

# The compelling influence of nonlinguistic aims in language status policy planning in Puerto Rico

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On April 5, 1991, Spanish was made the sole official language of Puerto Rico, a move which replaced the 1902 Official Languages Act, which had put English and Spanish on an equal footing on the island, in name if not in practice. This paper analyzes this language status policy decision in terms of both its linguistic and extralinguistic purposes and implications. The new law is placed in the context of the political status of the island.

## Introduction

On April 5, 1991, Governor Rafael Hernández Colón of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico signed into law a bill making Spanish the sole official language of the island. The law was not so much an effort to officialize Spanish, but to de-officialize English by replacing the 1902 Official Languages Act which had put both languages on an equal footing on the island, in name if not in practice.

This language status policy decision did not occur in a political vacuum, and it cannot be analyzed without reference to the issue of the political status of the island. In 1988, Hernández Colón called on the United States Congress to allow a plebiscite to decide the matter. The people of Puerto Rico would choose their future as the 51st state, an independent nation, or an "enhanced" commonwealth. As Garvin has noted, an endoglossic official language can be characterized by a strong separatist function, which "can be viewed as the linguistic ingredient in the current world-wide tendency to establish a separate cultural (and political) identity." In this case, the reaffirmation of Spanish as the language of Puerto Rico, or the de-officialization of English, depending upon one's point of view, was directly tied to a move to block statehood (1974:76).

This paper will attempt to analyze this status policy decision in terms of both its linguistic and extralinguistic purposes and implications. It is necessary, however, to establish first what is meant by status policy and by language planning as a whole.

### **Status Policy Planning**

Perhaps the only point on which sociolinguists universally agree regarding the field of language planning is that a coherent theory has yet to be established. This can hardly be surprising given the inability to agree on certain essentials—such as a single, comprehensive definition of what it means to plan language. The issue has been framed in various ways, but a significant number of attempts has involved the addressing of language "problems" (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971:xvi; Jernudd & Das Gupta, 1971:211; Fishman, 1974:79; Karam, 1974:105; Weinstein, 1980:55; Neustupny 1983:2 [cited in Cooper, 1989:30-31]). Robert Cooper has offered one of the more compelling arguments against this view:

Definitions of language planning as the solution of language problems are not wrong, but they are misleading. They deflect attention from the underlying motivation for language planning. Inasmuch as language planning is directed ultimately toward the attainment of nonlinguistic ends, it is preferable, in my opinion, to define language planning not as efforts to solve language problems but rather as efforts to influence language behavior (Cooper, 1989:35).

While many researchers such as Chaim Rabin (1971) have noted the importance of extra-linguistic aims, they have often framed their classifications in terms of corpus planning rather than status planning. Juan Cobarrubias (1983) explores the significance of this distinction, in terms of both research and ethical discourse, and finds that more exploration of the issues of status planning is needed.

Simply put, *status planning* refers to linguistic innovations as they relate to the allocation of language functions of a language or language variety in a given speech community, while *corpus planning* refers to linguistic innovations which relate to the structure of a language or language variety (Kloss, 1969 [cited in Cobarrubias, 1983:42]). Status planning frequently precedes corpus planning, necessitating changes in the corpus of a language in order for it to serve newly-prescribed functions. Cobarrubias specifically calls for research on the factors that produce innovations in the allocation of language functions, the extralinguistic variables which make it

possible or necessary for status planning to occur. We will return to this issue later in this paper.

Kloss (1968, cited in Cobarrubias, 1983:43) distinguishes four categories which relate to language status: (1) the origin of the language used officially with respect to the speech community; (2) the developmental status of a language; (3) the juridical status with respect to the speech community; and (4) the ratio of users of a language to the total population. This framework provides a useful tool for the analysis of the status of Spanish in Puerto Rico.

## The Status of Spanish in Puerto Rico

### Origin

The truly indigenous language of Puerto Rico is Taíno, which has long since been supplanted by Spanish. During the colonial era, indigenous peoples, Africans brought to the island as slaves, and Spanish landowners communicated in the language of their European overlords. Thus, Spanish may now be said to be the *endoglossic*, or indigenous language of the island.

In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the United States took control of the island and instituted a policy of "Americanization" designed to lead the Puerto Rican people to democracy and eventual statehood. In 1902, the Official Languages Act made English and Spanish joint official languages; thus an *exoglossic*, or imported language held the same status as the indigenous language. (A brief outline of the political and language status history may be found in the Appendix.)

Up until 1949, there were seven different policies regarding English and Spanish instruction. The U.S. appointed Governors and their Secretaries of Education, in consultation with education experts at institutions such as Columbia University's Teachers College, tinkered with policy while they debated the best method of using bilingual education to create English speaking Puerto Ricans who could assume the rights of full democracy (Liebman, 1970:12-15). There was always an assumption that Puerto Rico hoped to become a state and should be helped to that end. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote in 1937:

It is an indispensable part of American policy that the coming generation of American citizens in Puerto Rico grow up with a complete facility in the English tongue. It is the language of our Nation. Only through the acquisition of this language will Puerto Rican Americans secure a better understanding of American ideals and principles (Gutiérrez, 1987:105).

