ASSOCIATED LANGUAGE: *PURA VIDA* IN COSTA RICA[1]

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RESUMEN

Mediante un esquema teórico de múltiples estadios que reúne conceptos pragmáticos y una socio-lingüística interaccional, se explican los varios usos de 'pura vida' en el español costarricense. Aunque existen numerosos elementos que componen el lenguaje de Costa Rica, 'pura vida' les ofrece a los hablantes un método clave en el auto-identificarse como costarricense y de igual forma les permite abrazar mucho de lo que define quién pertenece al grupo de los ticos.
Palabras clave: lenguaje asociado, pragmática, pura vida, sociolingüística interaccional

ABSTRACT

A multi-tiered theoretical framework that embraces ideas from pragmatics and interactional socio-linguistics is used to explain the various uses of pura vida in Costa Rican Spanish. Although there are numerous elements that comprise the associated language of Costa Rica, pura vida offers users a prime way of establishing claims to Costa Rican identity and allows them to express much of what is associated with in- group membership.
Key words: Associated language, interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics, pura vida

1. Introduction

The well-known expression *pura vida* is inextricably linked with Costa Rican language and culture. Literally translated as 'pure life,' *pura vida* delineates Costa Ricans as "invencible…capaz de todo … el más vital y optimista, si no el más feliz de los pueblos de la tierra"

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(Echeverría 1999), 'invincible, capable of anything, vital and optimistic, perhaps the happiest people on earth.' The phrase was coined by the Mexican comedian Clavillazo, who employed it liberally in the jokes of his comedy act. He used the expression with such frequency that he was eventually cast in the starring role of a film entitled, *Pura Vida*. After the screening of the movie in Costa Rica in 1956, the expression started to become trendy there, first manifesting itself in the argot of the juvenile sector of the population in the 1970s (Varela 1999).[2] Over the past several decades, *pura vida* has increased in popularity, and the two words now serve as the country's unofficial national motto.[3]

There are numerous linguistic elements that comprise the 'associated language' (Eastman and Reese 1981) of Costa Rica. Associated language links speech (or other forms of expression) with ethnic identity. Language is a prime way of establishing claims to identity and allows speakers to demonstrate their in-group membership. Utterance of *pura vida* allows Costa Ricans to display their "cultural solidarity and distinctiveness by speaking like [their] cohorts, be they ethnic, professional, or some age-grade …" (Eastman and Stein 1988: 188). While lexical items such as *ticos* (what Costa Ricans affectionately call themselves); *chunche* 'thingamagig;' *maje* 'dude, buddy;' *tuanis* 'cool, too nice,' and the use of *vos* (see Hasbun and Solís Hernández 1997; Murillo Rojas 1995) also fall within the realm of Costa Rican Spanish, knowledge of these dialectal features tends to be reserved for native speakers of Spanish or those non-native speakers who have more extensive knowledge of the Costa Rica's language and culture. By contrast, *pura vida* epitomizes this tiny Central American nation both within Costa Rica and in the outside world.

2.   Theoretical bases for analysis

A multi-tiered theoretical framework that embraces ideas from pragmatics and inter-actional sociolinguistics is essential to explain *pura vida*. Pragmatics (Levinson 1983; Mey 1993; Yule 1996) addresses the myriad occurrences in language that cannot be explained with traditional grammatical analysis. It embraces both social and societal dimensions and affords us a much fuller and deeper account of human behavior with regards to language. Pragmatics is built on the notion of context, a dynamic environment that highlights users rather than structures, and it sometimes offers the only possible or plausible account of discourse behavior.

The domain of interactional sociolinguistics (Goffman 1971; Gumperz 1982a and 1982b; Schiffrin 2001**;** Tannen 1984, 1989) showcases the interrelated activities of those engaged in discourse. As they take their turns in speech, interlocutors 1) create and search for structures, 2) convey meanings and 3) accomplish actions. The most prominent structural feature of discourse is its dialogic nature, i.e. speakers perform both linguistic and social acts as they draw on the resources provided by the language and culture: "Each instance of discourse is another instance of the laying out of a grammatical pattern or the expression of a belief, so each instance of discourse reinforces the patterns of language and the beliefs associated with culture" (Johnstone 2002: 42; see Brody 2003). Use of *pura vida* concisely articulates their world view and effects a type of kinship with others in their midst.

3.   Data and analysis

My data comprise both examples of *pura vida* derived from 1) editorials and articles appearing in newspapers (on-line and hard copy), 2) commentaries on internet websites, 3) interviews and 4) face-to-face interactions (Stewart 2003; Trester 2003). While most exchanges occurred between native Costa Ricans, two involved participants in cross-language encounters (Stewart 2000), i.e. interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers of a language. In both of these cases, *pura vida* was uttered by native speakers of Costa Rican Spanish. I have glossed all Spanish examples with my English equivalents.

