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## Review of: *Épocas y avances: Lengua en su contexto cultural*, and Cuaderno de trabajo to accompany '*Épocas y avances: Lengua en su contexto cultural*'

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**Gravina, Scott, et al.** *Épocas y avances: Lengua en su contexto cultural*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. Pp. 438. ISBN 978-0-300-10836-1 (Student Edition). ISBN 978-0-300-10838-5 (Instructor's Edition).

**Funcia, Ramón, et al.** *Cuaderno de trabajo to accompany Épocas y avances: Lengua en su contexto cultural*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. Pp. 275. ISBN 978-0-300-10837-8.

In the “Preface” to this, the first edition of *Épocas y avances: Lengua en su contexto cultural*, the authors immediately state the goal and scope of the text: “Designed to present a broad spectrum of content-rich materials for the study of language and culture of the Spanish-speaking world, *Épocas y avances* offers a communicative-humanistic approach to second language acquisition” (vi). The term “humanistic” is defined as something “more than just a language survival kit”; that is, learning that “takes into account the human needs beyond pragmatic, instrumental uses” (vii). The authors have also organized their activities in a graduated, progressive manner, going from what they term the “episodic” (“every-day functional skills that constitute the basics of language learning”) to the “symbolic” (synonymous with “humanistic” in this context) (vii).

It is clear from the outset, as evidenced in the use of this terminology, that this text is quite different from its counterparts in intermediate to advanced grammar and composition; but *Épocas y avances* especially distinguishes itself through its historical and cultural contextualization. As is the case with many texts, this one serves the so-called five Cs of language learning: communications, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities; but the manner in which it does so is particularly novel and noteworthy. That is, while students are advised that *Épocas y avances* is not a history text and should not be studied as such (x), the text is organized chronologically with multi-disciplinary lessons, including authentic materials that highlight the history, culture, art, geography and original literature of Latin America and Spain from the tenth-century Mayans to modern times—all in the service of optimized language production (vi).

To this end, each of the text’s 22 chapters is organized with an historical flair including a *Prelectura* meant to prepare students for the chapter material. This is followed by *En el horizonte*, the main reading that serves to provide context for the chapter. *Compás* is a vocabulary section that includes no English translations, thus encouraging students’ use of a dictionary as well as the analysis and inference of meaning. *Itinerarios* is a section that includes contextualized images and activities meant to motivate oral and written production and to introduce the next section, *Briújula*, a review of grammatical structures presented entirely in Spanish. *Un poco más lejos* is a series of more complex oral and written activities including dialogue, debate, and investigation that require students to combine language skills and cultural knowledge in a sophisticated manner. The *Extensión* section delves deeper into grammar study by presenting additional grammatical structures and instances of linguistic variation with an eye toward demonstrating the diversity of the Spanish-speaking world. Finally, the *Escala literaria* section presents nine important selections from authentic literature, from a variety of genres and authors, interspersed throughout the text and intended to reflect and represent a particular historical period. The two subsections herein, *Reflexiones* and *Perspectivas* teach analysis and critical thinking in the first instance and encourage advanced discourse by providing open-ended activities based on the readings in the second.

In the service of presenting culture, literature, and history, the chapter topics include (with *Escala literaria* literary selections in parenthesis according to their placement in the text): *Chicken Its (Cane y Sac-Nice)*, *Córdoba, Diversidad cultural (Las Jarchas)*, *Los aymaras, El Popul Vuh (Popul Vuh)*, *El Camino de Santiago, Alfonso X el Sabio (Berceo’s “El ladrón devoto”)*, *Códices precolombinos, La medicina azteca, La Peste Negra en España (El Conde Lucanor)*, *Los Andes, Los Reyes Católicos, Bartolomé de las Casas (Isabel de Guevara’s “Carta de Relación”)*, *El Renacimiento en España, El imperio decadente, La América Colonial (Sor Juana’s “Villancico de Santa Catarina”)*, *Crecimiento y Desarrollo en Hispanoamérica, La Ilustración en España, Intervención e independencia, Del Romanticismo a la Independencia*

en *Latinoamérica* (José Cadalso's *Los eruditos a la violeta*), *El Siglo XX en Latinoamérica* (Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*), and *El Siglo XX en España*.

Throughout its *Brújula* sections, *Épocas y avances* includes all of the expected grammar points: *ser/estar/haber*, present indicative, preterit/imperfect, pronouns, command forms, future, conditional, passive voice, impersonal usage, present and past subjunctive, *si* clauses, and compound tenses. The *Extensión* sections present such often-overlooked points as *Verbos con preposiciones*, *La entonación en español*, *Diferencias en el vocabulario del español*, *Perífrasis verbales*, *Los auxiliares léxicos*, *Estrategias para la conversación y el debate*, *Los gestos en español*, *Diminutivos y aumentativos en español*, and *Expresiones de cortesía en español*, among others. The text reaches far beyond the study of history, as many of the exercises ask the students to contemplate their own lives and the future of our world.

*Épocas y avances* is a quality learning package. The sequencing of grammatical points is well done; the contextualization is excellent; the exercises are varied in design to practice a variety of skills (including research) and appeal to multiple learning styles; the text includes no English in its vocabulary lessons or grammar explanations; the images that populate the book are not mere decoration, but catalysts for speaking and writing practice. The text includes an audio CD to accompany its *En el horizonte* sections, a comprehensive glossary, a bibliography of the literary sources, and four useful appendices: accentuation; tense, aspect, and mood; impersonal verb forms (infinitive, participle, and gerund); and verb conjugation charts. The accompanying *Cuaderno de trabajo* is equally well contextualized and includes an audio CD for oral practice. Further, like the textbook, the *Cuaderno* includes a variety of exercises including inventive, open-ended writing assignments, sometimes with cues and sometimes requiring library or Internet research; and the *Instructor's Edition* is filled with useful teaching tips and techniques designed to make the most of the package.

*Épocas y avances* is indeed innovative in its premise of teaching grammar and literature through history. It takes students beyond the typical dry grammar-book fare, all the while urging them to develop and practice a myriad of skills in an interesting and meaningful way. Importantly, as well, it prepares students for future, higher-level courses in history, culture, literature, and literary history, as much within a Spanish degree program as in other areas of study. In discussing their humanistic objectives in the "Preface" to their text, the authors rightly contend that "[l]ife does not simply consist of ordering food at the restaurant but includes being able to engage in fruitful human interaction at the table, ponder the world—its history, current state and future—talk about our species' cultural achievements and its protagonists, theorize about the nature of things, [and] empathize with [our] fellow human beings" (vii). This view, of course, goes far beyond the instruction of Spanish grammar and composition; and any text that contributes to the development of well-informed, thoughtful, and empathetic individuals with a global perspective is certainly worth the educator's careful consideration. I, for one, am anxious to use *Épocas y avances* in my own classes.

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**López García, Ángel.** *El boom de la lengua española: Análisis ideológico de un proceso expansivo*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007. Pp. 222. ISBN 978-84-9742-662-6.

El propósito de este trabajo es analizar las implicaciones ideológicas que tiene la expansión del español en el mundo. La tesis que defiende López García es que, debido a los valores interculturales que conlleva, el uso del español como lengua internacional contribuye al diálogo entre civilizaciones. El concepto de lengua internacional comprende dos dimensiones ideológicas: la dimensión electiva, que una sociedad proporciona a una lengua al darle un determinado valor ideológico (el árabe en los países islámicos), y la dimensión factual, que está determinada por su utilidad como instrumento de comunicación (el inglés en el mundo actual). Este trabajo estudia estas dos dimensiones ideológicas con respecto al español, lengua en la que confluyen ambas.