Ethnolinguistic Identity and Spanish Proficiency in a Paradoxical Situation: The Case of Puerto Rican Return Migrants

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The article addresses the social psychological paradox of learning a language, which in one interethnic situation represents the ingroup language, while in another interethnic context, it represents the outgroup language. This situation characterizes the language-learning experience of most Puerto Rican return migrants (PRRMs) who have found themselves as subordinate members in two different interethnic environments. The study examines the language-learning behaviour of members of this ethnic group by investigating the influence of ethnolinguistic identity on their development of Spanish proficiency in this paradoxical situation. Such an investigation identifies three variables which may mediate PRRMs’ learning of Spanish in Puerto Rico: (a) ethnolinguistic vitality, (b) perceived hardness of linguistic boundaries, (c) awareness of cognitive alternatives to the status quo. The study reveals problematic relationships between (a) ethnic identity, (b) multiple-group membership and Spanish proficiency phenomena which may be peculiar to PRRMs (and other ethnic minority groups who have also found themselves in similar intergroup situations).

Introduction

This is an exploratory study to determine the effect of ethnolinguistic identity on the development of Spanish proficiency in a paradoxical situation, a situation in which Puerto Rican return migrants (PRRMs) face the task of developing proficiency in Spanish, which in one interethnic situation (the United States mainland), represented their ingroup language, the symbol of unity even if it was not spoken fluently, while in the other interethnic situation (Puerto Rico), it represents their outgroup language, the symbol of divisiveness. The study contends that close attention to the role of ethnolinguistic identity and its effect on the development of language proficiency as it relates to PRRMs, might help to identify the variables that influence the extent to which PRRMs develop Spanish proficiency.

Each year thousands of PRRMs attempt to establish a new life on the island. In the same way that earlier waves of Puerto Rican migration to the US had repercussions for the educational system and all the social services there, the return of approximately 35,000 Puerto Ricans per year to the island since 1973 has caused widespread educational and social consequences here (see Zentella, 1990). In order to understand some of the factors responsible for this cyclic migration (as it is frequently called) and their impact on PRRMs, it is necessary to take a brief look at migration within the framework of Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship to the US. After the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, a series of decrees imposed by the military government established the basis of total US
control over tariffs and markets on the island. The incorporation of the military
decrees in the Foraker Act in 1900 facilitated the appropriation of arable lands by
North American corporations thereby restricting the agricultural production of
local landowners. Puerto Rico then embarked upon a capitalist mode of
production and massive industrialisation which led to job losses to peasants and
labourers. As a result, a mass surplus population was created causing an
unemployment crisis on the island. By the 1940s and 1950s this unemployment
situation triggered an exodus of Puerto Ricans to the US mainland in search of
job opportunities and by the mid 1960s the rate of migration had slowed down.
Nevertheless, in the 1970s and 1980s the US capitalist system of economic growth
on the island shifted from a dependence on a labour-intensive industry to a
capital-intensive one — heavily export-oriented, using little local content in its
products, and creating relatively few new jobs on the island. This condition led
to another wave of migration of Puerto Ricans to the US mainland searching for
steadiness of employment, higher income and a better chance for occupational
advancement. (For a more detailed discussion of migratory trends of Puerto
Ricans, readers are directed to Hernández Cruz, 1994.)

However, beginning in 1973, the Northeastern region of the US, the area where
most Puerto Ricans settled, had been heavily hit by a recession leaving large
numbers of Puerto Ricans unemployed and underemployed. Living in the worst
city slums, working in the most menial jobs (for those who have been able to find
employment), facing harsh discrimination both because of their language and
their colour, Puerto Ricans in the US have found it difficult to make the dreams
that brought them from their Caribbean surroundings come true (Hernández
Cruz, 1994). This state of affairs has forced the steady return of about 35,000
Puerto Ricans per year back to the island. Approximately two-thirds of the
children of returnees in the educational system in Puerto Rico were born in the
US and spent more than seven years there before returning to the island (Zentella,
1990). Many learned to function primarily or only in English (because in the US
mainland public schools the medium of instruction is English) and have
excruciating difficulties adjusting to monolingual classes in Puerto Rico which
require knowledge of formal Spanish.