Criticism of Puerto Rican bilingualism and, by extension, biculturalism has been voiced for as long as the U.S. has held the island. Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico's first governor and architect of the current commonwealth status, was very vocal on the subject. He criticized bicultural Puerto Ricans as

neither Puerto Ricans nor Americans, but merely puppets of a mongrel state of mind, susceptible to American thinking and proud of Latin thought...going to a singularly fantastic and painless hell...a foretaste of Pan Americanism (Gutiérrez, 1987:98).

He apparently did not include himself and his fellow leaders in this category, although they were bilingual and were educated abroad. Many interpret Muñoz Marín as actually favoring independence, although his rationale may have differed from that of many other *independentistas*. He described rule under Spain as benevolent. "Puerto Rico was a land of opportunity. Opportunity in a serene Spanish sense. Opportunity within classes...You didn't have much, and you could only want a little more" (Gutiérrez, 1987:98). In his third term as governor, he conceived Operation Serenity, a Puerto Rican cultural program, to balance the Americanizing effects of Operation Bootstrap, the industrialization program which he had enacted with the help of the U.S. Government (Gutiérrez, 1987:98,99). This elitist and paternalistic attitude has, to some degree, characterized both the language planning and political movements, as will be demonstrated later in this paper.

### **Developmental Status**

Spanish is clearly a language of wider communication with a high degree of entrenchment. (Just how deeply entrenched it remains in Puerto Rico will be explored below.) According to Kloss's criteria, it is "a fully modernized, mature, standard language, through which modern scientific and technological knowledge can be imparted at both the secondary school and the college level" (Kloss, 1968 [cited in Cobarrubias, 1983:43]).

Nevertheless, in Puerto Rico it is not generally the language of scientific and technological knowledge. English-language textbooks are used in island universities, technical institutes and professional schools; English is the preferred medium of doctors, accountants, engineers, and scientists; it dominates the areas of business, finance, and technology (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:5). Many of the elite have

traditionally sent their children away from the island to universities in the United States, not to Latin America or Spain (Liebman, 1970:13).

Furthermore, there is a widely accepted perception that Puerto Rican Spanish is somehow deficient. The linguistic insecurity of speakers of Puerto Rican Spanish has been researched by Betancourt (1985), who studied the language attitudes of 104 high school teachers and students. The studies assessed such factors as the perceived social status of the students and teachers; student attitudes toward teachers as linguistic role models; attitudes about correctness and the tendency towards hypercorrection; and the prestige of language varieties spoken by various social, occupational, and national groups, including the subjects' own. The survey found the subjects to be generally insecure, particularly at the lexical level of language structure. All but two subjects placed themselves in the middle class, and all had had exposure to other speech styles. They generally thought that Puerto Rican Spanish needed improvement, particularly in vocabulary. Although they considered that the language should be improved by some authority, they could not determine the source of that authority. Most subjects also expressed a feeling that there was something wrong with Puerto Rican Spanish, but they could not pinpoint it or suggest a remedy. Most felt that their own pronunciation was flawed in ways similar to those expressed in the stereotypes.

Many Puerto Rican intellectuals perceive English and Spanish in an adversarial relationship in which Spanish is devalued due to the instrumental value assigned to English. Garvin has noted that the separatist function of an endoglossic language and the participatory function of an exoglossic language, which may facilitate worldwide communication, are in conflict. The participatory function predominates in the technological realm for practical reasons, but when the need for cultural self-expression and the search for cultural identity take the foreground, the separatist function will predominate (1974:76-77).

Hence, the stance of the intellectuals. They argue that this has resulted in an inhibition against learning Spanish, a failure to master English (since it is the culprit that devalues Spanish), with the result that many Puerto Ricans are unable to speak either language well. There has been no linguistic research to validate this claim, and in fact, many have dismissed claims of the deterioration of Spanish, while acknowledging the increasing presence of English loan words in the Puerto Rican lexicon (Rúa, 1987, 1988; Meyn, 1981, 1988 [cited in Vélez & Schweers, 1992:6]).

The bill to make Spanish the sole official language was taken up by intellectuals who defined Puerto Ricanness almost exclusively as Hispanicity. They

cited early U.S. policies of Americanization and enforced use of English in the schools and courts, arguing that the greater autonomy gained in 1948, which was quickly followed by local efforts to mitigate the effects of Americanization, was not enough to alleviate the inferiority complex in the Puerto Rican psyche. The establishment in the 1950s of the Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española and the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña were not insignificant, but nor were they sufficient (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:4). A policy of Spanish as sole official language would be a step in the right direction, and would militate against the imposition of English in the future, a not insignificant possibility given the rise of the English Only movement in the United States and the prospect of Puerto Rican statehood. Spokespeople for the National Action for the Defense of the Mother Tongue such as Pedro Juan Rúa voiced these opinions during the Puerto Rican House of Representatives debates on the issue. The President of the Puerto Rico Intellectuals Committee, Awilda Palau, agreed that passage of the measure would send the U.S. Congress a clear message that Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking country and would make it easier for advocates of statehood to negotiate the island's political future. Her openly militant *independentista* stance caused some to view this argument cynically, however (Medina, 1990, August 31:3).

