

Two speech communities in Puerto Rico: An ethnographic study about social class and children learning English in public and private schools of the island.

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ABSTRACT. This paper describes an ethnographic study related to the learning of English in a public school and a private school in two small towns on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. The research examines the social interaction of elementary school students in the English classroom, and the cultural capital that families use to increase the learning of English in their children. Cultural capital is a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) to refer to the different artifacts and approaches that people implement to achieve higher social status. This paper illustrates how cultural capital is an asset in the learning of English in Puerto Rico. The methodology included classroom observations, a sociolinguistic questionnaire, sociolinguistic interviews with focal parents, and brief interviews with focal children. The conclusions discuss how English is perceived as a social mobility tool in the social class strata of Puerto Rico.

Keywords: English in Puerto Rico, bilingualism, speech communities, cultural capital, social class

1. INTRODUCTION. This paper describes the educational, sociocultural, and linguistic factors that influence the learning of English as a second language in the public and private schools of Puerto Rico. The following research questions guided this research: (a) Are there two speech communities in Puerto Rico? If so, what are the language use and social differences in these two speech communities? (b) How do public and private school children and their families see English as a social mobility mechanism in their future professional lives? (c) What kind of interaction do public and private school children have in their English classrooms? This study presents my belief that the access to additional resources—English tutoring, English literacy, bilingual professional parents, traveling abroad, extracurricular activities—is fundamental in the development of private school students' linguistic, social, and educational skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW. Brutt-Griffler (2002) suggests that Puerto Rico is developing two speech communities via a macroacquisition process. A group sharing a particular language is a **SPEECH COMMUNITY** (Brutt-Griffler 2002:141). The speech community is a linguistic expression of the community. Brutt-Griffler defines **MACROACQUISITION** as the acquisition of a second language by a speech community; it is a second-language acquisition process. She illustrates two types of bilingual speech communities. Type A macroacquisition takes place in a multilingual setting. Type B refers to macroacquisition that takes place in a monolingual society, and then the acquisition of a second language turns that society into a bilingual speech community. Puerto Rico would be classified as a Type B bilingual speech community. Brutt-Griffler suggests that in macroacquisition contexts, the children of emerging speech communities acquire their English from schools. In many countries, schools might be the only English-speaking context that are emerging speech communities and are developing new English speakers. However, in Puerto Rico, as in other countries colonized by the United States or England (e.g. India, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka), effective English education is reserved for the wealthier classes, while the working classes receive limited English education (Brutt-Griffler 2002, Pousada 1996, 2009, Schweers & Hudders 2000, Torruellas 1990). Two proposed speech communities are used in this study: the

lower-working class families and their children (public school families) and the upper-middle class families and their children (private school families). The criteria used to cast a family as being of a particular class is discussed in 3.1.

Previous studies about English learning in Puerto Rico from the perspective of colonialism and Americanization do not make an in-depth analysis of many language questions, such as: (a) Is English a foreign or a second language on the island? (b) What is the relationship between the use of English and social class? (c) Is there any resistance or empathy toward English in schools? (Kerkhof 2001, Nickels 2005, Pousada 2009, Torruellas 1990, Zentella 1999).

Cultural capital refers to the different artifacts and approaches that people implement to achieve higher social status (Bourdieu 1977). New studies should critically examine English as a form of cultural capital in Puerto Rico and as a means of reproduction of social inequality (Torruellas 1990). Several authors expose the relationship between language choice and social class in Puerto Rico (Torruellas 1990, Resnick 1993, Pousada 1996, 2009, Ramírez-González and Torres-González 1996, Schweers & Hudders 2000). Segregation exists between those who have mastered English and those who have not. Highly competent bilinguals in Puerto Rican society tend to be upper-class members of the elite. Although English instruction is available in public schools as a mandatory subject, studies indicate that students from private schools more often become functional bilinguals because private schools teach English effectively. These private school students have access to forms of cultural capital – bilingual parents, private tutors, English literacy, traveling abroad, and extracurricular activities – and this increases their opportunities to practice their English (Torruellas 1990, Pousada 2009). Children of the elite continue to become bilingual and to be able to attend universities in the United States. The problem of learning English in Puerto Rico is not limited to merely a personal choice of whether to speak Spanish or English; it goes much further and deeper. Learning English in Puerto Rico involves complicated historical, social, cultural, economic, and educational factors that are intertwined with issues of social-class stratification.

