

# THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN PUERTO RICO

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## English as lingua franca

Promoted globally  
as language of  
science,  
technology,  
business, and  
diplomacy.



## David Crystal (1997, 2004)

- About 1.4 billion people speak some form of English (1/4 of Earth's population)
- Now there are more non-native users of English
- than native speakers.



## Implications of English importation

Concerns about English displacing local language as young people associate English with modernity and reject vernacular as old-fashioned



## Language shift



- *Language shift* is when a community shifts preference or dominance from one language to another.
- In U.S., typically takes three generations for most immigrant communities (Fishman 1989)

## Language death



- Worst case scenario
- When a language is totally abandoned by its speakers.
- Common among “small” languages
- 90% of current language varieties will disappear by end of century (Wurm 2001).

## Puerto Rico



- Neither language shift nor language loss likely to occur
- World-class status of Spanish language
- Overwhelming majority of residents speak Spanish

## Loanwords

- Local communities will borrow English words for inventions and concepts developed in English-speaking areas.
- Loanwords may eventually become completely integrated into native language.



## Loanwords in PR

- *el closet*
- *la dona*
- *el matre*
- *el suéter*



## Code switching

- When larger elements of two languages alternate in same stretch of discourse.
- Common among society members that are socially mobile and in contact with English users either directly or through media.

## Sample of code switching

- SI TU ERES PUERTORRIQUEÑO, your father's a Puerto Rican, you should at least DE VEZ EN CUANDO, you know, HABLAR ESPAÑOL.



## Role of the elite

- Often elite depend more and more on English to carry out their functions.
- Make subtle adjustments to English, utilizing structures from their own languages.



## Role of the lower classes

- Sometimes the lower classes are the source of the innovations.
- Vendors, guides, taxi drivers, service personnel are active agents in language change, as are athletes and musicians who become prominent.



## Role of media

- The media play a huge role in disseminating changes made at both the top and the bottom of society.



## New English in PR

- Word borrowing, code switching, and creation of new English forms are definitely taking place in PR
- The rest of this talk will focus on the influence of English on PR Spanish and the development of PR English



## English presence in PR

- return migrants, North Americans, and other foreigners
- product names
- cable TV
- instructions for taking medications and using electrical appliances
- street and commercial signs



## Common signs in PR



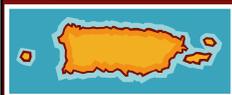
## More English presence

- newspapers
- magazines
- Hollywood movies
- Federal Courts
- tourism



## English in education

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



## Circular migration

- Constant migratory flow between U.S. and PR
- Thousands of PRs relocate to States for periods of time, learn English, and then return to occupy positions which require using English on a regular basis.



## Influence of English on PR Spanish

- Anglicisms most common among doctors, lawyers, engineers, media
- Least common among teachers
- People involved in auto mechanics, sports, fashion /beauty, and computer technology highly prone to using loanwords.



## Anglicisms in San Juan press

1) Using Spanish words with English meanings

e.g., *bloques* [building blocks] for “street blocks” instead of *cuadras*

María Vaquero (1990)

## Anglicisms in press 2

2) Creating a Spanish-looking word based on an English word form instead of its Spanish equivalent

e.g., *coincidentalmente* instead of *de forma coincidente*

## Anglicisms in press 3

3) Loan translation: translating literally from English into Spanish

e.g., *hacer sentido* to mean “make sense”

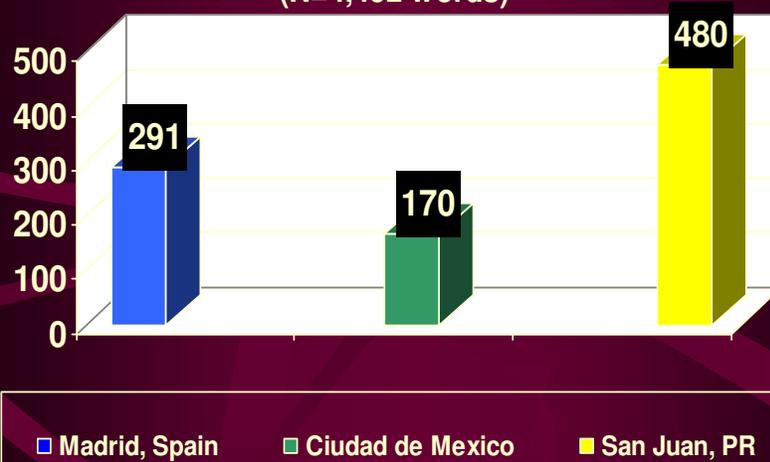
## Anglicisms in press 4

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



Figure 1: Number of Anglicisms  
(N=4,452 words)



Adapted from Lopez Morales (1992)

## Syntactic influences in PR

Lipski (1996: 358)



- ¿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.]
- Él sabe cómo hablar inglés. [He knows how to speak English.]

