En una palabra, Sevilla

Reviewed by

Nina Moreno
The University of South Carolina

PRODUCT AT A GLANCE

Product Type:
Simulation, facilitative tool

Language(s):
Spanish

Level:
Beginning, intermediate, advanced; adolescent and adult

Activities:
Fill-in exercises (if adapted), pronunciation, listening comprehension, oral and written production, vocabulary learning, culture

Media Format:
CD-ROM

Operating Systems:
Windows 98, 2000, XP; Macintosh OS 10.1.5 or higher

Hardware Requirements:
Windows:
Windows 98, Pentium II, 64 MB RAM; Windows 2000, Pentium III, 128 MB RAM; Windows XP, Pentium III, 128 MB RAM; No hard disk space required (runs directly from CD-ROM); sound card and speakers; good resolution video

Macintosh:
G3, 128 MB RAM; No hard disk space required (runs directly from CD-ROM); speakers

Supplementary Software:
QuickTime, ver. 7.2 (can be downloaded from http://www.apple.com/quicktime)

Documentation:

Price:
Single user $44.95
Multiple copies
Institutions’ language labs can purchase a copy and automatically receive rights to upload an electronic copy of the material on a password-protected network, available to students and faculty. Language labs can also loan the number of purchased copies to their students.
GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The CD-ROM *En una palabra, Sevilla* is a video-based program that revolves around 10 key words and the different interpretations that 15 people assign to these concepts. The informants are asked, one at a time, to define or explain the following terms:

1. *ambición* ‘ambition,’
2. *amigos* ‘friends,’
3. *libertad* ‘freedom,’
4. *familia* ‘family,’
5. *felicidad* ‘happiness,’
6. *individualismo* ‘individualism,’
7. *éxito* ‘success,’
8. *orgullo* ‘pride,’
9. *país* ‘country,’ and
10. *trabajo* ‘work.’

The mode in which the information is conveyed follows that of a recorded video interview. The length of each entry and the detail in which each interviewee discusses the concepts varies and does not follow a set of guidelines.

The pool of participants is very diverse; the 15 people interviewed are all adults and come from different walks of life: college students, a housewife, elementary school teachers, the Argentinean wife of a social activist, a Moroccan immigrant with an impeccable command of Spanish, a high-school graduate, and a retired mechanic, among others.

The description offered on the Georgetown University Press website states that “While these words are easily translatable into any language, the definitions offered by the speakers reveal the diverse nature of culture and how words convey individual and collective values, which are not always obvious”—a description indicating that this product was envisioned and designed to serve mainly as a tool to teach and learn about culture.

Another highlighted feature of this material is the glossary; when users click on a content word in the transcription of an interview, a definition—taken from the RAE dictionary—appears in the Glosario box.

One feature that makes this CD-ROM unique and interesting is precisely that it is entirely produced in the target language and that the speech used in the interviews is produced by native speakers at natural speed. This is not a common feature in pedagogical tools available to a language instructor, since as Munday, from Sacred Heart University, claims in her review of the material, “obtaining real language, spoken by real people has always been a challenge for the language professor” (Georgetown University Press website).

In addition to the CD-ROM, instructors can obtain a free online instructor’s handbook with ideas and suggestions on how to use the material in classes at different proficiency levels.

EVALUATION

Technological Features

The *En una palabra, Sevilla* program is compatible with both PC (Windows 98, 2000, XP) and
Macintosh computers (OS 10.1.5 or higher). The program does not require installation. Once the CD-ROM is inserted into the drive, the autorun feature will take users directly to the main screen (see Figure 1). If necessary, users only need to download QuickTime, version 7.2, in order to view the interview video clips. The download of QuickTime can be easily done free of charge (http://www.apple.com/quicktime). First-time users are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the icons and the steps necessary to watch and listen to any one of the 150 entries.

Figure 1
Main Webpage

The main page contains icons at the bottom that take users to a help menu (ayuda); this feature is especially helpful for first-time users because it explains clearly what every button’s or icon’s function is (see Figure 2).
The instructions on this page are in Spanish but are simple enough for learners of all levels to understand them.