### Juridical Status

Juridical status is essentially the issue of status policy planning, as it is characterized mainly according to governmental attitudes toward usage (Cobarrubias, 1983:48). The government's role in the debate over the Spanish as Official Language bill was characterized by extralinguistic considerations, as is arguably typical in issues of this nature. Cobarrubias points out that the ethical criteria which govern such decisions "seem to depend upon certain ideologies the group in control wishes to endorse. Language-status planning is ultimately contingent upon such ideologies" (1983:41). Cooper elaborates on this issue:

Language planning is typically carried out for the attainment of nonlinguistic ends such as consumer protection, scientific exchange, national integration, political control, economic development, the creation of new elites or the maintenance of old ones, the pacification or cooption of minority groups, and mass mobilization of national or political movements. In any war, one uses all the ammunition at hand. If the modification of a language, or its use, or the promotion of its acquisition is perceived as ammunition, such ammunition is likely to be fired (Cooper, 1989:35).

There has been little denial on the part of any of the players involved that the question of official language is significantly one of politics. The first sentence of the bill clearly frames the issue in terms of the political status of the island: "In this hour of our history...when we aspire to define our destiny, it becomes necessary to categorically reaffirm that Spanish is the language of Puerto Ricans" (Medina, 1991, March 28:3). Clearly, it is crucial to an understanding of the debate over language status to have a grounding in the debate over political status.

### Political Status

Since the United States took control of Puerto Rico in 1898 there have been widely disparate views over the issue of sovereignty. While an analysis of this history is not in the purview of this study, it is important to understand the current situation.

In 1967, two years after the decision to use Spanish in the judicial system in Puerto Rico, a plebiscite was held in which Puerto Ricans chose to remain a commonwealth. Of the population, 60.4% favored continued commonwealth status, 38.9% favored statehood, and .06% voted for independence (Pear, 1990:A-1), although it should be mentioned that *independentistas* called for a boycott of the plebiscite and it is possible that those *independentistas* who did vote viewed commonwealth as preferable to statehood (Weisman, 1990:32).

The issue has continued to dominate Puerto Rican politics to the point where the three major parties define themselves essentially on their stance toward political status. When he was elected governor by a narrow margin in 1988, Rafael Hernández Colón, president of the pro-commonwealth Popular Democratic Party (PDP), called for a new plebiscite. During the negotiations with the United States Congress over what the three options of the plebiscite would actually mean, Hernández Colón called for "enhanced commonwealth status," meaning that the local government would share full dual sovereignty. This has been rejected out of hand as an oxymoron. According to the United States Constitution, Congress has power over all territories not incorporated as states.

The other significant party, in terms of numbers, is the New Progressive Party (NPP), which calls for full statehood, with full cultural duality. Its leaders want to permanently link Puerto Rico to its wealthy neighbor, even if it means the loss of the island's current economic benefits. They argue that the full rights of democracy are worth the potential hardships. While the PDP calls this ridiculous, claiming that the United States would never accept *un estado jibaro*, a hillbilly or hick state, NPP

leaders find no problem with this, freely making the case that Statehood is for the Poor, as former governor and party president Romero Barceló entitled his book on the subject (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1).

The third and least popular party is the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), estimated to represent between five and eight percent of the electorate (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:9). Primarily a party of intellectuals, it recognizes no distinction between commonwealth and colony, citing U.S. policies which have been destructive to the distinct culture of Puerto Rico as an indication that independence is the only viable option. Its leaders, such as its president Rubén Berríos Martínez, a graduate of Georgetown University, Yale Law School, and Oxford University, claim that Puerto Rico's Latin American neighbors find the current status abhorrent, and would find statehood a travesty, a "gobbling up" of one of their own. Currently, *independentistas* are dissenters. If Puerto Rico were to become a state, they would become secessionists, traitors. Berríos Martínez negotiated a generous independence option from the U.S. Congress involving a gradual weaning from its current subsidies over a ten-year period (Weisman, 1990:40).

