11 Language education policy issues in Puerto Rico

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1 Introduction

Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking territory that exists within a complicated political status with the United States known as Estado Libre Asociado (Free Associated State or Commonwealth). Language planning issues pertaining to both Spanish and English have received varying degrees of attention since the territory was taken over by the United States in 1898; however, overall, the situation has been characterized by a lack of organized language planning and the adoption of language education policies that respond more to the pressures of federal administration and insular party politics than to pedagogical prudence (Ostolaza Bey 2001).

All modern, industrialized states have to confront questions of language education policy (Shohami 2006; Gibson 2006). Language policy issues faced by educators worldwide fall into three general categories: language status, language corpus, and language acquisition (Wright 2004). These concerns overlap and may be addressed simultaneously by different types of language policies initiated and implemented by distinct groups. They are all observable in Puerto Rico.

Language status policies are generally the most controversial and overtly political in nature. They involve the official selection of one or more language varieties for use in the schools, government, and media, and the value explicitly or implicitly assigned to the given codes (Cooper 1990). Language status planning was a central issue in many of the decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Africa and the Pacific (Fishman, Ferguson, & Das Gupta 1968). Language status decisions are generally guided by sociopolitical ideologies such as nationalism, assimilationism, pluralism, or internationalism. The formal allocation of language resources is commonly made by governmental bodies but put into action and/or monitored by school administrators and teachers, as well as other language stakeholders such as the courts and the media.

In Puerto Rico, language status was the major concern between 1898 and 1948 when the US government controlled education and attempted to utilize English as the language of instruction in order to Americanize the island (Torres González 2002; Pousada 1999; Morris 1996; Algren de Gutiérrez 1987; Negrón de Montilla 1970). However, status issues have cropped up periodically even after Spanish

became the sole language of instruction in 1949, mainly in connection with the waging of party politics and/or the proposal of bilingual programs (Schmidt 2014; Barreto 2001; Vélez 2000; Clampitt-Dunlap 2000).

Language corpus policies are concerned with paying attention to or engineering changes in the internal structure of the language(s) being used (Ferguson 2006), including the determination of standard norms versus non-standard usage, the revision and regulation of spelling and accentuation, the treatment of foreign loanwords and archaisms, the establishment of scientific and technological terminology, and the carrying out of lexicographic research for the preparation of dictionaries. Language corpus decisions are often made by language academies, linguists, publishers, or influential intellectuals and then put into effect by educational systems (Haugen 1983).

Overall, since both Spanish and English are highly standardized codes with extensive written literatures and prescriptive reference materials, there is little need for much corpus planning in Puerto Rico, in contrast to other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America where the existence of creole and indigenous languages necessitates the creation of official orthographies and grammars (Aceto & Williams 2003; Roberts 1994; Winer 1990). The Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española has primarily concerned itself with the preparation of specialized dictionaries of standard and non-standard Puerto Rican Spanish, Anglicisms, Puerto Rican regionalisms, and occupational jargon; the explanation of standard Puerto Rican Spanish grammatical norms; and the description and historical analysis of social dialects of Spanish on the island, but its public impact has been rather limited.[1]

Language acquisition policies refer to the design of curricula and materials for the development of linguistic proficiency in a language or set of languages, either as vehicles of instruction or as academic content (Tollefson 1981, 1991). They also include the recruitment of teachers and the training necessary for teachers to utilize the curricula and materials effectively. Language acquisition planning is primarily the work of educational planners, textbook companies, and administrators, although once again, it is implemented by classroom teachers. Universities are also involved, since much pre-service and in-service pedagogical training occurs through university degree and certificate granting programs.

Another language acquisition concern, which is also closely linked to language status planning, is the development of positive attitudes toward the process of learning other languages and toward the speakers of those languages. A number of studies of attitudes toward English in Puerto Rico indicate complex mixed emotions (Schenk 2011; Lugo 2002; Schweers & Vélez 1999; Clachar 1997b; López Laguerre 1989); however, this ambivalence has not been adequately addressed in educational planning. Other studies show an increasing willingness among young Puerto Ricans to learn English. Pizarro (2006) found that freshman UPR, Río Piedras students who had studied in a Spanish-medium high school maintained a high average in English at both the high school and university levels, held positive attitudes toward English (while not devaluing their Spanish), and planned to use their English to pursue professional careers. There is also recent research that

indicates that in some areas of the island (e.g., Bayamón) a wholeheartedly positive attitude toward English is developing, accompanied by the very controversial notion that knowing Spanish may not be the defining feature of being Puerto Rican (Domínguez Rosado 2013).