This population characterised by low Spanish proficiency, therefore, poses a
tremendous challenge for educators in Puerto Rico since lack of mastery of the
language mitigates against the adjustment process on the island, educational
advancement, employment, and eventually, acceptance by the Puerto Rican
society. Attempts to increase the Spanish proficiency of PRRMs have been limited
by a dearth of empirical data regarding variables that influence the language-
learning process of this group (Hernández Cruz, 1994). Certainly, a great deal of
effort has been expended on the development of appropriate curricula to provide
quality Spanish instruction to PRRMs and institutions of higher education on the
island have witnessed the establishment of units which provide guidance and
counselling to aid PRRM students in adjusting to the new environment. There
has also been a growing concern with the social and psychological factors
associated with adjustment and their effect on PRRMs’ learning of Spanish
(Claudio, 1983).

While these issues exhibit significant advances in the understanding of the
problems that interfere with the development of Spanish proficiency by PRRMs, this study argues that they possess certain drawbacks since, according to Hernández Cruz (1994), PRRMs' levels of Spanish proficiency continue to be suboptimal. Prime among these drawbacks has been the failure to take into account the fact that PRRMs have been exposed to interethnic situations which may affect how they approach the task of learning Spanish. Consequently, the social and psychological processes underlying ethnonlinguistic identity must be brought to the fore in order to foster an understanding of how the language-learning process might be hindered in interethnic contexts. The study, therefore, submits that an examination of the ethnonlinguistic identity construct (discussed in the next two sections) and its effect on the achievement of Spanish proficiency might help to clarify the complexity of variables that prevent many PRRMs from attaining a high level of Spanish proficiency in spite of concerted efforts to provide quality Spanish instruction.

**Background of the Study**

Claudio (1983) states that PRRMs, having had to adapt to the North American social, cultural, and economic norms, do have lifestyles, social behaviours, and cultural values which are at variance with those of island-raised Puerto Ricans (IRPRs). Claudio's comparison of the two groups goes on to recognise that no single distinctive characteristic appears to polarise the two groups more than language: PRRMs typically have low proficiency in Spanish because in United States mainland public schools they are educated in English and have little or no opportunity to develop mastery of Spanish. She alleges that upon their return to Puerto Rico, they are required to use Spanish in all domains. Due to poor speaking and writing skills, they are often ridiculed, made to feel different, and treated as subordinate members. Language, therefore, creates an ethnic boundary, a cue for interethnic categorisation and distinctiveness. If one accepts Edwards’ (1985: 10) definition of an ethnic group as those individuals who share 'a cultural and historical allegiance to a group, invoking both a felt group boundary and some attachment to an observably real past', then it seems reasonable to conclude that PRRMs and IRPRs represent two different ethnic groups in Puerto Rico. This state of affairs gives rise to an interethnic situation (PRRMs and IRPRs) in which language is a distinctive characteristic of membership in each of these two ethnic groups, a significant dimension for interethnic categorisation, and the medium for facilitating intragroup cohesion.

Rodríguez-Cortés (1990) submits that on the United States mainland, many Puerto Ricans often assert ethnic identification by expressing their 'Puerto Rican-ness', thereby manifesting an allegiance to the Spanish language, the ingroup language, even if it is not spoken fluently. However, when they return to the island to live, they are stigmatised and made to feel separate and subordinate partly because of their low proficiency in Spanish. As a result, it is argued, they are likely to manipulate an ethnic identification which embodies the 'North American component' of their ethnic background and, consequently, manifest an allegiance to English which now represents the ingroup language. The paradox which, therefore, surfaces is that in the former interethnic situation (on the United States mainland), Spanish represented the ingroup language (the
symbol of unity) while in the latter (on the island of Puerto Rico), it is the outgroup language (the symbol of divisiveness). Spanish, as the outgroup language, is not acquired to optimal levels of proficiency by many PRRMs in spite of concerted efforts by educators on the island to provide quality Spanish instruction (Hernández Cruz, 1994). The paper proposes that close attention to the role of the ethnolinguistic identity issues involved in these two interethnic contexts might help to identify the variables that prevent many PRRMs from attaining proficiency in Spanish.

