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## Lusophony: Communication in the Portuguese Speaking World \*

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**Abstract**

This article provides a general overview of media and communication in the Portuguese Speaking World. It could be said that the media were an awareness catalyst for Lusophone issues well before the formal constitution of the Lusophone Community. Even in periods of more tense political/diplomatic relations between Lusophone countries, the media always maintained what could be described as a minimum connection. Information has traditionally circulated with ease in this space through news agencies, newspapers, radio and television international broadcasts. Films, series, sports programmes, and cultural products such as *telenovelas*, faced no cultural resistance, being well received in all Lusophone countries. Brazil and Portugal clearly are the main producers of information and entertainment content but the content flow is far from being unidirectional.

**Key words**

Lusophony, Communication, Portuguese Speaking World, Language Community, Cultural Area

## **Lusophony: Communication in the Portuguese Speaking World**

The concept of Lusophonie takes us to the Portuguese language domain: a Lusophone is a Portuguese speaker. But beyond the purely linguistic meaning, Lusophonie has at least three inter-related interpretations. Firstly, Lusophonie is a geo-linguistic space, that is, a number of highly dispersed regions, countries and societies whose official and/or maternal language is Portuguese. Secondly, Lusophonie is a sentiment, a memory of a common past, a partition of common culture and history. Thirdly, it is a set of political and cultural institutions attempting to develop the Portuguese language and culture in Portuguese speaking spaces and fora (Léonard, 1999: 438).

Being an ambiguous concept, Reis (1997: 23) draws one's attention to the fact that Lusophonie might be perceived as Luso(Portuguese)centric. And, in order to clarify this complex term, he characterises Lusophonie according to three main principles: inter-disciplinary, diversity and relativity.

By inter-disciplinary, Reis means that, although Lusophonie is a linguistic community, its identity and strength goes far beyond the linguistic question. Lusophonie involves states and civil societies alike and it is expressed simultaneously by institutions, writers, entrepreneurs, teachers, economists, sociologists, journalists, etc. Lusophonie has different, inter-disciplinary discourses.

Reis' diversity principle might be understood in the following terms: the Lusophone space or community is diversified and should not have a Luso centre. The Portuguese-centred analysis has no room in the identification and resolution of problems in the Lusophone space. A Lusophone community has to recognise non-Portuguese cultural realities and trends such as the strong Japanese, Italian and German communities in Brasil as well as the Brazilian integration in the Latin-American market (Mercosur). Portuguese speaking African countries also have strong cultural and institutional links with Francophone and Anglophone countries.

Lastly, the principle of relativity means that, given the enormous geographical, economic and cultural asymmetries between countries and communities within the Lusophone space, one should revise a number of general assumptions. Indeed, when the word 'community' is used, it does not necessarily mean that its members form a homogenous group. Brazil, for example, has 150 million inhabitants whilst S. Tomé and Príncipe has a population of 132 thousand people. Portugal has a per capita income of 8,400 dollars; in Guinea-Bissau, the per capita income is 160 dollars per year.

### **The geography of the Lusophone Space**

Nearly 600 years ago, the Portuguese initiated its overseas adventure, which became known as the 'Discoveries' or the Portuguese Expansion. The Portuguese explorers reached the Americas, Africa and Asia. The current Lusophone space is a construct cemented by the perceived positive traits of Portuguese colonisation. As such, language and culture assume a particularly relevant role.

The sheer size of Brazil makes it the most powerful member of Lusophone space. Brazil gained its independence from Portugal in 1822, and - despite close relations with Latin America and the US - it has been an important defender of the Portuguese language and the Lusophone community.

Lusophone Africa comprises five countries whose official language is Portuguese. Angola and Mozambique are the most important for their dimension, strategic localisation and potential in natural resources. Due to its enormous wealth, Angola used to be considered the jewel of the Portuguese Empire, but Mozambique has also considerable natural resources. Both countries were involved (Angola still is) in long-standing civil wars after the decolonization process in 1975.

Guinea-Bissau is a relatively small country which lies on the West coast of Africa. Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world and is now going through a rebuilding period, after last year's armed confrontation between the President and the Armed Forces. Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe are tiny islands in the Atlantic Ocean. In spite of their economic difficulties, both have political stability and a great potential for tourism.

In spite of the huge differences between these African countries, they have in common a colonial past, one-party systems from their independence, in 1975, up until the early 1990's, and, of course, the Portuguese as official language. However, contrary to Brazil, other languages are widely spoken in these African countries. In Angola, the most common vernacular languages are Ovimbundo, Kimbundu, Bakongo and Chokwe while in Mozambique the most common are Ronga, Shangaan and Muchope. In Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe, most people speak Portuguese and Creole. Amongst these countries, Guinea-Bissau is the only one with a low percentage of Portuguese speakers (around 20%). Creole is also official language and it is widely spoken (Sousa, 1992: vii-viii).

Still, in geographical terms, the reach of Lusophonie surpasses the borders of Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe. Clusters of the Portuguese seaborne Empire in other parts of the world still maintain a linguistic and cultural attachment to Lusophone countries proper. The clearest examples are East-Timor (occupied by Indonesia since 1975) and Macao (under Portuguese administration until December 1999 when it will be transferred to China) but there are also strong links in Goa, Damão and Diu (India) and Melaca (Malaysia).

