

# Voces del Lunfardo

Final Project Report

Natalia Bustos and Aaron Helton

Spring 2026

DHUM 70002

## **Project Narrative**

Lunfardo is the slang in current use in Argentina that originated in the Río de la Plata region (Buenos Aires and Montevideo) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaped primarily by the daily experiences of working-class Italian immigrants. While often mischaracterized as criminal slang, many of its terms became popular through tango lyrics, and over time, these words moved beyond tango and entered common speech, where they continue to evolve in meaning and usage. Despite its presence in everyday speech in Argentina today, it is absent from standard Spanish instruction. This is a status it shares with other dialects and slangs that are part of the broad diversity of the Spanish language. Our project addresses this gap.

The limited presence of Lunfardo and other regional varieties in Spanish language classrooms also reflects broader attitudes toward linguistic prestige. In “Actitudes del profesorado de ELE/L2 hacia las variedades lingüísticas del español: identidad y prestigio,” Narciso M. Contreras Izquierdo explains that subjective perceptions of linguistic prestige often influence the selection of linguistic forms and teaching materials in Spanish as Second Language instruction. Although there is an increasing recognition of the value of dialectal varieties, traces of a hierarchy that grants greater prestige to Peninsular Spanish from Spain can still be observed (Contreras Izquierdo 303). At the same time, instructors generally report presenting multiple varieties in the classroom and do not consider any single variety inherently superior to others (303). Guided by a similar understanding of the importance of exposing students to the linguistic diversity of the Spanish-speaking world, including regional slang and nonstandard forms that are closely tied to cultural identity and authentic communication, with the intention of addressing any negative attitude towards local varieties of the language in the Spanish classroom, our project presents materials that introduce learners to authentic Argentine language and culture.

The importance of incorporating lunfardo into Spanish as a Second Language instruction can be understood through the close relationship between language, culture, and society. Yang argues that learning a foreign language involves more than acquiring vocabulary and grammar; it also requires learning to communicate in culturally appropriate ways, as native speakers do (Yang 1). In his study “El lunfardo como referente sociocultural del aprendizaje de E/LE en contextos sinohablantes”, Yang highlights Lunfardo as a key sociocultural resource for language learning and includes a Lunfardo–Chinese glossary as part of his pedagogical approach. This perspective aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which defines sociocultural competence as knowledge of everyday life, interpersonal relations, values, and cultural practices necessary for meaningful communication (Yang 2). Similarly, the Instituto Cervantes Curriculum Plan (PCIC) incorporates intercultural skills and attitudes as essential components of language learning. From this perspective, the study of slang enables learners to engage more directly with the lived experiences and cultural realities of the communities that use it. As Yang notes, the global popularity of tango, including its presence in contexts as distant as Japan and Taiwan, provides a compelling argument for the inclusion of Lunfardo in Spanish as a Foreign Language curricula (Yang 4). The author further emphasizes that Lunfardo’s cultural significance is reinforced by the international impact of Argentine tango, one of the most widely recognized Latin American artistic expressions worldwide. In addition, Lunfardo appears not only in tango lyrics but also in Argentine literature, theater, cinema, and other cultural productions with global reach (Yang 4). Teaching Lunfardo therefore allows students to develop a deeper understanding of Argentine culture and more authentic forms of everyday communication.

Recent pedagogical research further reinforces the value of incorporating Lunfardo and tango lyrics into Spanish as a Foreign Language instruction. Panagia and Villanueva Roa demonstrate that working with Lunfardo vocabulary through tango songs facilitates learning for students of Spanish as a Foreign Language, as musical context increases motivation and improves memorization (117). The project analyzed the presence and evolution of Lunfardo in 39 tango songs, compiled a dictionary of 336 terms, updating their meanings and current usage. This resource is particularly valuable for foreign learners and researchers, as it helps determine whether specific expressions remain in use or have regained popularity. The study also highlights the emergence of new meanings for existing words, reflecting the ongoing evolution of Lunfardo (117). The study concludes that the use of Lunfardo through tango lyrics encourages students to value the linguistic and cultural diversity of Argentine Spanish, while also helping them develop artistic, sociocultural, and intercultural understanding through an active, learner-centered methodology (118).

