

# THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PUERTO RICO: FROM IMPOSITION TO REINVENTION

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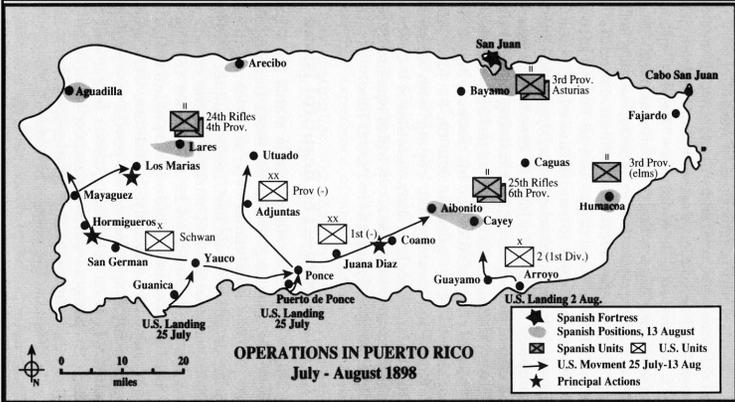
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## INTRODUCTION

English has had a long and tortuous history in Puerto Rico.

Although the language arrived on the island at least a hundred years before the U.S. invasion of 1898, it will forever be remembered as one of the major tools of the subsequent Americanization effort.

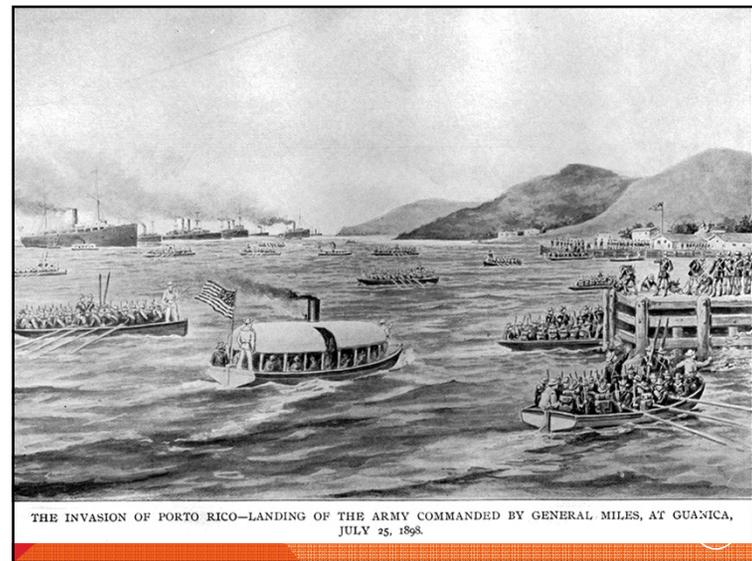

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**OPERATIONS IN PUERTO RICO  
July - August 1898**

### U.S. operations in Puerto Rico, 1898

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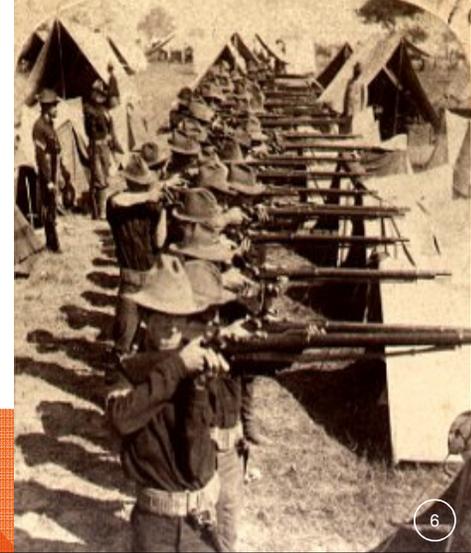




