Business Portuguese in the age of digital instruction

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ABSTRACT
This research article provides an overview of the online material available for business Portuguese classes in the United States and it explores the potential for digital instruction. It also shows the results of a needs-analysis survey conducted with 111 participants, including business people and university students in the United States. It finished with a proposal for a business Portuguese class that takes advantage of digital instruction resources already available.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing need for the development of teaching material and classes of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) in critical languages, especially on those with an impact in the business world, such as Portuguese. This current study provides an overview on the development of materials for business Portuguese and it proposes the use of digital spaces for the development of such materials. It also shows the results of a needs-analysis survey conducted with two groups of university students (Portuguese students and students of other languages) and business people who speak Portuguese in the United States.

While the field of critical languages LSP has moved slowly, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has developed substantially since the late 1960s and early 70s by contextualizing the use of English, developing material, and conducting research (see Ewer and Latorre, 1969; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Selinker & Trimble, 1976; Halliday et al., 1964; Swales, 1971; among others). ESP started by focusing primarily on Scientific and Technical English (English for Science and Technology [EST]) and expanded in some areas, such as Medical and Legal English. The premise of ESP is that the teaching of English is learner-centered: "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need" (Hutchison & Waters, 2010, p. 8).

The realm of LSP has followed the steps of ESP towards the development of curricula and programs that attend the needs of the learner, including the conduction of needs analysis surveys, discourse analysis, register, research design, and theoretical and practical applications of LSP (Mackay & Palmer, 1981). Language organizations in the United States have included LSP in their research, conferences, and special groups, such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). Some organizations have been created with a focus on LSP, as in the case of the Network of Business Language Educators (NOBLE), founded in 2009 by Mary Risner, the Associate Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida (see https://nble.org/) and Centers for International Businesses Education and Research (CIBER). CIBER was created by the US Congress in 1988 and is administered through the United States Department of Education. CIBERs are hosted in 17 universities throughout the United States. Their mission is "to increase and promote the nation's

capacity for international understanding and competitiveness" (http://us-ciberweb.org/institutions/). In addition, the International Symposium of Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP) conferences have been a catalyst for ideas and research on LSP since 2012.[1]

WHY WE SHOULD NOT CONDUCT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSES IN ENGLISH ONLY

A recent article on BBC News Capital indicates the importance of knowing more than only English when negotiating with non-native English speakers. The BBC article, titled "Native English Speakers are the World's Worst Communicators," highlights that English speakers are falling behind when communicating with non-native English speakers in business settings in English (Morrison, 2016). This article shows that many English speakers are not able to adjust their communication in English in interactions with foreigners, hurting their business perspectives. The misunderstandings in English conversations are partially a result of the lack of awareness of the monolingual native-English speaker. Furthermore, the author argues that non-native English speakers are more effective than native English speakers when communicating in English in business settings: "English speakers with no other language often have a lack of awareness of how to speak English internationally." (Coulter as cited in Morrison, 2016, What is ETA? para. 6). Often times, the language of English speakers is too complicated for NNES who communicate more directly in English: "Non-native speakers generally use more limited vocabulary and simpler expressions, without flowery language or slang. Because of that, they understand one another at face value." (Morrison, 2016, Relating to your Audience para. 3).

A plausible argument is that by learning an additional language, being it Portuguese or any other language, the business person is more likely to be aware of language variations and to adjust language according to the audience. In addition, monolingual native English speakers who negotiate with Brazilians and other Portuguese speakers are prone to be more isolated in business circles in Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Africa where English is less used. With the exception of Portugal, business people from other Portuguese-speaking countries often lack the language skills in English, even in business settings where English is expected, such as startups in the city of São Paulo, for example. By speaking some Portuguese, even if at the beginner level, an English-speaker is more capable of leaving a positive impression with the business counterparts and to facilitate the conversation during a negotiation.

DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIAL FOR BUSINESS PORTUGUESE AS OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Orlando Kelm and Mary Risner are at the forefront in the development of language material for Portuguese as an open platform in the United States. The book and online tool *Brazilians Working with Americans: Cultural Case Studies* (2007) is a reference for Portuguese language instructors teaching business Portuguese in the United States. It

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[1] This current essay emerged from a presentation in the IV ISLSP/ CIBER Business Conference at the University of Florida in 2018.

offers 10 case studies with video clips of American and Brazilian executives discussing their entrepreneurial pursuits, accompanied by translations in English and Portuguese. Another online material created by Kelm is *Falando de negócios: Português comercial,* which offers video clips of 27 Brazilians from several fields (Human Resources, Banking, Accounting, etc.) with cultural information and procedural information about businesses in Brazil. This online tool was developed with the support of the CIBER center at the University of Texas at Austin.[2]

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, NOBLE has compiled several links of online materials to learn Portuguese on their website, including the links on business Portuguese mentioned previously and from other sources, such as the podcasts from the Center for Open Educational Sources and Language Learning from the University of Texas at Austin (COERLL). In addition, Kelm has developed podcasts that focus on several dialogues with Brazilians and offer an analysis of the language structure, pronunciation, and cultural elements in a conversational style. In regards to European Portuguese, the Instituto Camões has a series of scanned articles about businesses from 2011 available online as well. Some of the topics are not as current and the PDF format of the articles take some time to download. The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania created the website Knowledge@Wharton in 1999 that offers online news on business in Chinese, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. A reliable source of news in Portuguese, the webpage about business in Portuguese is divided by topics—finances, management, social impact, innovation, leadership, marketing, public policies, technology, and works in partnership with the Universia Network, sponsored by Santander Bank.[3]

NEEDS ANALYSIS SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the needs of potential language students, a needs analysis survey[4] was conducted with undergraduate students in a major US university and with business people in the West Coast of the United States. Three groups participated in the needs analysis: 14 students of Portuguese, 77 undergraduate students who did not take Portuguese, and 20 business people in the university area who spoke some level of Portuguese. A total of 111 people completed the survey (see Appendix A for the survey and results).[5]

The goal of the needs analysis survey was to identify the demand for a business Portuguese class to be offered at the university and to determine the format of the class. The first survey was distributed by email to students enrolled in Portuguese classes at the university. The second survey was given to students with a variety of majors who were taking English writing classes in interdisciplinary studies. A third survey was emailed to business people who were included on the Seattle Portuguese meet-up group's mailing

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[2] Although these two online sources are indeed important, most of them are somewhat outdated. The videos are obsolete given that they are running in a MOV file.

[3] Most of the material currently available online about Business Portuguese needs to be updated. The development of an online platform would require constant revisions in order to keep the sources relevant and useful for Portuguese instructors.

[4] A needs analysis survey is a tool, normally a questionnaire, used to determine the needs and the demand for a certain program or activity; in this case, the need of a Business Portuguese class.

[5] The surveys were developed and conducted in the Fall of 2016. The Human Subjects Division in the Office of Research at the university exempted this research.

list. The group is comprised of working professionals who speak Portuguese in the Seattle area. Participation in the surveys was voluntary and there was no compensation for taking part. The surveys were anonymous and were administered through a Google form tool.

The needs analysis survey was dived into two sections. The first one collected background data about the participants, including their university majors and/or field of work. It also collected information about the participant's first language and additional languages. The second section collected information about the participants' desire to take a business language class in a language other than English and their preference for the format of the class (face-to-face, online, or hybrid). In addition, the survey sought the aspects that participants would prioritize in a business language class and the possibilities of doing an internship locally or overseas to improve language skills and acquire more experience in their field (see Appendix A for the questionnaire that was given to the cohort of 77 undergraduate students).

Among students taking Portuguese, 85.7% would consider taking a class in business Portuguese and 78.6% would consider taking a class in English about cultural aspects of Portuguese-speaking countries. Among the undergraduate students not taking Portuguese (N = 70), 78.5% would consider taking a business class in an additional language already spoken by them. The percentage is comparable to the Portuguese students. In the group of business people who speak some level of Portuguese, 89.5% would consider taking a business Portuguese class (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Responses from business people to the question: "If you speak Portuguese, would you consider taking a class in business Portuguese to strengthen your knowledge of the business world in Portuguese-speaking countries?" (N = 19)*

31.6% YES	10.5% NO	57.9% – Perhaps, depending on the type of class.

The university students would prefer to receive credits for the business language class. They also gave preference for classes offered during the day. The business people in the survey preferred evening classes and did not need to receive the university credits for it. The main challenge in these results was to find a class time that would be suitable for university students and for business people.

Among all survey participants, the economy, current trends and news, and business terminology in Portuguese were considered very important aspects. The questions below are from the survey with business people.

