

# Trends in Portuguese

A range of economic and developmental factors point to demand for Portuguese language courses in Portugal growing in the future, and there is scope for agencies in the market. GILLIAN EVANS reports.

Portuguese is not one of the main language choices in the language travel market. However, there are indications that it could be ripe for expansion. "Although Portuguese still belongs, on a worldwide level, to the exotic languages, the integration of Portugal [into] the European Union (EU), the pacification of Angola, the economical development and stability of the African Portuguese-speaking countries and the economic development of Brazil all indicate a growth market for the Portuguese language," asserts Damiao Costa Sequeira of Mundilingua in Portimao.

Alexandra Borges de Sousa, Director of Studies at CIAL, says that many students learn Portuguese for professional reasons, for use in the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa and Brazil. Like Sequeira, she highlights the importance of Portuguese as a global language. "[Portuguese] is spoken by 200 million people, it is the official language in many international organisations and many international companies are moving either to Portugal or to Portuguese-speaking countries. It is becoming an asset for future career goals," she says.

The relocation of people to Portugal has propelled growth at Centro de Linguas de Lagos in Lagos, according to Maureen McKeeve. "Student numbers have steadily increased over the past two years by about 10 per cent each year. The reason is that more people – mainly from England and Germany – are coming to live here permanently," she says.

Despite the positive market growth indicators, for many Portuguese language providers the evolution of the market has been patchy. Colin McMillan, Director of International House (IH) Lisbon, reports that their growth has fluctuated up and down by around



five per cent for the past few years. "The Portuguese market is always unpredictable," he says, pointing to recent demand from Spanish students "for reasons to do with the EU".

Instituto Ipfel in Lisbon has also experienced an influx of students from Spain over the past year, which Lucy Ferreira at the school puts down to the "growing number of Spanish companies and stores in Lisbon".

In general, there are two types of students who take a Portuguese language course, according to Sequeira. Mundilingua's students – generally 70 per cent Germans and 15 per cent British – are either university students studying Portuguese language and literature in their home countries, or business people whose companies have contacts in Portugal.

Although EU nationals make up the bulk of language students, de Sousa says that at CIAL, "the number of US students has also grown, mainly because we offer courses accredited by US universities". This has affected the average length of stay too. "With more programmes accredited by universities, long stays – 12-to-16 weeks – have increased, although the main focus is still on stays of two-to-six weeks," she reports.

While general language courses and business courses are the most popular in Portugal,

there have been some recent innovations from schools to target niche markets. For example, as a result of a high demand for language programmes from Spanish health professionals, IH Lisbon has developed a course for doctors and nurses. In contrast, Interlingua in Portimao is targeting the holidaymaker, with its two-hour "crash course" for tourists. "This fun course is intended to make their stay more enjoyable," explains Zita Neto.

Despite all the growth indications, the market in Portugal remains relatively underdeveloped, with the teaching of foreign languages to Portuguese nationals being the main business of many schools. As a result, the marketing of their Portuguese language courses is generally relatively low key. Ferreira, at Instituto Ipfel, says that student numbers have decreased by around 50 per cent over the last three years "due to a lack of publicity/marketing strategies as other areas of our activity are considered more important".

With the notable exception of a few language schools such as CIAL, agents do not play a very big role in the recruitment of students at present. At IH Lisbon, McMillan says, "The number of students sent by agents is very insignificant. Ninety per cent of our enrolments are made via the Internet and email."

## The market in Brazil

As in Portugal, executive learners and university students are driving demand for Portuguese language courses in Brazil, but while Portugal's main student markets are in the European Union, Brazil's lie closer to home.

"We always have students from Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and even from Chile, enquiring about our courses, and at the same time, we have Brazilians learning Spanish," explains Valdecir Cerkvenik Ferreira de Melo at the Cambridge School of English in Londrina, Brazil.

Dialogo in Salvador attracts a high proportion of university students, mostly from the USA. According to the school's Uta Röpcke, 70 per cent of students are American. "A couple of years ago there were more Europeans, but especially after the currency change to the euro, the travel market has decreased," she says.

The average student age in Brazil seems to be from 25 to 35 years old, with Ferreira de Melo reporting that students generally study for four weeks and "then return to their country of origin to get a job in multinational companies". At Dialogo, Röpcke reports that the average length of stay has increased to three or four weeks. "Some students come with scholarships for three to six months," she adds.

Röpcke also reports that tourism is boosting interest in Brazil as a study destination, and she points to high demand for extra-curricular activities, particularly those to do with Brazilian culture.

Ferreira de Melo points out that English language schools in Brazil have had to diversify because of demand for Portuguese, in contrast with the situation in Portugal. "Ninety-eight per cent of so called Brazilian English language schools are now teaching Portuguese and Spanish in order to survive the tough market," he says.