**U.S. troops in Arroyo, PR, 1898**

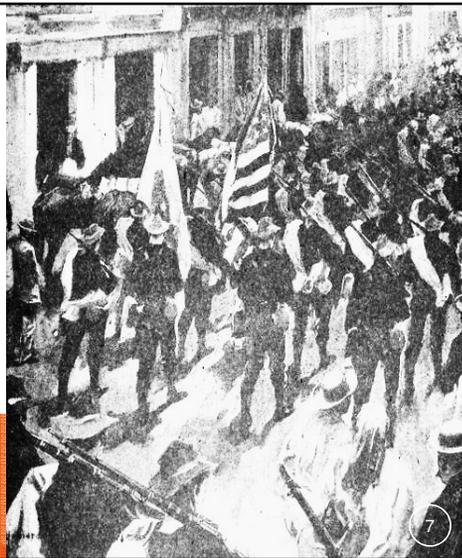
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**U.S. 1st Kentucky Volunteers in Puerto Rico, 1898**



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**American troops entering Ponce, 1898**



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As they were to do later around the globe, the American forces who occupied Puerto Rico after the Spanish American War took on the personae of great liberators bringing peace and freedom to the Puerto Rican people, so long under the thumbs of the Spanish empire.



8

- The ideologies of Manifest Destiny and Social Darwinism combined to justify American expansion.
- Senator Albert J. Beveridge (R-Indiana) explained in 1900 the responsibility of the U.S. with regard to Puerto Rico:



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*“Do not the blazing fires of joy and the ringing bells of gladness in Porto Rico prove the welcome of our flag? . . . do we owe no duty to the world? Shall we turn these peoples back to the reeking hands from which we have taken them? Shall we save them from those nations, to give them a self-rule of tragedy? It would be like giving a razor to a babe and telling it to shave itself. It would be like giving a typewriter to an Eskimo and telling him to publish one of the great dailies of the world.”*

Albert J. Beveridge cited in Thernstrom, 1984, p. 506

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The Goddess of Liberty heralds the day of Freedom for Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines.

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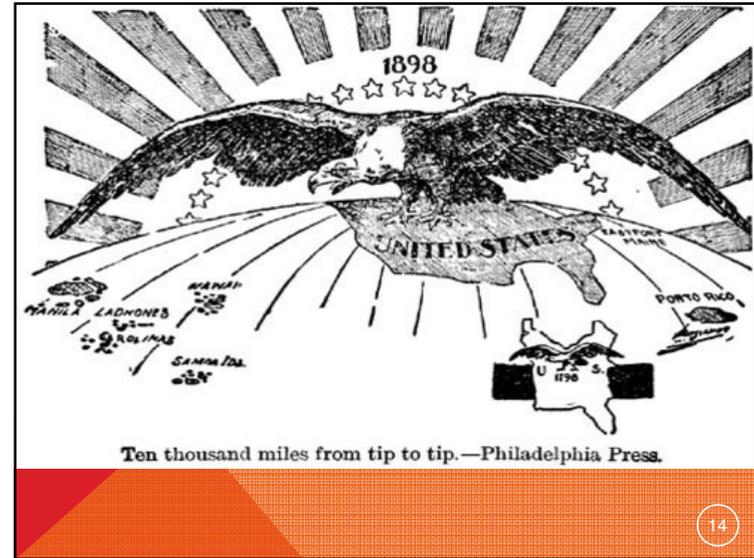


Propaganda from administration of U.S. President John McKinley & Vice Pres. Theodore Roosevelt

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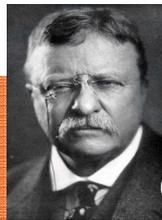


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- Theodore Roosevelt was an ardent advocate of the “melting pot” ideology regarding immigrants that was current in his day --“We must Americanize them in every way.” (1894).
- He applied this thinking to the annexation of Puerto Rico, ignoring the fact that Puerto Ricans were not willing immigrants, but rather hostages of war.



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Theodore Roosevelt visits Puerto Rico, 1898

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- The English language was seen as key to civilizing the people and making them understand the concepts of democracy.
- English as a medium of instruction was intended to make Puerto Ricans loyal to U.S. interests and ideologies.
- The Spanish vernacular was dismissed as a “patois”.