### **Constructing a Lusophone Community**

It might be argued that the Lusophone construct is as old as the language itself. However, the formal constitution of a Lusophone Community is a recent development. On the 17th July 1996, the heads of state and heads of government of the Portuguese Language Countries signed, in Lisbon, the Constitutive Declaration of the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP). The world's seven Portuguese-speaking countries gave official status to their 'shared realm of expression' (Wise in *Financial Times*, July 26 1995: 3).

Indeed, a number of reasons might be given in order to explain the timing for the setting up of CPLP. From the early 1960's until the Portuguese 1974 Revolution, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau were at war with Portugal. Twenty years after the Revolution, the wounds of the independence wars have healed and a new relationship could be built. The Marxist one-party systems which run the Portuguese-speaking African countries for two decades have given way to multi-party systems. Brazil, which accounts for more than three-quarters of the world's Portuguese speakers, wanted to 'use the CPLP to strengthen the position of the language - and its own influence - in Latin America' (Wise in *Financial Times*, July 26 1995: 3). Obviously, at that time, Portugal also expected to assert its cultural influence that was increasingly under threat in its former colonies.

Following years of diplomatic efforts, the Lusophone space gained a Community, that is, a 'privileged multi-lateral forum to deepen mutual friendship, to co-ordinate political and diplomatic strategies and to develop Cooperation amongst its members' (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa, 1996, Article 1). According to CPLP's statutes, the general objectives of the community are:

- a) the co-ordination of political and diplomatic efforts amongst its members in the international arena in order to reinforce the presence of Lusophone countries in international fora;
- b) the co-operation, mainly in the economic, social, cultural, legal and scientific domains.
- c) the materialisation of projects regarding the promotion and diffusion of the Portuguese language (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa, 1996, Article 3).

Undisputed universalist principles like peace, freedom, human rights, democracy, social justice, parity amongst members are put forwards as CPLP's underlying objectives. Despite initial scepticism and difficulties, and notwithstanding its infancy, it is possible to identify growing governmental commitment and, most importantly, signs that the idea of a language community is gradually being absorbed by civil societies in the seven CPLP countries.

### **Media in the Lusophone Community**

It could be said that the media were an awareness catalyst for Lusophone issues well before the formal constitution of the Lusophone Community. Even in periods of more tense political/diplomatic relations between Lusophone countries, the media always maintained what could be described as a minimum connection. Information has traditionally circulated with ease in this space through news agencies, newspapers, radio and television international broadcasts. Films, series, sports programmes, and cultural products such as *telenovelas*, faced no cultural resistance, being well received in all Lusophone countries. Brazil and Portugal clearly are the main producers of information and entertainment content but the content flow is far from being unidirectional.

Following the formalisation of the Lusophone Community, in 1996, a number of initiatives were taken in order to increment the relations between the seven countries in the media/communications sector. The media and communications are naturally perceived as an important tool to develop the Lusophone space, and governments, institutions, companies and individuals are attempting to construct a meaningful community in this sphere. Initiatives are indeed very diverse, the most notorious being related to training and exchange of journalistic and entertainment content.

With UNESCO's support, a Regional Media Training Institute was set up to train media professionals. This institute is already training media professionals from Portuguese speaking African countries in Lisbon but it is also developing training centres in several Lusophone countries. Angola and Mozambique are expected to be the first two African countries to have operative training centres.

In the television sector, public service television operators from Angola (TPA), Cape Verde (TNCV), Mozambique (TVM), Portugal (RTP), S. Tomé and Príncipe (TVS) plus several Brazilian television stations (TV Cultura, TV Abril, TV Educativa) decided to create a so-called 'common interests association'. The association of 'Portuguese Language Televisions' aims to develop synergies in terms of production and distribution of television products, to improve telecommunications between these countries, and to develop training programmes for television professionals. The association is very supportive of the existing Portuguese international television channel specifically designed for Portuguese speaking African countries, RTPÁfrica.

National news agencies from all Lusophone countries (ANGOP from Angola, RADIOBRAS from Brazil, CABOPRESS from Cape Verde, ANG from Guinea-Bissau, AIM from Mozambique, LUSA from Portugal, and STPPRESS from S. Tomé and Príncipe) have associated themselves in an Alliance of Portuguese Language News Agencies. This alliance was established to implement a free flow of information between these news agencies, to promote technical assistance and cooperation, to improve the existing telecommunications networks and to prepare common data banks.

In the media/communication studies arena changes are also taking place. The Brazilian Communication Researchers Association (INTERCOM) and the Portuguese Communications Researchers Association (SOPCOM) are developing efforts to promote the establishment of similar associations in Portuguese Language African countries as communications studies are still incipient. INTERCOM and SOPCOM are already associated in a federation of communication researchers' national associations. This federation, LUSOCOM, has had its first scientific meeting in 1997, in Lisbon (Portugal), and its second one in 1998, in Sergipe (Brazil). The third meeting will be held in Braga (Portugal) in October 1999.

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