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Paper:

*“Pura vida: A Costa Rican Cultural Expression from a Foreigner’s Perspective”*

Presenter:

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Abstract:

Any foreigner, who has come to Costa Rica and who has a rudimentary grasp of either written or spoken Spanish, will inevitably encounter the expression *“Pura Vida.”* If one pays attention to people speaking in Costa Rica, and if one pays attention to items for sale in Costa Rica, the expression is literally everywhere. On the streets, on the job, at home, on billboards, in advertisements, both on television and on the radio, in newspapers and magazines, and even on storefronts, the expression is literally seen and heard everywhere. *Pura Vida* seems to represent Costa Rica in the same way or arguably even more than other national symbols of Costa Rica do, such as the slogan *“Jardín de Paz y Democracia,”* “el árbol de Guanacaste,” “el yigüirro,” “la guaria morada,” “la carreta,” and “la marimba.” However, if one does notice how often this expression is used, a simple question arises: “Just what are *‘Ticos’* really saying when they say *“Pura vida?”* A study of examples of people using the term will show that it may be as simple as greetings or expressions such as *“Hello,” “Good-bye,” “Thank you,”* or *“You’re welcome.”* Nevertheless, a more in-depth analysis of the term will show that the expression is far more elaborate and complex than it appears. It is quite possible that not even Costa Ricans really know all the potential meanings that the expression *“Pura Vida”* embraces.

The author of this study who is a foreigner residing in Costa Rica, documented the expression “Pura Vida” every time that he saw it or heard it from May 2015 to May 2016. The purpose of this paper is to study and analyze the 343 entries that he observed, in order to determine just what is happening linguistically and culturally when “Ticos” use this expression. Theoretical views from Linguistics and the field of Popular Culture will be taken into account to frame this topic.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that although the expression “Pura Vida” is very common, the multi-dimension of its meaning has not been seriously analyzed. Definitions of the term abound, but their meanings expose interesting cultural features and social expectations. Thus, this study can give us important insights into Costa Rican culture and the Spanish of Costa Rica as well.

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