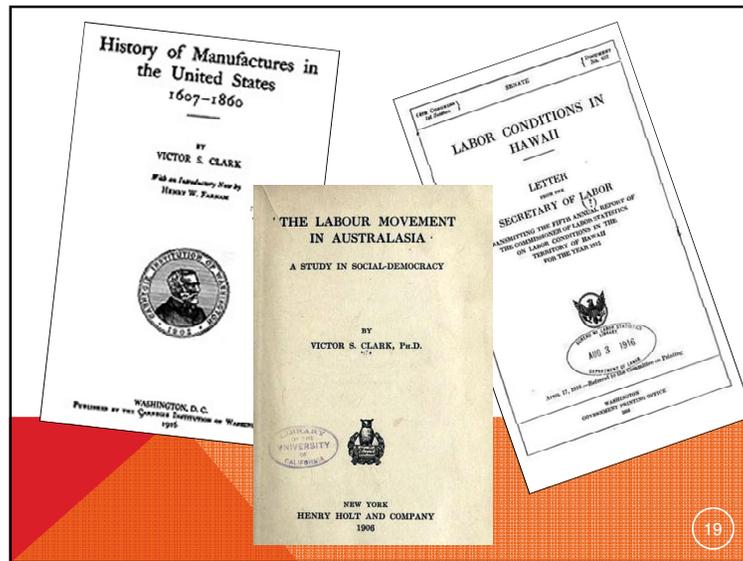
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President of the Insular Board of Education Victor S. Clark sized up his new clientele in Puerto Rico in the following manner:

“The great mass of Puerto Ricans are as yet passive and plastic . . . Their ideals are in our hands to create and mold.”  
(Morris, 1995, p. 26).



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Ironically, 30 years later, while visiting Puerto Rico as part of the Brookings Institution’s research team, Clark described Puerto Rico as “vividly aware of its own individuality.” (quoted in Ayala & Bernabé 2007, p. 76)



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### The Puerto Rico Plan

- American teachers were brought to Puerto Rico to teach English.
- The learning of English by all island teachers was made mandatory.
- English-speaking teachers were given preferential hiring.
- All high school and normal school candidates were examined in English.

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- Language instruction focused upon the implanting of U.S teaching practices, holidays, and cultural values.
- The 1902 Official Languages Act made Spanish and English co-official languages of Puerto Rico.



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- Every combination of English and Spanish as media of instruction and areas of study was tried between 1898 and 1948 in an attempt to fast-forward the process of Americanization. (see handouts)
- However, the Puerto Rican people resisted repeatedly in various ways, from outright rebellion to obstinate foot dragging.

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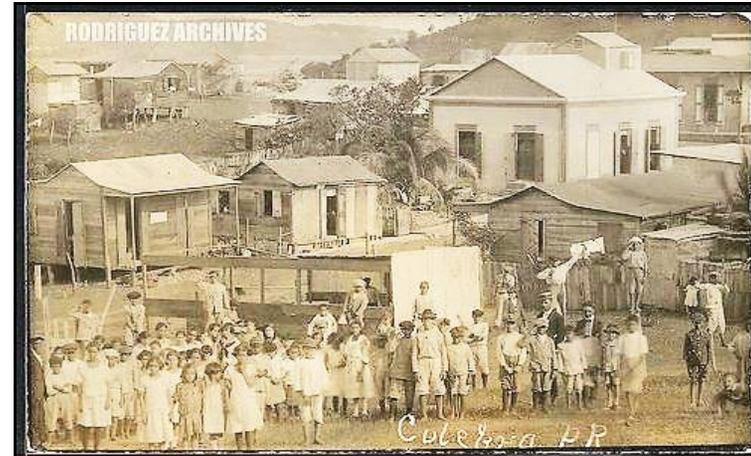
- In 1912, the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR or Teachers Association) was founded. One of its main objectives was to establish Spanish as the instructional medium.
- The AMPR marched in countless rallies throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and lobbied in the Puerto Rican legislature for a change in the language policy.





1930s rally

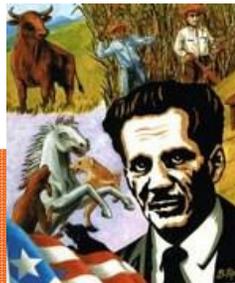
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School children in Culebra, PR circa 1920

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Notable examples of literary resistance and reaffirmation of Puerto Rican culture included Abelardo Díaz Alfaro's 1947 short story "Peyo Mercé enseña inglés," which ridiculed the efforts made to impose English upon the Puerto Rican people.



