

9 Language Profile

Lowland Chontal

About the Consultant (How I Became a Midwife)



Adelaida Espinoza Raymundo was born in December of 1935 in San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico. As the oldest girl in the family, she ran the household on the family's small farm in the highlands while her mother cared for the other children, down in the town. From the age of 10, Adelaida cooked, cleaned, did the laundry, hunted, and gardened for her father and the other men who worked in the fields. She remembers this as a frightening time at first, but ultimately she sees this forced isolation as a big part of the reason she is independent, resourceful, and an excellent speaker of Lowland Chontal. The youngest fluent first-language speaker I worked with, she was an enduring source of patient teaching, great cooking, and friendship throughout the years.

When I met Adelaida, she told me about her primary job. She said in Spanish, 'Levanto criatura', meaning literally, 'I pick up children'. I was mystified until I realized that *levanto criatura* is a good calque for the Chontal compound stem *lef'ki* 'to lift out a living thing': she is a midwife. (And I was instantly hooked on those verbs!)

Adelaida is also a traditional healer, using both

herbs and prayer, and her beautiful hand-made paper flowers are in steady demand for the many festivals and celebrations throughout the year. Today she lives in Huamelula, along with various siblings, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.