

**REVIEW OF *TELL ME MORE SPANISH***

<b>Title</b>	<i>Tell Me More Spanish</i>
<b>Platforms</b>	PC or compatible; Windows 95/98, NT4, Millennium, 2000 or XP (Windows 95 and NT4 need Microsoft Internet Explorer 4 or higher.)
<b>System requirements</b>	Windows: Pentium Celeron 333 MHz or equivalent; 64 MB of RAM (128 MB for NT4, Millennium, 2000 and XP); 8x CD-ROM drive; 16 bit Windows compatible sound card; microphone and loudspeakers or headsets; graphics card: 800 X 600 with 65.536 colors (16 bit)
<b>Publisher</b>	Auralog Inc. 2720 South Hardy Drive, Suite 3 Tempe, AZ 85282
<b>Support offered</b>	Customer service (in the US): <a href="mailto:supportusa@auralog.com">supportusa@auralog.com</a> (888) 388-3535 x11
<b>Target language</b>	Spanish
<b>Target audience</b>	Beginner level
<b>Price</b>	Tell Me More Spanish Premium Collection (Levels Beginner-Intermediate-Advanced): US \$195. Can be ordered online in the US and Canada at <a href="http://www.auralog.com/american.html">www.auralog.com/american.html</a> ; Network versions start at \$1,500 for 15 PCs
<b>ISBN</b>	ISBN 2-7490-0136-6

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**OVERVIEW**

*Tell Me More Spanish (TMMS)* forms part of a series of language learning software (CD-ROMs) by Auralog, a French software development company. It is similar in format to *Tell Me More Arabic*, *French*, *German*, *Japanese*, *Chinese*, *Italian*, *Dutch*, and *ESL*, and is directed toward individual users (e.g., business professionals) as well as classroom learners (high school and adult). The object of this review is the beginner-level CD-ROM for *Tell me More Spanish*.

The material in this program is divided into six workshops: *lesson*, *cultural*, *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *oral*, and *written*. The lesson workshop consists of 12 lessons on topics normally covered in beginning classes (e.g., *vida familiar* "family life," *objetos y animals* "objects and animals"), as well as some that focus on business contexts (*el ordenador* "the computer," *diálogo con el jefe* "dialogue with the boss"). The cultural workshop consists of an encyclopedia (cultural texts and maps) and activities related to this information. The vocabulary workshop contains a glossary and eight different types of vocabulary exercises from picture-word associations to crossword puzzles. Students can enhance their knowledge of grammatical rules in the grammar workshop, through the use of grammatical explanations and six (mostly discrete-point) exercises. The oral and written workshops essentially provide easy access to all program activities that either practice listening/speaking or reading/writing skills. Several icons in the top right part of the main menu page allow the student to access reference tools and help when necessary. The *tools* menu provides access to a dictionary, conjugation tool, and printer interface. The *Tell me More Spanish* learner also has access to online services, in the form of a Web site (<http://tmmsi.auralog.com/>) called the Auralog Club, available to users of the *Tell Me More* language series.

**DESCRIPTION**

The program consists of 12 lessons on topics normally covered in beginning classes: *vida familiar* (family life), *aspecto físico* (physical appearance), *cifras y letras* (numbers and letters), *fecha y hora* (date and hour [time]), *objetos y animals* (objects and animals), *adjetivos* (adjectives), *llegada a España* (arrival in

Spain), *la fiesta* (the party), *Por Madrid* (around Madrid), *indicaciones* (directions), *el ordenador* (the computer), and *diálogo con el jefe* (dialogue with the boss). The last two lessons emphasize business contexts. Within each of the 12 lessons there are several activities for students to complete in the various workshops. In order to be able to review all of the program's activities, the author of this review used the free-to-roam mode to navigate through the program.

