

REVISTA KÁLATHOS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE VALORIZATION IN PUERTO RICO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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1- Abstract

This article reviews the scholarly literature concerning English language valorization in Puerto Rico. Among the issues discussed are the discourse of language valorization, the historical forces shaping the educational system and the political importance given to the English language; the divergent interpretations of individuals concerning the educational policies and the functions granted to both languages, and the patterns of communicative interactions used by individuals. This article reveals that English language valorization in Puerto Rico is grounded in two pivotal historical eras which have determined its function and shaped a bilingual reality and permitted students to be creative while communicating, thus deriving maximum benefit from their bilingual experience. Keywords: [*americanization era, bilinguality, code switching, political autonomous era, subtractive bilingualism, valorization*]

2- Resumen

El artículo repasa la literatura relacionada a la valorización del idioma inglés en Puerto Rico desde la perspectiva de las fuerzas históricas que le han dado forma al sistema educativo, la importancia política y las interpretaciones de los individuos; las funciones de ambos idiomas y los patrones de comunicación interactiva. Se argumenta que la valorización del inglés se fundamenta en dos periodos históricos los cuales han determinado su función, dado forma a una realidad bilingüe y permitido a los estudiantes ser creativos en el uso del idioma y beneficiarse de la experiencia bilingüe.

[Período de americanización, uso de mas de un idioma, uso alterno de dos idioma, Periodo de autonomía política, bilingüismo sustractivo, importancia al idioma]

3- Introduction

Critical scholars have documented the history of English on the island from diverse perspectives. The literature reveals a wide range of speculations as to the forces that have created resistance to learning and using English as well as to the status conferred upon this language. [1]

Historians (Canino, 1981; Meyn, 1983; Negrón de Montilla, 1980; Rua, 1987; Torres, 2002) find evidence that the United States' concentration on compelling the use of English in the public school system overshadowed the Spanish language. The educational policies implemented generated degrees of resistance toward second language (L2) development among many students. However, other students recognized English as a cognitive and economic tool. Indeed, investigations concerning the presence of English in Puerto Rico contend that while aversion to English language learning is deeply rooted in the body politic, some students hold a positive attitude toward English and perceive it as important for success at school. This attitude has resulted in the appropriation of language behaviors and in an increased use and valorization of the English language in their language repertoires. [2]

The present article analyzes both the resentment towards and the importance associated with English in Puerto Rico, as recorded in a number of studies of the history of English language use on the island. The analysis utilizes the conceptual/theoretical framework of Hamers and Blanc (2003) which focuses on the importance of language valorization, described by the authors as “the attribution of certain positive values to language as a functional tool, that is, as an instrument which will facilitate the fulfillment of communicative and cognitive functioning signifies a language valorization process”. [3]

For Hamers and Blanc, the valorized aspects of language are those which help construct a certain notion of prestige that is bestowed upon a language by society. They also explain that in order for children to develop language, they “must be exposed to, valorize and be motivated to learn and use language in its cognitive functions” (p. 121). The communicative and cognitive functions of the language develop through a number of mediating mechanisms, provided there is an adequate environment within which individuals can pick up the necessary cues from the social network. In sum, Hamers and Blanc state that the valorization process of a language emerges from social interaction. To understand the value attributed to English in Puerto Rico, it is crucial to examine the discourse of valorization in the writings of scholars who investigate languages in contact on the island. [4]

4- The discourse of language valorization in Puerto Rico

Language valorization in a highly Spanish-dominant context such as Puerto Rico must be understood within the historical context of English language instruction on this island. Critical scholars have captured the concept of valorization in a series of articles that explore the perennial conflict between Spanish and English. [5]

Rúa (1987) identifies the "degradation" of Puerto Rican Spanish due to its relation to English in the bilingual context. He postulates that because the languages are adversaries, they mutually block acquisition. He further points out that the vernacular is devalued at the social communicative level because islanders have been conditioned to believe that English is a linguistic necessity for their educational and professional advancement, a notion which Rúa rejects. On the other hand, Rúa also notes that imposition has had a reverse effect because island residents are not mastering the language but instead are developing a sense of resistance, as evidenced by the fact that 90% of high school graduates do not write English well enough to fill

out a job application (p.32). Rúa argues that the value given to English has been the mediating factor in the devaluation of Spanish as well as in the resistance generated toward learning English. [6]

Vélez and Schweers' (1993) analysis of the Spanish Only Law in Puerto Rico discloses that defenders of the law pressured the issue by indicating that giving English the legitimizing status of an official language would foster the super-valorization of English as well as the devaluation of Spanish. Vélez and Schweers interpretation of Rúa's theory indicates that Spanish is devalued due to the instrumental value assigned to English and that such devaluation inhibits Puerto Ricans from attempting to refine their Spanish skills. Thus English is seen as the culprit responsible for the devaluation of Spanish. [7]

