

RECENT RESEARCH carried out by Alicia Pousada

August 2003-May 2004: The role of choice in instructed second language learning: What happens when L2 is learned by choice rather than by mandate?

This was a review of the pertinent research literature in the fields of adult and child instructed second language learning, language attitudes, language awareness, and language policy and planning globally. It revealed that among children, the issue of choice in instructed L2 learning is less salient, since it is usually their parents who are making the choice; however, students in high school may be able to “opt out” of foreign languages. In all cases, parental attitudes, motivation, and expectations are extremely important in assessing the children’s progress, particularly with regard to the acquisition of English worldwide. Among adult learners, it is less clear whether instructed L2 learning progresses more effectively when there is choice involved, since there are so many factors involved in adult second language learning that make separating out the effects of “choice” extremely difficult. The line between choice and mandate is often blurred due to economic and societal pressures. All around the world, learning English is so strongly linked to economic advancement that the question of “free choice” is almost absurd. At a policy level, choice is more complicated than mandate, because choice means tailoring curricula, books, teachers, etc. to different communities or subgroups within a community, and this is expensive. There is also the question of how to evaluate progress and success when the criteria vary from school to school. Finally, for individuals living in Western societies, choice is more satisfying than mandate. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done in this area, since non-Western societies present varying degrees of adherence to this principle, and it is difficult to operationalize degree of satisfaction.

August 2004-May 2005: Language planning efforts in the Caribbean beyond Puerto Rico

This was a review of the pertinent research literature in the field of language policy and planning in the islands of the Caribbean beyond Puerto Rico. In brief, the review revealed that language planning in the Caribbean has been piecemeal and sporadic, although there are growing moves toward regional cooperation and educational planning. There are dramatic differences among the different islands’ language policies due to their varying colonial histories, their current relationships with the former colonial powers, and their status within the world global economy. In recent years, language planning has increased in importance in the region. Nevertheless, there is a strong need for more involvement of local communities in language planning efforts, especially with regard to developing awareness and acceptance of a function for creoles in the domains of education and government. Finally, understanding the situation of language in the Caribbean beyond Puerto Rico can put into perspective some of the language issues that we face here in Puerto Rico. 2

January 2005-April 2005: The mandatory use of English in the federal court of Puerto Rico [Paper presented at International Linguistic Association conference, in NYC on April 15, 2005]

While Spanish is the vernacular in Puerto Rico, English is a required school subject and utilized in certain professional or commercial interactions. One setting in which English is mandatory is the U.S. District Court. Despite the fact that most court personnel and jurors are native Spanish speakers, they are legally required to be competent in English because the proceedings are in English. The language requirement is implemented through special tests for attorneys and a jury selection process which disqualifies non-English-proficient candidates. The policy has clear constitutional implications since it restricts jury participation to a generally upper class minority and calls into question the guarantee of "a jury of one's own peers." Efforts to change the practice have been on-going but unsuccessful. This paper traces the history of the issue from 1900 to the present and argues that switching to Spanish as the court language would be congruent with prevailing notions of human rights and language planning.

August 2005-May 2006: Language planning efforts in the Caribbean beyond Puerto Rico: The success stories of the English-speaking Caribbean

This study is an extension of the research on language policy and planning in the Caribbean beyond Puerto Rico initiated during the 2004-2005 academic year. The focus of the new project is an examination of the cases in which language planning and policy-making have been successful in the schools of the English-speaking Caribbean. The overall hypothesis being explored is that the analysis of successful creole / standard English language education programs in the English-speaking Caribbean can yield findings that have relevance for other school systems working with a native vernacular plus standard English, such as those of Puerto Rico. The specific goals of the project were:

1. To identify creole or standard English language education programs in the English-speaking Caribbean that are considered to be successful by educators, parents, students, and/or the society at large.
2. To determine the features of curricula and teaching materials utilized in such programs which may contribute to the success of the programs.
3. To analyze any existing evaluations or surveys of such programs in search of significant linguistic or pedagogical factors that lead to success.
4. To consider also sociopolitical conditions which may foster success in some cases and thwart it in others.
5. To extract from the research possible guidelines to raise general language awareness in the Caribbean region and, more specifically, help improve English and Spanish education in Puerto Rico.

August 2006-December 2007: The use of English in the federal courts of Puerto Rico.
[Revised and updated for publication in Centro journal. Published in 2008]

See January 2005 for abstract of the research.

May 2008-August 2008: Dónde están los bilingües? La cartografía del idioma en Puerto Rico. [Presented at the Puerto Rico Studies Association conference in October 2008]

En las páginas de turismo del Internet, se describe a Puerto Rico como un territorio "bilingüe;" sin embargo, el recién llegado a la Isla descubre muy pronto que el vernáculo es sin duda ninguna el español y que los espacios sociales y físicos concedidos al inglés son circunscritos. Esta ponencia tiene como propósito la descripción de las comunidades y las redes sociogeográficas dónde se utiliza el inglés (con o sin el español).

The research is based on careful analysis of 2007 census data regarding the distribution of individuals who described themselves as speaking English very well. First, analysis is done by municipalities which reveals expected clustering around the San Juan metro area (with the strange exception of Ciales in the center of the island). Then the analysis is done by barrios which reveals a sprinkling of bilingual niche communities all over the island. The findings are viewed as indicators of neighborhoods where further research should be done.

August 2008-present: La selección libre del idioma en Puerto Rico: A consideration of what would happen if Puerto Ricans were able to freely choose the second language they learn in school. The paper analyzes the issues of motivation, locus of control, coercion, mandate, resistance, and other matters related to freedom of choice.