Pura vida is a key phrase in Costa Rican Spanish. Just as key words (Wierzbicka 1997) reveal important aspects of a cultural group, *pura vida* symbolizies Costa Rica and has become commonplace among speakers of all levels of society. Once confined to the speech of younger residents on the fringes of Costa Rican society, *pura vida* has permeated other sectors of the population, with little regard for age or social standing. Moreover, the expression has begun to appear in writing, enjoying additional exposure as a symbol of Costa Rican language and culture. My analysis will depict *pura vida* as a culturally rich, multifunctional expression that can be used effectively in a variety of contexts.[4]

4.   Discursive uses of *pura vida*

In its most basic form, *pura vida* functions as a conversational routine. Routines, integral elements of our everyday interactions, are context-sensitive interactional devices that carry both social and cultural meaning. To use them effectively, speakers must know their linguistic (how they are formed) and social (when they are appropriate) dimensions. Use of *pura vida* has been likened to that of the Italian <<ciao>> and the French << ça va>>[5] (see Duranti 1997a; Echeverría 1999; Trester 2003). In fact, usage of *pura vida* more closely mimics the Hawaiian *aloha* since both span a broader range.[6]

Pura vida assumes a pivotal role in greetings and/or leave-takings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; see Duranti 1997a and 1997b; Foley 1997). Greetings operate as attention-getting devices, show recognition of another's presence, are highly predictable, and may work to establish or negotiate social solidarity between speakers. Leave-takings act in a similar fashion, serving as 'achievements' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), or solutions, to the ending of a speech event.

When speakers employ *pura vida* in other domains, some do so metalinguistically (Jakobson 1960). Metalinguistic use involves using language to talk about language, while metalinguistic awareness displays knowledge that a speaker has about language. Speakers use *pura vida* pragmatically to invoke a particular context, display an attitude or establish social relations. They may also use the expression metapragmatically (Silverstein 1993), to describe the contextual aspects of "speech-as-action" or exhibit metapragmatic awareness as they articulate the appropriate context for *pura vida*.

4.1.   Greeting/leave-taking with pura vida

As mentioned previously, *pura vida* operates as a greeting and a leave-taking, and frequently comprises adjacency pairs (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), a sequence of two utterances

by different speakers. Below, in an example from Trester (2003), two male speakers of Costa Rican Spanish are introduced to each other in a bar. *Pura vida* in their exchange illustrates "how we talk around here" (Schilling-Estes 1998):

a.

S1: *Pura Vida.*   Hey, how's it going?

S2: *Pura Vida.*[7]   Great.

Trester notes that the greeting is "brief and somewhat cursory – effectively conveying that the interaction has begun and ended in the same moment" (see Sacks 1975: p. 3) — since the interlocutors' real attention was other-directed, at a woman of mutual interest.[8] The perfunctory nature of their interaction aligns well with Duranti's (1997a) evaluation of a greeting's function as establishing a spatiotemporal unit of interaction; the single occurrence of a greeting in a single interaction as constitutes "minimal proper conversation" (Sacks 1975 cited in Duranti 1997b).

4.2.   Leave-taking with *pura vida*

Two females utter *pura vida* with two intended meanings:

b.

S1: *Muy bien. Nos vemos mañana a*   Good. Tomorrow at 5:30.
las cinco y media

S2: *Pura vida. Hasta mañana*   Okay. See you tomorrow.

S1: *Pura vida.*   Bye.

For these two women in friendly conversation, *pura vida* serves a two-fold purpose, for S2 as confirmation of a 5:30 meeting the next day and for S1 as an end to their conversation.

The male speaker below combines leave-taking with an affective expression of gratitude:

c.

S1: *Aquí estamos*   Here we are.

S2: *Muchas gracias, señor.*   Thank you very much, sir.

(Reads meter and hands T 2,000 *colones*   for a 250 *colon*[9] fare)

S1: *Su cambio, señora.*   Your change, ma'am.

S2: *Para Ud.*   Keep it.

S1*: ¡Pura vida!*   Awesome/thanks/goodbye!

This cross-language encounter occurred between a taxi driver and me. I offered what the taxi driver perceived as an excessive tip, in appreciation for his patience and his safe driving, characteristics manifested infrequently among San José taxi drivers. Since tipping of this magnitude occurs rarely in Costa Rica, his reply of *pura vida* was appropriate.