Strauch (1992) also analyzed the language status policy decision. She clarified the "supervalorization of English" as the value that the vast majority of Puerto Ricans place upon bilingualism since they view English as the instrument which will offer them and their children economic mobility within the class system that exists (p.19).[8]

Torres (2002) specifically uses the term "language valorization" in his book *La presencia del inglés en Puerto Rico*. His perspective on valorization draws from the unequal value attributed to the English and Spanish languages in the Department of Education of Puerto Rico's Proyecto para Formar un Ciudadano Bilingüe (Fajardo, Albino & Báez, 1997) (Project to Create a Bilingual Citizen). He argues that both languages hold instrumental value for employment purposes as well as social and communicative value for integration in society and culture, manifested in the capacity to express, symbolize, and reinforce cultural and national identities. Although Torres does not explicitly use the term "resistance," his argument is framed in negativity toward the importance awarded to English as a dominant language. [9]

Evidently, the choice of words and expressions serves to distinguish the devaluation of Spanish from the resistance toward learning and using English. Furthermore, the discourse of valorization remains focused on the political perspective. Missing in this discourse is a vocabulary for attaching importance to this language. Moreover, scholars have set up a definition of *valorization* based on the experiences that have prompted resistance toward L2, without considering those students who have valued English for communicative purposes. [10]

5- English: A high priority

History reveals that while the Island was under the sovereignty of Spain, poverty and hunger left islanders dependant on unofficial economic relations with the United States, thus initiating a gradual usage of English even before the invasion of United States' troops (Canino, 1981; López-Yustos, 1997; Torres, 2002). Further historical documents disclose that after assuming control of Puerto Rico in 1898, the United States implemented English as the vehicle of general education in the curriculum of the Puerto Rico public school system. Canino (1981) analyzed Puerto Rico's English language policy in the education system and disclosed that "at the end of the first term of the 1899-1900 scholastic year, about 3000 children were receiving all their instruction from American leaders" (p.62). Despite the fact that later commissioners of education introduced varying combinations of Spanish and English in their language policies, the U. S. commitment to "Americanization" (Osuna, 1949; Negrón de Montilla, 1970) gave English a privileged position in the curriculum. Because greater status was attached to the English language, while Spanish was overshadowed, with the goal of culturally transforming the Puerto Rican people, the early contact between the two languages has been considered *the era of Americanization*. (Canino, 1981; Meyn, 1983; Negrón de Montilla, 1970; Rúa, 1987; Strauch, 1992; Torres, 2002; Vélez & Schweers, 1993). [11]

The political reasoning behind the educational changes that occurred during this Americanization era has been documented by historians and educators. Negrón de Montilla (1970) documented how the contact between the two languages abruptly intensified after 1898 and the designation of Dr. Martin G. Brumbaugh as the first Commissioner of Education. Negrón also makes note of how through the school system the Americanization process was made evident by having students sing the national anthem in English (p. 63). She further discloses that the constant changing of language policy and the unquestioned application of U.S. approaches to a Puerto Rican reality caused great instability in the school system and overt resistance on the part of teachers and administrators. (p. 72) [12]

Fisher's (1971) studies on bilingualism in Puerto Rico clarify the views of the commissioners of education, particularly with regard to the teaching of English, as he states,

There seems to be little doubt that until 1947 each commissioner of Education was appointed to the island primarily because of his stand on the role of English in the schools. At the time of his appointment, each Commissioner seems to have felt that English should be the medium of instruction for at least a majority of the school years (p.19). [13]

However, the presumption by policymakers at the time that instruction in English was the best way to raise English proficiency is disputed in the recent work by Angrist, Chin, and Godoy (2006) who disclosed that "English-intensive instruction is not sufficient for improved English language skills" (¶ 21). [14]

Vélez (1999) also makes clear that the politicization of English was to benefit the United States

The history of the imposition of English between 1898 and 1948 leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the ones who first made English a political issue were, in fact, the American colonial administrators, and not the Puerto

Ricans who were reacting to these initiatives and against the favoritism enjoyed by English at the expense of Spanish. (p.2) [15]

Evidently, during the years from 1898 to 1947, the political aim was for Puerto Ricans to assimilate North American culture through imposed English language instruction, thus awarding greater importance to English. Enforcing English as the language of instruction in the public school and recognizing this language as the common means to communicate and operate socially meant attributing integrative value to the English language. From this perspective, English was also granted political value, became the language of education, and was linked to the dominant class, a notion discussed by Apple (1996). The intent undoubtedly was to integrate islanders by developing in students an interest in taking part in and becoming members of North American culture. [16]

In 1948, Puerto Ricans elected Governor Muñoz Marín, who appointed Mariano Villaronga as Secretary of Education. This marked an important historical change and a new era in the educational system of Puerto Rico. The Secretary of Education instituted Spanish as the medium of instruction at all levels, with English as a special subject. [17]

This policy remains in effect today. Scholars documenting the contact between the two languages once Spanish was reinstated as a medium of instruction in the school system refer to this second era as *the political autonomous era*. (Carroll, 2005; Schweers & Hudders, 2000; Torres, 2002; Vélez, 1999) [18]