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- It was only after 1948, when Luis Muñoz Marín became the first Puerto Rican elected as governor, that Spanish took its rightful place as the medium of instruction at all levels, with English as a mandatory subject.
- This is the language policy currently in place in the Department of Education of Puerto Rico.



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## ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH IN PUERTO RICO

English in PR is viewed simultaneously as:

- the symbol of PR's relationship with the US;
- a great tool for survival in the modern world;
- an appropriate aspect of bilingualism at the individual level; and
- the potential usurper of Spanish and Puerto Rican culture at the societal level.

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Nationalistic pride is very prominent in Puerto Rico. No matter what their views regarding the appropriate relationship to the United States may be, Puerto Ricans highly value their local language and culture and do not wish to give it up.



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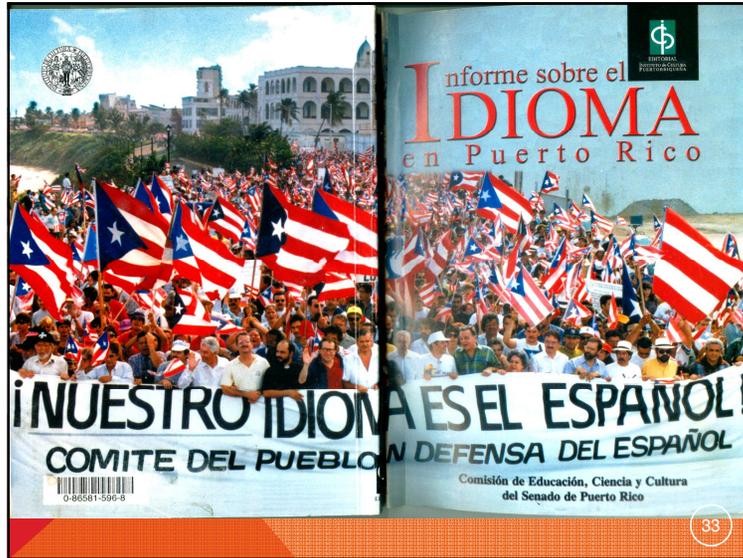


Great is the empire that we defied,  
but greater still is our right to liberty.  
(sign in Vieques, PR)

31

There is a strong concern, especially among intellectuals (ironically, those who have the most mastery of English) that the rising use of English in Puerto Rico represents a threat to the stability of the vernacular Spanish.

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The flip side of the passionate defense of Spanish by the *intelligentsia* is the paralyzing fear of English among less privileged sectors of the Puerto Rican population, as expressed in a popular advertisement for a private English institute on the island:

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- Both the intense nationalism in favor of Spanish and the crippling fear of English should be kept in mind as we go through the rest of this presentation.
- For many Puerto Ricans, the pull of these two factors make learning and actively using English a less-than-tranquil enterprise.

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- The Spanish Language Academy in Puerto Rico has taken the position that the best course is to follow the UNESCO guidelines which establish the vernacular as the best language for initial literacy and schooling.
- Additional languages can be incorporated afterwards without harm to the solid foundation of the vernacular.

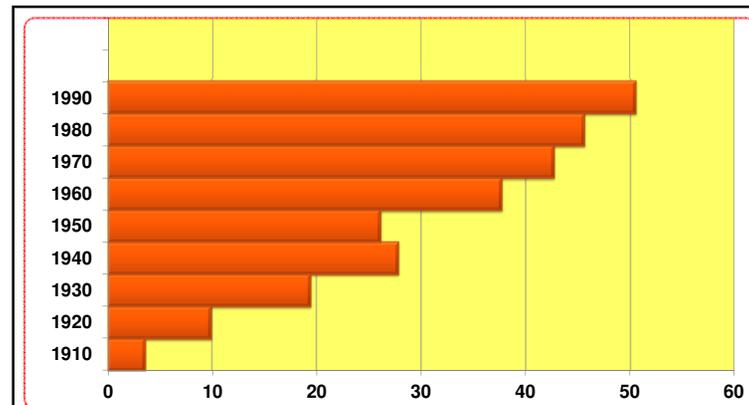


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### ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN PUERTO RICO

Despite initial protests, over time, the English proficiency of the Puerto Rican people has increased steadily, although mastery is far from complete for a great many students in the public schools.