It should be noted that there is no official body that directly addresses language planning issues in Puerto Rico. The Language Planning Institute, which resulted from a Senate investigation into language matters (Ostolaza Bey 2001), was approved on August 9, 2002 but never funded or convened. On July 29, 2010, the law authorizing the Institute was revoked because neither the political climate nor the economic situation of the island favored the creation of a new administrative body. In January of 2013, Senator Antonio J. Fas Alzamora presented PR Senate Bill 266 to restore the Institute, with the stated goals of protecting and maintaining the Spanish language, facilitating and accelerating the learning of English, and making possible the learning of other languages, particularly French and Portuguese. The new bill (which has not yet been passed)[2] included within the Institute's responsibilities the creation of language testing mechanisms, research comparing Spanish and English teaching results, and a study of the methods for foreign language teaching utilized at the university and lower levels (Fas Alzamora 2013; Propone restablecer 2015).

One government body that has been somewhat involved in language policy issues in Puerto Rico is the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Institute of Puerto Rican Culture), whose website can be found at www.icp.gobierno.pr/. Its purpose (as set out in Law 89 on June 21, 1955) is to conserve, promote, enrich, and disseminate the cultural values of the Puerto Rican people and foment a deep understanding and appreciation of these values. Language is central to cultural values, and the ICP deals with language in some of its publications. Most notably, in 2004, it published in book format the study on language carried out by the Puerto Rican Senate titled *Informe sobre el idioma en Puerto Rico*.

Periodically, non-governmental organizations dedicated to language advocacy crop up. For example, on August 19, 2008, a lawsuit (*Diffenderfer v. Gómez-Colón*) was filed by American residents on the island to object to violations of the voting rights of non-Spanish speakers. Three weeks before the November 2008 elections, Federal District Court Judge José Antonio Fusté ordered that the ballots be printed in both Spanish and English because "the Spanish-only ballots violate the Voting Rights Act, the Equal Protection Clause, and the First Amendment" (*Diffenderfer*, 587 F. Supp. 2d at 343). He also certified the suit for class action and awarded the plaintiffs $67,550.34 in attorney fees. The lawsuit stimulated the formation of a coalition that succeeded on September 7, 2009 in obtaining the passage of an amendment (Law 90) to the electoral law of Puerto Rico, obligating the printing of thousands of bilingual ballots (Olivera-Soto 2010; Hernández Vivoni 2009).

From the opposite pole of public opinion, in 2009, a group of Puerto Rican lawyers and intellectuals created an association called *Unidos por Nuestro Idioma* to protest the utilization of English on public signage and police cars in locales like Guaynabo and to uphold Spanish as the "natural, everyday language of Puerto Ricans."[3] They prepared a manifesto of 13 points that affirmed the importance of Spanish in Puerto Rican identity and culture, as well as its prominence worldwide, and stated unequivocally the need to preserve and defend it in the face of "progressive deterioration" of vocabulary, basic oral and written skills, and critical thinking. They clarified that they held no prejudice toward English; however, they were concerned about the mixing of Spanish and English, which they felt demonstrated inadequate knowledge and management of the two languages. They called for recognition of the primacy of Spanish and acknowledgement of the historically proven inefficacy of programs that force English upon Puerto Rican students. They closed by asserting that the Spanish language was a non-negotiable feature of Puerto Rican society, regardless of the political status of the island (*Manifiesto* 2009: 1; Rivera Quiñones 2009). The group succeeded in organizing an impressive march on the Capital, which nevertheless did not result in any appreciable change in the existing language policy.

The activism of such groups contrasts with the sociolinguistic reality of the island as described by a study carried out by Hispania Research Corporation in 1992, which confirmed that Spanish was used in most social domains on the island and that the greatest exposure to English came via books (i.e., schooling) and cable television. More recent research (Carroll 2008) indicates that the Internet has become the central arena for English language use in Puerto Rico, since Puerto Rican users of MySpace and Facebook create a bilingual linguistic continuum by code switching constantly between Spanish and English.[4] Neither of these studies supports the claims that Spanish is threatened by English or that English speakers are discriminated against in Puerto Rico.

2 Development of English proficiency

2.1 School-based instruction

In spite of significant effort, expense, and a plethora of overtly assimilationist language education policies between 1898 and 1948 (Torres González 2002), the US government was unsuccessful in making English the language of the Puerto Rican masses by obligating it as the medium of instruction (Clachar 1997b). Since 1949, instruction in the public schools has been almost exclusively in Spanish, with English as a required subject at all levels up through college. While the number of English speakers has steadily increased since then (see Figure 11.1), with 50 percent of the population indicating on the 1990 census some ability to speak English, in 2000, only 17.6 percent of islanders considered that they spoke English "very well" (U. S. Census Bureau 2000).

