

SPEAKERS OF LANGUAGES OTHER THAN SPANISH HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT IN PUERTO RICO¹

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This paper reports preliminary findings from the initial stages of what will eventually be an extended study of residents of Puerto Rico who speak languages other than Spanish. It situates immigrant groups historically, geographically, socially, and economically within the local *languagescape*. It also attempts to account for the ways in which they are able to manage their lives on the island utilizing the linguistic resources at their command. Finally, it considers the language policy implications of this linguistically diverse segment of the population for the island as a whole.

1.0 Cultural and linguistic diversity in Puerto Rico

Every school child in Puerto Rico is taught that Puerto Rican culture developed from three founder populations: indigenous Taínos, Spanish conquistadores, and enslaved Africans². According to the popular conception of Puerto Rican ancestry, once these three “roots” grew together, Puerto Rico was fairly homogenous in cultural and linguistic terms, with the Spanish language (enriched with Taíno and African terms) as the major shaper of island identity.

In actuality, significantly more sociocultural diversity has existed (and still exists) in the *languagescape* of Puerto Rico. By *languagescape*, I mean the full range of language varieties present on the island.³ According to the entry for Puerto Rico in *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simmons, & Fennig, 2014), the population includes native speakers of different varieties of Chinese, Corsican, Yiddish, French, Italian, Ladino, Arabic,

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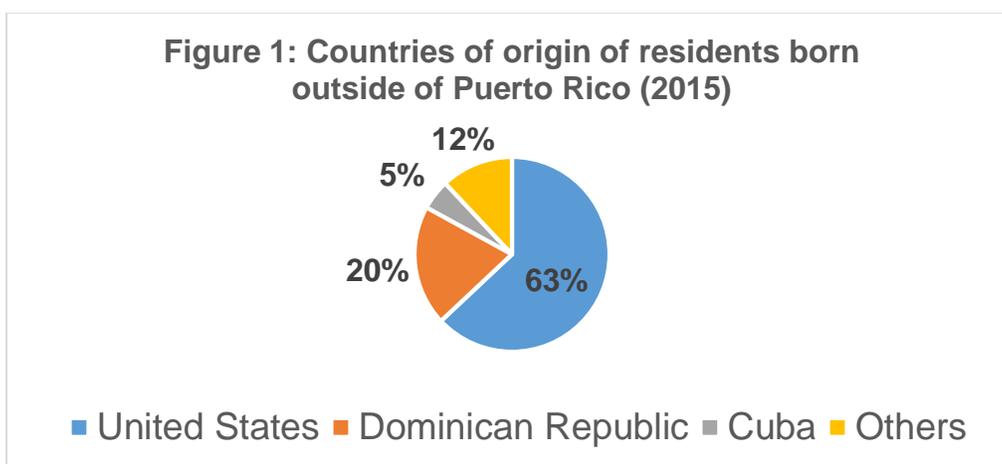
² School children are never told that free Blacks accompanied the Conquistadores to the New World. There were also freed slaves from Jamaica and Saint Dominique (Haiti) who staffed the garrisons in Puerto Rico.

³*Languagescape* is an analogical term based on the model of “landscape.” It has been used by several authors (see Smit, 2010; Pratt, 2011; Loven, 2014).

Standard German, and English, in addition to the expected language of everyday discourse: Spanish. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, thousands of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East arrived, intermarried with the local population, and added their contributions to the genetic and cultural makeup of the island.

As a result, the pantheon of notable Puerto Ricans contains many individuals with non-Spanish surnames. Among them are: Arturo Schomburg (historian and writer), Francisco Matos Paoli (poet), Mariana Bracetti (independence fighter), Ramón Power y Giralt (military officer and politician), Nilita Vientós Gastón (educator and lawyer), Cayetano Coll y Cuchí (politician and writer), Enrique Laguerre (Nobel prize winning novelist), and Hiram Bithorn (Major League baseball player), to mention only a few.