## Commonly heard in PR

- *La guagua está supuesto 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.*



## 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?



## 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



## Sociolinguistic view of loans

- Natural result of contact between speech communities
- Serve to enrich vocabulary, particularly when integrated phonologically and morphologically
- Can be utilized as synonyms or to express nuances not present in equivalent native word.
- In and of themselves, do not represent danger to native language.



## English lexicon

- Greatest strength of English language has been its willingness to take in elements from virtually every language
- Lexicon is enormously rich treasury of more than 1 million words (2 million if we count scientific terminology)



## Caveat

- Appreciating the value of foreign loanwords does not mean that teachers should stop teaching children native words for expressing themselves.



## Development of PR English

- Rose Nash (1971) coined term *Englañol* to describe English spoken by Puerto Ricans in PR
- Englañol has false cognates used in a Spanish manner, loan translations, and spelling pronunciations.



## Phonological characteristics of PR English (Walsh 1994)

- [ð] and [·] pronounced as [d] and [t] (*those three* comes out as *doze tree*).
- “j” pronounced like “y” (*jokes* becomes *yolks*)



## Phonological characteristics 2

- devoicing of [z] to [s], pronouncing *his* as *hiss*
- confusion of “ch” and “sh”, pronouncing *watches* as *washes*



## Phonological characteristics 2

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



## Syntactic characteristics of PRE

- Inverted word order  
e.g., *They tell me how important is the bill for them.*
- New lexical creations based on English forms  
e.g., *There are many urbanizations in Puerto Rico.*

Fayer et al. (1998)

## Syntactic characteristics cont.

- borrowings from Spanish,  
e.g., *I was stuck in the tapón.*



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

## 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 the US.

## Acceptability cont.

- 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.



## Acceptability cont.

- Included such terms as: *interpreted* (for “sang”), *domination* (for “command”), *approved* (for “passed”), *celebrated* (for “held”).
- Full list of stimuli on Figure 2 (see your handout)

## Acceptability cont.

- The second task 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



## Results

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



## Results cont.

- Considerable difference between acceptability rates of PR English teachers (61% and 30%) and native speakers (28% and 3%).
- Complete results in Table 1 of your handout.

## 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.



## Implications

- Educators need to comprehend language contact.
- No language is impregnable to outside influences



## Puristic response

- Fight (in vain) to maintain English and Spanish as totally distinct and unsullied.



## Realistic approach

- Accept that there are hybrid varieties in use, and that over time, these may become ratified as local standards.
- Even the Real Academia Española has recognized the validity of regional standards



## What to teach

- Children need to be taught that standard language varieties exist because these are instruments used by gatekeepers to grant or block job and educational opportunities.



## What to teach cont.

- But at the same time they need to be taught that the natural state of language is to change constantly and to be influenced by other languages and cultures.



## What to teach cont.

Mixed language varieties are commonplace and do not imply inferiority. Both standard English and standard Spanish descended from highly hybridized (even creolized) varieties



## Conclusions

To conclude, the teaching of English in Puerto Rico has had significant sociolinguistic implications for both the English and the Spanish spoken on the island.

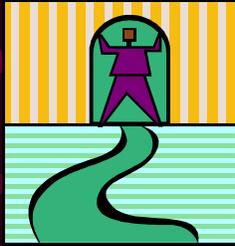


## Conclusions cont.



Understanding and appreciating the nature of language contact and the ways in which it creates changes in languages is necessary for our collective self-esteem.

## Conclusions cont.



Our children should not believe that the only path to bilingualism is through narrow insistence on linguistic purity.

## Conclusions cont.

- Nor should they believe that both their Spanish and their English are flawed vehicles of communication.



## Building linguistic pride

We must instill in them a sense of pride in the creative force of their people who take elements of another language and bend them to their will to enhance their self-expression in their native language.



Not the end...but rather the beginning.