There have been many attempts to improve the quality of English instruction in Puerto Rico. Preferential pay scales for English teachers were set early in the twentieth century to attract English-proficient Puerto Rican instructors, and American teachers have been enlisted at different points to teach English on the island (Rodríguez Sanfiorenzo 2009; Osuna 1949). Nevertheless, the Puerto Rico Department of Education cannot compete with the considerably higher pay scales

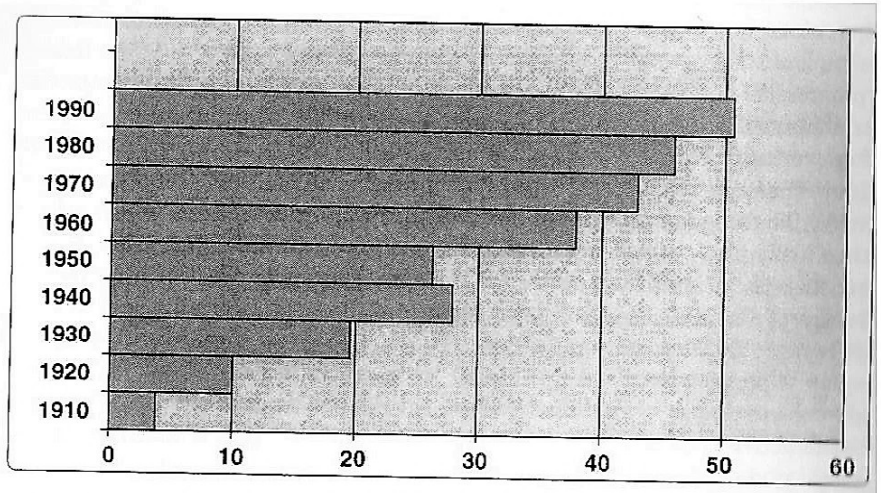

Figure 11.1 Percentage of Puerto Rican population aged 10 or older that speaks English to some degree, 1910–1990 (US Bureau of the Census figures reported in Torres Gonzalez 2002, p. 152)

in the United States, and English-proficient Puerto Rican teachers are regularly recruited to work in stateside bilingual programs (Velázquez 2013; Burgos 2013). Some of the teachers who stay behind on the island fall into the habit of teaching the English class in Spanish to accommodate the students' limited English skills. This furthers a common perception among students that English is a "Mickey Mouse" course that one can pass without really making an effort or learning the language. In addition, the English textbooks utilized in the public schools are designed for use among minority group ESL learners in the States and are not truly relevant to islanders' interests or needs. There are very few locally written books for young people in English. It appears that Puerto Rican youths are learning more English from the Internet, radio, and cable television than from classroom instruction.

To make things worse, English and Spanish are constantly characterized as combatants instead of as complements. Drops in Spanish test scores are often attributed to the time spent on English (Agencia F 1997). The College Board scores of high school seniors between 1985 and 2008 reveal two very clear patterns: 1) the public school students score lower in both Spanish and English than do the private school students; and 2) the Spanish scores among the public school students have been decreasing since 1985, while the English scores have remained fairly constant and slightly lower than the Spanish scores (College Board Puerto Rico y América Latina 2009). Blaming the decline in Spanish scores on the English classes is illogical since most public school students receive only an hour of English a day and carry out the rest of their academic endeavors in Spanish. Private school English scores have surpassed Spanish scores since 1995 probably

because the private schools stress English strongly to comply with parental expectations; however, their Spanish scores never dip down as far as the public school students' scores, most likely due to the greater resources available in the private schools.

Despite the existence of various bilingual public schools and numerous private schools that teach in English only or in both languages,[5] the island lacks a cohesive language education policy with regard to bilingualism. Various schemes to create a bilingual citizenry have been tried, most notably that of Secretary of Public Education Víctor Fajardo in 1997 (Fajardo, Albino, Báez, et.Al. 1997) and that promoted by Governor Luis Fortuño in 2012 (Marcano 2012); however, their implementation was undermined by rushed or limited planning, opposition from teachers (Navarro 1997), shortages of trained personnel and materials, and lack of continuity and follow-through due to post-election administration changes.

2.2 English as tool of business and professional endeavor

Language-related issues abound in the commercial and professional arenas and have serious implications for education.[6] Strauch (1992) found that most Puerto Ricans "supervalorize" English as an instrument of socioeconomic ascent. Consequently, the use of English and Anglicisms is most common among upwardly mobile individuals such as doctors, scientists, pharmaceutical employees, engineers, business executives, lawyers, media personnel, and computer technicians (Alcina Caudet 2001; Cuadrado Rodríguez 1993; Huyke Freiría 1973; Mellado de Hunter 1961).

Most businesses in Puerto Rico have their own informal rules for language use. The tourist industry and US-based corporations usually hire employees with strong English skills, while local companies often include "bilingual" in their classified ads[7] but do little to evaluate or utilize these skills. Many jobs in Puerto Rico require only minimal English skills, but there is a strong popular conviction that English is equated with economic success. The media lend credence to this belief by depicting bilingual speakers on the island as trendy, modern consumers of luxury merchandise. Coupled with the current economic crisis (14.7 percent official unemployment rate), this presentation stimulates Puerto Rican youths to immigrate to the United States in search of work rather than remain at home and fight to improve the local state of affairs.

In addition, it is common practice in Puerto Rico to utilize English in naming businesses and promoting products, regardless of the nature of the business and its language demands (i.e., Quality Roofing, Smart Computer PR, Yoly's Hair Cut, Los Primos Auto Collision, etc.). The longstanding association of English with business success is further perpetuated by the multitude of American franchises (e.g., McDonald's, Sears, K-Mart, KFC, etc.).