Table 2. *'Very important' aspects of a business Portuguese class according to business people to the question (N = 20)*

Cultural customs	History	Economy	Current trends and news	Business terminology in Portuguese
69%	15%	60%	70%	65%

Furthermore, most participants supported the hybrid/online course option (71.4% of Portuguese students, 83.20% of the undergraduate students, and 90% of the business people).

As the discussion of results will show, there is an agreement among most participants that a business language class is indeed relevant. Nonetheless, there are also many challenges on how to offer it, which times and class format would be more suitable and also if Portuguese, for the purpose of this survey, would be a viable course in business in this particular institution in the West Coast of the United States.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The surveys were conducted in the Fall of 2016 in Seattle, a city in the US state of Washington. Seattle hosts many multinational corporations and leaders in the high-tech industry, and some of them have branches in Brazil and businesses in other Portuguese-speaking countries (e.g. Microsoft, Google, and DocuSign, among others). The city also has a major R-1 institution, the University of Washington and several colleges in the region. Nonetheless, there is not any business Portuguese classes offered in the Seattle area. This is also the case in most universities in the United States where business Portuguese classes are an exception to the rule. Upon conducting an internet search, one finds that most courses in Portuguese offered at US universities are language courses and courses in literature and culture.

The results of this survey, however, show that participants are inclined to take business language classes, both in the cohort of students taking Portuguese (N = 14) and in the undergraduate group who spoke other additional languages (N = 77). Despite having an apparent demand for LSP, universities in the United States, with some exceptions, seem reluctant in introducing such classes. The reasons go beyond the scope of this essay, but involve the politics of school administrators, tenure-track faculty, and lecturers. In part, research institutions focus on the combination of research and education, which, for language programs, includes the teaching of the language and content classes, traditionally on literature and linguistics of the target language.

Given the current demand for language programs and declining university enrollment nation-wide in the United States (Lonney & Lusin, 2018, p. 2), a more flexible approach is needed in order to attract students and increase enrollment in minors and majors in languages.[6] In the case of Portuguese, the argument is that by attracting students interested in learning business Portuguese or in Portuguese for the professions, these same students might decide to minor or major in the language and take additional classes in literature, linguistics, and cultural studies. The institutions that have followed this kind of approach, by offering a certificate in language for the professions for instance, have seen an increase in their enrollments. It has been the case of the University of Florida, which offers a Certificate in Spanish for the Professions and has seen its

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[6] In a report from the Modern Language Association (MLA), the aggregated Fall 2016 course enrollments in languages other than English were 1,417,921. It shows a decrease of 9.2% in comparison to fall 2013, when enrollments were 1,561,131 (Looney & Lusin, 2018). This is the second-largest decline in the history of the census conducted by the MLA (the largest declined of 12.6% was in 1972). The results of 2016 present a decline of 15.3% between 2009 and 2016.

enrollment numbers increase despite the trend nationwide of having less students enrolled in Spanish classes.[7] The creation of an online platform for business Portuguese goes beyond this important discussion about the politics of language departments by providing an open educational resource (OER) to language instructors to facilitate their language classes and also to language learners who may not have access to a business Portuguese class in their region. Through OERs, the information can be disseminated easily and without a cost for the learner. In the case of critical languages, such as Portuguese, OERs are even more important since they help to supplement teaching materials that are scarce in some foreign languages.

Some of the survey results between the two cohort of participants: university students and business people are in contrast. For instance, most students (N = 77) prefer to have regular classes for credit (74% of the undergraduate students) while the business people (N = 20) prefer classes that are non-credit (85%). This naturally follows a pattern in other aspects as well, where the majority of students in the R1 institution give preference for day-time classes while the business people choose evening classes, for example.

The possibility of participating in an experience abroad, such as an internship or a study abroad program, is also desirable by the majority of the participants in the survey. Over 85% would consider a study abroad program and over 75% would consider an internship option, pointing to the hands-on nature of this kind of language course.

Considering that the lower retention rates in online courses is a concern for most academic leaders (Allen & Seman, 2013, p. 30), the chance of interacting in class at times and of having some synchronous interactions with the instructor and classmates should increase the level of success of the course. A hybrid version is the most suitable one. 90% of the business people would take a hybrid language business course and 70% of the university students would also enroll in a hybrid course.

A considerable advantage of using the digital materials is the easiness to update the content and to make corrections and adjustments as needed. This aspect is also noticeable in the surveys. Participants rated high the importance of current events and trades, the economy and the business terminology in Portuguese in a class. The majority also agreed that an online/hybrid class format is desirable depending on their schedules. In the case of business people, flexibility is even more important, as their schedules can be complicated and attending a class online is highly desirable in some situations.