### **Lesson Workshop**

The lesson workshop provides overall access to various activities in each of the 12 lessons: *pronunciation* (dialogue, word pronunciation, sentence pronunciation, phonetics exercise); activities (picture/word association, word searches, word association, the right word, fill-in-the-blanks, words and topics, words and functions, grammar practice, mystery phrase, crossword puzzles, word order, sentence practice, dictation, written expression); *video* (video and questions); *reference works* (glossary and grammar explanations). Sometimes, however, an activity with the same name will vary slightly according to the skill being practiced; these variances are noted below in the explanations. Within each of the workshops, a pop-up menu bar at the bottom center of each screen allows the student to select the activity of his/her choice.

### **Cultural Workshop**

The cultural workshop consists of an informational section (*encyclopedia*) with cultural texts and maps, as well as an activities section containing activities to test cultural knowledge. The *cultural texts* consist of several dozen "cultural capsules" about mostly Olympian culture (Big C National Standards cultural "products") that are related by a hierarchical menu that groups them into categories: *geografía* (geography), *historia* (history), *tradiciones* (traditions), *gastronomía* (gastronomy), *literature* (literature), *arte-arquitectura* (art-architecture), *ocio* (leisure time), and *socioeconomía* (socioeconomics). The student may access a total of 71 different cultural text summaries (one sentence descriptions of an accompanying authentic photograph or sketch from the Spanish-speaking world). Key words in these texts are highlighted to make them more salient in the input so learners can notice them more easily and make them candidates for acquisition. The student can then click on an icon to get the entire text (approximately 100 words), which presents historical, artistic, and political information on topics ranging from García Lorca to the Argentine tango. Another button allows the student to read an English translation of the cultural text. The *maps* section contains physical (geographic), linguistic, and political maps of Spain, Europe, and the world.

The screenshot displays the 'Cultural Texts' section of the 'Tell Me More Spanish' application. It features a 'Free-to-Room Mode' header and a 'Beginner' level indicator. The main content area is split into two panels. The left panel shows a photograph of the Plaza de España in Seville, Spain, with a stone bridge over a canal. The right panel contains a search bar, a title 'Sevilla monumental', and key words: 'Sevilla | andaluza | monumentos'. Below this, a text box states: 'Sevilla es una ciudad andaluza rica por su historia y monumentos.' A small map of Spain highlights the location of Seville, with a label 'Plaza de España' and the category 'Geografía'. The interface includes various navigation icons, a 'Choose an activity' dropdown menu, and a 'Cultural Workshop' indicator.

The student can also test his/her retention of this material using various activities. The *riddles* exercise presents the student with a cultural content question: *¿Qué artista español nació en Málaga en 1881?* (What Spanish artist was born in Malaga in 1881?). In the *reply* box, the student must type in the answer (Pablo Picasso) by clicking on the letters of a keyboard to spell out his name. Several Spanish language clues are also available to the student (*Fue pintor, dibujante y escultor* "He was a painter, sketch artist, and sculptor"; *Vivió en Barcelona y Paris* "He lived in Barcelona and Paris"; and *Pintó el Guernica* "He painted *Guernica*"). The use of these target/second language (L2) cues forces the student to make L2-L2 connections and to put forth mental effort for deep processing of the material (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). The *patchworks* activity invites the student to click and drag a Spanish word to identify the picture that it represents (e.g., *Salamanca, La Habana*); the fact that there are only two choices renders this exercise less effective than others. Even though a great effort is made to include cultural artifacts from the entire Hispanic world, the Eurocentric focus of this program is quite noticeable (from the maps of Europe to the Castillian accent that predominates in the lessons); in addition, half of the ten historical cultural capsules have to do with Spain.

### Vocabulary Workshop

The glossary contains an alphabetized list of Spanish vocabulary words with their English counterparts. Students are able to click on a word to hear it pronounced and can choose the level of difficulty of vocabulary words ranging from elementary (*profesor* "professor") to specialized (*pibe* "kid"). The words in the glossary can also be accessed by topic/semantic field (e.g., *vida cotidiana* "everyday life," *esfera intelectual* "intellectual sphere," *esfera social* "social sphere," *esfera profesional* "professional sphere"). These four categories are then broken down more finely (e.g., *esfera profesional* → *mundo del trabajo*

"the workworld," *personal y organigrama* "personnel and organizational flowchart"). When the last hierarchical category is chosen, the words in that group are presented in an alphabetical list, instead of in a meaningful context. A search function also allows students to look for specific words.