Essential to an understanding of the variables that might influence PRRMs' Spanish proficiency in an interethnic situation, is the theory of ethnolinguistic identity. This theory outlines the conditions necessary for individuals in an interethnic context to maintain, accentuate, or create a favourably valued ethnolinguistic identity. The theory also delineates the converse conditions which lead individuals in an interethnic context to attenuate or relinquish their ethnolinguistic identity (Hildebrandt & Giles, 1983). Members of an ethnic group are often found to accentuate or attenuate their ethnolinguistic identity through the use of language (Woolard & Gahng, 1990). Hildebrandt and Giles postulate that group members in an interethnic situation who have a strong desire to maintain their ethnolinguistic identity will tend to accentuate their ingroup language as a means of attaining linguistic distinctiveness. Such individuals are likely to experience difficulty in, or show resistance to, achieving native-like proficiency in the outgroup language. On the other hand, group members who have a desire to relinquish their ethnolinguistic identity will tend to give up their ingroup language and assimilate to the dominant group, primarily through the acquisition of the dominant language.

Extrapolating from the ethnolinguistic identity theory, PRRMs' level of proficiency in Spanish may, to a large degree, be influenced by the extent of their desire to maintain their ethnolinguistic identity. Thus, a strong ethnolinguistic identity, it is argued, is likely to encourage PRRMs to accentuate the ingroup language, English, and evince low motivation to develop proficiency in Spanish, the language of the outgroup (the IRPRs).

The paper represents an exploratory attempt to identify and explain the ethnolinguistic identity factors that motivate many PRRMs (exposed to two different interethnic situations) to accentuate their ethnolinguistic identity and not achieve proficiency in Spanish, the dominant outgroup language. Recent research in the area of ethnolinguistic identity theory (Clements & Noels, 1992; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990) has predominantly focused on an ethnic group in only one interethnic situation. There has been virtually no attention given to an ethnic group which has had a history of finding itself in two different interethnic situations such that the language to be learned represents both the ingroup language in one interethnic situation and the outgroup language in the other. The study of PRRMs who have found themselves in these two interethnic situations may have great appeal for furthering an understanding of the second-language learning process and the extent to which this process is governed by the attenuation or accentuation of ethnolinguistic behaviours in interethnic contexts.

This study, therefore, attempts to put the ethnolinguistic identity theory under
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Further scrutiny by examining its hypotheses with respect to this unique interethnic situation of PRRMs in the hope of discovering new complexities among variables not already accounted for. The paper first discusses the theoretical edifice upon which ethnolinguistic identity is built. Next, the effect of ethnolinguistic identity on the PRRMs' development of Spanish proficiency is examined and these results are analysed. Finally, based on the analysis of results, suggestions for reformulations of certain dimensions of the ethnolinguistic identity theory are offered and implications (taking into account the sociolinguistic reality of Puerto Rico) are discussed.

**Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory**

Ethnolinguistic identity theory rests largely on the interaction of five social psychological variables, namely, (1) social identity and the related concept of ethnic identification, (2) perceived ethnolinguistic vitality, (3) awareness of cognitive alternatives, (4) perceived hardness or softness of ethnic and linguistic boundaries, and (5) multiple-group memberships. An individual's strength of ethnolinguistic identity is regulated by these variables (Giles & Byrne, 1982; Giles & Johnson, 1987). Each of the five variables will now be briefly discussed.

