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Review: Working Portuguese for Beginners. Monica Rector, Regina Santos, Marcelo Amorim, with M. Lynne Gerber. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010

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REVIEW

Monica Rector, Regina Santos, Marcelo Amorim, with M. Lynne Gerber. *Working Portuguese for Beginners*. Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2010.

Working Portuguese is a textbook for beginning-level Portuguese that will not be for everyone, but it will be exactly what some others will desire. Not all learners are going to want, for example, to focus on describing the organization of a commercial enterprise. When it comes to language for specific purposes, designers of textbooks can take one of two approaches. The first is to say that no matter what the final objective, beginning-level students all have initially similar needs in establishing a linguistic foundation. For example, all learners of Portuguese need to conjugate verbs, learn about agreement, and understand tense and aspect. The “specialization” of language for business, emergency responders, law, or engineering best happens after the foundation is established. The challenge that comes with this first approach is that learners may never get to their “specific” purpose. Quite simply, a nurse does not have time to study Spanish for years and never learn how to say, “turn your head and cough.”

The second approach is to say that learners should be exposed to the content that they will use from the very beginning of their language learning. For learners interested in business, one starts with a business context. There are two major challenges that come with this second approach as well. The first one has to do with the fact that it fragments learners. It is difficult to combine students who have drastically different learning objectives. The second challenge related to this approach is that the “specific purpose” may not tie in well to beginning-level language tasks. For example, police officers who deal with family disturbances are involved in a linguistic task that simply requires a high level of general proficiency, much more than a routine traffic stop. It becomes difficult to teach learners how to do tasks that require advanced language skills, when the learners are at beginning stages of the language.

Working Portuguese clearly takes the second approach of creating a beginning language course within the context of business. The book still presents

the traditional beginning concepts for new learners of Portuguese: verb conjugations, agreement, use of pronouns, past tense, *por* vs. *para*, etc. The context, however, is built on a good mix of topics such as business meetings, extending invitations, social gatherings, sales meetings, making administrative decisions. In all there are twenty-four lessons, which are enhanced with dialogues, vocabulary lists, cultural readings, and practice exercises. The textbook includes a DVD-ROM with mp3 tracks of the dialogues and the audio exercises. There is also a complete Portuguese-English, English-Portuguese glossary. The teacher's edition also includes an extensive array of supplementary slides and sample quizzes and tests. If desired, users can also incorporate online activities via Quia.com <<http://Quia.com>>.

Working Portuguese does respond to the challenges of the textbook approach it follows. Fragmentation is overcome by a number of creative strategies. First of all, the business context is a popular enough theme to still have a fairly large audience. It is not so uncommon to teach language learners who want to have a business focus. There are plenty of textbooks that present the content from the perspective of a university student. In *Working Portuguese* it is refreshing to see the business setting serve as the foundation for the presentation of grammar and vocabulary. Next, although the topics are business related, they are not business specialized. That is to say, the topics are general enough that learners who are not business focused can still use the book. For example, lesson 12 is entitled “*Como chegar ao seu destino*” (“How to get to your destination”). The vocabulary is general enough to include words like “traffic light, ice cream parlor, bookstore, pharmacy, straight ahead, to the left,” all words that one would expect in a chapter about giving directions. The grammar topic of this chapter includes command forms, another item that is frequently associated with giving directions. Third, the content in *Working Portuguese* is flexible enough that the textbook can be used for classroom application, individualized instruction (self-directed learning), or distance education. There does not have to be a large audience for an instructor to use the book.

The second challenge to overcome is whether or not the business content can be applicable and appropriate to beginning levels. This, indeed, is one of the strengths of *Working Portuguese*. There are no attempts to have students practice using Portuguese in tasks that are beyond the beginning level of the book. The textbook does not cover income statements, investment strategies, stock market analysis, INCOTERMS, or other such topics. This may sound obvious, but too often business language textbooks jump into topics that force learners to deal with tasks that are beyond the proficiency levels of the learners.

Instead, *Working Portuguese* limits itself to topics that are more manageable, for example, planning a meeting, selling your idea, employee responsibilities, and department goals. Indeed, *Working Portuguese* resolves the challenges that often accompany textbooks in language for specific purposes.

Working Portuguese is part of a series, which includes Spanish and Mandarin as well. Language students at the Kenan-Flager Business School at the University of North Carolina, where the Working Language Series was created, use these textbooks as part of their pre-immersion travel experience. Indeed, students can benefit from using this textbook as part of a pre-departure preparation for in-country experience, and also as part of a traditional curriculum.

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