speaking children in various contexts, including heritage language settings and multilingual classrooms. Studies that compare the development of narrative skills across different Portuguese varieties could reveal further insights into the role of linguistic environment in language acquisition. Additionally, exploring how these adaptations impact the motivation and engagement of children from different linguistic backgrounds could contribute to best practices in educational assessment.

This adaptation of MAIN serves as a stepping stone toward a more comprehensive approach to language assessment in multilingual societies. By valuing the linguistic diversity within and across language communities, educators and researchers can develop tools that not only assess language proficiency but also affirm children's linguistic and cultural identities. Such efforts pave the way for more equitable and inclusive language education policies that recognize and celebrate the richness of linguistic diversity.

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