Furthermore, most products sold in Puerto Rico come from the United States and are therefore labeled in English. Every trip to the supermarket, drug store, or mall exposes Puerto Ricans to English, although many of the product names may be hispanized and phonologically integrated into Spanish (e.g., *Visine* pronounced

as vee-**see**-neh instead of vay-**zeen**). It should be noted that Puerto Rican consumers may not appreciate the full semantic content of product names (e.g., Tide, Pamper, Caress, Renuzit, etc.) due to limited English vocabularies but still develop product loyalty from the omnipresence of the merchandise in local stores.

Mazak (2008) carried out an ethnographic study of the uses of English text in a rural Puerto Rican community and discovered that rural adults utilized and wrote English texts that pertained primarily to the social domains of bureaucracy, health, and finances. Thus even in areas distant from the metropolitan center, English is linked to the acquisition of services and monetary benefits and cannot be ignored in the planning of language education policy.

2.3 English in the legal system

Puerto Rico has had two official languages, Spanish and English, since 1902 when the United States set up a civilian government on the island. The Official Language Act of 1902 was approved primarily for the benefit of the English-monolingual colonial governors and the implementation of a bald-faced Americanization plan. While the text of the law refers to treating the two languages "indistinctly," the fact is that English was the language of power, particularly in the local courts. In 1966, a law was passed enforcing Spanish as the language of the insular courts with special provisions made for non-Spanish-speaking individuals who came before the law. In 1991, under the administration of pro-Commonwealth Rafael Hernández Colón, Spanish was made the sole official language of Puerto Rico (Law 4, April 5, 1991), but this only lasted until 1993 when pro-statehood Pedro Roselló was elected governor and fulfilled a campaign promise to reinstate Spanish and English as co-official languages (Law 1, January 28, 1993). This was one of the most blatant illustrations of the intense interaction between party politics and language policy on the island.

Interestingly enough, the US federal court in Puerto Rico has always held its sessions in English (Pousada 2008). Interpreters are provided for witnesses and accused who do not speak English, and Spanish testimony is translated into English for the consideration of the bilingual jury members. English is the language of record, even though virtually all participants are native Spanish speakers. The official explanation is that this approach is necessary to facilitate the appeals process in the Boston Circuit Court; however, several cogent proposals have been made to translate only the contested parts of the testimony in the case of an appeal (cf. Justice Hiram Cancio's pronouncements in 1989, reported in Baralt 2004).

2.4 Concept of PR English

The English spoken in Puerto Rico does not always follow the rules of standard US English. Like the many "Englishes" spoken around the world, Puerto Rican English (PRE) has a flavor all its own. As would be expected, it is heavily influenced by the lexicon, semantics, phonology, and syntax of Puerto Rican Spanish. The official recognition of PRE would have important language policy implications, but this is highly controversial.

Back in 1971, Rose Nash coined the term *Englañol* to describe the English spoken by Puerto Ricans in PR. Englañol has false cognates used in a Spanish manner, loan translations, and spelling pronunciations. Some examples of *Englañol* would be

1 My **assistance** [*asistencia* = attendance] in class has been poor this semester.
2 We need to **pass the vacuum** (*pasar el vacuum* = vacuum) before the party.
3 I'd like to **separate** [*separar* = reserve] that room for the meeting next week.

Nash considered Englañol to be "the true standard" in Puerto Rico: "With very few exceptions, it is Englañol rather than Standard English that is taught in the public schools, from the first grade through the university level" (1971: 121).

Later studies suggested the emergence of a new English along the lines of Indian English, Nigerian English, or Australian English. Schweers (1993) proposed the possibility of a Puerto Rican variety of English and recommended research to describe its users and its functional context. Walsh (1994) identified a number of features of PRE, such as de-spirantization of [ð] and [θ] to [d] and [t], de-affrication of [dʒ] to [ʒ] or [j], devoicing of [z], confusion of [ʃ] and [tʃ], and shifting stress to the last element of compound nouns (e.g., pronouncing ***dish**washer* as dish**washer**). She argued that the impact of Spanish and the fact that the majority of English teachers in Puerto Rico used the local dialect of English contributed to the maintenance of the two varieties of English. She recommended that teachers recognize the existence of local practices and adapt their English lessons to that reality (Ortiz Garcia 1997).

In 1997, Blau and Dayton carried out a study of the acceptability of PRE among 223 subjects, including UPR students in basic, intermediate, and honors English classes; Puerto Rican English teachers; and native speakers of English residing in the United States. Task 1 entailed reading real sentences containing lexical items that were posited as belonging to PRE. Participants had to correct any sentences they felt merited repair. The test sentences included false cognates such as *interpreted* (for "sang"), *domination* (for "mastery"), *approved* (for "passed"), and *celebrated* (for "held"). Task 2 consisted of multiple choice questions in which target words were replaced by blanks that respondents filled as they saw fit. The researchers also interviewed an island-raised English teacher, a return migrant English teacher, and an English native speaker. They found that native English speakers accepted the least number of PRE items. As student proficiency increased, students accepted fewer PRE items; in fact, at the honors English level, the students' scores equaled those of the teachers on the multiple choice task. There was additionally considerable difference between the acceptability rates of the PRE forms on the two tasks by the Puerto Rican teachers (61 percent and 30 percent) versus the native English speakers (28 percent and 3 percent). Given that English teachers are trained to teach standard language forms, they would be expected to approach native speaker levels; however, it appears that they are aiming at Puerto Rican English norms, rather than US English standards.

