



## An Ethnographic Approach to Listening

### *Las Voces de las Mujeres de Latinoamérica*

By Tess Lane

LARC's Digital Media Archive project is actively working to create seamless national access to authentic materials for teaching and learning languages via the web. Collaborating faculty bring to LARC their copyright-cleared materials and in collaboration with LARC, develop media-rich teaching and learning resources, lesson plans, and course modules for both less and more commonly taught languages. The following piece describes a project that is currently being developed by Tess Lane at Hawai'i Pacific University and LARC at SDSU. This project is as a DVD set at [nlrc.hawaii.edu/voces](http://nlrc.hawaii.edu/voces). The DMA version of the project will be available soon.

#### **An Ethnographic Approach to Listening**

*Las Voces* project uses an ethnographic approach to listening. The voices heard in the media from Latin America are overwhelmingly male voices. Women carry the principle responsibility to socialize their children, and therefore are rich sources of cultural views and information. In my travels, I have found that many women in Latin America are willing to share their views and experiences with me, and through my video camera, with my students. They are pleased that someone cares about what they have to say. Their sincerity and candor in expressing their views provides students with a rich source of both authentic language and cultural insights. This project is possible because the women have opened their hearts and lives by sharing their voices with us. Blair E. Bateman (2002) eloquently sums up the goal of ethnographic interviews which is shared by this project:

"Besides providing insight into the interviewees' culture, ethnographic interviews have the potential to help students learn about themselves. As they come to understand the point of view of an individual from another culture, students become aware of aspects of their own culture that are often invisible until seen in contrast with other cultures. They learn that there are ways of looking at the world besides their own, and begin to comprehend how they are seen by others. This understanding can lead students to a fuller awareness of their own culture and how it influences the way they see the world" (p. 321).

#### **User Interface and Presentation of Listening Materials**

*Las Voces* is an HTML-based program that opens with a map of Latin America, indicating the three loca-

tions of Quetzaltenango, Morelia, and Lima. Students click on the desired location. At the home screen for each location, a fixed menu bar offers students options to read a short history of the area in Spanish (*Historia*), view photographs of the area (*Fotos*), read instructions to use the program (*Instrucciones*), and listen and view introductions by the 20 women of that region (*Introducciones*). In the *Preguntas* option, students see a list of the seven questions and can listen to all 20 of the women's answers to one question, as each interview is segmented into seven clips. The last menu button, *Entrevistas*, takes students to a screen that plays the entire interview. This database of interviews gives students many choices to develop their own research questions and to look for answers. Hoven's (1999) model identifies control and navigation as important in learner-centered instructional design.

Students click on one of the 20 women's photos to access the interview clips, with the question displayed at the top of the screen. Students have full control of the QuickTime video, which allows for listening to the same videoclip, or part of the videoclip, multiple times. Students can also choose to reveal or hide a glossary of regional words and expressions specific to each clip.

These listening materials are different from most recorded interviews in that they provide students with many voices answering the same set of questions. Responses contain many of the same vocabulary words and structures, which provides repetition and restatement in listening practice. Students can select which women to listen to, and they are exposed to regional varieties of Spanish. Idiomatic expressions and paralinguistic features such as gestures and facial expressions enhance the students' listening experience.

According to Hoven (1999), the level of difficulty of authentic listening materials can be modified by varying the texts, contexts, and tasks. The materials are accessible to all levels, as lower level students can concentrate on the introductions and first two or three

## Concept

*Las Voces de las Mujeres de Latinoamérica* is an ongoing project to bring the voices of women of Latin America to students of Spanish. Videotaped interviews were conducted in 2003 and 2005 with 20 women in each of three locations: Quetzaltenango, Guatemala; Morelia, Mexico; and Lima, Peru. This growing video-archive presents the views, values, and choices of women of many ages (10 to 78), backgrounds, and professions. Each woman was asked the same set of seven open-ended questions in Spanish:

1. *Introducción.* Introduction, description of family, profession, personality
2. *¿Cuáles son las tres cosas más importantes en su vida? ¿Por qué son importantes?* What are the three most important things in your life, and why are they important?
3. *¿Qué problemas tiene en su vida? ¿Qué hace para resolverlos?* What problems do you have? How are you trying to resolve these problems?
4. *¿Cuáles son los valores más importantes que aprendió Ud. de su madre? ¿Cómo pasa estos valores a otras personas?* What values did you learn from your mother? How do you pass these values to others?
5. *¿Hay una experiencia que me pueda contar que tuvo un impacto fuerte en su vida?* Is there an experience you can tell me about that had a strong impact on your life?
6. *¿Qué espera para su futuro? ¿el futuro de su familia? ¿el futuro de su país?* What do you hope for your own future? the future of your family? the future of your country?
7. *Si tuviera la oportunidad de hacer cualquier cosa, no importa el dinero, ¿Qué haría?* If you could do anything, and money didn't matter, what would you do?

This project is being developed as part of the LARC Digital Media Archive. Its goals are:

1. Help students explore the female views of cultures with an inductive approach.
2. Provide students with repetitive, structured, and student-controlled listening practice.
3. Provide a model for an ethnographic approach to learning language and culture.

questions. The intermediate to advanced students can understand most of the interviews, but they can also be allowed to self-select which interviewees they listen to. Students can compare all of the women's answers to one question, or listen to an entire interview of one particular woman.