The website we created aligns with these pedagogical and cultural considerations since it intends to support students' linguistic and intercultural competence while increasing exposure to an important but often overlooked variety of Argentine Spanish. *Voces del Lunfardo* (English: *Voices of Lunfardo*) is a website containing a collection of Lunfardo terms that are widely used in Argentina today. However, this website is different from other online Lunfardo dictionaries and glossaries that already exist. These resources are lexical repositories that list Lunfardo terms and brief definitions, offering valuable reference tools for researchers and general audiences. However, they are not specifically designed for Spanish learners and present vocabulary in isolation, without history, cultural context, or explanations of contemporary usage. In contrast,

*Voces del Lunfardo* is explicitly aimed at Spanish students and teachers and emphasizes contextualized and interactive learning.

The materials on this site serve as a direct learning resource for students and also a pedagogical guide for Spanish teachers, which addresses the absence of Lunfardo in standard instruction. Situated in this way, this project explores the cultural and historical significance of Lunfardo through two central questions. First, it shows how the use of Lunfardo in tango lyrics functions as a critical archive of immigrant working-class identity in Buenos Aires, capturing the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. Second, the project illustrates how each term is used today and the role it plays in contemporary Argentine culture, exploring the ways in which these words have or evolved while continuing to carry traces of their historical and cultural origins.

Each entry on the site incorporates tango lyrics and multimedia links to songs, explanations of cultural and historical significance, examples of current usage drawn from contemporary media, and interactive activities that encourage learners to practice Lunfardo terms in meaningful present-day contexts. By integrating language learning, cultural history, and digital pedagogy, this project moves beyond a static glossary and presents Lunfardo as a living and evolving component of Rioplatense Spanish. This project addresses these gaps by using DokuWiki, which allows for the creation of richly detailed pages that function as a digital dictionary, while also supporting multimedia resources and interactive, pedagogically driven activities for student engagement.

Each term is represented as an individual page on the DokuWiki platform, allowing for the organization of rich, multimedia content in a structured format. On each item page, students will find the Lunfardo term alongside its standard Spanish equivalent and English translation.

The page also includes tango lyrics featuring the term, with links to audio and video recordings, as well as explanations of its cultural significance in the context of tango and working-class identity. In addition, each entry provides a link to current media sources, such as movies, news articles, and commercials, that demonstrate contemporary use of the term, accompanied by reflections on its current use and cultural implications. The site combines linguistic, historical, and cultural content in a single, navigable digital space, making it easier for students to explore the terms in both their historical and contemporary contexts. The platform also allows for future expansion and the integration of interactive activities, encouraging active student engagement with the material.

## **Audience**

*Voces del Lunfardo* is aimed at three main groups. First, it is a tool for college or intermediate level Spanish students who may be interested in improving their Spanish language skills by exploring regional variations and dialects, or who are traveling to Buenos Aires or the surrounding areas and want to gain some familiarity with Lunfardo before they go. Except for this whitepaper, the linked blog posts, and the text of the community-sourced citation module, the site's contents are completely in Spanish, which reinforces the expectation that those who will find the most benefit from it are already comfortable with Spanish.

Second, it is a pedagogical tool to assist Spanish language teachers in preparing lessons around the use of Lunfardo, including its cultural significance and current usage. This site fills a critical gap in standard Spanish language instruction by providing concrete reference and pedagogical structure to supplement regular class materials.

And third, it is a special purpose reference for language enthusiasts who want to improve their understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Spanish. Spanish has a wide geographic reach with a commensurate diversity in local dialects and slangs. This project provides a rich platform to afford language enthusiasts the means to explore the fullness of Spanish through the lens of Lunfardo.

## **Project Activities**

The project staff consisted of Natalia Bustos as the project lead focused on term collection and description, and Aaron Helton as the project co-lead in charge of systems and technical matters. Both shared copy-editing responsibilities.