On the left of the help page, a tab labeled El glosario y la transcripción describes to users how the glossary and the transcriptions are presented in the program (see Figure 3).
The next tab, Características del glosario, explains that the glossary is meant to help beginning and intermediate level students understand the interviews and that the words in the glossary are taken from the transcriptions of the interviewees’ contributions. This information, while very useful, is also written in Spanish and may need the instructor’s intervention to ensure thorough understanding on the part of learners at lower proficiency levels. A small fault was found with the glossary feature; when clicking on a content word that did not have a gloss, the definition for the word hombre ‘man’ appeared on the screen.

The last tab contains the technical requirements. This material is compatible with both PCs and Macs, broadening the venues at which it could be used and maximizing its versatility.

The program does not present any significant delays when starting or loading the interviews. No crashes or stalls were detected either. The buffering of the video files goes very quickly, and the sound is so clear that the distinctive Andalusian Spanish variation is not hard to detect. The most characteristic speech features of the Sevilla variation are presented under a handy Habla de Sevilla ‘Sevilla speech’ section, which can be found under the set of Habla de Sevilla tab at the top of the screen. The other tabs present information on the pedagogical objectives of the program and a segment on the city of Sevilla and the south of Spain.

Although the stated main goal of En una palabra, Sevilla is to teach culture, the content of the interviews does not so much reflect cultural diversity as it does different personal viewpoints. This is not to say that the material cannot be used for discussion, but instructors using the program should be careful not to assume that their students will be exposed to a diverse Spanish culture when listening to the interviews and should advise learners not to make generalizations based on this material.

The fact that the interviews were done with speakers of a not-so-commonly used variation in Spanish teaching materials is truly worthy of praise. All Spanish variations should be of interest to a Spanish language learner, and it is important that the stereotype of the central-northern Spaniard accent (which uses the interdental, voiceless, fricative /θ/, not the apical /s/) be eliminated as being the only variation used in Spain. The only observation in this regard would be that instructors need to be aware of this fact so they can point out to learners beforehand what to expect. It would be recommended to have learners visit the tab Habla de Sevilla first so they familiarize themselves with the different phenomena that can be encountered among speakers from southern Spain.

The presentation of the material is attractive, and the fact that the users are exposed to the language samples of real people, not actors following a script, will most certainly attract students’ attention. Learners are able to pause, stop, rewind, and forward the video files just as they would with any video they watch online.

Activities (Procedure)

When users examine the different interviews, they listen and watch native speakers of Seville Spain, two foreigners, and one Spaniard from another part of Spain but living in Seville express their thoughts on one of the 10 words that users select.

The instructor’s manual suggests different ways that the instructor or users can group the informants: by relationship (e.g., husband-wife and aunt-niece), by place of work (e.g., co-workers at the same Human Resources office), by place of study (e.g., college students of the same school department), by immigration status, by religious affiliation, or by age (e.g., younger group, middle-aged group, or senior citizen).
The online manual also suggests activities that vary according to the learner’s proficiency level. It is advised that for beginning level students the instructors be more actively involved in monitoring learners’ activities. As was previously mentioned, the instructor’s help will most certainly be necessary at this level to prepare learners for input that is well beyond their capabilities and to avoid frustration. Most activities for the beginning level are for listening comprehension, and oral/written production. One suggested pretask activity could include discussing learners’ own ideas of what a certain concept (e.g., *familia*) means to them. After this kind of brainstorming session, students—in a whole-class format—could listen to one of the video files and compare that informant’s ideas to their own.

Another activity that is recommended in the online manual involves a fill-in-the-blank task. Learners can be instructed to listen to one of the video files and fill in the missing words of a modified transcription of the text. Only a few files, however, could be used for this purpose at the beginning of the course if learners have just begun to be exposed to the Andalusian variation.

The manual suggests a ‘vocabulary expansion’ activity that relies on the use of English and resembles a simple translation task. It involves presenting learners with English words or phrases (e.g., ‘wife,’ ‘I mean,’ ‘wider,’ or ‘in other words’) and urges learners to guess what their Spanish equivalents might be after listening and watching the selected interview. Lastly, a commonly used task of discussion is suggested. Follow-up questions on terms, concepts, and ideas that have come up in the video files can serve as good discussion topics. Instructors should avoid simple yes/no questions (e.g., “Do you think Antonio José’s definition is similar to that of the majority of people from your country?”) and make an effort to formulate questions that will enable learners to use the vocabulary and structures they have seen in class.