4.3.   Confirming with *pura vida*

In an interview (Rivera 2003), between a sportswriter (S1) for *La Nación* and a boxer (S2) who was poised to defend his welterweight title in Las Vegas, the boxer elaborates after his utterance of *pura vida*:

d.

S1: *Campeón, ¿cómo están las cosas?*	Champ, how are things?
S2: *Pura vida. Estoy muy bien, te lo juro.*	Great. I'm fine, I assure you.
S1: *¿Cómo espera que sea la pelea?*	How's the fight gonna go?
S2: *La cosa va a ser rápida. Lo voy a noquear en dos rounds. No te preocupés.*[10]	It's gonna be quick. I'm gonna knock him out in two. Don't worry.'

S2 initiates his response with *pura vida;* the additional verbage provides further evidence of his good condition. Such additional clauses are known as post-completion extensions, which are "products of speaker-recipient negotiation specifically aimed at achieving interactional ends" (Ford 1993: 102). These clauses are inserted at possible pauses in the discourse, as affirmations of previous statements or after interlocutors have demonstrated disbelief or lack of understanding.[11]

Pura vida is the standard answer from a Costa Ricans (comparable to the US, "Fine.") when asked how things are going. In the example below, a patient (S2) responds with *pura vida* when her doctor (S1) asks about her sore leg (Jara 2004):

e.

S1: *¿Cómo le va?*	How's the leg?
S2: *Pura vida.*	Fine.

When the patient thought about her response after the fact, she noted that the medical context was rather inappropriate for the utterance of *pura vida*, a phrase typically reserved for more informal interactions. However, in this particular situation, she was so happy that the doctor was treating her with so much care and not causing her any undue pain. Her automatic response of *pura vida* was an expression of approval, gratitude and relief.

4.4.   Probing with *pura vida*

Pura vida provides a further inquiry as to state of being in the following interchange (from Trester 2003) between a male disc jockey (S1) and a female caller (S2) into a Costa Rican radio station:

f.

S1: *Cómo está, Alejandra?*   How are you, Alejandra?

S2: *Bien. ¿y usted?*   Fine, and you?

S1: *Bien. Pura vida, ¿sí?*   Good. *Pura vida*, right?

S2: *Pura vida.   Pura vida.*

S1: *Ah bueno,¡qué dicha!*[12]   Oh good! That's great!

Although the speakers have already greeted each other in lines 1-2, the DJ presses the caller by using *pura vida* to see just how well she is doing. This probe with *pura vida* illustrates how "social identity and ethnicity are established and maintained through language" (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982: 7).[13]

4.5.   Evaluating with *pura vida*

Pura vida positively reacts to an addressee in the example from Trester (2003) below:

g.

  Pero Don H, ¡Ud. se ve muy pura vida!   My, Harold, you are looking very well![14]

Pura vida reflects the speaker's opinion of H's healthy appearance, echoing Echeverría's 1999 claim that *pura vida* functions "para calificar cualquier cosa que esté muy bien hecha o que sea muy agradable," 'to comment favorably on anything well done or particularly pleasing.'

The Costa Rican taxi driver (S1) quoted in the travelogue uses *pura vida* in a locally appropriate manner in response to his customer (S2) (Mannino 2004):

h.

  S1: … where are you going tomorrow?

  S2: Puerto Jiménez. I need to be at the Stanset terminal by two-thirty.

  S1: Well, then. My hotel is much closer to the terminal than any place in San José. No worries, my man. *Pura vida.*[15]

This usage may be interpreted in either of two ways: 1) as confirmation of the fact that he can take care of his customer in a timely fashion or 2) as a self-congratulation for having directed business towards 'his' hotel.[16]

4.6. Distancing with *pura vida*

The next interchange is part of an interview (Benavides 2003) between a writer (S1) for *La Nacion's TeleGuía* and a Costa Rican journalist (S2) who is working for *Televisa* on *Gran Musical*, a very popular program on Mexican TV:

i.

S1: *¿Qué sigue ahora?*	What's next?
S2: *Seguir trabajando y aprovechar toda la oportunidad de aprender de quienes saben hacer televisión en grande y así poder ser mejor. Disfrutaré mucho de mi trabajo en Gran Musical y diré 'pura vida' en cada una de mis entrevistas para que no se les olvide (ni se me olvide) de donde vengo.*	Keep on working and take advantage of every opportunity to learn from those who know how to succeed in TV and learn how to be better. I will enjoy my work on *Gran Musical* to the fullest, and I'll say, *'Pura vida'* in every interview so that they don't forget where I come from (and neither do I).