According to the American Community Study of 2015, nearly 92% of the then 3,474,182 residents of Puerto Rico were island-born. Of the 280,494 born outside of Puerto Rico, almost two-thirds were from the U.S., about 20% from the Dominican Republic, 5% from Cuba, and the remaining 12% from other countries (see Figure 1 below).

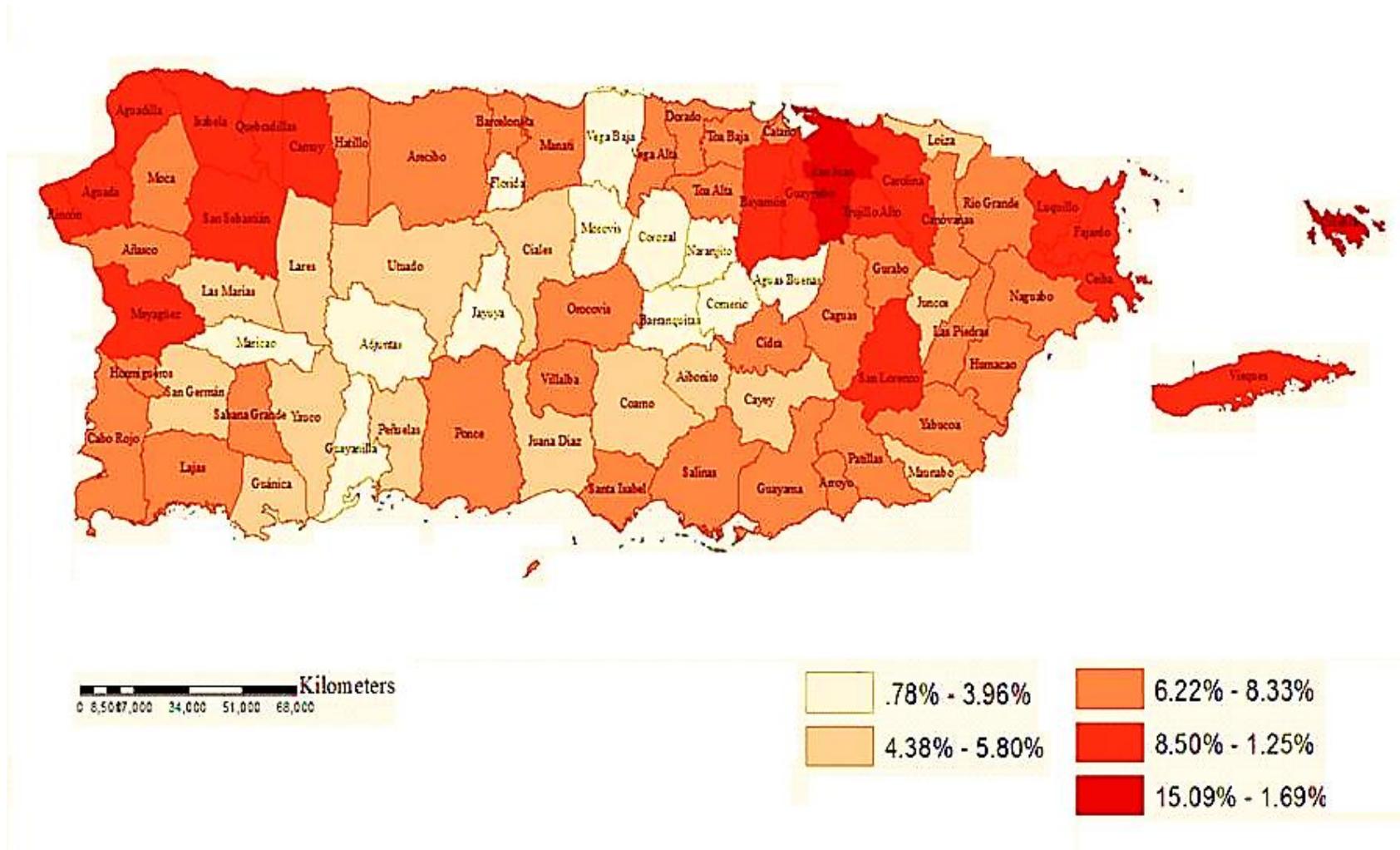


If we exclude the United States as a “foreign country,” then there are approximately 97,343 foreign-born individuals who constitute 2.8% of the total 2015 population of 3,474,182. About 45% of them are naturalized U.S. citizens, and most entered Puerto Rico prior to 2010. The overwhelming majority came from Latin America (91%), and Spanish is their native language. The remaining 9% are primarily from Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa. A more detailed breakdown by country can be seen below in Table 1. (Note that only the largest groups are included in the table.)

Table 1: Foreign population in Puerto Rico in 2015 (in descending order by size) Source: American Community Study		
Ancestry	Estimated pop.	Percentage of total pop.
Italian	4,633	0.1
West Indian	4,007	0.1
Sub-Saharan African	2,932	0.1
German	2,304	0.1
Arab	2,196	0.1
French (except Basque)	2,084	0.1
English	802	0.0
Irish	742	0.0
Scottish	459	0.0
Portuguese	376	0.0
Russian	345	0.0
French Canadian	341	0.0
Polish	264	0.0
Greek	191	0.0
Dutch	103	0.0
Scotch-Irish	93	0.0
Norwegian	72	0.0
Danish	62	0.0
Ukrainian	22	0.0

Foreign-born residents of Puerto Rico tend to cluster along the coasts of the island. As we can see from Figure 2 (adapted from León López, 2013), the largest concentrations (darkest colored areas) are in the San Juan metro area and around Mayagüez in the Northwest. Vieques and Culebra also contain many residents who were born off-island. The mountainous interior of the island has the lowest percentage of foreign-born (lightest colored areas). This distribution can be explained by the concentration of tourist spots and commercial enterprises which provide employment along the coast and the absence of urban conveniences that foreigners may expect and require in the interior of the island.

Figure 2: Distribution of foreign-born in Puerto Rico



[Source: León López (2013)]

2.0 History of immigration to Puerto Rico