Development of the project proceeded in three main phases across two tracks, with some activities ongoing throughout. In the first phase, conducted from February 2026, we began collecting and categorizing terms by cultural significance and current use. While there are many Lunfardo terms, many are no longer in current use, making them less likely to be encountered today. To establish both historical and current usage, we reviewed and collected well-known tangos that used the terms and searched for modern usage in contemporary songs, news sources, and movies, with a requirement that all be available on YouTube. Term collection and evaluation continued through the remaining phases as our research uncovered more details about the terms. We collected the associated materials in shared documents for reference and revision.

As an additional matter for the early phases of the project, we submitted a poster proposal to the Association for Computing in the Humanities (ACH) conference, whose theme in 2026 specifically focuses on Global South issues, including decolonization, and whose schedule

includes events in both English and Spanish. At the time of submission, Omeka was still the platform of choice, having been in the original project proposal.

The second phase of the project, conducted from March 2026, focused on refinement of system requirements, including necessary affordances, before we could confirm our system selection or choose something else. During this phase, we determined that, based on our requirements and the affordances we needed, our original platform choice, Omeka, was insufficient. This prompted us to evaluate other systems, and we ultimately chose DokuWiki for its minimal system requirements (no database, for one), which increases its long term maintainability and sustainability. Additionally, DokuWiki has better multilingual support, which was a critical factor in deciding what platform to use. And finally, it was available as a one-click install from Reclaim Hosting, which we selected during this phase as our extremely cost-effective hosting provider.

In parallel, the second phase also saw a refinement of the page architecture. We had some initial ideas about what should be on any given page, but those ideas solidified after we saw what the interface would allow us to do. As a result, each term page has a consistent structure: a definition, etymology, and current usage section at the top of the page; a cultural commentary section that includes two components; and an interactive activity (quiz) section. The cultural commentary section contains a historical usage description connected to a tango, including an embedded tango video, and a current usage description connected to a still image or video sourced from movies, news, sports, and other current events.

During the third phase of the project, conducted from late March and early April 2026, we continued to refine all elements of the site, paying attention to styling, spacing, consistency, and system affordances. It was during this phase that we developed the custom quiz module.

While there are existing modules, we determined that they did not provide the specific functionality we wanted, and in some cases their styling clashed with the styling we had developed for the site.

Styling was an important consideration as we developed an identity for the site. To showcase the site's connection with Argentina, we deliberately chose a color palette based on the Argentinian flag. Additionally, we sought out other styling touches based on the culture of Argentina. An early conversation about the elaborate ornamental style known as fileteado or filete porteño yielded productive inspiration for the header font selection and graphic flourishes throughout. This culminated in the design of the front page logo, which captures a sense of the colors of Argentina (the gold L and border), filete porteño, and tango (the silhouette).

Term collection and description also continued through the end of April and entailed decisions about which terms to include. As we sought sources of videos and other evidence of current use, we determined that some of our originally chosen terms were less widely used than previously anticipated, which prompted us to adjust the list we started with and include different terms. Astute users of the site will be able to find these pages, which remain intact but otherwise unlisted.

And finally, in response to feedback as we developed the site, we determined that the site should be available completely in Spanish. DokuWiki accommodates this with no problem, and our initial decision to make Spanish the default language and English a secondary possibility via DokuWiki's namespaces meant we could adjust with very little rework. There are English translations of some pages still available, but they are de-listed and not in sync with their Spanish equivalents.

## Accomplishments

The main output of the *Voces del Lunfardo* project is the website we have produced, [www.vocesdellunfardo.org](http://www.vocesdellunfardo.org). The site contains an initial fifteen Lunfardo terms, with the possibility of further expansion later. In addition to the terms, the site includes an introduction on the first page and subpages detailing the following: definition and sourcing information for the meanings of the terms; a description of the methodology by which we selected the terms; a list of objectives for the site; roles and biographies of the project staff; a blog section linking to a selection of updates throughout the project to date (noting that the blog posts are in English); and a copyright statement to cover any fair use and other licensing details.