The *picture/word association* function allows learners to look at a photograph and click on the word that describes the picture within a multiple choice format. The *word search* exercises invite the student to find target vocabulary words related to the lesson topic hidden in a grid. In the *word association* exercise, learners reinforce L2-L2 relationships by drawing lines between related concepts. The multiple-choice *right word* click-and-drag activity asks the student to choose which of the given words fits appropriately into a blank in a sentence (e.g., *Se \_\_\_\_\_ que Ud. está redactando un informe (gritando, volver, vale, trabajo, ha, supone, "One \_\_\_\_\_ that you are editing a report. ("yelling," "to return," "OK," "work," "has," "supposes")*). The *fill-in-the-blank* activity requires students to complete sentences within a dialogue by clicking and dragging words from a list into their proper slot in the dialogue. Students in the *words and topics* exercise get a chance to make L2-L2 associations by grouping related words into categories (semantic mapping; see Morin & Goebel, 2001; e.g., from a combined list of family relationships and greetings, the learner must click and drag the words for family relations into the *familia y entorno* "family and surroundings" category and place the greetings expressions into the *saludos y formulas de cortesia* "greetings and courtesy formulas" box.) In the *mystery phrase* activity, the learner must produce (type) a word that corresponds to the L2 definition given (e.g., cue = *esposo*, answer= *marido*). The *crossword puzzle* provides L1 clues for the L2 words that fit into the crossword puzzle (e.g., "dinner"= *cena*).

### Grammar Workshop

In the grammar workshop the student can choose the level of *grammar explanation* (also accessed via a button on the main menu page, as described above) s/he wants: elementary, basic, average, advanced, or specialized. However, it is sometimes difficult to understand why the forms *conmigo*, *contigo*, and *consigo* ("with me," "with you," "with himself") are considered more difficult (specialized) than the relative pronouns *cuyo*, *lo cual*, and *el cual* ("whose," "that [neuter] which," "that [masculine singular] which"), which are categorized only as advanced. Within each level the student is presented with a list of grammar topics that are also grouped by category (the sentence, nominal modifiers, the verbal group). The grammar topics accompanied by a smiling face icon provide the learner with an example of the grammar point used in context (in a spoken and written script to accompany a short cartoon narrative). These cartoons are meant to be humorous and often contain sound effects (crowds cheering and high pitched voices of animated characters) and enhanced written input (darkening the markers of the grammar point illustrated) to attract the learner's attention.

The screenshot shows the 'Grammar Explanations' section of the 'Tell Me More Spanish' software. The interface is titled 'Free-to-Room Mode' and 'Beginner'. It features a navigation menu on the left with various grammar topics, including 'Subject pronouns', which is currently selected. The main content area displays a cartoon titled 'Subject pronouns' showing a man saying 'Yo soy fuerte.' (I am strong.) and a woman replying '- I am strong.' The interface includes navigation buttons, a search bar, and a 'Choose an activity' dropdown at the bottom.

These cartoons might be entertaining for high school students, but they border on the ludicrous for many adult learners. In addition, many reflect sexist attitudes and cultural stereotypes. At the end of the cartoon, the students are automatically presented with the explanation of the grammatical point highlighted in the cartoon (e.g., the formation of the plural) in their choice of either English or Spanish. Grammar topics preceded by the letter X only provide the grammatical explanations, without the cartoons.