One of the challenges of an OER for business languages is the need to keep the digital platform updated in the long-term. It involves the contribution of language instructors and tech professionals in order to have teaching materials that are current and relevant to business students. This is a key element. Taking the example from Knowledge@Wharton, the longevity of an OER is also the results of a solid partnership between interested parts, being them NGOs, corporations, and/or universities and language associations. This may be the most sensible direction to take, to develop a partnership in order to have an OER running in the long term. The proposal below would just be sustainable if such initiative is taken.

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[7] This information was provided during a presentation by Gregory E. Moreland: "Certificate in Spanish for the Professions: One Model" at the IV ISLSP/CIBER Business Language Conference at the University of Florida in 2018.

PROPOSAL OF A DIGITAL CLASS IN BUSINESS PORTUGUESE

The proposal of a digital class in business Portuguese aims to attract more students of Portuguese and to promote the importance of language learning, decentralizing the perspective of an English-only narrative in international business. The goal is for students to participate in a business language course that highlights core cultural differences, promoting a more effective communication when conducting business in the Luso-Brazilian world, being Brazil, Portugal, or Angola, for example.

The proposal of a digital platform for business Portuguese hosted in the United States is not a new one. However, what is lacking is a pedagogical approach to the teaching of business Portuguese in a digital format. The proposed design is intended for language instructors to teach in alignment with *Language Learning in the 21st Century* (ACTFL, 2011) and to take advantage of the resources currently available online. It could be used by language learners asynchronously.

Furthermore, the idea is to recycle material already available on Creative Commons (CC BY) that is still relevant, as in the examples of some of the study cases and videos developed by Kelm and Risner, and combine it with the creation of new videos and materials whenever possible. The use of links and connections with current events can also be incorporated in the course as needed.

By using an open platform or course management system, such as Moodle or Canvas, language instructors could take advantage of available digital media. The proposed Portuguese Business class should:

- be offered to both working professionals and university students
- follow an interdisciplinary approach, combining material from different areas of knowledge when relevant to the student needs
- be multilevel, allowing the participation of students with different levels of proficiency
- offer a fast-paced / alternative path for Spanish speakers and heritage speakers of Portuguese
- focus on differentiated tasks (tasks that are adaptive to the student's language level)
- include the cultures and language variants of European Portuguese, in addition to Brazilian and African Portuguese
- connect students in the United States with students in other countries
- be a catalyst for networking and internships, job hunting, etc.
- take advantage of the benefits of the social media, such as Twitter and Instagram

CONCLUSION

Successful language programs need to take into consideration the importance of LSP to satisfy the demand of students looking for classes that attend their professional needs. In the case of Portuguese, the development of a digital platform in an open source would provide language learners the possibility of taking business Portuguese in a hybrid or full-online class. It would also give the flexibility needed by business people looking into

learning or improving their language skills. Nonetheless, there are shortcomings on online courses and that is why a hybrid option would be ideal, providing students with some face-to-face interactions with an instructor and contributing to a better retention rate to the course as well.

This essay is a call to action. It articulates the idea of an online business Portuguese course created in collaboration with a group of faculty members that takes advantage of some of the OER material already available. The list of sources and links are in the reference section of this paper. The business Portuguese online course should follow the pedagogical approach of the twenty-first-century language learning guidelines (ACTFL, 2011) and take into consideration some of the suggestions made previously, such as the multidisciplinary approach and the use of differentiated tasks. Digital business courses offered as OER are particularly important for programs in critical languages where administrators and faculty members are looking for ways to attract students and to strengthen their offerings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Needs Analysis Survey (students in several fields)

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
You are being invited to participate in a survey conducted in collaboration with the
Global Business Center at the Foster School of Business, the Center for West European
Studies, and the Center for Global Studies at the Jackson School of International Studies
the UW. Your identity will remain anonymous and the results of this survey will be used
in the design of a Business class in a foreign language at the UW. The data collected will
be presented in conferences and published in academic papers. This research has been
approved and exempted by the Human Subjects Division (HSD) at the University of
Washington: HSD study # 52387 entitled "Needs Analysis Survey for Business Language
Classes."