Current educators when referring to this second era, also establish a link between education and politics and suggest that schools are sites in which ideological conflicts are often disputed. For example, Nurse (1980) asserts that the Secretaries of Education implemented

policies attuned to the political changes of the Island which have transformed public instruction. Nurse also explains that their educational philosophies reflected political premises. [19]

Torres (2002) suggests that the ideology of Americanization was transferred during the era of political autonomy, presumably with different shadings, as he indicates that today formal education does not openly focus upon the Americanization of Puerto Ricans. Instead, massive school enrollments along with questions of retention, the exploration of diverse teaching methodologies, and a greater exposure to both languages have been the key concerns of the Secretaries of Education, who also have given special and considerable attention to the teaching of English in Puerto Rico. [20]

Researchers (Carroll, 2005; Pizarro, 2006; Rodríguez, 2002; Torres, 2002) coincide that English language learning is a priority for the DE due to the low percent of students who pass the English exam and the low scores on the English language proficiency tests administered by the DE, namely Pruebas Puertorriqueñas, as well as the serious deficiencies revealed on the College Entrance Examination Board. [21]

Torres' (2002) investigation of the presence of English in Puerto Rico after 1948 also finds that the educational school system continues to be intertwined with political status positions. Recently, Pousada (2006) observed that, "many of the same voices that clamor for more English instruction are of the opinion that the presence of English is somehow a threat and responsible for the problems that Puerto Rican children have in Spanish" (p.2). However, in a review of research on the situation of English in Puerto Rico, she confirms that significant numbers of Puerto Ricans consider English to be important and necessary. Indeed, what is most notable to Pousada is the ambivalence of many Puerto Ricans who are simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the need to learn English. [22]

The reinstatement of Spanish as the language of instruction in the public school system generated a number of educational reforms. Although Spanish has been the medium of instruction and English has lost its elite status in the Department of Education, researchers (Canino, 1981; Carroll, 2005; Torres, 2002; Vélez, 1999) sustain that English language instruction continues to be a political issue which is also tied to our status issue. Researchers (Carroll, 2005, Schweers & Hudders, 2000; Strauch, 1992; Torres, 2002; Vélez, 1999) have analyzed the language debate on the island and its major effect on the teaching of English. They concur that the educational system of Puerto Rico readapts their language curriculum plan according to the political party in power. Therefore, the educational policies are attuned to the island's political realities. Vélez (1999) indicates that English will be associated with statehood and Americanism and Spanish will be associated with the commonwealth, independence and Puerto Rican nationalism. At this point of discussion, it seems important to bring to the fore the stance of the parties in relation to the public school curriculum and English language teaching.

[23]

Carroll (2005); Ostolaza (2001); Schweers & Hudders (2000); Strauch (1992), and Torres (2002) have observed that when the statehood party is in power, English gains a significant position. Ostolaza's report to the Puerto Rico Senate documents the repercussions on the Department of Education of officializing both Spanish and English as the languages of Puerto Rico. Ostolaza observed that while the party made English the joint official language with Spanish, the DE implemented the Bilingual Citizen Program. She claims that the intent, among others was to establish bilingual schools with an emphasis on the immersion programs and the teaching of Spanish and math in English. She also voiced that the overpowering emphasis given

to English disadvantaged the Spanish Program. (p.14) Carroll (2005) explains this is a political tactic to move Puerto Rico closer to statehood. [24]

Then, when the commonwealth party is in power, the Spanish language regains importance. For example, while the party platform makes Spanish the sole official language of the island, the DE took emphasis off creating the Bilingual Citizen. Researchers (Carroll, 2005; Clampitt-Dunlapp, 2000; Schweers & Hudders 2000; Strauch, 1992; Torres, 2002) perceive this was a political move to distance their party's stance from the pro statehood party and to reduce the influence of English upon the Spanish lexicon. At present, the commonwealth party is governing the island and the DE designed the Curricular Framework for the English Program. This model for the teaching of English on the island specifies that it moves away from competing with another language as it states,

The teaching and learning of English in Puerto Rico must move away from the concept of a subtractive approach. The pedagogy must vigorously move forward towards an additive approach where the learning of English as a second language is genuinely perceived as desirable additional knowledge, which will open up new opportunities for learners, and will not be seen as a sociopsychological or political threat (p.9). [25]

Therefore, it is safe to say that educational policies, attuned to the Island's political realities, consider the usefulness of English in meeting educational requirements. The DE is viewed as conferring instrumental value upon English. In this perspective, English is credited with having practical value because knowledge of English can presumably provide further opportunities and "enable learners to do other useful things" but has "no special significance in itself" (Nakanishi, 2002, p.3). [26]