This research contributes to the current literature related to English as a second language and to social-class stratification in Puerto Rico. This work is significant to the field of educational linguistics and sociolinguistics because only a few studies (Torruellas 1990, Pousada 1996, 2009) compare access to additional educational and social resources (e.g. bilingual parents, private tutors, English literacy, traveling abroad, and extracurricular activities) provided by public and private elementary-school students in Puerto Rico and its relationship with the learning of English.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH. I used qualitative research to conduct this study. I study the participants in their natural settings, which helped me build a holistic picture of their communities (Creswell 2007). This research uses an ethnographic approach that involves the study of a particular cultural group (Creswell 2007). I studied two social and economic groups that included three public school families and three private school families in rural Puerto Rico. I conducted the research in two small towns, Camuy and Hatillo, on the north coast of Puerto Rico. This research used the critical ethnography approach, which studies schools that provide certain privileges and addresses concerns of inequality, power, and dominance (Creswell 2007). I sought to determine if the private school provided certain privileges (learning English) to its students (upper-middle class children) that the public school did not.

3.1. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THE FOCAL PARTICIPANTS. I selected three families in each of the schools because two families would only provide a small number of participants. After I obtained the approval of the Human Research Protections Office (HRPO/IRB) at the University of New Mexico, I started my research. To select the focal children and their families, I designed a brief questionnaire in which the parents answered questions about their children's education and English learning. During the first week of my observations in the schools, I gave 22 notification letters and brief questionnaires to all the children in the class to give to their parents. They returned the notification forms and questionnaires the next day of class. I analyzed the responses to the questionnaire. One of the main selection criteria was socioeconomic status. I did my best to select children who represented the population of each school. The school population demographics were determined with the help of the school administrators and English teachers. I consciously selected lower-working class participants at the public school and upper-middle class participants from the private school.

3.2. INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS. The three focal families at each school consented to be part of the research and to be interviewed. These focal children were learning English as a second language. All were fifth graders at Central Town Public School and Ocean View Private School.¹ I observed the English classroom twice a week for four months (September 2011 to December 2011). The duration of each observation was approximately one hour to one-and-a-half hours, depending on the school. I conducted 23 hours of observation in each school. I conducted two sociolinguistic interviews with one parent of each of the students selected as participants and two brief interviews with the six children at their homes. These were individual interviews with each one of the focal participants. I, a native speaker of Spanish, conducted all of the interviews in Spanish (the participants' native language). I carried out the first set of interviews in October 2011 and the follow-up interviews in February and March 2012. I focused on certain aspects of their social lives, such as their view of English, English as a social mobility tool, extracurricular activities, use of technology in their homes, and the use of Spanish and English. The first interviews included the same set of questions for every focal child and the same set of questions for every focal parent. The second interviews included a different set of questions for each focal student and a different set of questions for each focal mother and/or father based on the responses of the first interview questions. All of the parents and children's interview questions were open-ended. A sociolinguistic questionnaire was administered to the six focal parents before the first interview. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions about demographic facts, parents' education, use of technology, leisure activities, the families' uses of English, Spanish, literacy, and educational practices.

4. THE PARTICIPANTS. The six focal families are the main source of information for this research. They are a sample of the families whose children attended Central Town Public School and Ocean View Private School at the time of the study. The details in the following two tables point out the main sociocultural characteristics of these families. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, each family had unique characteristics and a particular interest in English and in the education of their children.

Focal family	Number of family members	Parents' jobs	Access to cable TV/ Internet	Extra-curricular activities	Traveling/ vacation
Family of Joshua	Mother, father, two boys	Mother: receptionist Father: driver	Cable TV: yes Internet: yes	No	Yes – one time to Orlando, FL.
Family of Aidan	Mother, father, three boys	Mother: stay at home mother Father: mechanic	Cable TV: yes Internet: yes	Yes – Music classes funded by a federal program.	No
Family of Vincent	Mother, one boy, one girl	Mother: cashier	Cable TV: yes Internet: no	No	No – But they lived two or three years in California.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Public school Focal Families.