Fayer et al. (1998) and Fayer (2000) investigated linguistic reformulations of English in Puerto Rico based on Spanish models, such as inverted word order in

noun clauses (e.g., *They tell me how important* ***is the bill*** *for them.)*, new lexical creations based on Spanish forms, borrowings from Spanish (e.g., *There are many* ***urbanizations*** [public housing projects] *in Puerto Rico.*), and hybrid compounds utilizing English and Spanish words (e.g., *Many people were arrested at the* ***drug punto*** [place drugs are sold]). They considered that there was sufficient syntactic, lexical, and morphological evidence to propose the existence of PRE. This was further confirmed by Schweers and Hudders (2000), who also collected considerable lexical, phonological, and discourse level evidence of distinctive patterns in the English of Puerto Ricans.

Nickels (2005) considers that "the variety of English spoken in Puerto Rico is only beginning to be identified as a variety in its own right through research, but only time will tell whether Puerto Ricans will claim ownership of this variety" (234). She makes a very interesting point regarding the recognition of PRE and the teaching of English on the island.

Perhaps labeling English in Puerto Rico as Puerto Rican English would encourage learning of the language as "original" and without any resentments or feelings of betrayal to Hispanic heritage, thus allowing the teaching and learning of English to flourish and enter into the next stage in the life cycle of non-native varieties. (235)

3 Development of academic discourse structures in Spanish

3.1 The Language Academy

The Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española (the Puerto Rican Spanish Language Academy), directed by Dr. José Luis Vega, is at present the only agency that directly addresses language corpus issues on the island.[8] Its goal is to promote the correct use, conservation, and study of Puerto Rican Spanish. It carries out linguistic research to amend existing grammars, document historical changes, carry out spelling and accentuation revision, and contribute to an international Spanish language corpus project called CORPES. The Academy publishes grammars, general and specialized dictionaries, special editions of classic works, and tributes to significant literary figures. It is greatly concerned with the development of *lengua culta* (standard or cultured language) and carries out regular campaigns to increase linguistic awareness, including requests for local submissions to the *Real Academia Española* dictionary and a Facebook page that posts regular guides to standard Spanish usage (www.facebook.com/pages/Academia-Puertorrique%C3%B1a-de-la-Lengua-Espa%C3%B1ola/297768212160?fref=nf). One of the stated goals of the Academy is the early identification of foreign borrowings in order to provide native alternatives that facilitate linguistic uniformity. Its online journal called *Dilo* (Say it) informs the public on different aspects of language structure and usage and responds to questions regarding spelling, grammar, and word selection.

In December of 2010, the Academy initiated a campaign to popularize the use of typically Puerto Rican words called "*Español puertorriqueño: ¡Atrévete y dilo!*" (Puerto Rican Spanish: Dare to say it!). Fifty 30-second radio capsules

were recorded by influential artists and public figures, and 75 Puerto Rican words were promoted during the campaign.

The Academia has a moderately normative effect upon the teaching of Spanish on the island since it serves as an authoritative voice and publishes reference books that are employed as source material for textbooks and other pedagogical documents. Nevertheless, its work is not widely known outside of academia despite occasional televised programs and the new Facebook page.

3.2 Effects of English contact on Puerto Rican Spanish

English loanwords are widespread in Puerto Rican Spanish, and being communicatively competent in Puerto Rico includes knowing how to use Anglicisms while speaking Spanish. English structures, usually phonologically and morphologically integrated into Puerto Rican Spanish, are an intrinsic part of the local lexicon. The loans can be single nouns or verbs (e.g., *dona* [donut], *matre* [mattress], *bómper* [bumper], *faxear* [to fax], etc.) or phrases (e.g., *Dame un breiquecito.* [Give me a little break. or Let me break into line/pass in front of you.]). Some occupational groups are more prone to use Anglicisms than others (e.g., auto mechanics, sports announcers, fashion/beauty consultants, and computer technicians), but everyone, regardless of English language proficiency, employs them on a daily basis.

It should be noted that the incorporation of English loans into local speech repertoires is a global trend. Linguists view borrowings non-judgmentally as an inevitable consequence of contact between speech communities and point to the ways in which they enrich vocabulary by increasing the number of synonyms and expressing nuances not present in equivalent native words. In and of themselves, they do not represent a danger to the native language.