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and there is no remuneration involved. If
you have any questions about this survey, please contact the Principal Investigator in
Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Eduardo Viana da Silva at (206) 543-7943 or
evsilva@uw.edu

For questions about the Human Subjects Approval, please contact Deborah Dickstein at
the Human Subjects Division at 206-543- 5971 or dickstei@uw.edu

Thank you very much! Muito obrigado!

1 – If you speak an additional language, would you consider taking a class in business in
that language to strengthen your knowledge of the business world? (70 responses)

31.4% YES	21.4% NO	47.1% – Perhaps, depending on the type of class

2 – If you don't speak an additional language, would you consider taking a class in
English to learn about the culture of doing business with another countries? (62
responses)

54.8% YES	3.8% NO	40.3% – Perhaps, depending on the type of class

3 – Which class format would you prefer? (77 responses)

74% - A regular university class (Grade assigned)	26% – A non-credit university class through Professional and Continuum Education (No grade assigned)

4 – What do you consider more important when dealing with business in other countries? Please provide a raking form "very important" to "least important." (77 responses)

The table below listed the percentage of the selections of "very important"

To speak the language of the country	To be culturally proficient, despite speaking the language	To visit the country in person	To do an internship in a company in the country	To do an internship in a company in Seattle that works with the country in question.
40%	58%	35%	10%	12%

5 – How likely would you consider doing a study abroad followed by a business language class? (77 responses)

Very likely	Likely	Maybe	Less Likely	Not Likely
15.6%	27.3%	42.9%	3.8%	10.4%

6 – How likely would you consider doing a internship in another country followed by a business language class? (77 responses)

Very likely	Likely	Maybe	Less Likely	Not Likely
16.9%	31.2%	27.3%	11.7%	13%

7 – Given your job perspectives, how likely do you believe a business language class would be an asset for you? (77 responses)

Very likely	Likely	Maybe	Less Likely	Not Likely
13%	32.5%	31.2%	18.2%	5.1%

8 - In a Business language class, which kind of information do you believe is important, please rank from "very important" to "least important." (77 responses)

The table below listed the percentage of the selections of "very important"

Cultural Customs	History	Economy	Current Trends and News	Business Terminology in Portuguese
44%	13%	40%	53%	45%

9 – Which time of the day would be ideal for you to take a business language class? (77 responses)

48.1% Morning	41.6% Afternoon	10.4% Evening

10 – Which time of the week would be ideal for you to take a Business language class? (77 responses)

Mondays and Wednesdays	Tuesdays and Thursdays	Only once a week	Self-paced with some instruction facilitation
32.5%	31.2%	31.2%	5.1%

11 – If the class is offered fully online with the hybrid option, would that be a positive aspect for you? (77 responses)

53.2% YES	16.9% NO	29.9% It depends on my schedule

12 – Do you have any additional comments on what you would like to have in a Business language class? (23 responses)

APPENDIX B – BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

Background Information
Major:
Minor:
Additional language(s): (Please indicate the language and level of fluency as: novice, intermediate, advance, or superior).

Survey Questions
1 – If you speak an additional language, would you consider taking a class in Business in that language to strengthen your knowledge of the business world?

2 – If you don't speak an additional language, would you consider taking a class in English to learn about the cultural aspects of doing business with other countries?

3 – Which class format would you prefer?
A regular credit university class (grade assigned)
A non-credit university class through Professional and Continuum Education (no grade assigned)

4 – What do you consider more important when dealing with business in other countries. Please provide a ranking from "very important" to "least important."
To speak the language of the country
To visit the country in person
To do an internship in a company in the country
To do an internship in a company in Seattle that work with the country in question

5 – How likely would you consider doing a study abroad in a Portuguese-speaking country followed by a Business Portuguese class?

6 – How likely would you consider doing an internship in a Portuguese-speaking country followed by a Business Portuguese class?

7 – Given your current job perspectives, how likely do you believe a Business language class would be an asset for you?

8 - In a business language class, which kind of information do you believe is more important, please rank from "most important" to "least important."
Cultural Customs   History   Economy   Current Trends and News
Business Terminology in the foreign language

9 – Which time of the day would be ideal for you to take a business language class?
Morning   Afternoon   Evening

10 – Which time of the week would be ideal for you to take a business language class?
Mondays and Wednesdays
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Only once a week
Self-paced with some instructor facilitation

11 – If the class is offered fully online with the hybrid option, would that be a positive aspect for you?
Yes   No   It depends on my schedule

12 – Do you have any additional comments on what you would like to have in a Business Portuguese class?