Several practice activities also comprise the grammar workshop. The *right word* and *fill-in-the blank* activities have already been explained under the vocabulary lesson description. The *words and functions* section requires students to group words according to grammatical function (nouns are extracted from a sentence and put into a box -- mapping of forms, not concepts). The *grammar practice* activities are comprised of written mechanical transformational exercises at the word level (e.g., make the following words plural: *un día* → *unos días*, "day" → "days") in which students must produce (type in) the target forms. The *sentence practice* activity involves the written production of larger transformations at the sentence level (e.g., *Mi marido trabaja* → *Mi marido está trabajando*, "My husband works" → "My husband is working").

### Oral Workshop

The *oral workshop* brings together in a list various activities in the program that require listening comprehension and oral production. Listening activities include the following: *diálogo* (listening and speaking), video and questions, word searches, and crossword puzzles. In the *diálogo* activity within the oral workshop the learner is presented with a picture and an oral question with three possible rejoinders, only one of which is appropriate:

The screenshot shows the Auralog software interface. At the top, it says "Free-to-Room Mode" and "Auralog". The main title is "Dialogue" with a sub-header "Beginner" and the instruction "Listen first, then say the right answer." There is a "Speak..." button with a microphone icon. A video player shows a man and a woman in white clothing. To the right, there are three multiple-choice questions: "¿Quién es usted?", "En Francia, ¿y usted?", and "De acuerdo. Adiós.". Below the video is a "Links" section. The bottom navigation bar includes a "Choose an activity" dropdown and an "Oral Workshop" indicator.

The learner then pronounces one of the three answers and his/her speech is analyzed by the speech recognition software.

The *video and questions* section provides a videoclip that is loosely related to the general theme of the lesson. After the clip is seen, the learner is presented with a written multiple choice activity to test the learner's of the video. Other listening exercises in the oral workshop are modifications of activities already described (e.g., *word searches* in this workshop give oral cues to the student trying to pick the word out of a grid of letters and *crossword puzzles* serve as mini-dictations by asking the student to listen to the L2 word being pronounced and to type the word into the crossword puzzle). The *dictation* exercise provides an opportunity for the learner to listen to longer phrases and write them down. The learner must make sure s/he includes the relevant punctuation, or the written responses will be counted as wrong. Icons allow learners to access grammatical explanations of items in the dictated sentences.

This workshop also contains several oral production activities involving speech recognition that are aimed at helping the learner improve his/her pronunciation. Both the *word pronunciation* and *sentence pronunciation* exercises provide waveforms and pitch curves for the oral native speaker cues as well as for the learner's responses. The program then compares the learner's waveforms and pitch curves to that of the native speakers and generates a score from between 1-7 (7 is the highest score) to indicate how well the student's language matches that of the native speaker, and where pronunciation errors occurred (highlighted in red). A cumulative visual record of the score is kept as the learner attempts to pronounce the word correctly several times; as a result, the student can monitor his/her progress toward the native speaker norm.

The *phonetics exercise* is quite helpful to students, since it allows the student to choose the phoneme s/he would like to improve. First, the student is urged to watch the 3-D animation as it demonstrates how the lips and tongue should move in the mouth to produce the target sound. Then the student clicks on the model and hears the target sound produced, along with waveforms and pitch curves. The learner then pronounces the target word, and the program evaluates the student's pronunciation on the same scale of 1-7 described above. The student may rehearse target sounds as often as s/he wishes and can see if s/he is improving by looking to see if his/her pronunciation score improves.

Other activities that require oral production and the use of speech recognition software include the *word order activity* and *picture/word association*. In the word order activity, the student is asked to orally produce a sentence by putting the words provided by voice cues in order (e.g., *usted, hoy, Miguel, ¿Cómo está?* "You, today, Miguel, How are you?" → *¿Cómo está usted hoy, Miguel?* "How are you today, Miguel?"). The computer program evaluates the student's spoken response and indicates which part of the answer was correct (in green) or incorrect (red). The learner then has the opportunity to correct his/her response and once again get the program's feedback.

The *picture/word association* activity is a modification of previously described activity in which the learner orally indicates which of three words in a list on the right side of the screen accurately describes the picture to the left.