Thus, both before and after 1947, English was imbued with political importance, and it continues to be a protected subject in the Department of Education (DE) curriculum. It is also

clear that prior to 1947, because the goal was to linguistically and culturally Americanize the island, the educational and political leaders of the time failed to see that students were processing and internalizing different messages regarding language issues. While some students perceived English as “a language of control and oppression” (Freire, 1982), a significant group recognized English as a tool of communication. In fact, research has documented that despite the political reasoning behind the teaching of English in Puerto Rico, many Puerto Rican students give special importance to the English language (Garcés, 2005; Lockwood, 2004; Pousada, 2000; Rodríguez, 2002; Rodríguez, 1999; Torres, 2002). [27]

Frequently cited publications (Canino, 1981; Cebollero, 1945; Osuna, 1949) on the history of the English language in Puerto Rico document that those students who had been exposed to English as the medium of education could speak English. Fiet (1996) explains how people who are now in their seventies or eighties are still “skilled speakers”, many of them without having left the island to residing in an English-speaking country. Scholars analyzing the history of English in Puerto Rico (López-Yustos, 1997; Schweers & Hudders, 2000; Torres, 2002) also agree that those adults came to see the instrumental utility of English in their professional lives. [28]

Many Puerto Rican parents today also value English for certain functions. They advocate transmitting the importance of English to their children at home through emphasizing the importance of this language, schooling in private schools that emphasize English as a first language, conversations at home and adopting the media to help their children gain a better understanding of English. (Caratini-Soto, 1997; Garcés, 2004; Resnick, 1993; Sostre, 2006; Torres, 2002; Vélez, 1999) [29]

Many students today also value English and hold positive attitudes toward learning this language. ESL learners, particularly at the college level, highly value English as a cognitive tool which empowers them in their own construction of knowledge, provides further opportunities in meeting educational requirements and as a means to communicate and socially operate in an L2 context (Camara, 2006; Garcés 2004; Lockwood, 2004; Rodríguez, 2002). [30]

Rodríguez (2002) explored Puerto Rican English language learners' beliefs about this language, their beliefs about their learning experiences, and the pragmatic purposes assigned by them to this language. Through an in-depth analysis of information contained in her own reflections as well as her students' reflection, Rodríguez found that bilingualism is highly valued as an educational goal by the participants and that there is a great need to learn English in Puerto Rico. [31]

The attitudes toward English of today's Puerto Rican ESL learners have been researched. The most recent investigation is the one by Pizarro (2006) who studied the relation between attitudes toward English and ethnolinguistic identity. The questionnaire disclosed that freshman college students held both a positive attitude toward English, acknowledge their native language as an important part of their lives, and held a healthy ethnolinguistic identity. The analysis of data also revealed that the students who had studied in a Spanish as-a-first-language high school and now form part of what she called the "elite" UPR campus maintained a high ESL average in both high school and the university, sought to study a professional career, and were interested in learning English, thus a positive attitude toward L2 (p.89). [32]

However, that ESL learners today resist learning English is also demonstrated in the work of Resnick,1993; Rodríguez, 1999; Rodríguez, 2002; Torres, 2002 and Torruella,1991. One of the most recent investigations on the attitudes and perceptions toward L2 learning in Puerto Rico

among ESL students is the one conducted by Rodríguez (1999). The survey revealed that high school learners felt silenced throughout the process of learning English. These feelings were attributed to course organization, texts and materials, peer pressure, anxiety and fear of speaking English. As a result students voluntarily chose not to actively participate in class. Rodríguez concluded that students were falling into a pattern of resistance to learn L2 while becoming self-conscious of their errors of performance which in turn affected their L2 cognitive growth (p.3). [33]

6- The development of bilingualism

The political events which imposed the English language on the Puerto Rican populace, thereby bringing about dramatic educational - changes, also thrust together peoples from two different cultural backgrounds. Grosjean (1982) finds that population movement, no matter what the reason, is an important cause of bilingualism. In Puerto Rico, the pattern of migration has taken several forms: the migration of North Americans as a consequence of colonization, the exodus of Puerto Ricans to the United States for social and economic reasons, the first and second generation return migration, and international emigration, as the Island has participated in the global economy. These movements have forced islanders to learn English to facilitate their entry into English-speaking economies and to culturally adapt to completely different systems. In accord with Grosjean's (1982) analysis of bilingualism and biculturalism, the presence of English has helped transform Puerto Rican society, including its political system and its language dynamics. [34]

Recent examination of languages in contact distinguishes the social from the individual role of languages, as observed in the use of the terms *bilingualism* and *bilinguality* in Hamers and Blanc (2003)

The concept of bilingualism refers to the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual; but, it also includes the concept of bilinguality. Bilinguality is the psychological state of an individual, who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication. (p. 6) [35]