In order to better understand the current presence of foreign-born individuals in Puerto Rico, we need to examine the history of immigration to Puerto Rico. In this section, we will take a brief look at the histories of six major groups that arrived in Puerto Rico: the Irish, French, Corsicans, Germans, Chinese, and Arabs.

2.1 The Irish

During the 16th century, many Irishmen, known as "Wild Geese," signed up with the British Army after their lands were expropriated. However, they found even more persecution within the military, so they deserted and joined the Spanish Army. Some were stationed in Puerto Rico on garrison duty and remained there after their military service to Spain was completed, marrying high-ranking Puerto Rican women of Spanish descent and assimilating into island life. In 1797, after an attack by the British on Puerto Rico, the Spanish governor of the island, Ramón de Castro, ordered the expulsion of the Irish from the island because he suspected that they were helping the British. Some were imprisoned and others exiled; however, the majority later returned once tensions relaxed.

In 1815, the Spanish throne enacted the Real Cédula de Gracias (Royal Decree of Graces) to encourage European Catholics of non-Spanish origin to immigrate to the Puerto Rico and Cuba. The actual royal agenda was to attempt to squash growing independence movements in both colonies.

Another influx of Irish came during the 19th century when the Potato Famine killed over one million Irish people and created nearly two million refugees, some of whom came to Puerto Rico after having been turned away from the U.S. due to

epidemics onboard the ships on which they sailed. Many of these Irish settlers married local women and were integrated into the general population linguistically and culturally. They were very active in the sugar industry and highly instrumental in establishing the tobacco industry on the island.

The modern day mall of Plaza San Patricio was established on the grounds of the former Hacienda San Patricio, named in honor of the patron saint of Ireland by Tomás O'Daly, the Irish colonel responsible for the fortification of El Morro in 1797. Today, familiar Irish names in Puerto Rico include O'Neill, Murphy, O'Reilly, McClintock, O'Daly, Doran, Martín, and Solivan (Sullivan).