The screenshot shows the 'Picture/Word Association' activity in the Tell Me More Spanish software. The interface is in 'Free-to-Roam Mode' and is set to 'Beginner' level. The main task is to 'Pronounce the word that corresponds to the image.' The image shown is a small, light blue house with a chimney and a porch, surrounded by orange flowers. To the right of the image is a list of three options: 'palacio', 'casa', and 'castillo'. The interface includes a 'Speak...' button, a 'Choose an activity' dropdown, and a 'Beginner' level indicator.

If the correct choice is made, its written representation turns green; an incorrect choice (of the three) will turn red. If the learner pronounces a word not on the list, the phrase "I do not understand you" or "*No he entendido*" (if instructions are in Spanish) will appear in red at the top of the screen.

### Written Workshop

The written workshop gives the student access to various reading and writing activities in the program. The *diálogo* activity in the written workshop is a reading and listening exercise since the oral cues are also provided in written form. In this workshop the student reads and listens to the oral cue from the computer and then clicks on the correct/appropriate answer, instead of saying the answer out loud as s/he did in the oral workshop. The *grammar practice* and *sentence practice* exercises that are accessible in the written workshop have already been described above, since they also form a part of the *grammar workshop*. The *word order* activity in the written workshop has the student click-and-drag words to create a cogent sentence with proper word order. After the entire sentence is formed, feedback is given to the student in the form of red (incorrect order) or green (correct order) cues in different words. Students take *dictation* when they are provided with a button to push to hear the prompt, and the space to write down their answers. The *written expression* exercise is by far the most creative exercise in the *TMMS* program. The students are asked to look at a picture or a short videoclip and describe what they see in at least 30 words. Since the program cannot evaluate spontaneous written prose, this exercise must be printed off and sent to the teacher for correction.



## EVALUATION

The overall look and feel of *Tell Me More Spanish* is very sophisticated. The high resolution graphics, pictures, and video, high-end speech recognition and audio software, and an extraordinarily complex network of hierarchical infrastructure make this product a monument to technology and to the creation of an inviting learning environment. The use of relaxing background music (New Age compositions) on the menu pages is reminiscent of the Suggestopedia approach. This soothing music is played while the student decides what workshop activities to choose. After the learner chooses an activity, this music fades to silence and the whirr of the CD-ROM player accompanies the presentation of the activity page chosen.

One of the strongest features of *Tell Me More Spanish* is the multimodal input presented to the learner. Each lesson consists of pictures and videos that are related directly to Spanish words (with the English translations available, but not intrusive). This use of multimodal input in language learning environments is supported by Paivio's (1971) dual coding theory, which proposes that a learner possesses two interconnected symbolic systems (verbal and non-verbal [objects or pictures]) and that representations in one system can be activated by those in the other system. Dual coding also allows the learner to process new L2 forms more deeply and to associate them directly with images from the target culture.

SLA scholars agree that the feedback learners receive helps them "notice the gap" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986) between their interlanguage system and the target language so that they can modify their output (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). This type of feedback and opportunity for modified interaction is necessary for the restructuring of the target language system and should be part of multimedia CALL activities (Chapelle, 1998).

*Tell Me More Spanish* provides feedback to the student throughout all exercises in the program. For instance, in the *grammar practice* exercise, after the learner types his/her answer, s/he clicks on the OK button to obtain feedback. At that point the computer highlights any incorrect parts of the answer in red. The learner is allowed to try again and follows the same procedure to get feedback. When the correct answer is finally given, the entire phrase turns green. The *solution* button, represented with a light bulb, can provide the correct answer at any time.

The speech-recognition software in *Tell Me More Spanish* is state-of-the art. Some feedback is given to the student in the form of wave forms (amplitude), pitch curves (frequency) graphs, and pronunciation evaluation scores, while other feedback occurs when students choose a particular response to a question posed by the program, which offers rejoinders tailored to the answers given by students. However, care must be taken to follow strict guidelines when using this speech-recognition software, or it will not be effective. For instance, in order for the software to evaluate speech samples properly the student must make sure to wait for the beep before speaking, they may not pause while speaking, and they need to fit all of what they have to say in a five second span (long and short answers alike).