Many argue that the real issue of status is not political or cultural but economic. Currently the island has a standard of living far above that of any Caribbean or Latin American nation. Manufacturing accounts for 40% of its output while agricultural production accounts for only 1.5%, far below the level of most islands in the tropics. The gross national product was \$19.2 billion in 1988, at least partly because subsidiaries of American businesses in Puerto Rico have unrestricted access to American markets, yet pay no federal taxes on profits under Section 936 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. Currently almost one third of the Fortune 500 companies have operations in Puerto Rico, creating more than 150,000 jobs. Nevertheless, the per capita income in 1989 was \$5,733, compared to the United States average of \$17,596. Unemployment was 14.6%, compared to a U.S. national average of 5.3%, with the highest unemployment rate, West Virginia's, at 8.6%. Only 39.6% of people over the age of 24 have high school diplomas. If Puerto Rico were a state, it would rank lowest, behind Kentucky at 53.1%. (All figures from Pear, 1990:A-1)

With statehood would have to come the elimination of the tax advantages under Section 936, which, according to Hernández Colón, would take away "the engine that keeps our economy running." His estimate is that more than 600 industries would depart leaving Puerto Rico "a tropical South Bronx" (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1). Currently almost one-half of Puerto Rico's residents receive federal aid, for a total of about \$6.5 billion. If Puerto Rico were made a state, it would theoretically qualify for



about \$3 billion more in aid, although some U.S. legislators have said that they would not accept a form of statehood which would cost the United States more than the current arrangement. Nevertheless, one of the NPP's arguments for statehood involves increased federal aid for the poor of Puerto Rico; the PDP counters that it would certainly need it with the increased unemployment. It has urged for enhanced commonwealth status to include continuing current tax policies, at least for a certain period of time, as well as increased aid. Fomento, Puerto Rico's economic development agency, has conducted studies which show that, even under the best of circumstances, it could take 50 years for Puerto Rico to catch up with Mississippi, currently the poorest state in the nation. "In other words, we do not have the money to join the country club and pay the monthly dues," says José R. González, branch manager of the First Boston Corp, and former Hernández Colón advisor. "Let's face it, the United States is a rich man's club" (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1).

While these considerations were being debated in Puerto Rico, the plebiscite issue was undergoing some difficulties in Washington, D.C. President George Bush, who favored statehood in the 1988 campaign and in his 1989 State of the Union address, tried to push the plebiscite legislation through the U.S. Congress. Jaime B. Fuster, Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner in the U.S. House of Representatives, who has a voice but no vote, lobbied consistently for the House version of the bill, which passed unanimously. It called for a non-binding referendum and a procedure for Congress to consider the results, offer amendments, and send it back to Puerto Rico for a second referendum. The Senate plebiscite bill, however, called for one binding referendum, whose result would go into effect immediately. A second version of the bill included a five-year transition period.

### Politics of Language Status

Senator J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA), Chair of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, was the architect of the Senate plebiscite bill. In 1989, he advised the president of the pro-statehood NPP, former Governor Romero Barceló, not to push for bilingualism in statehood. "Why not be silent on the question? Let Puerto Rico be Puerto Rico. You don't want to risk this legislation on language." Supporters of statehood reluctantly agreed and opened themselves up to charges that they had turned their backs on their promise to defend Spanish at all costs. In 1989, when U.S. English urged the Senate committee to make English Puerto Rico's official language under statehood, Johnston rejected this also. Thus, neither the Senate nor the House bills on the plebiscite mentioned language in any way (Turner, 1990, August 30:2).

Nevertheless, language and political status have been inextricably tied from the outset.

When the PDP introduced the bill to make Spanish the sole official language into Puerto Rico's Congress, it was openly regarded as a bid to make the pro-statehood movement look bad before the plebiscite (Medina, 1990:14). Arguments regarding the need to maintain Spanish in a pure form, to stop the influence of English upon its lexicon and structure, frequently degenerated comically into the very mixture of Spanish and English being disparaged. Juan López Hernández, one of the bill's staunchest supporters, caught himself slipping unconsciously into an Americanism in the heat of the debate, shouting down his NPP opponent by claiming that he had "el floor." "Hemiciclo!" whispered a colleague, correcting him, to the smiles of the audience (Navarro, 1990:A-14).

Governor Hernández Colón, however, framed the issue as one of identity:

You have to think of us as one of the most over-populated countries in the world. We have no natural resources, very little land for very many people. We have a cultural and a historical identity unlike any state. We're more like Costa Rica than Georgia. We are a Latin American people...one of the countries established by Spain. At the same time, we cherish our ties to the United States and we're irrevocably bound to the United States (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1).

The New Progressive Party's pro-statehood stance clearly dictates an adversarial stance on the "Spanish Only" law as they called it, a reference to the English Only movement in the United States. Nevertheless, it would be politically dangerous to advocate that Puerto Rico adhere to the United States' original plans and become English-speaking; in fact, the NPP has always claimed that statehood would have to involve a bicultural arrangement. As Carlos Romero Barceló snapped at a reporter,

there is no such thing as surrendering Spanish. Am I to tell a mother she cannot sing a lullaby to her child in Spanish?...The nation does not need another state that speaks English. A state that speaks Spanish would help the nation (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1).