Hamers and Blanc focus precisely on a major issue in the interaction of English and Spanish that has affected a large part of the Puerto Rican population, particularly its students. During the Americanization era, while English gained socio-political prestige and the public school system curriculum was transformed to stimulate English language learning, pressure was put on students to learn the dominant language, giving up a valuable part of the vernacular culture for the sake of blending into the North American scene. Thus, English was highly valued by most pro-American politicians and educational leaders, while Spanish was devalued. This implies that the teaching of English was favored over the learner's cognitive growth in Spanish. Applying Lambert's (1977) idea of *subtractive bilingualism* (where two languages compete and one is lost in the process), it becomes clear that, during the Americanization era, many Puerto Ricans experienced a subtractive form of bilingualism. [36]

Historians (Canino, 1981; Clampitt-Dunlapp, 1995; Cebollero, 1945; Negrón de Montilla, 1970; Schweers & Hudders, 2000; Meyn, 1983; Strauch, 1992; Navarro, 1997; Torres, 2002) agree that during the Americanization era the devaluation of the Spanish vernacular adversely affected the educational process of students attending the public school system. Cebollero described that by the end of the school year 1911-1912 the change from Spanish to English as the medium of instruction was practically complete (p.12). First graders were taught to read in English, but not in Spanish. According to Torres, there was the assumption that the

teaching of Spanish did not require attention because students learned and practiced their first language at home (p. 141). Since the school dropout rate before completing the 4th grade was an approximate 80%, the development of a decontextualized vocabulary was also affected. In 1947, Spanish was again instituted as the language of instruction. However, as Torres stated, the educational reform recognizing Spanish in the public schools was not extended to the high schools, thereby not recognizing Spanish as the vernacular of Puerto Ricans (p.147). Thus, the use of a foreign medium deliberately blocked the educational process by substituting an unwieldy tool for the one children were familiar. On the other hand, the few students who made it to high schools tended to be from the elite families on the island, who sent their children to universities in the United States. Upon return they were able to compete for the English speaking jobs, while the average Puerto Rican remained monolingual and not able to go beyond elementary school. As suggested in Meyn (1983) obviously, during the first 50 years of US colonial regime, the unequal opportunities to develop the second language undervalued the development and maintenance of their first language, Spanish (p.113). [37]

Puerto Rico's attainment of local self-government in 1947 permitted Spanish to recover its function as the language of education (Schweers & Hudders 2000; Vélez 2000). While the ostensible commitment of the Secretaries of Education, since that time, has been to depoliticize English, so that everyone has a chance to learn the language of the United States, emphasis has also been placed on the improvement of Spanish, for fear of losing this heritage language (Bliss, 2004). Thus, today both Spanish and English are highly valued and present in the goals of the Secretary of Education and seem to coexist without conflicting and discouraging circumstances for the individual. This suggests that the development of English does not currently occur at the expense of the vernacular. Applying Lambert's (1977) idea of *additive bilingualism* (where the

two languages complement one another, and neither replaces the other), one can hypothesize that during the political autonomous era, the purely instrumental importance conferred upon English generated an additive form of bilingualism. (Torres, 2002; Vélez, 1999) [38]

Recent research is divided in its assessment of the relative valorization of Spanish and English in Puerto Rico. Vélez (1999) considers that Spanish and English are not adversaries and can and should be seen as allies. On the other hand, Torres (2002) asserts that extensive investigation concerning the presence of English in Puerto Rico points toward subtractive bilingualism and feels that the experience of imposing English as a dominant language was in fact counterproductive. [39]

7- Resistance vs. acceptance

As already noted, early research indicates that reactions toward the emphasis given to English as the mode of instruction generated a degree of resistance (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987; Canino, 1981; Meyn, 1983; Negrón de Montilla, 1970). Indeed, an antipathy toward English and a resentment toward the use of English developed among many students (Osuna, 1949). For example, Osuna found that the overpowering concentration of English had a reverse effect, which frustrated even President Franklin Roosevelt, who complained that after 38 years of being under the American flag and 20 years of citizenship, hundreds of thousands of islanders had little if any knowledge of English. Navarro (1997) also documented that as far back as 1912, the Puerto Rico Teachers' Association resented that the language used in the classroom responded to the changing political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States rather than to pedagogical principles (p.3). [40]

Despite the fact that English and Spanish hold officially equal status on the Island and that Spanish is the mode of instruction, Torruella (1990) reports a counterculture of resistance in

English classes at three private schools. Furthermore, Rodríguez (1999) asserts that resistance toward dual language learning occurs as a result of having internalized the constant political pressures and in reaction to educational policies developed on the basis of political agendas. However, the author also acknowledges that “not all students are alike. Naturally, some students respond positively toward second language learning” (p.5). Though Rodríguez acknowledges this, she leaves untouched the envelope of possibilities that might explain English language development within a politically charged cultural context. [41]