Although all of the technical innovations described above in *Tell Me More Spanish* are impressive, much of its content and its approach to the teaching of Spanish constitute a classic example of missed opportunities. For example, in Lesson 1 (*vida familiar*), the attempt at cogency provided by the "daily routine" script of the video, is belied by several choices made by the developers of this software program. In the first place, cultural authenticity is sacrificed, seemingly for the bottom line. The video in the *video and questions* sections is of very high quality, but the images and sounds used do not usually come from the target (Hispanic) culture. In the daily routine dialogue of Lesson 1 the images portray people, places, and activities from a variety of cultures, but mostly from modern middle class urban European (often non-Hispanic) and Asian contexts. No attempt is made to include images of Latin Americans from mixed heritages (e.g., *mestizos*) or from lower socioeconomic status or rural communities in the *Tell Me More Spanish* program. This fact, coupled with the Peninsular bias noted in the use of Castillian Spanish and

cultural capsules heavily focused on Spanish topics, render this program less useful for a North American audience of Spanish learners who focus heavily on the language and cultures of Latin America.

Although the use of images of people from various non-Hispanic cultural groups around the world allows the learner to be more aware of the global village in which s/he lives, the use of visuals that do not come from the target culture, and that are accompanied by a voiceover L2 narration instead of a dialogue among L2 speakers, does not allow the learner to view the target language *in situ* as a form of social practice (Kramsch, 1993). However, by using more global images and voiceover narrations that can easily be rerecorded in different languages, the developers are able to reuse some of the same videos and pictures not only in various lessons in the same program (the videos in the *objetos y animales* lesson is the same as the video for the *adjetivos* unit), but also in other software products in the *Tell Me More* series that teach other languages. In the process, however, the Spanish learner does not make connections between L2 words and target culture (C2) images; for instance, in Lesson 1 the video couples the word *casa* (house) with a photograph of a very northern European-looking grey domicile, complete with a tall chimney stack and a white picket gate (see picture below under picture/word association in the *oral workshop*).

In addition, these non-Hispanic global images are linked together by narrations accompanied by background synthesized music in a surrealistic pastiche worthy of MTV. For example, in Lesson 1 (*vida familiar*) instead of following a cogent script (Schank & Abelson, 1977) of the daily routine of one person from a Spanish-speaking culture throughout a typical workday in an authentic cultural context, the narrator "dialogues" with an erstwhile protagonist (portrayed by several images of people from various cultural backgrounds) who never answers her questions. The video script often goes off on small tangents with new and unexpected eye-catching colorful hip images that might entertain high school students, but that could confuse the adult learner trying to make sense of the series of images strung together.

For instance, in lesson 1, the video opens with the sounds of morning birds as the female narrator tries to wake up a sleeping boy with the words "*Venga! Arriba! Perezoso!*" (Come on! Get up! Lazy boy!). It then provides several generic images with descriptive statements about nature *El sol brilla* "the sun is shining," *Los pájaros cantan* "the birds are singing," followed by the phrase *Lávate los dientes* "Brush your teeth" that accompanies a humorous photograph of an alligator with an open mouth displaying several sharp white teeth. After the protagonist apparently leaves the aforementioned gray house to go to work, the narrator asks if s/he takes the train (*¿Coges el tren?*) as a train whistle is heard in the background and a picture of the train going through the countryside appears. Before that question is answered, the next picture shows someone driving a small, urban commuter red car and the narrator states "*Vaya! Tienes un coche muy bonito. Es un coche rojo*" (Hey! You have a very good-looking car. It is a red car.) This mechanical statement of the obvious (the driver knows what color his car is) calls to mind pre-communicative paradigms of language instruction.