The site was built with DokuWiki and is hosted on Reclaim Hosting. It will remain web accessible in its published format. The contents of the site are made available under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-SA), allowing students and educators to freely use the materials we have developed. Additionally, we have captured a post-project snapshot in Web Archive Collection Zip (WACZ) format using the ArchiveWeb software provided by WebRecorder. This serves as a picture of what was complete at the close of the main project, before the site enters longer term maintenance mode. We will examine the possibility of depositing this snapshot into CUNY Academic Works for preservation, or store it offline.

We configured the DokuWiki installation with a few community plugins, a semi-custom theme including a custom header font and flourishes, and a fully custom quiz module. The community plugins we use are as follows:

1. Auto-Tooltip by Eli Fenton: Provides a syntax for including tooltip text in wiki text blocks, which was useful in cases where a Lunfardo term appears in the cultural commentary (usually tango lyrics) of another Lunfardo term.

2. Citations for DokuWiki by Terence J. Grant: Provides permalinks and populates a citation page for every revision of every page in the site. This is useful for scholarly applications, such as citation in reviews, and attributed inclusion elsewhere. Note that the citation page is in English.
3. Columns Plugin by Mykola Ostrovskyy: Provides support for multi-column text blocks, which were essential for laying out the information in the terms' cultural commentary sections.
4. Video Sharing Site Plugin by Andreas Gohr: Provides easy embedding of YouTube videos without cumbersome embed codes.

Our theme is a customization of the WikiPraktik template by Petr Kajzar. To account for the inclusion of filete porteño and Spanish language elements, we named our theme WikiPractica.

Additionally, we developed our own custom quiz module to provide simple syntax for page authors to create their own interactive quizzes or activities based on the contents of the page. The aim of such interactive activities is to both reinforce learning on the part of students and to serve as a reference for teachers who want to incorporate Lunfardo lessons into their Spanish curriculum. The plugin was developed using the same stack that DokuWiki is built on: PHP, JavaScript, HTML, and CSS. The working prototype, which is live now, was created with the assistance of LLM coding tools and will be reviewed and refined for contribution to the open source DokuWiki community. We have captured an archive of the code as it exists at the close of the class project phase.

Finally, we are pleased to report that our project poster, submitted to ACH 2026, was accepted, and we are excited to bring this important tool to the attention of other digital

humanists. This is especially pertinent to the [ACH 2026 theme](#) of emergence/emergencia, whose bilingual conference explicitly positions digital humanities as something that “fosters dialogue and solidarity on equity and justice across local, transborder, and global contexts”.

## **Evaluation**

The project was presented to two Spanish professors, who provided constructive feedback.

One professor commented that she had already incorporated some of these Lunfardo terms into her own “Conversation and Composition” course, where she uses Argentine films as a complementary teaching resource. In her classes, she has introduced terms such as “quilombo”, “guita”, and “chorro”, highlighting their conversational use. She compared *lunfardo* with *caló* in Spain, commenting on the parallel process of inclusion of these slang forms into the Spanish language. She shared a video illustrating how *caló* terms are increasingly entering standard Spanish through social media, showing a trend of linguistic diffusion in digital environments. Regarding the structure of the website, she recommended moving key sections, such as Methodology, Definition, Blog, and Goals, so that they appear immediately below the title, in order to increase their visibility and improve user orientation within the site. She also suggested incorporating English explanations for selected terms and for more complex sections of the commentaries to enhance accessibility for learners. In response, we explained that this feature had already been partially implemented through tooltips, beginning with entries such as “cambalache” and “gil”, where definitions are available on hover to support comprehension without interrupting reading flow.

The same professor shared a personal anecdote regarding the term “falluto”, which reminded her of her uncle in Spain, who used the word to describe objects that did not function well. This observation illustrated how users may begin their exploration of the site from personally meaningful entries.

The second professor also provided positive feedback and suggested extending the project’s visibility by including on the website of the department dedicated to promoting cultural activities of the Hispanic world: [¡Viva la cultura hispana!](#) This recommendation reflects the potential of the project to reach a broad academic and cultural audience.