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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)

40

In the 2000 Census, 82.4% of Puerto Ricans over the age of 18 claimed to speak English "less than very well." This means that only 17.6% considered that they spoke English "very well."



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In the San Juan metro area, 20-42% of respondents reported speaking English "very well".



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Outside of the metro area, the great majority of municipalities had only 10-14% of the adults reporting that they spoke English "very well," and in the mountainous interior of the island, the level was only 0-9%.

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**Map 1: Municipalities with highest number of people who speak English "very well" (2000 Census)**



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### ENGLISH PRESENCE IN PR

- newspapers
- magazines
- radio stations
- cable TV
- street and product names
- commercial signs



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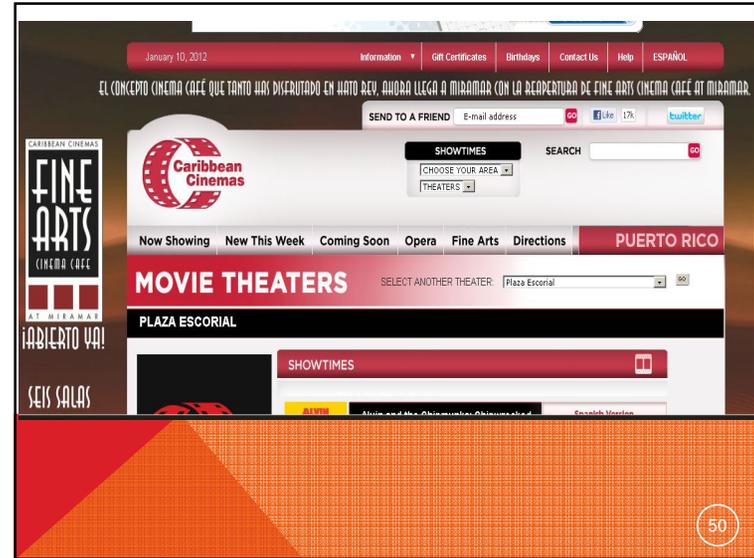
- Federal Court
- tourism
- Hollywood movies
- long-term US residents
- professional reports in English (e.g. doctors, accountants, lawyers, architects, etc.)



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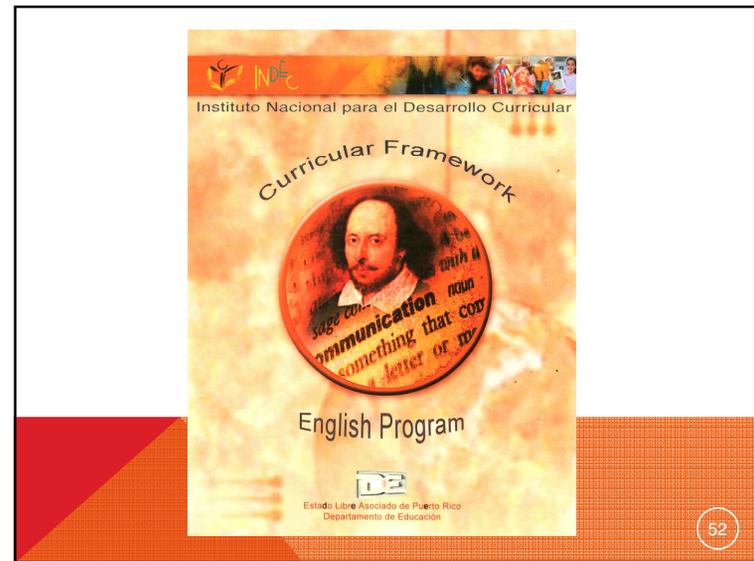
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## ENGLISH IN EDUCATION



- Required subject from kindergarten until university in both public and private schools.
- Some bilingual and English-only schools
- Countless commercial institutes dedicated to English teaching

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**Inglés sin Barreras**  
El Único Método de Inglés Conversacional

**Hable Inglés** francés, alemán, español y otros.

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- Cursos para niños desde 5 años en adelante.
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- Cursos de Inmersión Total® (6 a 10 horas diarias)
- Más de 130 años de experiencia y 500 centros en 50 países alrededor del mundo.