Maria Vaquero (1990) carried out a study of Anglicisms in the Puerto Rican press and isolated various strategies for incorporating English forms into Spanish. Among these are: 1) creating a Spanish-looking word based on an English word form instead of its Spanish equivalent (e.g., *coincidentalmente* instead of *de forma coincidente*); 2) using Spanish words with English meanings (e.g., *bloques* [building blocks] for "street blocks" instead of *cuadras*); 3) translating literally from English into Spanish (e.g., *hacer sentido* to mean "make sense" instead of *tener sentido*); and 4) using an English word to refer to a specific aspect of the meaning of a particular referent (e.g., *magacín* for popular magazines and *revista* for news magazines and journals).

Humberto López Morales carried out a comparative study of the use of Anglicisms in Madrid, Mexico City, and San Juan, PR in 1992. Figure 11.2 shows how Puerto Ricans have the highest number of Anglicisms, but Madrid and Mexico City are not far behind.

In 1996, John Lipski wrote about a number of syntactic influences of English upon Puerto Rican Spanish. Among the Anglicized examples discussed were: *¿Cómo te gustó la playa?* [How did you like the beach?]; *El problema está siendo considerado.* [The problem is being considered.]; *Te llamo para atrás.* [I'll call you back.]; and *Él sabe cómo hablar inglés.* [He knows how to speak English.].

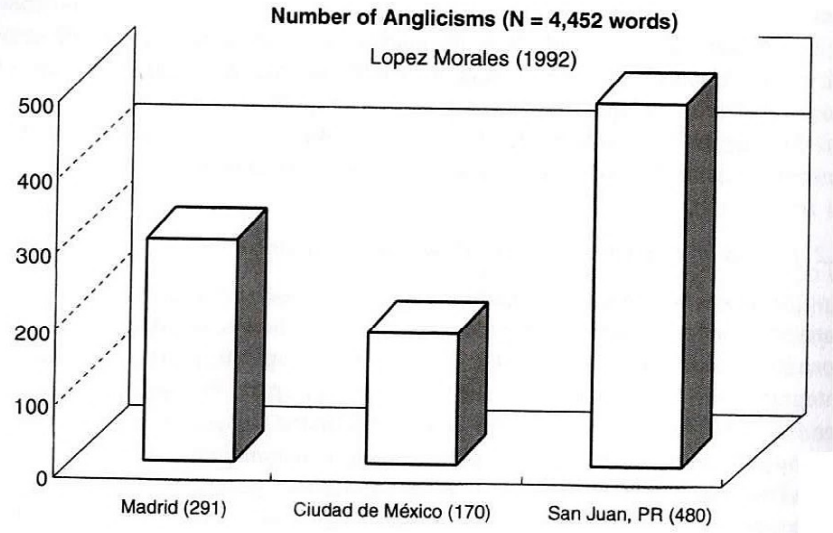

Figure 11.2 Use of Anglicisms in Madrid, Mexico City, and San Juan

Amparo Morales (1986, 1989, 2001) looked at the use of present continuous verbs such as *¿Qué estás haciendo?* [What are you doing?] instead of the simple present form *¿Qué haces?* to see if it had resulted from English contact. She concluded that such syntactic influences were low in frequency and could be found in other Hispanic speech communities, even those with little direct English influence. In some cases, they were retentions of older forms of Spanish. She pointed out that not every variation in Puerto Rican Spanish syntax was automatically due to English.

More linguistic research needs to be done on the influence of English on Puerto Rican Spanish to determine its current extent, its effects on the society, and how educators are dealing with it.

4 Eradication of functional illiteracy in Spanish

Literacy has long been a language policy issue in Puerto Rico, particularly in rural and urban working class neighborhoods. Table 11.1 presents the illiteracy figures from 1898 to 1990.

In 1898, when the Spanish ceded Puerto Rico to the United States, the illiteracy rate was 79.6 percent. In 1926, high school students from Vieques and Caguas volunteered to give night classes to illiterate adults. During the 1930s, the federal Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) operated 22 literacy camps around the island. During the 1940s, combatting illiteracy was an integral part of industrializing the island. By 1950, only 24.7 percent of Puerto Ricans

Table 11.1 Illiteracy in Puerto Rico based on Ortiz (1990)

Year	*% of population*
1898	79.6
1899	79.0
1910	65.5
1920	55.0
1930	41.4
1940	31.5
1950	24.7
1960	16.6
1970	10.8
1980	11.5
1990	10.4
2000	NA

remained illiterate. In 1954, the Literacy Program (*Programa de Alfabetización*) was created and, in 1958, the Program for Continuing Education. By 1970, illiteracy was reduced to 10.8 percent. During the 1980s, there were programs of peer teaching, education for the homeless, and library-based literacy classes.

In the island census of 1990, 10.4 percent of Puerto Ricans (245,291) indicated that they could not read and write in Spanish, their native tongue. It should be noted that this is still very high for a supposedly industrialized society. In 2000, the Puerto Rico census bureau began utilizing the US census questionnaire, which does not include a literacy question, so there are no data for that year. However, we do know from the 2000 census that more than 25 percent of island residents aged 25 and over had less than a ninth-grade education, which would imply a limited level of productive literacy. In 2000, a creative literacy curriculum called *Alfabetización: La Magia de Leer* (Literacy: The Magic of Reading) was put into effect. It featured reading, math, learning games, flexible hours, and alliances with other government agencies. By May of 2005, it had given service to 42,334 adults.