Luis A. Ferré, founder of the NPP and chair of the Puerto Rican Republican Committee, appealed for Governor Hernández Colón to veto the Spanish Only law, as it would contradict the Puerto Rican Constitution's preamble, which places the two cultures on equal footing (Hemlock, 1991, March 13:3). The elimination of English as

an official language could also be harmful for businesses and professionals. But the NPP's most strident argument against the bill was that since the issue was not the creation of a national language where there had been none, but the elimination of English, it would send the wrong message to Congress and the American people: that Puerto Rico wished to distance itself from its benefactor and would reject statehood. The plebiscite bill was foundering in Congress and did not need the added controversy that would result from a rejection of English.

The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) was strongly in favor of making Spanish the sole official language, for reasons which must be clear: it views any step away from the United States as a step in the right direction, and this affirmation of Puerto Rican pride in its heritage and culture greatly appealed to the intellectuals which comprise the majority of the party. During the hearings on the bill, several university intellectuals testified to this effect, notably members of *Acción Nacional para la Defensa del Vernáculo*, one of whose purposes is to create awareness of the threat to Spanish posed by the English Only movement.

When it passed the Puerto Rican legislature, Senator Johnston called the Spanish Only law "a particularly clumsy thing to do." Many United States legislators felt it "slammed the door on the plebiscite" (Hemlock, 1991, May 16:16). Jaime Fuster described the law as a symbolic gesture intended to correct historic mistakes and inequities and not "in any way an anti-United States bill....[The bill] is not intended to defy, it is intended to clarify" (The San Juan Star, 1991, April 11:3). United States Representative Dick Schulze (R-PA) did not concur with this view and called for an end to Section 936 tax benefits. A spokesperson said most U.S. legislators interpret the law as Puerto Rico saying to the United States: "We don't need you, we don't need your language, but please leave 936 alone" (Turner, 1991, March 31:3). Fuster could only repeat to Congress the PDP line, that the "Spanish Only" law would not have any practical effect, since most business and government affairs on the island are already conducted in Spanish and the bill explicitly states that English language education would not be affected. It was merely a symbolic affirmation of cultural identity.

Various public figures have contributed to charging the debate further. Justice Secretary Héctor Rivera Cruz endorsed the bill, recommending a referendum to give it constitutional status and to coincide with the Fifth Centennial as an act of "national justice" (Medina, 1991, February 7:12). One debate in the Puerto Rican House involved some lawmakers branding others "assimilationists," while others tried to end the debate in English (Medina, 1991, February 7:12). At the signing of the bill on April 5th, Senate President Miguel Hernández Agosto argued that, historically, the United

States has tried to supplant Spanish with English. "We can now say with legitimate pride that the attempt at the cultural coup d'état has failed." Resident Commissioner Jaime Fuster hastened to reassure islanders regarding his U.S. Congressional colleagues: "The bill is a symbolic measure that in no way affects the English language. To say it has provoked a climate in Congress against Puerto Rico is simply not true" (Suárez, 1991:14).

### Ratio of Users of a Language to the Total Population

One of the most frequently cited arguments in favor of the Spanish as Official Language legislation is that it was, in fact, a purely symbolic gesture which would have no practical effect. For the most part, the workings of Puerto Rican government life have been conducted in Spanish for many years, and exceptions to the new law can be made, according to the language of the bill, whenever "convenient and necessary." It also provides for the teaching of English as a second language in the schools (The San Juan Star, 1991:2). Basically, according to the PDP, it would change nothing because Puerto Rico is de facto a Spanish speaking nation. According to figures cited by Governor Colón, 19% of the population speaks English with ease, 23% with difficulty, and 58% are unable to speak English (McAllister, 1990, December 27:A-1).

Thus we come to the fourth and, in certain ways, the most significant of Kloss's categories which relate to language planning: the ratio of the users of a language to the total population. While there is no clear demarcation of one statistical increment to the next, there is a correlation between this ratio and the status of a language. However, as Cobarrubias points out (1983:45), "numbers are not the only source of power; social organization and resources are also needed." As most of the island speaks Spanish, the issue is the number of people who speak English and their relative power in terms of social organization and economic attainment.

### Ethoglossia

This cuts to the issue of what Cobarrubias calls *ethoglossia* (1983:52): the communicative character and strength of a language or variety. This is a result of several factors: the interaction of the functional distribution of a language and its *entrenchment*, which Cobarrubias views as the ratio and concentration of speakers of a language in conjunction with the historicity of its functions; whether or not its speakers choose to use it as a means of ethnic identity; and other factors such as the economic power and social organization of the speech community (54, 55). The ethoglossia of a language thus plays a significant role in language maintenance and

may influence status policy decisions or, at any rate, their acceptance by the public. Cobarrubias also suggests that a comparison of the ethoglossia of one speech community with another's gives insight into the nature of language conflict, particularly in multilingual settings where competitive relations are unresolved (53).