The following activities have been used with intermediate and advanced students of Spanish in a stand-alone version of the interviews with women of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Raphan (1996) suggests three phases of activities in her multimedia approach to academic listening: prelistening phase, listening phase, and postlistening phase activities. I prefer the terms previewing, viewing, and post-viewing to emphasize the visual component of the materials.

### Previewing Activities

Previewing activities designed for *Las Voces* materials consist mainly of students answering the questions themselves before listening to the interviews and to share their own answers with the class. The sharing of both personal answers and later summary and analysis by students of the women's answers helps to create a social context and builds community in the

classroom, two features of Hovel's model (1999). This activity is a challenge for some students, as these are not questions most US students have thought about.

Students also activate important vocabulary and grammar structures that are needed to express their answers in Spanish. Bacon (1992) found that students spent a lot of time activating schema and contextualizing listening passages. This pre-viewing activity might help shorten that time and better prepare students for the listening task. I have used this pre-viewing activity as an opportunity to review or provide important vocabulary and structures with my high-intermediate and advanced students of Spanish. According to Dunkel (1986), this is a crucial step which helps in "establishing common semantic fields between the speakers and the listeners, especially when listeners are from ethno-cultural backgrounds that differ from that of the speaker" (p. 103). Further support for listeners to better understand the background of the speakers is provided through the history of the area and photographs.

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The teacher can also use class discussion of the students' own answers to help students analyze which questions generate answers that are shared by many students (shared cultural values), and which questions seem to elicit different answers (individual variation). This type of analysis serves as a model for careful generalizations drawn by the students after they listen to the interviews. According to Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996), "students should be guided to focus on similarities as an initial point of departure" (p. 436). The authors also state that, "By directing attention first to similarities, the tendency to exaggerate and generalize differences can be undermined with positive affective and perceptual results, producing the opportunity for the synthesis of perceptions and joint understanding that is necessary for subsequent tolerance of differences" (p. 435). Students need to learn to draw careful conclusions about cultural values and norms through inductive reasoning. I have found that the teacher needs to model this process for the students using their own answers before sending students to listen to the voices of women from cultures that are very different from their own.

### Viewing Activities

The principal viewing activity is to listen for the main points of each woman's answer, and to summarize each response, rather than listening for specific words or forms. Jack Richards (1988) recommends that the design of instructional materials for teaching listening comprehension reflect "a view of the nature of listening and the process it involves" (p. 59). He stresses the importance of activities that encourage top down processing in listening, as this is a more real-life task than bottom up processing activities, such as listening for specific words or grammatical features. These authentic women's voices provide students with many examples of both social and informational functions of language.

Each student develops a research question after listening to all of the women's introductions, which will help them select the women and parts of the interview that they will listen to. *Las Voces* provides a wide range of ages, education, ethnic identity, marital status, profession, and economic status. Students gain insights into shared values as well as changing values of three home cultures of these women by comparing their answers. Research questions can seek to compare the women's responses to the students' answers within one culture. For example, students can listen to the difference in the problems of older women and younger women within the same culture. They could also compare young women's answers across cultures. Students listen carefully to authentic extended discourse, taking notes as they listen.

### Post-Viewing Activities

Students analyze their notes and look for similarities

and variations in beliefs, practices, and attitudes within a culture, and draw conclusions about shared cultural values. Students share their summary and analysis with the class, either orally or in writing. Critical thinking is encouraged as students form research questions and are asked to summarize or paraphrase responses and draw conclusions.

Students studying a second language need to learn to ask questions and listen carefully in order to acquire communicative competence. These materials model an ethnographic approach to listening and to learning about other cultures. Students can be encouraged to form their own questions and conduct interviews with local Spanish speakers. An ethnographic approach to teaching culture along with foreign language has been shown to be very effective (Donan, 1997; Egan-Robertson and Willett, 1998). Bateman (2002) reported that students in his study who conducted ethnographic projects showed "an increase in understanding of and respect for Spanish speakers" and that "many of them achieved a degree of empathy and understanding for the experiences of their interviewees" (p. 327). However, native speakers of a target language, especially those from more remote regions, are not always readily accessible to foreign language students. Ideally *Las Voces de las mujeres de latinoamérica* should serve as a model to encourage students to engage in conversations with native speakers of Spanish wherever they are.

### Future Goals

It is my hope that Spanish teachers who use these materials in different ways will share their ideas about how to effectively use video-taped interviews in teaching listening comprehension. It would also be wonderful if teachers who travel could add to the voices of the women of Latin America collected to date. Perhaps this project will also encourage similar projects that would share the voices of women in languages other than Spanish.

The National Foreign Language Resource Center of Hawai'i released a 2-DVD set of the interviews with Guatemalan women, *Las voces de las mujeres de Xelajú* available at: <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu>.

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As undergraduate experiences abroad increasingly become the norm on the SDSU campus, it's the returning students who are turning out to be the best recruiters. According to the provost, "every student says this is the best thing that I've ever done educationally, and most say this is the best thing that I've ever done in my life." The campus' student population is going global as more and more of them are, "taking flight as citizens of the world." Thank you, Provost Nancy Marlin, for giving them their wings.

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