Aspects of Brazilian Portuguese Grammar

Spring 2015
Tuesdays, 3:00–5:50pm
Kelly Hall 114
Evani Viotti

This course will present for discussion a selection of syntactic and semantic phenomena of Brazilian Portuguese which set it apart from European Portuguese and which have been of interest to Brazilian linguistics since the early 1980's. Among these features are the characteristics of the null subject and object, nominal and verbal agreement, relative clauses, cleft sentences, the middle domain, and bare noun phrases. The discussions will touch on questions related to the possible reasons which may have triggered the emergence of a grammar different from that of European Portuguese, with special emphasis on the factors related to the contact between 16th century Portuguese and African languages.

Class structure and requirements

Active participation will be expected of each student. Discussion of the reading material will be at the core of each session. Each class will have a student presenting a summary of the assigned texts, and one acting as a discussion leader, responsible for posing questions, and promoting participation. All readings will be available through CHALK in the Course Materials file.

Attendance is key to the course. All students are expected to engage in the discussion of the course material. Each student is expected to lead at least one session during the quarter, both as a presenter and as a discussion leader. This activity will count as 25% of the final grade. For a final assignment, students will choose one of the features of Brazilian Portuguese discussed during the course and write a short paper on it (10 pages maximum).

Grading will be done using the following scale: A (100-92%), A- (91-83%), B+ (82-75), B (74-69), B- (68-54)

Week 1 – Tuesday, April 1
  • Part 1 – Presentation of the course
  • Part 2 – Present linguistic situation in Brazil

Readings:


Week 2 – Tuesday, April 8
• The cradle of Brazilian Portuguese

Readings:


Week 3 – Tuesday, April 14
• Variable agreement in Brazilian Portuguese: the ‘drift’ hypothesis

Readings:


Week 4 – Tuesday, April 21
• Variable agreement in Brazilian Portuguese: the creolization hypothesis

Readings:

Week 5 – Tuesday, April 28
• Relative clauses: Turning different in the 19th century

Readings:
Week 6 – Tuesday, May 5

- The pronominal system

No readings. Topic will be presented by the teacher.

Week 7 – Tuesday, May 12

- Null subjects and null objects

Readings:


Week 8 – Tuesday, May 19

- Null subjects: a different view

Readings:


Week 9 – Tuesday, May 26

- Semi-clefts and Wh-questions

Readings:


Week 10 – Tuesday, June 2
• A twist of semantics:
  o The middle domain: absolute constructions
  o Bare singular nominal phrases

Readings:


Week 11 – Tuesday, June 9

Evaluation