Unlike early arrivals from the U.S., the Irish in Puerto Rico learned Spanish and soon became indistinguishable from the local population. Today the only perceptible signs of the Irish are in surnames, street names, and the many Irish pubs scattered around the metro area.

2.2 The French

There were two major sources of French immigration into Puerto Rico: Louisiana and Haiti. Between 1754 and 1763, the British and their North American colonists fought against the French in what is today known as the French and Indian War. French settlers in Louisiana fled south to Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), and Puerto Rico and resumed their trading and agricultural activities there.

Not long after, in 1791, enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) led by Toussaint L'Ouverture rebelled against the French. After the Battle of Vertières in 1803, in which the Africans prevailed, the French slave masters fled to Santo Domingo (today the Dominican Republic) and made their way to Puerto Rico, settling along the western

coast near Mayagüez. Because of their expertise in the sugar industry,⁴ they helped to transform Puerto Rico into a global leader in sugar production and exportation. As García Leduc (2002, p. 159) comments:

*La Revolución Haitiana...en pocos años redujo a un mínimo la producción de...azúcar y café para el mercado mundial. Este hecho estimuló la producción de azúcar y café en Puerto Rico y propició la disponibilidad de capitales externos para invertir en su desarrollo.*⁵

With the Royal Decrees of 1778 and 1815, Puerto Rico was opened up to foreign investors, and agricultural development progressed rapidly. Immigrants were given land and exempted from paying taxes for five years; however, they were limited during those years to doing business with the Spanish alone. Some stretched the letter of the law by acting as representatives of bankers situated in the Danish colony of St. Thomas.

The French were known in Puerto Rico for their beautiful architecture, cuisine, art, literature, agriculture, and military skill. "La Casa del Francés" (The Frenchman's House), built in 1910, is now a guesthouse on Vieques. The French were also instrumental in creating the sugar mills.

Puerto Ricans have long valued French language and culture. L'Alliance Française, an organization dedicated since 1883 to teaching French and promoting French culture around the world, established a site in Puerto Rico in 1937 and has operated ever since to forge Franco-Puerto Rican cultural links. It offers French

⁴García Leduc (2002, p. 173) comments that the French prospered in Puerto Rico because they brought with them money and slaves and because they also had extensive international contacts which permitted them to obtain credit and gain access to foreign markets.

⁵The Haitian Revolution...quickly reduced to a minimum the production of sugar and coffee for the world market. This stimulated the production of sugar and coffee in Puerto Rico and brought about the availability of foreign capital to invest in its development. [my translation]

instruction to 1,500 students per year, as well as classes in German and Italian through cooperative arrangements with the Goethe Institut and Dante Alighieri. Many Puerto Ricans also attend cultural activities, art exhibitions, and film festivals sponsored by L'Alliance. In addition, the organization provides translation services and organizes study trips.

French immigration was second in quantity only to Spanish immigration, and many Puerto Ricans today can claim French ancestry. Familiar French last names in Puerto Rico include: Vergne, Gautier, Gascon, Chardon, Laguerre, and Goudreau.

2.3 The Corsicans

Corsica is an island off the coast of Italy which belongs to France. The Corsican language (Corsu) is closely related to the Italian of Tuscany; however, the official language is French.

Hundreds of Corsicans and their families began immigrating to Puerto Rico in 1830 in search of better farming opportunities. The Corsicans settled mainly in the west and southeast of Puerto Rico (Yauco⁶, Guayama, San Germán, Guayanilla, Adjuntas, Ponce) and put their considerable agricultural skill to the cultivation of sugar, tobacco, and coffee. They ended up owning most of the coffee plantations by the 1860s and built worldwide coffee exporting markets. They were also involved in providing loans for the financing of agricultural projects all over the island. Approximately 60% intermarried with Puerto Ricans and became fully integrated into island society. Corsican migration to Puerto Rico came to an end with World War I.

⁶ Today the town of Yauco is known as both "Corsican Town" and "Coffee Town."