A more interactive task suggested for the intermediate level is to instruct learners to carry out their own interviews with Spanish speakers. Given that the main objective of this software is to provide the learners with a better understanding of culture, it is suggested in the manual that the interviews be used as support material for a sociolinguistic study of southern Spain reality. This idea does seem to tap into a true cultural component, although rigorous and comprehensive background information should be provided prior to engaging in such a task. For obvious historical reasons, Spaniards’ concept of *país* ‘country,’ for instance, can be a source of endless hours of analysis and discussion. However, without appropriate preparation, such a culturally, sociologically, and linguistically rich topic could wind up underused, misunderstood, or completely missed.

An activity that is suggested for an advanced course is to analyze different speakers’ speech. As mentioned above, this task can be done only after analyzing the characteristic features of Andalusian speech.

A task not included in the manual that seems amenable to the nature of the program is character building. Follow-up questions utilizing the content of the interviews could be used for this activity: based on what Mari Paz has said about *ambición* and *familia*, how would she react to her son moving to Buenos Aires to pursue a banking career?

What each interviewee says for each concept can be turned into an invaluable database for innumerable activities that are not necessarily suggested in the instructor’s manual but that would need a little bit of imagination on the instructor’s part. On the other hand, care should be taken in not overusing the material. If it has been used with first-semester students, it should be avoided in immediately subsequent courses and perhaps should only be revisited in high intermediate or advanced levels. This would give room for a different range
of activities and would also allow learners to see how far they have come since their first encounter with the material, when, perhaps, they will not need to use the transcript feature as often anymore.

**Teacher Fit (Approach)**

Ever since the emphasis in instructed second language acquisition (SLA) shifted towards real-life or real-life-like communication, the use of authentic material has been encouraged (see Nunan, 1991, 1999, and elsewhere). The approach has been successfully applied to the skill of listening in the reviewed material by means of 150 audiovisual entries by native speakers of the south of Spain, one by a speaker of the northern part of Spain, one by a speaker from Argentina, and one by a nonnative speaker from Morocco. While the efforts of including unmodified authentic speech are applauded, they also come with certain shortcomings. The literature has already warned us of the detrimental effects of using authentic material with beginners (Ur, 1984; Dunkel, 1986; Omaggio Hadley, 2001) and coincides with this reviewer’s opinion that it can become taxing, frustrating, and, in fact, counterproductive because it may bring about undesirable anxiety among learners (see Byrnes, 1984).

On the topic of the appropriateness of authentic materials for listening comprehension, the transcripción feature should be highlighted. Geddes and White (1978), among others, have found that the negative effects of incorporating authentic material in class can be minimized by means of an outline or notes that guide learners throughout the duration of the recording or the video material. This is the function that can be given to the transcript; it would be very useful if used as an aid after a first round of listening or as a primer for the content of the segment before listening.

In addition, the use of authentic material in this particular CD-ROM will prepare learners for face-to-face encounters with native speakers who may not always use ‘teacher talk’ with them.

Directed follow-up activities should be assigned before learners set out to use the material so that clear objectives and expectations are met. Although the CD-ROM could be assigned as homework, beginning-level classes should watch the videos with their instructor so that vocabulary questions and cultural issues can be discussed and more fully, profitably exploited.

The software encourages peer interaction through pair work, small-group projects, and whole-class activities. These types of tasks have the potential of promoting peer correction, feedback, and also self-correction—all of which can be key elements in learners’ interlanguage development (Swain, 1985, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

The CD-ROM deserves praise for including a sociolinguistic variation that is normally not found among teaching materials: Andalusian Spanish spoken by middle-class people of all adult age brackets. How to take advantage of this rich raw material will depend on the instructors’ imagination and their students’ interest in learning more about linguistic variation.