We have already examined the historicity of functions of both Spanish and English in Puerto Rico, but an ethnography of the various speech communities is beyond the scope of this paper. A brief background into the socio-economic and political relationships of certain groups may lend some insight, however.

### Socio-economic Status

The 19% of the island who classify themselves as bilingual primarily comprise two poles on the socio-economic continuum: members of the socio-economic-intellectual elite, and predominantly lower socio-economic status returned migrants. The elite are usually the products of private preparatory schools which use English as the medium of instruction, many of whom attend university in the United States. They come from the traditional upper class of the Spanish colonial era and from the upwardly mobile middle class who have benefitted from industrialization in recent years. But their socio-economic class alone is insufficient to guarantee continued success in contemporary Puerto Rico; the political and economic relationship with the United States makes oral and written bilingualism essential for professionals (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:19).

The returned migrants, on the other hand, tend to come from the *jibaro* or rural peasant class which found that industrialization did not bring the same benefits to all Puerto Ricans. The *jibaros* are the descendants of native American Taínos, early Spanish settlers, and Africans brought to the island as slaves. Each group contributed to the culture and language variety of Puerto Rico's lower class (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:20). The bilingualism of this community has not generally been the path to advancement that it has been for the elite.

The 81% of Puerto Ricans who are essentially monolingual in Spanish is a varied group. They rely on the public and middle class private schools, where English instruction is apparently inadequate to provide any level of comfort with the language. The more fortunate local university graduates acquire sufficient English to fill middle-management positions. This is the vast majority of Puerto Ricans; studies and surveys have shown that they almost universally value bilingualism since they view English as the instrument which will offer them and their children economic mobility within the

class system that exists (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:22; Associated Press, 1991:8; Medina, 1991, June 12:10).

This is what some intellectuals have called this the *supervalorization* of English, at the expense of Puerto Rico's cultural and linguistic identity. English has been said to be *supervalorized* due to its instrumental value on the island and internationally, while Spanish has been *devalorized* and may be viewed as nothing more than a home language to the upwardly mobile middle class. The de-officialization of English could at least guarantee the continued use of Spanish in areas under the jurisdiction of government: administration, schools, judicial system. The hope would be to not only promote its use as the vernacular, but to elevate its prestige and encourage Puerto Ricans to view their Hispanic heritage with greater pride (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:5).

Opponents of the Spanish as Official Language bill mounted a counterargument which cited the very fact that Puerto Rico continues to be primarily monolingually Spanish-speaking as evidence of the great level of entrenchment of Spanish and the cultural identity it represents. Spanish prevails despite all the colonial and more subtle influences exerted by the United States and the English language. Spanish-language media predominates and the great majority of proficient English speakers are equally proficient in Spanish. In addition, the high prestige of the English language is not specific to Puerto Rico and has little to do with its status as an official language. De-officializing English would therefore fail to address any attitudinal preferences or instrumental need for English, and would thus solve no problem, linguistic or otherwise (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:6).

### Ethoglossia and Education

The ethoglossic character of English in Puerto Rico and the implications for education were at the center of some of the most virulent arguments over the official language issue. There was a fear that the government was moving toward cutting English instruction in the schools, which led to a public outcry over the potential loss of economic mobility and opportunity for children. While the elite, most of the politicians among them, could continue to send their children to private English-language schools, the middle class and *jibaros* would be cut out of the opportunity structure. The bill was then amended to guarantee that English-language instruction on the island would not be affected, but the issue of class had been raised and letters to local newspapers continued to reflect concern. In the words of the author of one such letter, Raymond Matienzo,

Certainly the question of English and bilingualism has been associated with the delicate concept of colonialism—a feeling which has always permeated the island's political thinking. And the United States has been accused of fostering it. Wrong.

The real colonial powers in Puerto Rico are our local legislators and elite. Remember, the less educated the masses, the more tolerant they are of oppression.... Bilingualism must be reserved for the elite. No?...Perhaps it is nostalgia for Spain, the greatest colonizer of all times (Matienzo, 1990).

### Public Debate

Of course, there were letters reflecting other points of view, but Vélez and Schweers (1992:2,16) have analyzed the coverage and commentary which appeared in the three major newspapers with an educated, upwardly mobile readership (El Nuevo Día, El Mundo [which ceased publication in December, 1990], and The San Juan Star, the English-language daily) and found two interesting patterns. While all three papers devoted a roughly comparable amount of reporting to the official language issue, and all opposed the bill editorially, seven and a half times more letters to the editor appeared in The San Juan Star than in either of the Spanish-language papers, while these published two and a half times more op-ed columns written by intellectuals and politicians. Vélez and Schweers have taken this to indicate that the two speech communities have different points of view regarding who has the right and responsibility to participate in public debate (1992:16).