The interviewee's pragmatic use of *pura vida* illustrates the divergence aspect of accommodation theory (Giles 1973; Giles, Coupland & Coupland 1991), i.e. the use of a lexical item to accentuate a speaker's difference from their interlocutor(s). *Pura vida,* which distances S2 from her audience, illustrates her metapragmatic awareness and reaffirms her identity as Costa Rican.

4.7. Explaining *pura vida*

Costa Rican awareness of the status of *pura vida* is highlighted in the example below. The grandfather's instructions to his grandson (S2) allows him to model language that functions as a claim to group membership (Johnstone 2002):

j.

S1: *Dame la mano. ¡Dame la mano!*	Give me your hand. Give me your hand!
S2: [Says nothing, but offers his hand]	
S1: *Diga, "¡Pura vida!"*	Say, *"Pura vida!"*
S2: *¡Pura vida!*	*Pura vida!*

This interchange, which reflects the grandfather's metapragmatic awareness, is comparable to one between US interlocutors where a child learns the gesture and speech combination that accompanies the 'high five.' *Pura vida* as spoken by the grandfather demonstrates for the child one of the typical discursive practices of the Costa Rican speech community. This interaction

showcases the cultural and social aspects of language, and demonstrates how discourse and its structure serve as "the actual medium through which knowledge (cultural and social) is produced, conceived, transmitted, and acquired by members of society" (Sherzer 1987: 30).

4.8.   Adopting *pura vida*

Native speakers may seize an opportunity to introduce a visitor to this emblematic expression, as in example 10 between a hotel employee (S2) and a guest (S1). S2's explanation of PV and description of when to use it reveal metalinguistic use and awareness:

k.

S1: *¿Qué tal?*   How's it going?

S2: *Hola, muchacho*.   Hey, dude.

"The boy came in from outside and explained that Costa Ricans don't say *qué tal*, they say *pura vida*, which means 'pure life'."

S2: It's because the pace of life here is slow and tranquil, and we live life somewhat purely. And the people are also kind. Like us.

S1: Well, *pura vida*, friend. I'm hungry. Where's the nearest place to eat?[17]

The hotel guest acknowledges the native speaker's explanation of *pura vida* by claiming it as his own, inserting it into his very next turn[18] This use of *pura vida* is pragmatic and lends support to the argument that we accommodate[19] to our interlocutors to display our subcultural solidarity (Eastman and Reese 1981: 113).

Metalinguistic use and awareness and metapragmatic use and awareness show that Costa Ricans are conscious of the status of *pura vida* as a key phrase. The next examples are excerpts from articles by three different Costa Rican journalists, all of which appeared in the on-line edition of *La Nación*, Costa Rica's largest daily newspaper.

4.9.   Defining *pura vida*

Varela (1999) provides a simple metalinguistic definition that identifies appropriate contexts for the use of *pura vida*:

l.

[*Pura vida* es] *un modismo aplicado para saludar, despedirse, agradecer o simplemente para mostrar admiración hacia una situación, objeto o persona*

a saying used to greet, say goodbye, thank or simply to express admiration towards a situation, object or person.

Echeverría's (1999) metalinguistic and metapragmatic usage invokes a metaphor that assists readers in more readily capturing the essence of *pura vida*:

m.

Gran parte del encanto de esa frase [*pura vida*] *nace de su candor: es una negación total de la muerte. No en el sentido de pretender la inmortalidad, sino en el de no admitir la presencia de la muerte en el momento, en el cuerpo, en la mente.*	Much of the charm of this phrase comes from candor. It is a total denial of death. Not in the sense of feigning immortality, but of refusing to acknowledge death in the body or mind at the present moment.

In a response to Echeverría's article, Vargas (1999) displays increased metapragmatic awareness as he contrasts two lifestyles for which *pura vida* might be an appropriate description:

n.

BK - *la existencia superficial y absurda, el vacilón que aturde y que mata el tiempo*	an empty life involving a person who has little ambition and lots of time on his hands
ZK - *la vida que lleva rumbo cierto, la vida auténtica*	a life with direction, an authentic life'

Previous examples define contextual appropriateness, offer possible meaning and make philosophical
comparisons, each one proposing a more complex explanation of *pura vida*.

4.10.   Seeking *pura vida*

The author of the following excerpt, which appeared in the personal ads of *La Nación* (author unknown 2004), uses *pura vida* adjectivally to elicit a potential mate:

o.

Buscando una bonita relación afectiva y de amistad con una mujer profesional costarricense soltera, menor de 35 años, que sea alegre, positiva y pura vida.	Looking for a friendly, affectionate relationship with a single, professional Costa Rican woman who is under 35, happy, positive and *pura vida.*'

His pragmatic usage indicates his desire that the responder be *pura vida*, an obviously attractive quality.