Since there are two speakers from other countries (Argentina and Morocco) and one speaker from a different region of Spain, the CD-ROM would be ideal supplementary material for an introduction to Spanish linguistics, a Spanish phonology or a contrastive phonetics course.
Learner Fit (Design)

This material, although intended for all levels, seems more appropriate for learners at intermediate proficiency levels or higher. The CD-ROM does not focus on specific grammatical structures, lexical items (except the concepts presented by each informant), or sociolinguistic registers. Instructional foci will depend on the posttask activities and the objectives that the instructors set for their classes. There is virtually no feedback or error correction elicited by the program since it is rather limited in interactive features. The material is, however, versatile in that it can be adapted to fit different learners’ interests on various topics (e.g., family, country, friendship, etc.) and should be appropriate for learners 16 years of age and older.

The program is also very flexible in the degree to which control learners and their instructors have over the material. It will be up to the instructors to determine how much of the work students can do on their own and how much they will need to direct in class. The material seems better suited for those learners who are more visual, hands-on, and field dependent.

Although this material is presented as a useful tool for all learning levels, current research in the fields of SLA and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) suggests that higher proficiency level language learners use glosses more successfully than lower proficiency learners (Gasigitamrong, 2004; Lomicka, 1998). Since the glosses in this CD-ROM are in Spanish and may not be used to their fullest potential when presented to beginning-level learners, it would be advisable for instructors to provide more guidance and direction when presenting this material to their beginning-level students.

While adapting this program to a lower level proficiency class could be a challenge, the expectations and objectives set for intermediate and advanced levels should be easily attainable. Learners using this material at higher proficiency levels should be able to work with the program more independently as well. More analytical activities and work in a collaborative small-group format are suggested in the online manual.

The interviewees do not follow a script and they only seem to have been instructed to speak freely; thus, interjections, incomplete sentences, colloquialisms and repetitions are frequent. While this may give users a taste of what natural and spontaneous speech is in terms of speed and rhythm, the comprehension of what is being said, even after reading the transcription text, might be a taxing task for some students, especially those at the beginning level. Idiolect also comes into play, which could be an interesting topic to discuss in introductory linguistics courses but which could prove frustrating in a listening comprehension task. To avoid these pitfalls, it would be recommended that the materials be used mostly with intermediate- to advanced-level students and only sparsely with beginning-level students. Instructors should also be careful to select those entries that are not too lengthy or repetitive.

In fact, the corpus that this CD-ROM contains lends itself to a variety of comparative studies or projects of a more phonological/phonetic nature and would therefore be greatly beneficial in more advanced linguistics courses (e.g., introduction to (Spanish) linguistics or (contrastive) phonetics/phonology).

SUMMARY

While En una palabra, Sevilla is not necessarily an ideal tool to become better acquainted with culture, this CD-ROM can act as a useful source of listening comprehension material for intermediate- and advanced-level students. It could also be utilized as supporting material for
introductory linguistics courses, and institutions with study-abroad programs in the south of Spain should seriously consider exposing their students to this material before they depart to their destination.

One of the program’s advantages is that it is compatible with both PCs and Macs and that its navigation is simple, straightforward, and attractive.

The material requires a fair amount of preparation for pretask and posttask activities; however, the scarcity of spontaneous, natural, authentic auditory Spanish texts makes this CD-ROM worth buying and keeping in the language lab.

SCALED RATING
(1 low-5 high):

Implementation Possibilities: 3
Pedagogical Features: 3
Sociolinguistic Accuracy: 3
Use of Computer Capabilities: 5
Ease of Use: 5
Overall Evaluation: 3.5
Value for Money: 3.5

REFERENCES


**PRODUCER'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

E. Paris-Bouvret & A. Pérez-Gironés
Georgetown University Press
3240 Prospect Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Phone: 202 687 5889
Fax: 202 687 6340
Email: gupress@georgetown.edu
Web: www.press.georgetown.edu

**REVIEWER’S BIODATA**

Nina Moreno is Assistant Professor of Spanish and Pedagogy at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Nina holds a Ph.D. in Spanish Applied Linguistics from Georgetown University. In her most recent research, she examined the effects of different types of feedback and task features within a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) environment. Other current research interests include: teaching methodology, second language acquisition, attention to meaning and form.

**REVIEWER’S ADDRESS**

Nina Moreno, Ph.D.
701 Welsh Humanities Building
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
Phone: 803 777 2640
Email: MorenoN@gwm.sc.edu