### **Processes**

Public debate and the decision-making process may be said to comprise the decision-making phase of the language planning process. Models of language planning processes such as Fishman's (1979) indicate that this is merely one step in a complicated and iterative activity. Briefly, Fishman identifies six activities which should be understood as simultaneous and cyclical rather than discrete: decision-making, codification, elaboration, implementation, evaluation, and iteration (ongoing fine-tuning) (12-18). The passage of the law itself and its signing in April, 1991 correspond to codification. But what of elaboration, implementation, evaluation, and iteration?

The law was not clearly elaborated because it was viewed as symbolic and flexible, vaguely referring to loopholes "whenever convenient or necessary." However, a number of difficulties have arisen which might have been anticipated and avoided.

For example, when a representative of the Federal Emergency Management Agency traveled to San Juan from Washington, D.C. to lease some building space at the former Miramar naval base, the Commonwealth General Services Administration refused to accept an English-language lease agreement. He was told that he would have to have the lease translated or else obtain a waiver from Governor Hernández Colón (Luquis, 1991, April 25:3). Engineers, architects, and other technicians have complained of serious difficulties; the Puerto Rican government is an important regulatory agency as well as contracting agent, yet many projects need federal approval to receive federal funds, and plans are frequently contracted by U.S.-based manufacturing firms with boards of directors who want documents in English. The Government Development Bank, the Economic Development Administration (Fomento) and its affiliate, the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (Pridco) have also appealed for and been denied permission to continue to issue their tax exemption and factory rental agreements in English when convenient for clients (Hemlock, April 27:3). Puerto Rican industrialists have told of taking visiting potential investors to a government agency where officials who spoke English well were now insisting on speaking only in Spanish (Maldonado, 1991, June 30:38).

All of this points to a failure not only of elaboration, but also of implementation. The government does not seem to have taken its own assurances to heart, but has instead implemented a law which in some ways is, as the NPP originally claimed, "Spanish Only." The implementation issue has been very complex, with ramifications for the other processes as the government has struggled to implement its plan in a centralized manner.

Tollefson distinguishes between two types of language planning processes, centralized and decentralized, distinguished by the "degree of local initiative involved in the formulation and implementation of a national plan and to the scope (local, regional, national) of the intended outcomes of the plan" (1981:176). More specifically, this analysis identifies three salient factors to distinguish the two types of planning: degree of coupling, degree of plan adaptation, and relative importance of macro- and micro-implementation perspectives.

Centralized language planning is characterized by a tightly coupled planning system between central and local authorities, a low degree of plan adaptation by local



officials, and macro-implementation where federal authorities develop strategies to influence local governments to effectively implement the plan. Decentralized language planning is evidenced by a loosely coupled planning system (i.e., more local control), a high degree of plan adaptation, and micro-implementation.

One of the difficulties of implementation in this case was the lack of cooperation on the part of local governments. On March 11, the San Juan Municipal Assembly voted to keep English on an equal footing for civic affairs, opposing "any movement within the U.S. mainland or insular jurisdictions aimed at designating a single official language for exclusive use for official business" (Hemlock, 1991, March 11:3). The bill was then rewritten to leave no loophole for municipalities. Later, within one hour of the bill's signing, 30 NPP mayors and NPP Senator Nicolás Noguerras filed a bill in the U.S. District Court challenging the constitutionality of the law and charging that it violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964; "inhibits and illegally and unconstitutionally restricts the rights, privileges and immunities of United States citizens in Puerto Rico"; "attempts to interfere" with the opportunities of students to learn English and with the rights of parents to control their children's education; and violates the equal-protection rights of non-Spanish speaking residents of Puerto Rico (Luquis, 1991, April 6:14). It seems that no consensus was reached as to whether this plan would be implemented in a centralized or a decentralized manner, which has fed the general dissatisfaction with the law.

In addition to this refusal to conform by local authorities, and perhaps in part because of it, there has been a proven lack of public support for the measure. On March 21, the new NPP president, Pedro Rosselló, called for a national referendum on the language policy, citing polls indicating that 85% of the Puerto Rican people were opposed. There was no chance it would be agreed to by the PDP legislature, but it was meant to show the people "that a bad decision had been made and that the bill is a political strategy related to the plebiscite" (Medina, 1991, March 21:3). A later poll found two out of three respondents rejecting the law, and 88% saying the language question should have been decided in a referendum (Medina, 1991, June 13:10).

The issue of elitism in the decision-making process is again inescapable. As Vélez and Schweers point out (1992:15), "this was not a grassroots movement based on a perceived problematic situation, but rather an issue proposed, defined, and fueled by a small but very influential sector of the population." And, as some had feared and others had hoped, the status plebiscite bill foundered in the U.S. Senate, although Republican senators suggested that Puerto Rico was free to hold its own referendum.