According to the *Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico*, there are more than 300,000 descendants of Corsicans in Puerto Rico today. Well-known Corsican last names in Puerto Rico include: Agostini, Mari, Cervoni, Costa, Choudens, Denis, Fraticelli, Giovanetti, Mari, Negroni, and Pietri.

2.4 The Germans

In 1848, many Germans disappointed with the so-called “revolution” that led to the Frankfurt Parliament emigrated to the Americas and Puerto Rico. Most came originally from Alsace-Lorraine, Baden, Hesse, Rhineland, and Württemberg. Dubbed as the Forty-Eighters, they arrived in Puerto Rico from Curaçao and Austria and established warehouses and businesses in the coastal towns of Fajardo, Arroyo, Ponce, Mayagüez, Cabo Rojo, and Aguadilla in order to make it possible for Germany to avoid the high tariffs charged by the English in Europe. Others settled in the central mountainous areas of Adjuntas, Aibonito, and Ciales and dedicated themselves to agriculture.

German immigrants brought the custom of the Christmas tree to Puerto Rico. In 1866, the independentist medical doctor and botanist Dr. Agustín Stahl decorated a tree in his backyard in Bayamón and started a trend. The Germans established the first Anglican church in the Spanish colonies, the Iglesia Santísima Trinidad, in Ponce in 1872. Another German Protestant group, the Mennonites (Anabaptists), set up various churches on the island beginning in 1946 in Coamo and also established schools and a hospital in Aibonito. Germans opened the Zipperle's Restaurant in San Juan and Casa Bavaria in Morovis. Other German restaurants include the Heidelberg Haus in Río Grande and Das Alpen Café in Rincón. Other notable German businesses set up in

Puerto Rico included Mullenhoff & Korber (insurance), Feddersen Willenk & Co. (coal), and the Korber Group Inc. (advertising).

When the U.S. army occupied Puerto Rico in 1898, German-American soldiers arrived. Most still spoke German, and eventually some intermarried with Puerto Rican women. Later, during World War II, Puerto Rican soldiers were posted to Germany and learned the language. Some married German women and then returned to Puerto Rico.

Common German last names in Puerto Rico include: Schmidt, Stahl, Schatz, and Riekoff.

2.5 The Chinese

When the United States enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act on May 6, 1882, many Chinese in the United States fled to Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Latin American nations. They established small communities and worked in restaurants and laundries. After Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States under the conditions of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, Chinese workers labored on re-building Puerto Rico's infrastructure and rail systems. Many Chinese workers in Puerto Rico decided to settle permanently on the island (Lee Borges, 2018).

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, but large-scale Chinese immigration to Puerto Rico did not occur until the Immigration Act of 1965 was passed. Another influx of Chinese, particularly owners of small businesses, came in 1959 after the Cuban Revolution. There has also been a more recent immigration of university students from Taiwan. These are speakers of Cantonese with limited proficiency in either Spanish or English. It remains to be seen how many decide to stay in Puerto Rico.

According to Lee Borges (2018), there are approximately 17,000 Puerto Ricans who are of Chinese ancestry. Many are involved in operating Chinese restaurants, of which there are approximately 600 on the island. Most have integrated both Puerto Rican and Chinese cultures into their daily lives. Some have intermarried with Puerto Ricans, and many of today's Chinese-Puerto Ricans have Hispanic surnames and are of mixed Chinese and Puerto Rican descent (e.g., Wu-Trujillo). Common Chinese names in Puerto Rico today include: Chang, Chin, Kun, Lee, Wong, and Wu.

2.8 The Arabs

The Arab community in Puerto Rico began around 1880 with the arrival of Christianized Lebanese immigrants who were fleeing the persecution of the Ottoman Empire and established themselves in various spots in Latin America, including the east coast of Puerto Rico. The community grew further during the early years of the 20th century when young Arabs who had been living in the U.S., married Puerto Rican women there, and learned Spanish, decided to move to the island. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 prompted many Palestinians to emigrate, and a considerable number ended up in Puerto Rico. By 1970, the Arab population on the island was estimated to be about 2,000.