Finally, Oscar Conde, current President of Academia Argentina del lunfardo, commented that the links to tango music and the cultural commentaries were very helpful. He also gave his permission for the use of the 15 definitions incorporated in our site, and he mentioned a new use of the word “bondi” with the meaning of “bolonqui”, which is the inverted form “quilombo” (“mess”, “chaos”). This means that people nowadays, as a paronomastic play on words, are frequently saying “¡Qué bondi se armó!” instead of “¡Qué bolonqui se armó!”. Oscar Conde mentioned that he would continue looking at the rest of the terms and he would offer suggestions about current uses and new meanings.

## **Acknowledgment of Use of AI**

We would like to acknowledge the use of generative AI to create the working prototype of the custom quiz module in current use on the site. Development of the quiz module was hastened by leveraging GitHub Copilot. We appreciate that the DokuWiki source code and its

community extensions are open source, which allows us to extend it with our own bespoke tools and to contribute these tools back to the DokuWiki community.

Artificial intelligence was used as a supporting resource during the development of this project. In particular, AI was used to suggest possible options for the multiple-choice activities designed for the Lunfardo entries. These suggestions were not used in a uniform way: some were adopted, others were adapted to better correspond to natural uses of the language, and some were discarded altogether.

AI was also used to refine the commentaries accompanying the terms, especially to suggest possibilities in order to adjust the language to a B2 (Intermediate Spanish II) level of Spanish. AI was not used to generate the commentaries and reflections or to provide interpretations. It functioned as a linguistic and editorial aid to adjust the material produced by the author.

## **The Future of the Project**

The project will be presented publicly as a poster at the annual Association for Computing in the Humanities conference in June, 2026. Additional presentations may be possible as we identify appropriate venues and submit proposals.

Thinking about the future, we would also like to invite collaboration from other teachers, students, and researchers who are interested in contributing or expanding the project. The idea is to keep it open and incorporate new Lunfardo terms that are being created nowadays.

Another future goal is to create a simple teaching guide to go with the website. This would help instructors use the material in different classes, depending on their focus. For example, the website could be adopted to help teach topics such as immigration, soccer,

Argentinian art, music, and social and political aspects. The aim is to make it easier for teachers to adapt the resource to different learning contexts.

The site will remain online for at least the next five years. Our grant was sufficient to allow for this. During this availability window, we will provide regular maintenance to keep software updated, ensure the contents remain intact, verify the functionality of the installed extensions, and inspect the backups. Additional extension beyond this will depend both on the needs of Spanish language teachers and students at the time and the resources available.

The source code for the quiz module will be reviewed and packaged for open source distribution. We will list the project in the DokuWiki community's list of plugins and extensions, and we will commit to maintaining it for the initial five year hosting window of the site. As an open source tool, it will itself be open to inspection and contributions from external developers, which is another avenue by which the project can foster collaboration. Version snapshots will accompany website snapshots, which will be deposited in the same manner as the WACZ archives or archived offline.

As the project evolves through feedback and potential contributions and collaborations, we will continue to document its reach and impact by hand-curating links on the blog page, reformatting as necessary to surface more recent posts first. We will generate periodic WACZ snapshots to demonstrate the site's growth and change over its lifecycle. And in the event that we sunset the project, we will take one final WACZ snapshot and source code snapshot and either deposit the resulting file package as described above for preservation or archive it offline.

## Works Cited

Contreras Izquierdo, Narciso M. “Actitudes del profesorado de ELE/L2 hacia las variedades lingüísticas del español: identidad y prestigio.” *Boletín de Filología* 58.1, 2023, p. 303.

Panagia, Mariagrazia, and Juan de Dios Villanueva Roa. “Lunfardo in Tango Lyrics and Its Impact on the Learning of Argentinian Spanish: A Case Study.” *Investigaciones sobre Lectura*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2023, pp. 111–130.

Yang, Ling-yan. “El lunfardo como referente sociocultural del aprendizaje de E/LE en contextos sinohablantes.” *SinoELE: Revista de Enseñanza de ELE a Hablantes de Chino* 3, 2010, pp. 1–28.