Pousada (1996) states that the paradox of language in Puerto Rico lies in the fact that “though islanders acknowledge the importance of the language, many covertly resist learning it out of nationalistic loyalty to Spanish” (p. 1). In the same vein, Torres (2002) comments that despite the negative attitudes of many students toward English, it is striking that some hold a positive attitude toward English (p. 294). However, Torres (2002) explains that resistance arises in proportion to the degree of importance and exposure given to English. Torres also clarifies that language development occurs in an asymmetrical relation of power which, despite favoring English, is also characterized by resistance toward learning and by successful attempts at strengthening and reinforcing both the Spanish language and Puerto Rican culture (p. 292). Thus, acceptance of a need to overcome a linguistic disturbance, as well as the power relations between the two languages, often manifested in the political and cultural arenas, have both resulted in resistance toward learning English. [42]

The studies analyzing resentment toward the imposition of English have focused primarily on overt, publicly rebellious acts (e.g., teacher and student strikes, demonstrations, petitions, political campaign speeches, language laws, newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, etc.) that may have influenced students’ perceptions toward learning English in Puerto

Rico or established a certain attitudinal climate on the island. By limiting their analysis to the acts of resistance, researchers may have ignored those students who perceive their second language as an important and necessary prerequisite for success at school and work. They may also have ignored the possibility of changing student attitudes. [43]

Critical scholars exploring alternatives to enhance English language communication in Puerto Rico are focusing on the particularities of their groups of students. At the University of Puerto Rico, several efforts have been made “to create authentic English-speaking environments” (Camara, 2006; Krasinski, 1998; Lockwood, 2004; Pousada, 2000; 2004; Vicens & Vega, 1997) and convert English classrooms into a “communities of learners.” In this context, students as a group engage in interpersonal and interactive activities that ultimately provide for a more thorough understanding of their L2 linguistic skills. [44]

Current research reveals that social interactions where learners construct L2 knowledge serve as mediational mechanisms to valorize the English language. Pousada (2000) declares that “significant numbers of Puerto Ricans are adept in English and can be characterized as competent bilinguals” (p.2). In her analysis of personal interviews with 30 such competent bilinguals, Pousada indicates that all attributed positive values to the English language, which presumably resulted in the appropriation of language behavior and an increased motivation to use the acquired language effectively. [45]

Camara (2006) explored L2 learning and the construction of metalinguistic awareness through an analysis of classroom happenings. The qualitative analysis of written reflections revealed that meaningful instructional strategy and resources, group work, task management, and use of only the English language fostered L2 learning, and improved her student’s fluency in speaking and writing. She also observed her students’ socio-cultural, meta-linguistic awareness

and cognitive growth of the English language as a result of dynamic classroom interactions (p.97). [46]

In a similar context, Lockwood (2004) explored L2 cognitive development, particularly metalinguistic awareness, emotions and their meaning for freshman ESL college students under the Writing Process Approach (WPA) culture. The qualitative action research approach, disclosed that emotional awareness interacted reciprocally with metalinguistic awareness. As students recognized the value of writing as a cognitive function, their emotions changed from fear and anxiety to confidence and security. Methodologically, the reflective group discussions served as a context for additional reflections and transformations on the students' metalinguistic and emotional processes. This awareness was fundamental to the group of basic ESL students as it helped them take control of their L2 writing and empowered their learning process. [47]

Pousada (2004) has engaged in a joint venture between the University of Puerto Rico and North Carolina State University where students engage in a bilingual chat community. The purpose of this project is to foster reciprocal interaction among language apprentices and encourage cultural, linguistic and social development. Through questionnaire responses students have revealed their performance mastery experiences such as, loss of fear to communicate in their second language, vocabulary enrichment, fluency in oral and written expression, a higher level usage of grammar, the development of cultural awareness and the creation of friendship and a sense of community. [48]

As seen, the consensus among these investigations is that as students actively participated in classroom activities and engaged in language learning activities which addressed their particular ESL learning needs, they learned the value of L2 reading and writing and their English language performance improved. [49]

8- The dynamics of linguistic interaction

The societal relationships between Spanish and English, within which each language is used for different domains and functions, illustrate what Hakuta (1986) would describe as a “macro-level sociolinguistic reality called diglossia”. Hamers and Blanc (2003) posit that in cases of diglossia, the relative functions of each language are determined at the societal level. However, a change in the use of either language (such as introducing a compulsory language into school curricula) will bring about a change in the activation and distribution of that language in the social network, in interpersonal interactions, and in the individual as well. [50]

In the Puerto Rican diglossic situation, although English and Spanish are both official languages, each seems to perform distinct social functions. English is the primary or preferred language of a minority sector of the population comprised of English-dominant, return migrant Puerto Ricans, immigrants from other Caribbean islands, and North Americans resident in Puerto Rico (Vélez, 1999). English is also the language of the federal court system, of grand jury proceedings, and of the military establishment. English is taught as a special subject one period a day from first to twelfth grades in the public school system and as a required subject for two years in most colleges. English language skills are evident in high-income professions (e.g., banking, law, medicine, etc.) requiring bilinguality, the media, tourism, and in names displayed on signs. The language can also be seen in the first names of many Puerto Ricans and in the writings of the Island’s bilingual writers (Fayer, 2000). [51]