Currently, according to the Arab American Institute Foundation, there are approximately 7,284 residents of Puerto Rico who have Arab ancestry, and there are Arabs living in 33 of the 78 *municipios* of Puerto Rico, with the largest concentrations in San Juan and Carolina. Their countries of origin are primarily Palestine, Lebanon,

Jordan, Iraq, and Syria. According to the 2010 census, approximately 47% of Arab Puerto Ricans have Lebanese or Palestinian roots.⁷

The first mosque was established in 1981 in Río Piedras and has a full-time Imam. The second (the largest on the island) was constructed in 1992 in Vega Alta. Small mosques or prayer rooms can also be found in Jayuya, Fajardo, Ponce, Yauco, Hatillo, Aguadilla, Montehiedra, and Loiza (Kettani, 2012).

Arabs in Puerto Rico typically learn Spanish, but maintain their Arabic. They remit money to their families abroad and often send their children to be educated in their native lands because they feel that life in Puerto Rico is too distant from their cultural values and religious beliefs. They are heavily involved in commercial enterprises like clothing and textile stores, gas stations, restaurants, and pharmacies (like the now-defunct El Amal chain, close in 2011). Others are doctors, engineers, and university professors. Common Arabic names heard on the streets of Puerto Rico include: Galib, Fas, Frangie, Shahab, Bechara, Sued, and Tartak.

3.0 Foreign languages currently spotted within the Puerto Rican languagescape

It is no trick at all to pick out native English speakers in Puerto Rico, and certain locations (particularly the San Juan metro area and the islands of Vieques and Culebra) have large concentrations of them. Native English speakers tend to be North Americans or Puerto Rican return migrants raised in the States, but there are also many competent English speakers who come from nations of Europe, Asia, and Africa who learned it as their second or third language. At the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras, there are

⁷It should be noted that the U.S. census gives much lower figures for the Arab population (less than 3,000). However, these are most likely undercounts because of high levels of marriage outside of the ancestral group in the third and fourth generations and great mistrust of census surveys by recent immigrants.

professors from China, Russia, India, Ghana, France, Italy, Germany, and Haiti, among others, many of whom utilize English as their lingua franca here in Puerto Rico.

Documenting the active use of foreign languages other than English in Puerto Rico is more challenging and requires fieldwork and consultation with members of each language community. It is precisely in that direction that I wish to extend my future research. I believe there is a great deal to be learned.

3.0 How do speakers of languages other than Spanish survive in Puerto Rico?

What I do know at this initial point in my investigation is that most foreigners come to Puerto Rico to study or work. Occasionally they come because they have married Puerto Ricans they met in their own countries. Some establish businesses like restaurants that feature their country's cuisine or sell imports. Their children grow up learning Spanish natively, but the adults may only acquire functional competence. Within ethnic niche communities, the native languages of immigrants can be maintained. The degree to which this is happening is still an empirical question. Are immigrants to Puerto Rico shifting to Spanish (or English)? Or are there mechanisms (religious, social, ethnic) that aid in language maintenance?

4.0 Language policy implications

Given the presence of students who speak other languages at home, the Department of Education of Puerto Rico needs to help them learn Spanish and improve their English. Current services for immigrant populations are fairly scarce. 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 students who speak a

language other than Spanish at home or who come from outside of the U.S. and its territories (Pousada 2018); however, this program is insufficient and does not reach the neediest immigrants who may not be documented or may not participate in the public school system.

5.0 Conclusion

As we have seen, the languagescape of Puerto Rico is complex and requires more study. It is time to rethink the canonical three “roots” account of Puerto Rican identity. It is also time to extend the discussion of language in Puerto Rico beyond English and Spanish.

As I indicated at the outset of this presentation, my research into this topic is just beginning. The next step is to verify the current status of each of the languages on the island and see how much ancestral language retention actually exists. I look forward to unearthing much more information to add to the public discourse regarding multilingualism in Puerto Rico.

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