The narration then goes on to ask where the protagonist (obviously not the same boy in the first image of the video) works -- in the city? (picture of a North American city), at the zoo? (picture of a lizard or iguana) -- and then asks what s/he likes to do on the weekends. The female narrator states that she likes to go fishing (picture of a man fishing in a stream) because it is very relaxing, "just like going on vacation." The narrator then asks "*¿Viajas a menudo?*" (Do you travel often?; picture of airplane appears) and "*¿Has ido a Tailandia?*" (Have you been to Thailand?) as a picture of people riding an elephant in that country pops up. Immediately afterwards, the narrator states "*A mí me encanta Venecia*" (I love Venice) and a picture of Venice, complete with gondolas, appears. Although entertaining, this type of postmodern non-linear "free association" of images from around the globe does not help Spanish L2 students form in his/her L2 schemata the script of a daily routine in the life of a native speaker of Spanish in an authentic C2 cultural context.

Although using the structure of a narrative has been shown to help students make predictions and guess meaning from context (Bruner, 1996), this aleatory combination of scripts and images from around the

world somewhat belies the possible facilitative function of the narrative structure attempted in this program. The use of narration also prevents the learner from hearing and seeing authentic dialogues among speakers of the target language in C2 contexts, and, therefore, denies the learner pragmatic models of authentic language use.

The dialogue portions of each lesson also fall short of their potential. Language-related research has shown that the practicing of routine patterns of language helps to establish functional "chunks" of language in the mind of the L2 learner that s/he can use in conversations. From a connectionist standpoint Ellis (1996) notes that the establishment of such patterned collocations in the mind of the learner facilitates acquisition. In addition, modern communicative approaches to language instruction advocate teaching functional uses of language (Savignon, 1997). Although the dialogues in *Tell Me More Spanish* do provide the learner with chances to create oral interchanges with the computer program, most of the interactions are limited to a series of short adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) that are loosely strung together around a central theme (*vida familiar*) rather than forming a part of a larger whole with a functional purpose to the entire dialogic interaction. (See examples of *Tell Me More Spanish* interactions in the [dialogue](#) section above in the oral workshop discussion.)

Although the designer's attempt to create interactions that are communicative in nature is laudable, it does not go far enough to allow more realistic communication to take place. For example, as noted above, in the dialogue section of the lesson workshop, the student is presented with a question, but can only answer with one of three rejoinders. It does not matter if any of the three answers bears any resemblance to the reality of the life of the learner using the program (e.g., s/he may not live in Spain, France, or Sweden), the learner must answer with one of the given rejoinders in order to make the program function. Since the learner is, in essence, taking on a role of an interlocutor in order to communicate with the program, the learner is not talking about his/her own personal situation and is thus not able to personalize his/her use of the target language. The taking on of another role in and of itself, is not necessarily a bad pedagogical tool for CALL software, especially in light of the lack of artificial intelligence programming and the concomitant inability of the program to respond to unexpected answers with any facility. However, more contextualization of roleplay interactions in a task-based functionally-driven activity would have greatly improved this part of the program.

For instance, at the beginning of the dialogue section in the lesson workshop, a videoclip of a conversational interchange among native speakers of Spanish on a focused topic could be shown to the learners. The videoclip would dramatize a real world situation within the target culture and introduce various characters involved in the script (e.g., a Mexican family prepares for the celebration of a *quinceañera*; different family members talk about the various tasks they will perform to prepare for the event). After observing native speakers taking part in functionally-driven conversational exchanges in authentic cultural settings (making plans for the celebration in Mexico) the learner could then take on the role of one of the family members in the video in order to carry out an assigned task (e.g., finding a venue for the *quinceañera* celebration). The learner would then be led to another page of information that would help him/her carry out the task to be performed (e.g., searching various Web pages to find out about the cost and availability of three places to hold the celebration). The computer program could then ask the learner questions about each of the three venues and would respond appropriately to the information provided by the learner. In this way, there is a motivation for the task-based conversational exchange between the computer and the learner, and cultural information is presented as part of the daily life of the target culture, and not only as a cultural capsule, divorced from real language use. The use of native speakers in model dialogues also would allow for the presentation and instruction of various speech acts in different social contexts, the first step in Olshain and Cohen's (1991) five-step method of teaching speech acts (pragmatics) to second language learners.