Focal family	Number of family members	Parents' jobs	Access to cable TV/ Internet	Extra-curricular activities	Traveling/ vacation
Family of Jessica	Mother, father, two girls, one boy	Mother: secretary Father: pensioned	Cable TV: yes Internet: yes	Yes – Dance classes, volleyball team, church plays	Yes – two times to Orlando, FL. Summer weeks in a vacation complex on the southwest coast of Puerto Rico
Family of Amanda	Mother, father, and two girls	Mother: teacher Father: director of a technology center	Cable TV: yes Internet: yes	Yes – Volleyball team, guitar classes	Yes – Orlando, FL and Dominican Republic.
Family of Jason	Mother, Father, and Three boys	Mother: stay at home mother Father: engineer	Cable TV: yes Internet: yes	Yes – Art classes, catechism	Yes – California and Dominican Republic.

TABLE 2. Comparison of Private school Focal Families.

The parents' jobs and the children's extracurricular activities were two of the main differences between the two social groups. The jobs of the parents in the private school required higher levels of education, expertise, and the use of English. Private school parents were more exposed to the use of English in their jobs (secretary, director of a technology center, and engineer) than the parents in the public school. All of the focal children in the private school attended art-related or sport-related extracurricular activities that their parents paid for. Only one public school child attended an extracurricular sport-related activity that was federally funded. Private school focal children had a more extensive interaction with children of their same or higher social status than the public school focal children. These private school children experienced more diverse academic and social contexts than the public school focal children. The diverse contexts bring an additional opportunity for private school focal children to practice English sporadically with different children, as stated by two of the parents.

5. CLASSROOMS OBSERVATIONS. To describe what kind of interaction public and private school children have in their English classrooms, this section presents descriptions of the children's social interactions inside their classrooms. This analysis presents the numbers of the participation of the students in English and Spanish. The numbers and percentages were calculated in the following manner: every time a student participated in the class and answered one of the teacher's questions (e.g. What is the setting of the story?) and/or completed grammar exercises (e.g. Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb "be") in Spanish or English, I tallied that response in a chart with a check mark. I created a new chart each day I observed a class, which was divided into columns for Spanish, English, and no response. I then tallied the number of responses for all 23 hours of observations over four months. Table 3 presents the totals for participation and student answers in Spanish and English for the students in the public and private school English classrooms.

Central Town Public School			Ocean View Private School		
Spanish	English	No Response	Spanish	English	No Response
155	260	11	93	469	0
36%	61%	3%	17%	83%	0%
Total number of responses = 426	Total number of responses = 426	Total number of responses = 426	Total number of responses = 562	Total number of responses = 562	Total number of responses = 562

TABLE 3. Observations in the English Classroom.

As the chart shows, the fifth grade students at Central Town Public School gave their answers most of the time in English. The students answered in English 61% of the time during those four months and in Spanish 36% of the time. They did not respond to the teacher's questions 3% of the time. The students at Ocean View Private School provided their answers primarily in English. The students answered in English 83% of the time during those four months and in

Spanish 17% of the time. The students at Ocean View Private School always responded to the teacher's questions.

5.1. OTHER CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS. The observations in both English classrooms helped to distinguish the two speech communities. The interactions and patterns in the English classrooms of both schools are different and diverse. The main differences are reflected in the students' uses of English inside the classroom, the students' reactions to the participation of their classmates, and the students' opinions and actions with respect to the English class teaching methods.

Central Town Public School English Classroom	Ocean View Private School English Classroom
<i>Social interaction</i> – Students did not move around the classroom a lot; no cooperative learning; students felt uncomfortable and sometimes were laughed at by classmates when speaking English; frequent interaction in English and Spanish.	<i>Social interaction</i> – Students moved freely in the classroom; frequent cooperative learning; students helped each other when someone did not know the correct pronunciation of a word; most of the speaking interaction was in English.
<i>Participation</i> – Sometimes students did not answer the teacher's questions; infrequent use of spoken English; Vincent was the focal student who used English the most.	<i>Participation</i> – Students were excited to participate; more spoken English; Jason was the focal student who used English the most.

TABLE 4. Social Interactions in the Two English Classrooms.

One main difference between the classrooms was the role of the students in the learning-teaching process. The students in the English classroom in the public school did not seem to be very active in terms of participating and speaking in English. Cooperative learning or teamwork was almost absent in this classroom, and students who participated individually were sometimes laughed at and made to feel uncomfortable while trying to practice and improve their English. In contrast, the students in the English classroom of the private school acted as active agents in their learning of English as a second language. These students interacted more with their classmates and were able to move from one place to another inside the classroom to check and discuss grammar and literacy tasks with their classmates.