**Social Identity**

In its basic terms, the theory of social identity proposes that human beings categorize the social world and, thus, perceive themselves as members of various groups. This knowledge of themselves as group members is defined as their social identity, and it may be positive or negative according to how ingroup members perceive themselves in comparison with relevant members of the outgroup (Giles & Johnson, 1987). Tajfel (1982) argues that group members endeavour to achieve a positive social identity by comparing themselves on dimensions which are highly valued by their ingroup members in order to establish favourable comparisons with the relevant outgroup. Such comparisons, he claims, enhance positive social identities which lead to high self-esteem, that is, a positive psychological distinctiveness. Since language is an important dimension of social comparison and ingroup identity, ingroup members are likely to adopt a variety of strategies in order to assert their linguistic distinctiveness, such as maintaining their ingroup language over a long period of time in spite of pressures from the outgroup to linguistically assimilate, accentuating their speech styles, switching to their ingroup language, or, simply not achieving native-like proficiency in the second language, that is, the language of the outgroup (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990).

However, should social comparisons with an outgroup on valued dimensions result in a negative social identity for ingroup members, Tajfel (1982) proposes that the latter will adopt one or more of the strategies of individual mobility, social creativity or social competition in order to attain a more satisfactory social identity. Sachdev and Bourhis (1990) claim that these strategies have linguistic repercussions such as achieving native-like proficiency in the language of the outgroup.

As members of a group strive to achieve a positive social identity, ethnic group membership and, thus, ethnic identification become important for group
members since it affords a positive differentiation from members of the relevant outgroup (van den Berg, 1992). The strength of ethnic identification with the members of the ingroup or the outgroup is, consequently, a contributing factor to the development of one's ethnolinguistic identity.

Giles et al. (1990) assert that the accentuation or attenuation of the ingroup language or ethnic speech markers depends, in part, on the strength of an individual's ethnic identification. It follows, therefore, that group members' disposition to retain their ingroup language or relinquish it and acquire native-like proficiency in the outgroup language depends, to a large extent, on their strength of ethnic identification with their own ingroup or the outgroup. This paper contends that PRRMs who exhibit little or no sense of ethnic identification with the outgroup, that is, IRPRs, are likely to evidence low levels of proficiency in Spanish.

**Ethnolinguistic vitality**

Ethnolinguistic identity is also affected by individuals' cognitive representations of the socio-structural forces operating in interethnic situations. These socio-structural forces have been referred to as ethnolinguistic vitality factors and the more of these factors that members of a particular ethnic group have in their favour, the more vitality they are said to have and the stronger their ethnolinguistic identity is expected to be (Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984). Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) compiled a taxonomy of ethnolinguistic vitality factors and proposed that most of the variables influencing ethnolinguistic vitality can be subsumed under three headings: status, demography, and institutional support. The status factors include economic, political, social, sociohistorical, and language status variables. Therefore, the more an ethnic group has economic and political dominance over its fate, high social status, a highly valued tradition and history, and a language which enjoys prestige, the more vitality the ethnic group is said to have. The demographic factors relate to the numbers and demographic concentration of the group. Thus, the greater the concentration of the group in a particular territory, the higher the absolute number of the ethnic group, and the lower the rate of emigration of ingroup members as well as immigration of outgroup members, the more vitality the ethnic group is expected to have. Institutional support factors involve the extent to which ethnic group members are represented in mass media, education, government, industry, and culture. The more representation members of the group have in these areas, the more vitality they are said to have (Kraemer, 1993; Landry et al., 1991).

It is argued that PRRMs who exhibit high perceived ethnolinguistic vitality from the point of view of their perceived status, demographic concentration, and institutional representativeness in the Puerto Rican society, are more likely to evidence a strong ethnolinguistic identity, an inclination to accentuate the ingroup language, English, and, thus, a low disposition to develop proficiency in Spanish, the outgroup language, even though functional mastery of it is a necessity in Puerto Rico.

**Awareness of cognitive alternatives**

Another factor influencing ethnolinguistic identity is the extent to which
group members are aware of cognitive alternatives to the existing interethnic situation (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977). It has been proposed by these researchers that when a subordinate group perceives no cognitive alternatives to the existing interethnic situation, some group members are likely to find the 'passings' into the higher status, dominant group, an attractive option. In other words, they are likely to consider the position of their own ingroup vis-à-vis the outgroup as stable and legitimate and will attribute their subordinate position in the society to what they perceive as their own inferior characteristics. Such individuals will, therefore, be encouraged to pass into the higher status, dominant outgroup and linguistically assimilate to that group.