On December 8, 1991, the people of Puerto Rico finally had a chance to vote, in a non-binding referendum which had nothing to do with the U.S. Congress, on the issue of sovereignty. The ballot called for a yes or no vote on "the claim for Democratic Rights approved by the Legislature of Puerto Rico." The claim asserted the right of Puerto Ricans to choose their future political status without regard to the power of Congress over the island as a U.S. territory. It also demanded that any status, including independence, guarantee continued U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans, and declared unassailable the "culture, language and identity" of the Puerto Rican people (McAllister, 1991, December 7:A-21). Perhaps swayed by what the PDP called "scare tactics" regarding U.S. reaction to a "yes" vote, the public voted "no" by a margin of 53% to 44.9%, thus laying the groundwork for the NPP to call once again for statehood and a new plebiscite, perhaps from the governor's mansion, La Fortaleza (Friedman, 1991:3). A repeal of the law making Spanish the official language would be a likely step if another attempt to hold a plebiscite were made.

### Conclusion

Valter Tauli has written that

all kinds of diglossia are uneconomic and the aim of language policy should be to work for its elimination, but not by force....As in other LP [language planning] problems in diglossia, too, purely linguistic considerations may clash with social and other extralinguistic factors, which LP tactics must consider (1974:64).

Even if one were to accept as unadorned truth the claims of the Popular Democratic Party and the Puerto Rican Independence Party with regard to their language planning decision—that the Spanish language was in need of legislative support, that the measure was purely symbolic, that it was not a rejection of English and Puerto Rico's ties to the United States but a reaffirmation of cultural and linguistic pride—it would still be unimaginable that the extralinguistic issues outlined above would not need to be addressed.

In fact, it has been argued that this may not be a case of language planning at all since it involved so little in the way of careful study and reflection prior to the decision-making process (Vélez & Schweers, 1992:18). In addition, the insufficiencies of the elaboration and evaluation processes have been remarked upon above.

Nevertheless, a status policy decision was made which conforms neatly to Cobarrubias's observations on the subject: first, that the language planners in status policy decisions are generally politicians or statesmen with very little sociolinguistic background; and second that their decisions conform to the ideologies of the power elite or respond to the conflicting ideologies of other constituent groups (Cobarrubias, 1983:62). Thus, the decision in Puerto Rico to make Spanish the sole official language might be said to be a prototypical, although not ideal, case of status policy planning.

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## Appendix

### U.S./Puerto Rican Relations and Language Status since 1898

- 1898 Spanish-American War ends. Puerto Rico ceded to U.S. (PR useful in supply route to Panama Canal). U.S. forces welcomed on island. Military government established. Status undecided, but education specialists and other forces of "Americanization" arrive. Illiteracy rate ca. 80%; no public school buildings; 86% of children receive no education; no university. Poor public health system and infrastructure.
- 1900 Military government abolished under Foraker Act. Governor appointed by President.
- 1902 Official Languages Act establishes both English and Spanish as official. Viewed as practical measure, since governors and other U.S. officials spoke little or no Spanish. Part of move to peacefully transform Puerto Ricans into U.S. citizens. School instruction in English, with Spanish as ancillary.
- 1905 Puerto Rico's Supreme Court rules that the English language text of laws passed in Puerto Rico should prevail in the interpretation of said laws.
- 1917 Jones Act grants Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and right to vote for members of local legislature. Governor and Supreme Court justices still appointed.
- Article 13 of Civil Code states that Spanish language text of laws will prevail in legal interpretation.
- 1948 Puerto Rico elects 1st governor: Luis Muñoz Marín. Puerto Ricans still cannot vote for President and Resident Commissioner in Washington, an elected Island representative to Congress, has a voice but no vote.
- 1949 Spanish established as language of instruction. English still taught, but status as ESL or EFL poorly defined.
- 1955 Establishment of Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española and the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.
- 1965 Puerto Rican Supreme Court rules that Puerto Rican courts must use Spanish in their judicial procedures (People of Puerto Rico vs. Superior Court).
- 1967 Plebiscite on status. 60.4% affirm commonwealth status, 38.9% vote for statehood, 0.6% vote for independence. Some say independentistas boycotted election, or voted commonwealth to avoid statehood.
- 1977 PDP and NPP go on record in favor of the use of Spanish in the US District Court.



- 1981 Senator Peña Clos pushes a requirement for private schools to teach in Spanish. Never given much consideration.
- 1986 Peña Clos presents bill to make Spanish the sole official language.
- 1987 Intellectuals form Acción Nacional para la Defensa del Vernáculo.
- 1989 April 16 commemorated at the behest of intellectuals as Día Nacional del Idioma Español.
- US District Court drafts resolution that it cannot support the suggestion that Spanish be the language of the court. This is sent to the Senate committee negotiating the conditions for a status plebiscite.
- Bill presented by Senator López Galarza and others to make Spanish the sole official language of Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this table are to be found in Vélez and Schweers 1992 paper, "A U.S. Colony at a Linguistic Crossroads: The Decision to Make Spanish the Official Language of Puerto Rico." The majority has been garnered from consultation of various histories and articles, including Gutiérrez (1987) and items in the The San Juan Star, the English language newspaper of Puerto Rico.