**Nuevos:**

- Cursos de idioma Inglés por internet.
- Cursos de preparación cultural

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**Preferential use of Spanish and English in different communicative contexts in Puerto Rico, 1992**

		Spanish	English
Home & friends	Speaking with family	97.2	2.0
	Speaking with friends	95.0	4.0
Community	Getting service in stores	96.8	2.3
	Public speaking	98.3	1.3
	Speaking at work	91.9	3.4
	Religious services	97.0	1.7
	Speaking with doctor	97.3	2.2
Reading	Newspapers	90.6	7.9
	Books	87.3	11.0
	Legal documents	94.5	4.3
	Puerto Rico laws	95.1	3.4
	Work applications	92.6	5.2
	Work documents	90.2	5.4
Writing	letters	94.1	4.6
Media	Listening to news	90.6	7.9
	Watching TV	78.4	18.4

Adapted from data presented in:  
Hispania Research Corporation (1992,1993)

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**CIRCULAR MIGRATION**

- A crucial source of English in Puerto Rico is the constant migratory flow between U.S. and PR.
- Thousands of PRs relocate to States for periods of time, learn English, and return to occupy positions which require using English regularly.

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**CROSSLINGUISTIC INTERACTIONS**

**ESPANGLISH**

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- Regardless of the language proficiency of the speakers, English loanwords, phonologically and morphologically integrated into Puerto Rican Spanish, are an intrinsic part of the local lexicon.
- Being communicatively competent in Puerto Rico includes knowing how to use Anglicisms while speaking Spanish.

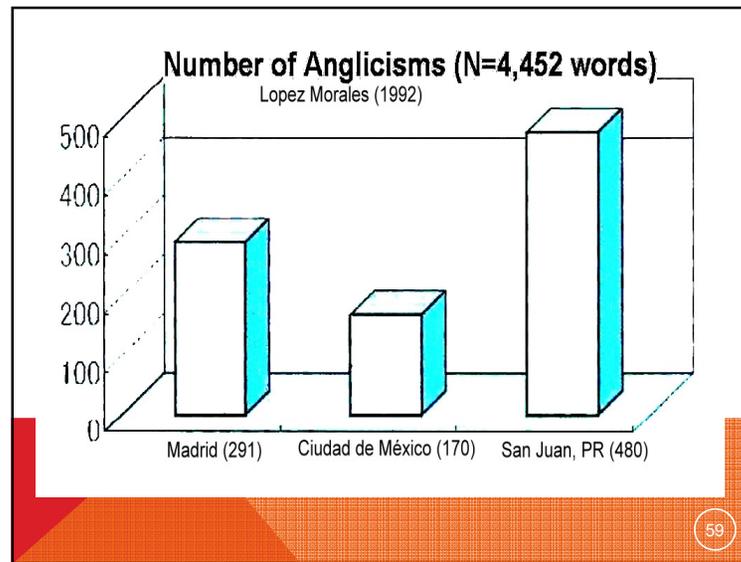
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It should be noted that this is a global trend and is seen in virtually all Spanish-speaking countries to some extent.

In 1992, Linguist Humberto López Morales carried out a comparative study of the use of Anglicisms in Madrid, Mexico City, and San Juan, PR.



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### INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON PR SPANISH



Anglicisms are most common among doctors, lawyers, engineers, media and least common among teachers

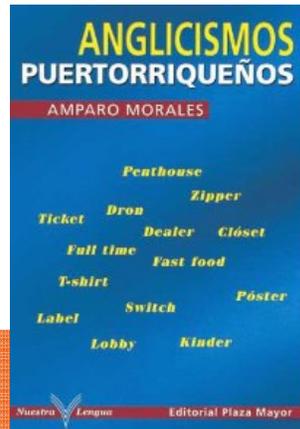
People involved in auto mechanics, sports, fashion /beauty, and computer technology are highly prone to using loanwords.



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## DICCIONARIO DE ANGLICISMOS EN PUERTO RICO

Morales  
(2001)



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*No puedo acceder el Internet desde mi hogar.* (I can't access the Internet from my home.)

Standard Spanish: *No puedo acceder a la Red desde mi hogar.*

70

*Necesito salvar los datos antes de apagar la computadora.* (I need to save the data before turning off the computer.)