Conversely, Spanish, the vernacular of an 80% Spanish monolingual population (US Census, 2000), is the primary language of instruction in the public schools and in most unofficial contexts, as well as in important areas of power and prestige in the political, economic and cultural spheres (Torres, 2002), such as the Puerto Rican legislature, the Commonwealth court

system, the municipal governments, and the criminal justice system. For most Puerto Ricans, Spanish is the language of choice in most situations and is the principal means of communication between the government and its people (Clampitt-Dunlap, 1995). [52]

Certainly, the Island's two official languages offers interlocutors alternative means to communicate. The Puerto Rican situation demonstrates that Spanish, a language of power and prestige, dominates formal as well as informal domains and functions. The diglossic reality also demonstrates that English, an internationally influential language, though spoken by a smaller percentage for limited functions, connects islanders with other English-speaking areas of the world. [53]

One might assume that the world-wide spread of English cultural dominance would propitiate a *language shift*, or replacement of Spanish by English (Resnick, 1993). However, Vélez (2000) asserts that political resistance and demographics have contributed to making the Island a language maintenance success story. This disputes the idea that granting importance to English overshadows the cognitive growth of Spanish. [54]

The efforts of the intelligentsia to defend Spanish and the worldwide prestige of the Spanish language as an educational tool have prevented the generation of a language shift. The conflicting educational policies met with great resistance from the intellectuals who perceived Americanization combatable with the strengthening of the vernacular. In 1912 the Teachers' Association of Puerto Rico argued against the imposition of English because they felt it was detrimental to the educational process. (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987; Pousada, 1999; Vélez, 1999). [55]

Political leaders responded and enforced a series of changes for Spanish to be used as the medium of instruction in the public schools, the University of Puerto Rico and the judicial

proceedings. As a result of their efforts, the position of General Supervisor of Spanish was also created. [56]

Literary writers also voiced their defense of Spanish establishing a link between language and culture. As Canino (1981) documented, a revitalized affirmation of cultural identity linked education and Spanish in a movement for reform unlike previous calls in defense of the island patrimony (p.165). In fact, scholars (Navarro, 1997 Negrón de Montilla,1970; Resnick, 1993; Torres, 2002; Vélez, 2000) have cited a number of writers such as, Emilio S. Belaval, Abelardo Diaz Alfaro, Fernandez Vanga and Tomas Blanco who believed that the culture of Puerto Rico was in danger of being destroyed by the United States. Through the defense of the Puerto Rican culture, writers attacked the efforts of Americanization, proclaimed Puerto Rican pride and Hispanic heritage and yearned for the innocence of island pride prior to the 1898 invasion (Vélez, p.12). [57]

The worldwide prestige of the Spanish language has also prevented a language shift. Scholars (Torres, 2002; Vélez, 2000; Resnick, 1993) agree that regardless of Puerto Ricans direct contact with English while in the United States as well as the functions ascribed to this language, the island is still today by and large a monolingual Spanish speaking society. Among the various reasons, Spanish is the language that gives access to the literary work of the Hispanic culture and other written materials. Universities in the United States such as Indiana University and Purdue University create awareness of the prestige of Spanish and offer a high-ranking Spanish program. Queens College (2007) also disseminates on its internet page the significance of studying Spanish. It establishes the link between Puerto Rico and Latin America indicating that,

Spanish is the official language, not only of Spain, but also of Mexico,
Central America, the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the

Dominican Republic, and most of South America. Spanish, with approximately 320 MILLION speakers, is the fourth most spoken language on the planet and the United States is now officially the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world! Spanish is spoken by approximately 10% of the total population of the United States (nearly 25,000,000 people) (p.1). [58]

Nonetheless, the regular use of two languages on the part of many Puerto Ricans has led individuals to develop personal techniques for second language acquisition. We note particularly that groups of students employ *code switching* (alternation of elements of two or more languages in the same stretch of discourse). [59]

Code-switching is a common practice among bilinguals in Puerto Rico, as it is throughout the world. Indeed, recent investigations demonstrate that code-switching preserves the structural integrity of the two languages, occurring in utterances that do not disturb the syntactic flow. In addition, as Sostre (2006) revealed “learners use both languages to explain their point of view because certain things are best said in one or the other language (p. 110). Further investigations disclose that some students develop code-switching skills from their parents who advocate transmitting code-switching skills to their own children to provide them with further opportunities to employ both languages, thus assigning an important value to both Spanish and English (Donovan 2004; Garcés 2004). [60]

Poplack (as cited in Wei, 2000) analyzed the code-switching behavior of Puerto Ricans in New York City, who had varying degrees of reported and observed bilingual ability. Poplack noted that there are virtually no ungrammatical combinations of the two languages in the switches studies, regardless of the bilingual ability of the speaker. She also disclosed that those

switches occurring within a single sentence, are the ones requiring most skill. She also concludes that codeswitching is a sensitive indicator of bilingual ability (p.254). [61]