Giles et al. (1977) also argue that when subordinate group members do perceive cognitive alternatives to the existing interethnic status quo, they are likely to perceive their status versus that of the outgroup as unstable and illegitimate and will define their low status in terms of the oppressive and unfair strategies of the outgroup. The researchers contend that it is when subordinate group members relate the cause of their stigmatised status to the outgroup's unfair dominance over them, and recognise that the interethnic status quo can be modified, that a motivation for distinctiveness is aroused. In such situations, this distinctiveness is reflected in a strong sense of ethnonlinguistic identity and linguistic distinctiveness (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990). This means that subordinate group members who are aware of cognitive alternatives to their stigmatised status tend to evidence a strong sense of ethnonlinguistic identity, accentuate linguistic distinctiveness, and are, therefore, not likely to achieve native-like proficiency in the outgroup language.

It is hypothesised that PRRMs who are aware of cognitive alternatives to the stigmatised position accorded them in the Puerto Rican society are likely to evince a stronger ethnonlinguistic identity, manifest linguistic distinctiveness through a strong allegiance to the English language, and, therefore, exhibit a low disposition to achieve proficiency in Spanish.

**Hardness vs. softness of ethnic and linguistic boundaries**

Ethnonlinguistic identity is also regulated by group members' perceptions of their ethnic and linguistic boundaries (Clement & Noels, 1992). Giles (1979) discusses a distinction between perceived hard versus soft ingroup boundaries, since members of the same ethnic group frequently do not perceive their group boundaries in the same way and, as a result, respond differently in interethnic encounters. One of the important factors contributing to perceived hardness-softness of linguistic and ethnic boundaries is the issue of boundary distinctiveness. Giles (1979) refers to boundary distinctiveness as the extent to which ingroup and outgroup members can be easily identified, that is, the observable characteristics associated with group membership such as dress style, physiognomy, religion, language, etc. He postulates that if there are clearly perceived distinguishing characteristics associated with each group (such as language difference in the case of PRRMs), the intergroup distinctiveness is likely to be intense and linguistic and ethnic boundaries will be perceived as hard. On the contrary, if there are few or no perceived distinguishing characteristics (language nor dress style, physiognomy, religion, etc.) between the ingroup and the outgroup, then linguistic
and ethnic boundaries will be blurred and perceived to be soft. Giles further states that the harder the linguistic and ethnic boundaries are perceived to be, the more strongly ingroup members will identify with ingroup norms and values and the more salient ethnolinguistic identity will be in interethnic situations. This study submits that the harder PRRMs perceive their linguistic boundaries to be, the more likely they will identify with the ingroup language, English, as a source of ethnolinguistic identity and the less disposed they will be to developing proficiency in Spanish.

Multiple-Group Membership

In addition to ethnic groups, individuals are usually members of other social groups, that is, multiple-group membership, each of which can influence the perceived salience of the ethnic boundary for individuals and, thus, the strength of their identification with the ethnic group (Giles & Johnson, 1987). The ethnolinguistic identity theory suggests that individuals who identify strongly with several social groups have fewer demands placed on their behaviour by any one of these groups than individuals who belong to only a few social groups (Hildebrandt & Giles, 1983). Ethnic attachment, therefore, is likely to be stronger and be present in a wider range of social situations for those who identify with few rather than many other social groups. Also, the greater the proportion of an ethnic group having high multiple-group membership, the softer the ethnic boundaries are likely to be perceived (Hildebrandt & Giles, 1983).

In this paper, it is argued that PRRMs who belong to fewer social groups may exhibit a stronger sense of ethnolinguistic attachment among themselves, perceive ethnic boundaries to be harder, and thus, evince a stronger ethnolinguistic identity which may mitigate against the motivation to develop proficiency in Spanish.