Standard Spanish: *Necesito guardar los datos antes de apagar la computadora.*



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## ANGLICISMS IN SAN JUAN PRESS

María Vaquero (1990)

1) Creating a Spanish-looking word based on an English word form instead of its Spanish equivalent, for example, *coincidentalmente* instead of *de forma coincidente*



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- 2) Using Spanish words with English meanings  
 e.g., *bloques* [building blocks] for “street blocks” instead of *cuadras*



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Another example of this can be seen in the following street sign in which the phrase “*personas extrañas*” [literally “strange people”] is used instead of “*personas desconocidas*” [“unknown people”] or “*extraños*” [“strangers”].

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- 3) Loan translation: translating literally from English into Spanish  
 e.g., *hacer sentido* to mean “make sense” instead of Standard Spanish *tener sentido* (literally “to have sense”)



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4) Use of English word for specific aspect of meaning of particular referent (e.g., *magacín* for popular magazines and *revista* for news magazines and journals.



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### SYNTACTIC INFLUENCES IN PR

Lipski (1996: 358)

- *¿Cómo te gustó la playa?* [How did you like the beach?] instead of Standard Spanish: *¿Qué tal te gustó la playa?* Or: *¿Te gustó la playa?*



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*El problema está siendo considerado.* [The problem is being considered.] instead of Standard Spanish: *Se está considerando el problema.*



79

*Te llamo para atrás.* [I'll call you back.] instead of Standard Spanish: *Te devuelvo la llamada* (literally "I'll return your call").



80

*Él sabe cómo hablar inglés.* [He knows how to speak English.] instead of Standard Spanish: *Sabe hablar inglés.*



81

*La guagua está supuesta llegar a las 11:15.* [The bus is supposed to arrive at 11:15.]

Standard Spanish: *Se supone que la guagua llegue a las 11:15.*



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### SYNTACTIC INFLUENCES

Amparo Morales (1986, 2001)

Looked at use of present continuous verb  
*¿Qué estás haciendo?* [What are you doing?] instead of simple present: *¿Qué haces?*

Is this due to the influence of English?



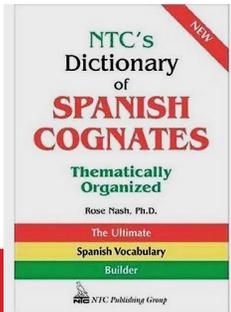
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### Morales' Conclusions:

- Syntactic influences low in frequency
- Found in other Hispanic speech communities
- Sometimes occur where little or no English influence can be documented
- May represent older forms of Spanish
- Not every variation in syntax is automatically due to English

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## DEVELOPMENT OF PR ENGLISH



Rose Nash (1971) 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.

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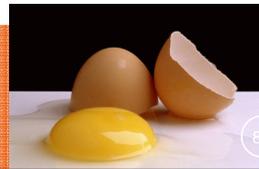
Some examples of *Englañol* would be:

- My assistance [*asistencia* = attendance] in class is not very good this semester.
- You need to pass the vacuum (*pasar el vacuum* = vacuum) before Mom gets home.
- Let's separate [*separar* = reserve] that date for the meeting!

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## Phonological characteristics of PR English (Walsh 1994)

- Interdental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ pronounced as alveolar stops [d] and [t] (*those three* comes out as *doze tree*).
- glide [j] pronounced as affricate /dʒ/ (*yolks* becomes *jokes*)



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## PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS 2

- devoicing of voiced alveolar fricative /z/ to [s], pronouncing *his* as *hiss*
- merger of affricate /tʃ/ with fricative /ʃ/, pronouncing *watches* as *washes*



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### PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS 3

- shifting stress to the last element of compound nouns, pronouncing dishwasher as dishwasher



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### SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PRE

Joan Fayer et al. (1998)

- Inverted word order: *They tell me how important is the bill for them.*
- New lexical creations based on English forms: *There are many urbanizations in Puerto Rico.* [housing developments]



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- borrowings from Spanish: *I was stuck in the tapón.*



- hybrid compounds utilizing English and Spanish words: *Many people were arrested at the drug punto.*

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### ACCEPTABILITY OF PRE

Dayton & Blau (1999)

- Acceptability study carried out with 223 subjects
- UPR students in Basic, Intermediate, and Honors English classes, Puerto Rican English teachers, and native speakers of English residing in US.

