

***Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class.***

BONNIE URCIUOLI. Boulder CO & Oxford: Westview Press, 1996. xiv + 222 pp. (Cloth US\$ 69.00, Paper US\$ 18.95)

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Bonnie Urciuoli's analysis of the language prejudice experienced by Puerto Rican adults on the Lower East Side of Manhattan stands shoulder to shoulder with Catherine Walsh's *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice* (1991), which addresses the speech of adolescents, and Ana Celia Zentella's *Growing up Bilingual in the Barrio* (1997), which deals with the speech of children, to complete the much-needed ethnolinguistic picture of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

The primary focus of this complex and thought-provoking book is the conflation of race, class, ethnicity, and language in the United States and its effect upon the lives of working-class Puerto Ricans. In her analysis, Urciuoli distinguishes "racialization" and "ethnicization." Racialized people are seen as disordered, dangerous, and disinclined to participate in personal or national advancement, while ethnicized people are viewed as orderly, safe, and striving toward class mobility. Although both are marked in relation to generic white, middle-class, English-speaking Americans, ethnicized people act like Americans in certain critical ways (e.g. family values, work ethic, educational goals, etc.), while racialized people fail to exhibit the attributes considered vital to an American identity.

Most U.S. ethnic groups were once racialized (e.g. Irish, Italians, Jews, Chinese); however, those who were colonized or enslaved and resisted the loss of their native language varieties (e.g. Afro-Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans) continue to be perceived as racially distinct and unassimilated. Racialized groups are stereotyped as non-producers who should be excluded, while ethnicized groups (though perhaps physically distinct) are judged as making an economic contribution and therefore worthy of respect. If ethnicized groups use foreign languages or have an accent, these features are seen as enriching and picturesque, while the vernaculars of racialized groups are considered to be inferior, threats to social stability, and obstacles to social success.

Racialized people face tremendous language prejudice and are forced to negotiate strategies for survival. Some of these serve to ethnicize and thus elevate them socially (e.g. learning "good" English or pretending not to know their vernacular), and some turn them into non-participants and objects of manipulation (e.g. pretending not to know any English and refusing to defend themselves verbally). They may also fall into parallel racializing prejudices toward individuals in power positions and conflate race and moral values (e.g. whites are cold, controlling, greedy). While ethnicization might be viewed as a pragmatic solution to their dilemma, it actually perpetuates

racialization since it does not resolve the “markedness” issue. As Urciuoli explains: “Marked Americans either succeed as good ethnics or fail as members of a raced underclass. In either case, the goal, never quite achievable, is to be unmarked” (p . 38).

Urciuoli’s basic thesis is that Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are treated as a racialized group, and their everyday bilingual speech is disallowed by outsiders. “Whenever English speakers complain about the ‘unfairness’ of hearing Spanish spoken in public spaces or in the workplace, they racialize Spanish by treating it as matter out of place” (p. 35). Since Puerto Ricans have not limited their ethnicity to festivals and parades which are safe, emblematic displays and familiar commodities in American society, they are viewed with suspicion. According to Urciuoli, Spanish and English among Puerto Rican adults must be analyzed in terms of “inner and outer sphere” functions, since linguistic variants stigmatized in public arenas are often valued in private interaction. She explains in detail how Puerto Ricans became racialized and explores the political topography of bilingualism in Puerto Rican communities. She also considers how “good” English has become “symbolic capital” in U.S. society and outlines the metacommunicative politics of exclusion and solidarity.

Perhaps the greatest strength of her analysis is its reliance on the opinions and perceptions of the people she interviews. As she probes the linguistic and social boundaries of their lives, her interviewees (who are rarely in a position to vent their feelings) sound out loud and clear on such issues as: how to be an American, acting white, racial teasing, respect, and self-defense. The copious and extended quotes from actual interviews are more than just descriptive; they form the backbone of the analysis. As she puts it: “What they know about the racialization of language, and the conflation of race and class is as much theory as data” (p. 179).

This superlative book should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in the interrelation of language, race, and class, the experiences of linguistic minorities, or the analysis of Puerto Rican culture in the United States.

## REFERENCES

Walsh, Catherine E., 1991. Pedagogy and the struggle for voice: Issues of language, power, and schooling for Puerto Ricans. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Zentella, Ana Celia, 1997. Growing up bilingual in the barrio. Blackwell.