The five main tenets underlying the ethnolinguistic identity theory (see Giles & Johnson, 1987) postulate that individuals of a subordinate group will strive to maintain their ethnolinguistic identity and most likely not acquire native-like proficiency in the dominant group’s language if the following conditions are present:

1. They identify themselves subjectively and strongly as members of a group which views its language as an important symbol of its identity.
2. They are aware of cognitive alternatives to their inferior status.
3. They perceive their ingroup ethnolinguistic vitality to be high.
4. They perceive their ingroup linguistic and ethnic boundaries to be hard and closed.
5. They identify with only a few other social groups.

Thus, Giles & Johnson (1987) hypothesise that subordinate group members will maintain their ethnolinguistic identity and not achieve native-like proficiency in the dominant outgroup’s language if Conditions 1–5 are operant. The converse set of conditions is hypothesised to be congruent with a weak ethnolinguistic identity which is likely to foster an integrative orientation and a strong motivation to acquire native-like proficiency in the dominant outgroup’s language.
Rodriguez-Cortés (1990) contends that when Puerto Ricans return from the United States mainland to live on the island, they are made to feel separate and subordinate by the dominant Puerto Rican population, i.e. interethic discrimination. It is, therefore, hypothesised that PRRMs are likely to assert an ethnic identity which emphasises the ‘North American component’ of their background and, thus, an allegiance to the English language as a symbol of their linguistic distinctiveness. It is predicted that for PRRMs, a strong ethnonuinguistic identity may involve a dispositional tendency to show little or no ethnic identification with IRPRs — a social psychological process likely to intensify the PRRMs’ inclination to accentuate their ingroup language, English, as a source of linguistic distinctiveness, that is, the hardening of linguistic boundaries.

Therefore, a slight adaptation of the ethnonuinguistic identity theory (Conditions 1 and 4) discussed by Giles & Johnson (1987) is in order. The adapted theory which frames this study claims that PRRMs who strive to maintain their ethnonuinguistic identity by accentuating their ingroup language, English, will be less disposed to developing proficiency in Spanish if the following conditions are present:

1. They manifest little or no ethnic identification with IRPRs.
2. They are aware of cognitive alternatives to their subordinate status.
3. They perceive their ethnonuinguistic vitality to be high.
4. They perceive their linguistic boundaries to be hard.
5. They identify with only a few social groups.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and fifty-six students on three university campuses in the northeastern and southwestern sections of the island participated in the study. Subjects (65% females) were between 18 and 27 years of age, born and/or raised on the United States mainland, and of Puerto Rican parents. Sixty-two per cent of the respondents were born and/or raised in New York City and 38% in other cities of the United States. All had resided on the United States mainland for at least 14 years and reported 0–2 semesters of formal instruction in Spanish in public schools on the US mainland. All subjects had lived in Puerto Rico for no more than three years. The completion of three semesters of Spanish placed them in the low-intermediate range of Spanish proficiency at the onset of the study.

Instrument

The instrument consisted of an ethnonuinguistic identity questionnaire and a Spanish proficiency test. The questionnaire had five sections (52 items). The first measured the degree to which PRRMs evinced a sense of ethnic identification with IRPRs. Following Martinelli’s (1984) recommendations, in order to measure the extent to which the PRRMs were identifying with IRPRs, the ethnic identification scale was designed to tap (1) PRRMs’ emotional attachment to the concept of ‘Puerto Rican-ness’, (2) solidarity with IRPRs, and (3) allegiance to Puerto Rican tradition and culture. Consequently, the ethnic identification scale consisted of two subscales, one measuring identifiational ethnicity (IDE),
adapted from Martinelli, and the other measuring cultural ethnicity (CLE), adapted from Sandberg (cited in Martinelli, 1984). The second section of the questionnaire examined subjects’ awareness of cognitive alternatives (ACA) to their status in the Puerto Rican society. The items were developed based on Giles & Johnson’s (1987) description of the construct. Subjects were asked to rate, for example, the extent to which they perceived that their mastery of Spanish would make them more accepted by the Puerto Rican society and the extent to which they perceived that it would be difficult for IRPRs to change the negative stereotypes that they have of PRRMs. The third section consisted of a 19-item perceived ethnolinguistic vitality (ETV) subscale compiled by Bourhis & Rosenthal (1981), which was appropriately adapted for use in the Puerto Rican context. The fourth section (adapted from Giles & Johnson, 1987) was concerned with subjects’ perceived hardness of linguistic boundaries (HLB). Some items required subjects to state, for example, their degree of willingness to converge to their interlocutors in Spanish in situations where they definitely have the power to either converge or diverge. The other items tapped subjects’ attitudes toward social norms prescribing the use of English in the Puerto Rican society. The fifth section was concerned with subjects’ multiple-group memberships (MGM). They were asked to state the number of social groups with which they identified and the nature of the groups. The Spanish proficiency test measured subjects’ knowledge of certain grammatical, discourse and sociolinguistic features of the language reported as indices of linguistic development by Harley et al. (1990).