5.　　　Summary and suggestions for further research

The examples presented, which were collected from a wide variety of sources, confirm that *pura vida* pervades Costa Rican language and society. The migration pattern of *pura vida* — from argot to mainstream speech to written discourse — and contextual elaboration of meaning suggest that this vital expression of life and language in Costa Rica is gaining in status as a marker of ethnic and social identity. Interlocutors of various ages and occupations were shown not only to employ *pura vida* liberally but also to display awareness of its broad semantic range, its varied contextual environments and its cultural significance.

Since data were collected mostly in the San José metropolitan area, comparison of speech in urban and rural areas could provide further evidence to support my claims. Investigations into the use of *pura vida* by speakers of other dialects of Central American Spanish could certainly prove useful.[20] Although I narrowed the focus of this investigation to *pura vida* in the speech and writings of native speakers, other of my data reflect ample usage by non-native speakers of Spanish as well. The appropriation of this unique piece of associated language by outsiders indicates that additional research could reflect even more diverse patterns of usage.

Notes

1.　Thanks to Jill Brody, Hugh Buckingham, Nancy Joe Dyer, Carla Jara, Dianna Laurent, Christine Martin, Joey Sandrock, Joel Sherzer and Billie Stewart for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. And thanks to Laura Zammit at Southeastern's Center for Faculty Excellence for her help in formatting this article.

2.　The Spanish philologist Arturo Agüero suggests that a possible reason for its surge in popularity was to distinguish Costa Rica from its Central American neighbors, many of which did not enjoy the same political and economic stability (cited in Varela 1999).

3.　*Pura vida* has been proclaimed by www.costarica.com as worthy of being Costa Rica's national motto.

4.　A parallel can be drawn between how formulaic routines and gestures (thumbs up in Brazilian Portuguese and pointed lip gestures among Kuna Indians) are elaborated in context (Sherzer 2004; see Sherzer 1994).

5.　According to some native speakers of French and Italian, both of these phrases can be used outside of the realm of greetings and leave-takings, but not nearly to the extent that *pura vida* is used in Spanish. Thanks to Drs. Lucia Harrison, Evelyne Bornier and Anna Rocca for their insight on this matter.

6.　*Aloha*, which is used as both a greeting and a leave-taking in Hawaii, can also be used as a modifier, as in '*aloha* spirit,' which can be used to describe a kind and gentle spirit. Thanks to Dr. Claudia Salcedo for this insight.

7.　Repetition is a common component of adjacency pairs, and functions to respond to, ratify and/or agree with the prior utterance (Johnstone 1987; see Merritt 1984).

8.　This minimal exchange of information is representative of Malinowski's (1923) notion of phatic communion.

9.   The *colon* is the official currency of Costa Rica. The exchange rate was approximately 395 *colones* per US dollar.

10.   Note the usage of the 'vos' form, which is a feature of some some dialects of Spanish, especially that of Costa Rica. For further information on this form, see Murillo Rojas 1995 and Hasbun and Hernández 1995.

11.   The additional wording conforms to Nofsinger's (1991) definition of 'assertive,' as it displays a speaker's belief in the propositional content of the utterance.

12.   *¡Qué dicha!* is another distinctly Costa Rican expression.

13.   This affirms Duranti's notion that greetings are a "near-boundary occurrence" (1997a: 68) that are close to the beginning of a social encounter but not necessarily the first words spoken.

14.   Trester's translation may be somewhat misleading due to the fact that 'Don H' could be translated as Mr. X.

15.   This is reminiscent of Bobby McFadden's song that advises, "Don't worry, be happy!"

16.   It is commonplace in Costa Rica for taxi drivers to form alliances with particular hotels. What the result of this particular fare being directed to the hotel in question is not known.

17.   The non-native speaker's usage of *pura vida* reflects "use of a group's language to lay claims to cultural attributes associated with its members" (Eastman and Stein 1993: 188; see Stewart 2004).

18.   This use of *pura vida* by an English speaker comes from data for an article in progress regarding the usage of the expression by non-native speakers of Spanish.

19.   The use of *pura vida* by the non-native speaker shows accommodation to the native speaker. For further information on accommodation in a second language context, see Beebe and Zuengler 1983; Beebe and Giles 1984; and Giles *et al.* 1991.

20.   *Pura vida* has also crept into the speech of some Nicaraguan speakers of Spanish, according to two Costa Rican women, Carla Jara and Gabriela Gutiérrez. This is undoubtedly due to the proximity of Nicaragua and to the huge influx of Nicaraguan immigrants in search of improved economic conditions.

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