There are also problems with the cultural workshop, in which dozens of cultural facts are tied together by general categories, but are somewhat Eurocentric. Even within a given category (*historia*) the culture

capsules are presented as unrelated isolated historical facts from various parts of the Spanish-speaking world. No insights regarding cultural perspectives and practices (National Standards, 1996) accompany the "products" of Hispanic culture that are presented. Even though in the cultural workshop the cultural images are authentic and of very high quality, this "cultural capsule" approach treats cultural knowledge as a "fifth skill" (Kramsch, 1993), isolated from the use of language as social practice in daily life. Even the video in the *Por Madrid* lesson of the lessons workshop is in the form of a travelogue with videoclips showing historical monuments in Spain. Despite the fact that the program proposes to teach Spanish as a second language, this *Por Madrid* video is the only one in the entire 12 lessons that specifically concentrates on Hispanic culture. Unfortunately, in this videoclip, knowledge about the C2 culture is, again, treated as an isolated unit, instead of being integrated into dialogues among native speakers of Spanish in authentic cultural settings. These cultural capsules could easily have been created by developers who were not even aware of the other activities that would be part of the same lesson. No overall integration of cultural knowledge from the cultural workshop with the infrastructure and activities contained in the grammar, vocabulary, oral, and written workshops is evident.

Even though the insights from the language-related research in the last quarter century have emphasized the need for language learning to focus on language in its social context (Lafford, 2000; i.e., the appropriate realization of communicative pragmatic speech acts and functions in culturally authentic settings), the activities in the *Tell Me More Spanish* program seem to be structurally, rather than functionally, motivated. Although the dialogues allow the learner to carry on short, and somewhat artificial, interchanges with the computer, they often change direction abruptly by a seemingly unmotivated change of topic. Also, many of the dialogues and video often appear to have been created just to highlight a given grammatical structure rather than to demonstrate pragmatic functions; for instance, most of the images in the video of the last lesson (*diálogo con el jefe*) are accompanied by a narration that contrasts the present tense with the present progressive form (*estar + -ndo*). The video consists of a string of sentences about people performing different actions, but no cogent narrative is formed from this list of progressive structures. In addition, pronunciation exercises often have students repeat short L2 chunks that have very little functional application in real word (e.g., *Soy un fantasma* "I am a ghost"). Although the *diálogo* sections sometimes provide useful chunks of language (e.g., *no me diga* "You don't say," *creo que sí* "I think so"), they are often part of short adjacency pairs that are not well integrated into a larger dialogue.

To conclude, for the most part the language practice activities in this program do not seem to be communicatively motivated; they are often decontextualized mechanical exercises that seem to have no overall functional purpose. This pedagogical approach is the antithesis of contemporary communicative, functional approaches to language teaching, which present learners with real world tasks to complete (Doughty & Long, 2003; Long, 1985), instead of having them focus so heavily on pronunciation and structures (mechanical exercises), techniques reminiscent of the audiolingual approach to language teaching of the 1960s.

## SUMMARY

*Tell Me More Spanish* is a technologically sophisticated multimedia program with high-end graphics and excellent speech recognition software that provides the learner multiple opportunities to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills and to gain knowledge about some isolated cultural facts. It is suited to the needs of individual learners, who are given a great deal of control over various elements of the program so they can forge their own learning path. However, the program's focus on pronunciation, structurally-based curriculum, mechanical exercises, decontextualized interaction, and use of culture capsules (mostly isolated from vocabulary and grammar exercises and listening, speaking and writing activities) causes this program to be out of step with modern communicatively-based views of task-based

foreign language pedagogy -- views which are grounded in cultural authenticity and the notion of language as social practice.

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### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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