A distinctly Puerto Rican English (Blau & Dayton, 1994) has been developed by learners to communicate their intended meanings. While some have retained a “patriotic” Spanish accent in their English as a way of underscoring their Puerto Rican identity (Pousada, 1996), others use wholly Spanish words to replace English items, employ English words in new ways, or invent or adapt English forms based on Spanish and English morphological and phonological principles (Schweers, 1999). As Schweers & Hudders (2000) indicated, there is abundant lexical, phonological and discourse level evidence that there are persistent non-English regularities in the English of Puerto Ricans. Schweers (1993) propose that if we accept the possibility of a Puerto Rican variety of English it would be important to identify the users, the context and the experience of those behind a Puerto Rican English (p.8). [62]

Technology also has a powerful influence on English language learning for Puerto Ricans. Researchers reveal that the widespread use of cable television, the World Wide Web, electronic mail, movies, and music contributes significantly to the development of positive attitudes, generates interest, and helps students learn English more effectively (Caratini-Soto, 1997; Garcés, 2003; Kaufman, 1999; Torres, 2002; Vélez & Schweers, 1993). [63]

The employment of these linguistic tools suggests that bilinguals go beyond the cognitive structure they have for each individual language in their repertoire and transform the information to construct meaningful communication. On the other hand, the transmission of skills to the second generation and the productive and linguistically challenging experiences acquired through technology reveal that English learners in Puerto Rico are being exposed and motivated to carry out linguistic functions in their second language. Furthermore, “motivated individuals

can count on many opportunities to acquire English while living in Puerto Rico” (Pousada, 2006, p. 7). [64]

9- Conclusion

As we have seen, English language valorization in Puerto Rico is grounded in two pivotal historical eras which have determined its function and shaped a bilingual reality. Moreover, the existing dual language system has permitted students to be creative while communicating, thus deriving maximum benefit from their bilingual experience. [65]

Historical documentation reveals the United States’ integrative rationale for imposing English language instruction that characterized the Americanization era. During this period while the English language was imposed, the Spanish language was devalued in the school curriculum. As a result students experienced a subtractive bilingualism which also affected the educational process. The first election of a Puerto Rican governor was a watershed in the history of language education and engendered the Political Autonomous era. During this second era the development of English does not occur at the expense of the Spanish language. As a result students experienced an additive bilingual experience where the Spanish language is recognized as language of Puerto Ricans and the development of English does not occur at the expense of the vernacular. Instead, English is seen as a language that can provide further opportunities. [66]

During both eras, the English language held political value in the educational scenario, although it also immersed teachers and students in conflicting instructional issues. Nonetheless, some students in Puerto Rico who acquire English language skills in the public school system neither place their focus on the political conflicts generated by the population’s interest nor perceive their situation along the same lines as those who feel that English devaluates Spanish.

Instead, far from being a threat, the development and use of English is seen by them as an opportunity to add linguistic skills to their repertoires. [67]

As one analyzes the divergent reactions toward the value conferred on English at specific times in history, one can observe connections between students' English development and the socio-political circumstances surrounding the education system. Perhaps if political and educational leaders had diminished external influences and insisted on Spanish as the linguistic code that distinguished islanders' culture from that of the Americans, the number of speakers developing English fluency might have been greater. [68]

However, one must keep in mind that in the early years the U.S. controlled the Puerto Rican government and the educational system. The U.S. President appointed the governors and the commissioners of education until 1947. Afterwards, Puerto Rico's dependence on federal funding for educational projects perpetuated the excessive imitation of U.S. teaching ideologies and orientations which continues to this day. [69]

Based on the information obtained during this review of the literature, we can uphold the notion that exposing students to the English language without demoting their Spanish native language can lead them to valorize both of their languages. Despite the resistance of some toward English in Puerto Rico, others attribute positive values to their second language; they do not focus on the political issues nor do they feel that learning English is a threat to their Spanish. Instead, as evidenced through classroom investigations having a voice in the teaching/learning process, interactions with others in learning communities, usage of English in unique ways, and awareness of the importance of English serve as valorization mechanisms. It is significant, therefore, to acknowledge the contributions of teachers who search for ways to improve students' second language communication. We would also do well to take note of integrating language

awareness approaches into the Puerto Rican school curriculum. Pousada (2006) proposes incorporating language awareness as a way to sensitize learners to the joys of language, to the explicit and systematic knowledge of their first two languages, and thus facilitate the eventual acquisition of a third language. She asserts that language awareness helps learners develop a love of language and assurance of their own cultural and linguistic identity, more tolerance of other cultures, and more willingness to interact with individuals from other groups. [70]

It is also sensible to reflect on the historical, psychological, and sociological perspectives of second language learning in order to obtain further insights concerning English language planning and the nature of English acquisition in Puerto Rico. These moments of reflection can provide both understanding and deeper interpretations about the process of second language learning in Puerto Rico. They can also suggest ways to improve teaching practice and bring about changes in the classroom learning environment and in student learning outcomes. [71]

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