Results

In order to determine the extent to which proficiency in Spanish can be predicted by ethnolinguistic identity, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed using Spanish proficiency as the dependent variable and IDE, CLE, ACA, ETV, HLB, and MGM as predictors. That is, the aim was to determine which ethnolinguistic identity variables were the best predictors of Spanish proficiency. The regression analysis is summarised in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the first predictor to enter the regression equation was ETV since stepwise multiple regression always enters the predictor that correlates highest with the dependent variable first. In this case, the correlation

<table>
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<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F(R²)</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
<th>F(R²) Change</th>
<th>beta</th>
<th>r</th>
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<td>ETV</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>93.87</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>93.87**</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
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<td>HLB</td>
<td>0.856</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>72.75</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>4.36*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>ACA</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>49.62</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>1.63**</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDE</td>
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<td>0.747</td>
<td>37.60</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>1.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGM</td>
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<td>0.750</td>
<td>29.96</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.867</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>24.66</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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N = 156 for all variables; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.005
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between ETV and Spanish proficiency was -0.84, i.e. high perceived ethnolinguistic vitality correlated very strongly with low proficiency in Spanish. The next variable to enter the equation was the variable which in combination with the first had the highest incremental variance explained; this was ACA. However, because ACA correlated nearly as highly as ETV with Spanish proficiency (r = -0.82), it entered the equation after HLB (r = 0.38). Thus, the variance in Spanish proficiency that might otherwise have been explained by ACA had already been accounted for by ETV. The ETV variable accounted for 71.1% of the variance in Spanish proficiency and the proportion of variance explained is significantly greater than zero, F(1,54) = 4.36, p < 0.05.

Although the proportion of variance explained (which increased from 0.711 to 0.751 as the number of predictors increased from 1 to 6) is significantly greater than zero at the 0.005 level, the additional variance accounted for by each predictor stops being significant after the entry of the third variable, namely ACA. The multiple correlation among the first three predictors and the dependent variable is 0.843 and using all six predictors, it is 0.867. The proportion of variance explained by the first three predictors is 0.741; using all six predictors, it is 0.751. Of the total variance accounted for by all six predictors, 98% is due to the first three. These results suggest that the degree of Spanish proficiency is, to a large extent, predictable by the variables ethnolinguistic vitality (ETV), hardness of linguistic boundaries (HLB), and awareness of cognitive alternatives (ACA). The associations between ETV, HLB, ACA, and Spanish proficiency suggested that it was useful to examine these variables further by a Pearson’s r correlation analysis which appears in Table 2.

The correlations indicated by the multiple-regression analysis were also supported by the Pearson’s r correlational matrix. The results demonstrated that Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were, upheld: low proficiency in Spanish was a function of high perceived ethnolinguistic vitality (Hypothesis 2), perceived hardness of linguistic boundaries (Hypothesis 3), and awareness of cognitive alternatives to the subordinate status (Hypothesis 4). Findings, therefore, partially supported the ethnolinguistic identity theory that the PRRMs’ lack of proficiency in Spanish may be attributed to their awareness of cognitive alternatives to their stigmatised status, their high perceived ingroup vitality on the island, and a perceived hardness of linguistic boundaries. There were no significant relationships

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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IDE</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CLE</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.91**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HLB</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETV</td>
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</table>

All correlations are based on N = 156; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.005
between PRRMs’ ethnic identification with IRPRs and Spanish proficiency (hypothesis 1) nor between multiple-group membership and Spanish proficiency (hypothesis 5).