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- Task 1 entailed reading real sentences containing lexical items that were likely candidates for inclusion in PR English.
- Participants had to correct any sentences they felt needed correction.
- Included: *interpreted* (for “sang”), *domination* (for “command”), *approved* (for “passed”), *celebrated* (for “held”), etc. (see handout for actual sentences)

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- Task 2 was multiple choice questions in which target words were replaced by blanks.
- Interviews also held with island-raised English teacher, return migrant English teacher, and English native speaker



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## RESULTS

- Native English speakers accepted the least number of PRE items.
- As student proficiency increased, students accepted fewer PRE items; at Honors English level, students equaled teachers' scores for multiple choice task.



95

- Considerable difference between acceptability rates of PR English in two tasks by PR teachers (61% and 30%) vs. native speakers (28% and 3%).
- See complete results in Table 1 of your handout.



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## CONCLUSIONS

- Given that English teachers are normative by nature and training, they would be expected to approach native speaker levels.
- Appears that they are aiming at Puerto Rican English, rather than U.S. standard English.



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## ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE CONTACT

- Attitudes toward language contact phenomena (loanwords, loan shifts, and code switching) and the notion of PRE are generally negative, especially on the part of teachers.
- Explanations regarding the mixed nature of all language varieties often fall on deaf ears.

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It is difficult to convince teachers about the inevitability of language variation, since they are entrusted with perpetuating standard language forms.



99

- Return migrant children in PR suffer the most from negative attitudes toward mixed varieties.
- They are criticized in the US because they don't speak standard English and criticized in PR because they don't speak standard Spanish.



100

### Puerto Rican identity

- This brings up the role of English in Puerto Rican identity.
- Marisol Pérez Casas (2008) found that code switching constitutes an integral part of the linguistic repertoire of a network of well-educated, Puerto Rican bilinguals who employ it habitually in informal group encounters.

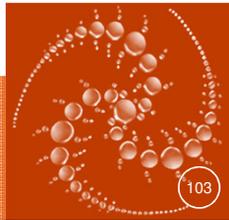
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- Their code switching style allows them to construct and rethink social identities such as: Puerto Rican, American, elite, and bicultural.
- They have reinterpreted what it means to be “Puerto Rican.”
- This is not just an aspect of interpersonal communication, but also part of a socio-historical change in progress that bears watching.

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### CONCLUSION

- English and Spanish in Puerto Rico exert cross-linguistic influences upon each other.
- Any examination of English in PR must take into consideration its synergetic relationship with Spanish.



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- The contact between English and Spanish brings up questions of identity that are troubling to many.
- Does speaking English on a regular basis constitute becoming less Puerto Rican?
- Can a person be Puerto Rican, live in Puerto Rico, and prefer English to Spanish? (a topic of hot online debate)

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- Is a “patriotic accent” the appropriate response to pressures to culturally assimilate American ways along with English words?
- Are variations from American Standard English “errors,” or do they represent an emerging “new English”?
- What does the future hold for the Spanish language in Puerto Rico, given the growing global presence of English?

105

- The delineation of a distinctive variety known as Puerto Rican English is only beginning, and there is considerable opposition among teachers and laypeople to the idea.
- They consider that to talk of PRE is to admit defeat in the teaching of Standard American English.

106

- One way to cast the changes in a positive way is to stress the idea of “reinvention”.
- Rather than “failing” at learning the imposed Standard American English, Puerto Ricans are creating a new variety that incorporates elements from their Spanish vernacular and responds to the specific needs of their linguistic and cultural environment.

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The greatest contribution that linguists and language teachers can make is to provide scientifically-verified findings regarding the changes occurring in both Puerto Rican Spanish and Puerto Rican English and contextualize them within world-wide linguistic trends.

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The International Corpus of English project is one way in which Puerto Rican English can be viewed in an international context.

We should cooperate to the fullest with the researchers from ICE and provide them with the benefit of our local knowledge. We all stand to benefit in the end.

ICE  
INTERNATIONAL CORPUS OF ENGLISH

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## SOURCES CONSULTED

See handout. Also available via email upon request along with an extensive bibliography on studies of English in Puerto Rico, only some of which was touched upon in this presentation.

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**THE END**

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