The private school students also acted as active agents in their learning when they frequently asked for the meanings of new words in English and when they encouraged the participation of their classmates. In contrast, the students in the public school checked their answers only with the teacher. Even though the public school students expressed their interest in the meanings of new vocabulary words, there was little encouragement for them to go beyond and participate more in the English class.

The participation of the focal students in Central Town Public School primarily involved the routine of selecting the correct word or phrase as an answer with little time for students to generate complex sentences as correct answers. Vincent's participation in the English class was more evident because he was more active reading aloud, and sometimes his classmates laughed

at him when his pronunciation was not correct. The focal students behaved well in the English classroom and followed the patterns and rules expected of them.

The participation of the focal students in Ocean View Private School was more noticeable because of the constant interaction and discussion of the English tasks among students. Jason was one of the most popular students in the English classroom because of his academic excellence. His classmates knew about Jason's highly proficient skills in English, and they always wanted to double-check their answers with him before the teacher corrected them.

6. PUBLIC SCHOOL FAMILIES. The perception of bilingualism of the public school focal parents included speaking English to be able to communicate and to find a good job. Public school parents did not mention during our interviews that their children speak English in their everyday context. These parents did not mention the use of English literacy (books, writing papers, technology) at the college level.

The parents in the public school stated reasons for considering English to be an important language in their children's education. These parents focused mainly on the need for English for communicative purposes in the workplace. They also considered English to be an important language in some national and federal jobs. Parents in the public school mentioned English as an important tool if their children move to the United States. The parents offered these answers to some of the interviewer's open-ended questions: (a) Do you support your children learning English in school? Why? (b) Why do you think learning English is important for their future life? (c) Do you think English is important to find a better job with higher pay? Why?

Parents' answers:

- Jobs and professions: education jobs, government jobs, federal jobs, U.S. Postal Service, Army.
- To move to another country.
- To work in the United States.
- To practice English in the United States.
- To read documents in English.
- To speak with someone from the United States in the workplace.

The public school focal children described their views of English in terms of socialization and academic purposes. The focal children also offered different answers to some of the interviewer's open-ended questions: (a) Do you think English is important for you? Why? (b) In what job positions/fields do people use English more? Why?

Students' answers:

- To speak with someone who speaks English in the workplace.
- To move and live in the United States.
- To play professional sports in the United States.
- To work in professional fields such as law and in the Army.

Parents as well as children focused on jobs in the military and postal service. The public school families said that the main goal is to speak very good English to communicate with any English speakers in Puerto Rico or in the United States. For these families, speaking English is

seen as a golden ticket that can open doors for any job position, especially in federal government branches.

7. PRIVATE SCHOOL FAMILIES. Private school focal parents mentioned bilingualism and the components of a successful bilingual education, such as: reading, speaking, vocabulary, writing, good pronunciation, and grammar. Some of these parents and their family members classify themselves as bilingual and feel comfortable speaking English. Two of the parents reported that their children speak English and most of the time felt comfortable using the language. According to these families, speaking is an important part of being bilingual. These focal parents are aware of other skills that are important to becoming a fully bilingual person, such as correct pronunciation, vocabulary, and literacy. These focal parents connected the use of English literacy with the future of their children at a university. They said how English literacy would be an advantage in their children's college life.

The focal parents in the private school gave diverse reasons for considering English a fundamental language in their children's future. Parents were focused on the use of English at the college level and as an important language in high paying professional careers. Finally, two of the focal parents said knowing English is the first step to becoming a multilingual speaker and having access to cultural knowledge from around the world. The parents offered these answers to some of the open-ended questions during the interviews: (a) Do you support your children learning English in school? Why? (b) Why do you think learning English is important for them? (c) Do you think English is important to find a better job with higher pay? Why?

Parents' answers:

- To move to the United States.
- To find a good job.
- To attend a good college.
- To have an easier life during the college years.
- To take the Advanced Placement Exams and transfer college credits in English courses.
- To have access to material possessions.
- To enter the fields of medicine, engineering, law, accounting, business, education, architecture, pharmacy, and to obtain a master's degree and a Ph.D.
- To travel, experience different cultures, meet new people, be accepted into internships, to study abroad.
- To understand technology and media.
- To work in multinational companies.
- To learn other languages besides English, such as Japanese, Portuguese, Mandarin, and French.
- To recognize bilingualism as a tool for career advancement.