Disdier Flores, Pesante González, and Marazzi (2012) reported the findings of the 2010 Literacy Survey of Puerto Rico (*Encuesta de Alfabetización de Puerto Rico*). This survey (intended to provide the missing census data on literacy) was carried out via telephone interviews with a representative sample of 6,574 people aged 18 or older.[9] They were asked 11 questions related to literacy skills. Statistical analysis was made of 244 variables. The findings indicated that overall literacy stood at 92 percent,[10] with slightly lower figures for females and for the elderly.[11] More than six percent of the participants stated that they needed help to understand what they read. Only 45.8 percent reported reading books weekly, while 98.5 percent watched TV or listened to the radio. Among the men, 7.5 percent had trouble writing and 18.5 percent of the interviewees had children at home who had difficulties reading (1).

There was a strong correlation between poverty and illiteracy. In Adjuntas, where illiteracy was 30.0 percent, 79.0 percent of the people lived under the poverty level, and Maricao was a close second with 22.3 percent illiteracy and 71 percent poverty (17). Disdier Flores and Pesante González (2013) correlated

literacy achievement with various health indicators and discovered that literate individuals were more likely to be healthy, have a lower incidence of diabetes, and be more active physically.

In 2012, the Education Commission of the House of Representatives in Puerto Rico reported that the literacy campaign of the Department of Education had failed in eradicating illiteracy since so many young people were dropping out of the schools and thus not completing their education. This points to a very serious problem. Functionally illiterate youths cannot operate effectively in a technologically advanced society and generally wind up among the permanently unemployed, the underemployed, or the criminally involved.

Literacy has many non-linguistic benefits. It helps to eradicate poverty, reduce infant mortality, control population size, promote gender equality, and guarantee sustainable development (UNESCO 2006). However, full societal literacy requires a good curricular design, adequate planning, continuous collection and publication of data, political and economic backing by the government agencies, and community support.[12] It also necessitates making school facilities available to communities during the evenings and weekends when adults and adolescents can attend classes. Conquering functional illiteracy will pay off in many ways and must not be ignored by educators and policymakers.

5 Education of immigrants and return migrants

While there is a general perception that Puerto Rican schools are relatively homogenous in ethnic makeup, the reality is that they receive increasing numbers of students from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, or other Caribbean islands, as well as return migrants who have been residing in the States. Dominicans speak a distinctive variety of Spanish, and Haitians and US return migrants may have little or no formal training in Spanish. Dominicans and Haitians generally have few or non-existent English skills, and the return migrants who are native speakers of English may speak non-standard varieties that are not accepted in the schools in Puerto Rico (Pousada 1994; Clachar 1997a).

The Department of Education of Puerto Rico operates the *Programa de Limitaciones Lingüísticas en Español e Inmigrantes* (Language Instruction for Limited Spanish Proficient and Immigrant Students), which is intended for all students who speak a language other than Spanish at home or who come from outside of the United States and its territories. This Spanish as a Second Language program, funded by Title III-A in compliance with federal No Child Left Behind policies, seeks to teach such students to read, write, speak, and understand Spanish; perform effectively in content areas; master the curricular standards for their grade; and integrate themselves into Puerto Rican society. Students are selected via a Home Language Survey and given a screening and placement test. Teachers receive special training for dealing with this population. In addition to classroom support, the program provides family literacy training, workshops for parents, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling.

However, this program is insufficient and does not reach the neediest immigrants, who may not be documented or may not participate in the school system.

Much more must be done to identify and give service to Puerto Rico's growing immigrant population. In addition, Puerto Rican return migrants may not qualify for this program since Spanish is spoken in their households, and many must depend on other means to get help with their sometimes limited or non-standard Spanish skills and their often challenging cultural adaptation to life on the island.

6 Teaching of additional foreign languages

Most public schools in Puerto Rico do not offer classes in foreign languages other than English. Private schools sometimes offer classes in French. The majority of students first encounter foreign languages at the university level. The UPR in Río Piedras is famous for its intensive foreign language courses in French, Italian, Portuguese, and German. It also offers courses in Japanese, Mandarin, Latin, and Haitian Creole on a less consistent basis, and the English Department of the College of Humanities offers a year-long course in Afro-Caribbean Creole English as part of its graduate program.

People often point to the successful learning of such foreign languages in a year or two and compare it to the far less stellar accomplishments of students in English despite many more years of instruction and exposure. However, there are various things to consider. First of all, the students who elect to study foreign languages are self-selected, intrinsically motivated, and strongly attracted to the "exotic" and "prestigious" nature of the languages. Second, these languages have not been pushed down their throats as an obligatory part of the school curriculum since elementary school and are not tainted with a history of colonial imposition on the island. Thus there are few attitudinal barriers to overcome, and that makes all the difference.

