

## RESEÑAS

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*¡A debate!: Estrategias para la interacción oral*  
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*¡A debate! Estrategias para la interacción oral* is an advanced level textbook, specifically recommended for C1-C2 level students according to the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR), or Advanced Mid and Advanced High level students according to the American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The textbook targets the improvement of accuracy of oral proficiency in advanced learners of Spanish as a second language.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first one consists of ten lessons or “Temas,” which are themselves divided into several sections. The themes for each lesson are relevant to global and current concerns, and are constructed around compelling, engaging and even provocative topics that grab the learners’ attention. Controversial topics such as the power of Internet and its effect on society, the urban expression of art and literature, today’s worlds of music and film, the world of journalism, and the functioning and mechanics of humor, among others, help the instructor to secure the students’ interest. Each chapter’s theme is presented through a series of questions related to a photographic image that pre-figures the topic; through an array of controversial remarks from well-known personalities related to the topic; and through a sizable interview with a prominent personality/celebrity from the Spanish world of business, art, and science, such as Iker Jiménez, “el periodista del más allá” [a journalist of the occult], the actor Eduardo Noriega, the controversial singer Loquillo, or the celebrity scholar, Eduardo Punset. For each theme, students are invited to comment on the colorful and attractive photography that normally opens the Tema, as well as critique controvertible statements by other well-known personalities of Spanish culture. Learners also have the opportunity to complete exercises around the interviews, such as construct the person’s biography, make conjectures regarding the person’s life or professional career, and answer questions related to the interview from a personal standpoint. Moreover, each Tema contains other sections, such as “Más palabras” [More words], an assortment of exercises that vary for each chapter in which students expand their lexical abilities; “Destacado,” [Outstanding] a series of exercises that include reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises which expand on the main topic, and also presents communicative resources related to particular speech acts such as formulas to begin telling jokes, to express skepticism, to express the opposite side of an argument, etc.—As a matter of fact, these communicative resources are scattered throughout all sections of the Temas. Other sections within each Tema include “Especial mundo hispano,” [Hispanic word special] a series of reading activities constructed around countries of Latin America; and “Cierre” [Closing], a section in which learners demonstrate the oral abilities practiced throughout the Tema, as well as the their knowledge of the Tema’s topic.

The second section of the book consists of a grammar manual, which is itself divided into ten parts, each part correlates directly with a Tema from the first section. The exercises in the

grammar manual consist of more traditional activities in which students have the opportunity to review those grammar concepts that are more problematic to learners, such as the verbs “ser and estar,” verbal tenses (preterit and imperfect), the subjunctive mood, prepositions and conjunctions, etc. These grammar exercises are constructed within the context of each of the main Temas allowing students not only to practice grammar in context, but also the opportunity to expand thematic vocabulary. This second part of the textbook is best suited as a tool for students’ homework.

A *Guíametodológica* [Methods Guide] is an instructor’s valuable tool that accompanies the textbook. A guide that offers suggestions on how to proceed with the teaching of each section of the Temas, including information on how to expand the activities through Internet and new technologies. The inclusion in this guide of “Tarea Final” [Final Task] gives instructors suggestions for the construction of larger projects for groups or individual students. The *Guíametodológica* also includes the solutions to grammar exercises. Additionally, the book comes with a CD that contains audio files of the interviews, giving the students opportunity to sharpen their listening skills. Unfortunately, the voices of the interviewees are not those of the real personalities, but that of voice actors.

This textbook, as many others do, lines up with ACTFL recommended guidelines for intermediate-advanced learners, and it represents a compendium of the latest research in Second Language Acquisition for the improvement of oral abilities. As the authors state, the variety of activities are intended to promote conversations, explanations, and argumentation in Spanish at the advanced level. In addition, what prompted me to use this book for my Advanced Spanish Conversation course, something that in my opinion constitutes one of the strengths of *¡A debate!*, was its basic construction around the interaction of a wide variety of current cultural topics with the learning and practice of oral skills, and its contextualization of grammar review. It’s not difficult to obtain and keep the students’ interest due to the global nature and the relevance of themes presented. Students want to have a voice in controversial debates, and the book offers the tools for students to express their opinions in Spanish. Because the review and practice of grammar concepts is intertwined in the Temas with compelling information about film, music, art, journalism, science, etc., it is difficult for students to detect that they are in fact reviewing grammar. Moreover, the attractiveness of the layout for each section, the variety of a number of activities, including reading and writing tasks that can be performed individually or in group, makes for a class that is never boring.

It is a bit unfortunate, that the cultural emphasis is placed mostly in Spain. Although the book contains small sections with bits and pieces of knowledge that relate to Latin American countries, the information is not substantial. The instructor has to supply this void with additional audiovisual materials and other information. The Latin American emphasis would be more practical to North American learners of Spanish, and it would be beneficial to offer the same compelling material underscoring Latin American culture.

The book’s strengths certainly outweigh its weaknesses. The authors accomplish their promise to equip advanced students with resources and strategies in order for them to reach communicative competence at the advanced level.

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