During their interviews, the focal children in the private school expressed their thoughts about English at the university level and the need of English to become a multilingual person. The focal children also answered the interviewer's open-ended questions: (a) Do you think English is important for you? Why? (b) In what job positions / fields do people use English more? Why?

Students' answers:

- To use it in the university.
- To study in a university in the United States.
- To use it in the following professional fields: medicine, law, business, technology, and computer programming.
- To travel and to experience other cultures.
- To be multilingual.

The perspectives about English of the private school children are similar to those of their parents. Parents as well as children see the need for English in their future academic lives in college and in high paying professional jobs.

8. CONCLUSION. To conclude, it is necessary to look back to the research questions to answer them with the analysis of the data provided. The first research questions: Are there two speech communities in Puerto Rico? What are the language use and social differences in these two speech communities? The following table presents the main findings of the two proposed speech communities:

Lower-Working Class/Public School	Upper-Middle Class/Private School
Pre-existing monolingual Spanish speech community.	Type B bilingual speech community.
Limited access to extracurricular activities.	Extracurricular activities.
Parents are not bilingual.	Parents are Spanish-English bilinguals.
Limited interaction in English in the classroom.	Cooperative learning and frequent English interaction in the classroom.
No clear connection of English literacy with college education.	English literacy important for college education.

TABLE 5. Proposed Speech Communities.

Brutt-Griffler (2002) makes clear that she is not calling countries such as Mexico, Japan, and Jordan bilingual nations. She is pointing out the existence of bilingual speech communities within them. Puerto Rico has a bilingual speech community within the monolingual Spanish speech community. Brutt-Griffler (2002:147) adds that ‘bilingual’ in the speech communities context does not refer to ‘balanced bilinguals’ who possess equal fluency in each language. According to my observations and the data from the interviews, the upper-middle class community is a Type B bilingual speech community under Brutt-Griffler’s conditions. They are an existing bilingual community that has learned English as a second language in Puerto Rico. They are non-native speakers of English, and perhaps some of their English teachers are or were non-native speakers of English. The lower-working class is a separate community and does not fit into any of Brutt-Griffler’s speech community categories. Many of them are Spanish monolinguals and do not share both languages – Spanish and English – with other members of the same community. It seems as if the lower-working class is the existing monolingual Spanish

linguistic community. The lower-working class is acquiring English as a second language, but they are acquiring it at slower pace and with a limited proficiency level when compared to the upper-middle class speech community.

The second research question was how do public and private school children and their families see English as a social mobility mechanism in their future professional lives. The public school focal families are an example of a speech community that sees English as a social mobility mechanism that can guarantee a secure job in a federal branch (postal service, Army). These families see English as a language that can bring economic stability to their children's lives, and this is also a way to see English as a social mobility mechanism to higher social classes, although not the elite social classes. The private school focal families are an example of a speech community that sees English as a door opener for many great opportunities in their children's lives such as high-paying professional jobs, a fulfilling college experience, and the opportunity to learn more languages. English is seen as a social mobility mechanism from upper-middle class to the upper and elite social classes of Puerto Rico.

The third research question asked what kind of interaction do public and private school children have in their English classrooms. The data from the public school English classroom revealed that students did not feel comfortable speaking in English because sometimes their classmates made fun of them. Also, conversation in Spanish and English was a common pattern. In contrast, the students in the English classroom of the private school seemed to have fun while learning and speaking their second language. The teamwork and cooperation in the English classroom of the private school were essential in the English learning process.

8.1. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH. Some of the limitations of this study included the small number of families selected to participate. This is a qualitative research study and does not attempt to generalize the results of the sociocultural practices of the focal families to all of the lower-working class and the upper-middle class families in Puerto Rico. This research covered only two small towns in Puerto Rico, so the additional educational and social resources of the families and schools can be different depending on the geographic location and access to resources in bigger cities. Future research includes expanding the study to other geographical locations in Puerto Rico, including metropolitan areas and elite schools where access to English as a form of cultural capital is extensive and diverse.

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NOTES

¹ I used pseudonyms for the schools' and focal participants' names.