The essential tasks involved in teaching any additional language, regardless of whether it is conceived of as a second or a foreign language, are the same. The identical requirements of well-trained instructors, attractive teaching materials, and adequate exposure to or immersion in the language are operative. The only real pedagogical difference lies in the degree of availability of extra-curricular language resources. Typically, a second language program relies on ready access to real-life language learning situations outside the classroom, while a foreign language program has to seek out or create simulated or online interactional settings for language acquisition or provide travel opportunities to its students. Puerto Rico possesses aspects of both second and foreign language environments and needs to utilize them all in the teaching of both English and other foreign languages. A change in perspective to "X as an additional language" would go a long way in advancing the island beyond the unproductive wrangling over labels for language programs (Pousada 2003).

7 Conclusion

This article has attempted to present an overview of the myriad of language policy issues that educators in Puerto Rico encounter today and some of the efforts that have been made to resolve them over the years. The teaching of English has been a major concern in Puerto Rico for quite some time; however, the development of

cognitive academic discourse skills in Spanish, the elimination of functional illiteracy in Spanish, and the education of immigrants and return migrants in Spanish have become increasingly problematic matters. Less frequently discussed issues are the evolution of Puerto Rican English as a distinctive variety and the teaching of foreign languages, but these should not be pushed off the language-planning agenda.

The need for structured and linguistically based language planning in Puerto Rico has been declared repeatedly over the years (cf. Ostolaza Bey 2001; Pousada 1996, 1985; Schweers 1993; Resnick 1993). Nevertheless, one of the biggest obstacles is the stranglehold that party politics and nepotism have over all aspects of public policy in Puerto Rico. Many creative language-related programs have been initiated and then abandoned with each new election. There is virtually no continuity of policy and very little evaluation of the effectiveness of any given policy. Therefore the wheel is constantly having to be reinvented and the frustration level of all stakeholders keeps rising. This leads to defeatist postures and acceptance of less-than-effective programs.

It is hoped that the brief review provided in this article will nourish an interest in the field of language planning and policymaking and provoke the sort of productive discussion that is needed for real changes to occur. Linguists must be involved in much of the work, particularly that involving language corpus revision and/or regulation; however, there must also be a recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of language policy and the unavoidable political factors that must be taken into account in coming to solutions that everyone can live with.

Notes

1 The Academia did address the language status issue in a small book in 1998; however, the major thrust of its work has been on language corpus matters.
2 The bill was filed on January 17, 2013 and referred to three Senate commissions that deal with education, culture, and public finances (Educación, Formación y Desarrollo del Individuo; Turismo, Cultura, Recreación y Deportes y Globalización; Hacienda y Finanzas Públicas). According to the Office of Legislative Services, it has progressed no further than the April 2, 2014 meeting of the Tourism and Culture commission (www.oslpr.org/legislatura/tl2013/tl_medida_print2.asp?r=PS266).
3 Original Spanish: "el lenguaje cotidiano y natural de los puertorriqueños."
4 It should also be noted that video gaming in Puerto Rico is another domain that favors interaction in the English language. Gamers often have surprisingly good vocabularies in English, especially those involved in role playing games (RPG). In fact, there is ongoing research into using video games pedagogically to improve English acquisition in Puerto Rico (Horowitz García 2013).
5 There are Protestant schools on the island which are taught exclusively in English due to the fact that they were set up by American missionaries.
6 Business and professional education at the university level typically emphasizes English, since it is required for communication with and certification by corporate headquarters and professional licensing boards in the United States.
7 Muntaner (1992) analyzed employment advertisements in Puerto Rican newspapers and ascertained that 80 percent called for English skills, and 36 percent sought completely bilingual candidates.

8 The College Board of Puerto Rico deals with the testing of language and math skills among all students in Puerto Rico and is therefore involved in the evaluation of language corpus planning. In its bulletin *Academia*, it regularly publishes test results. It also organizes conferences for teachers in which language issues are discussed and tests teachers for certification via the *Pruebas de Certificación de Maestros* (PCMAS).
9 It should be noted that using telephone interviews skews the data, since poor or homeless people may not have phones and are thus not represented in the sample. These are precisely the sector with the highest level of illiteracy.
10 This contrasts somewhat with the 2011 figure of 90.3 percent cited by the CIA's *World Factbook*.
11 Illiteracy was highest among the rural elderly (32.3 percent). It should also be noted that, in 2010, the World Bank indicated that the literacy rate among Puerto Rican youths (ages 15 to 25) was only 85 percent, meaning that 15 percent were unable to read and write (with understanding) a short, simple statement about their everyday life. Therefore the illiteracy problem existed both among the elderly and among the young.
12 Puerto Rico would profit from an examination of the highly effective literacy campaigns of Cuba and Nicaragua (e.g., Murphy 2012; Keeble 2002; Miller 1985; Hirshon 1984), which transformed those societies in a very short time.

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