**Discussion of Results**

It seems contradictory that ethnic identification *did not* significantly correlate with Spanish proficiency given that the accentuation or attenuation of an ingroup language depends in part on the strength of an individual’s ethnic identification. This contradiction is further compounded by the fact that ETV, HLB, and ACA (known to have a strong relationship with ethnic identification) *did* correlate significantly with Spanish proficiency. The question, therefore, becomes: Why didn’t ethnic identification correlate with Spanish proficiency? This result can be examined in light of the PRRMs’ ethnic experience and the effect that this experience may have on language learning. As indicated earlier, PRRMs have had a unique ethnic experience since they have found themselves as subordinate members in two different interethnic situations — (1) on the United States mainland in the dominant Anglo culture and (2) on the island of Puerto Rico as an ethnic group with values and social behaviors often at variance with those of IRPRs.

It can be argued that on the United States mainland, many PRRMs may have felt the need to manipulate ethnic identification to assert their ‘Puerto Rican-ness’ and, thus, the allegiance to Spanish. When Puerto Ricans return to the island to live, because they are made to feel separate and subordinate by IRPRs, that is, interethnic discrimination (Rodríguez Cortés, 1990), they are likely to manipulate an ethnic identification which encompasses the ‘North American component’ of their ethnic background and evidence an allegiance to English. It seems that many PRRMs may have difficulty compromising the two ethnic orientations, the result being a diffuse sense of ethnic attachment. This amorphousness is likely to create two ambivalent forces in a PRRM which may obfuscate the relationship with Spanish proficiency: integrativeness versus fear of assimilation into the new Puerto Rican society. The former represents the desire to become an accepted member of the new society and is the positive affective basis of the motivation to develop proficiency in Spanish. Also, since Spanish was once the ingroup language, it may symbolically still represent an ethnic marker through which a sense of integrativeness with the IRPRs is filtered. The latter is the negative affective basis represented in a fear that developing proficiency in Spanish will lead to a loss of group distinctiveness as well as linguistic distinctiveness.

Evidence of this diffuse ethnic identification is also supported by another contradiction which became apparent in the results: 78% of the PRRMs claimed ‘Puerto Rican’ in response to the item ‘How do you wish to be identified?’ and approximately 69% indicated strong ethnic identification with IRPRs and the Puerto Rican culture. However, responses to the HLB subscale revealed that over 58% of the subjects indicated that most times they were not willing to switch from English to Spanish when speaking to a Puerto Rican who does not speak English well; 61% stated that they often reply in English when served by shop assistants who speak to them in Spanish (divergence); 64% disagreed with the statement ‘Bilingual Puerto Ricans should not speak English among themselves in the
Ethnolinguistic Identity and Spanish Proficiency

presence of Puerto Ricans who do not speak English. Therefore, subjects did perceive linguistic boundaries to be hard and could not be evidencing a strong ethnic identification with the IRPRs.

Similarly, responses to the ACA subscale revealed that subjects did perceive their subordinate status to be potentially changeable. For example, 72% disagreed with the statement, ‘It is very difficult for Puerto Ricans raised on the island to change the negative stereotypes that they have of Puerto Ricans who were raised in the United States’. Eighty-one per cent disagreed with ‘Even if Puerto Rican return migrants become powerful and politically active on the island, they will face social rejection by Puerto Ricans raised on the island’. Subjects also indicated that they perceived their low status to be illegitimate: over 77% commented ‘not at all’ alongside items referring to their perceived power and well-representativeness in institutions on the island. Since PRRMs were aware of cognitive alternatives to their subordinate status and did perceive their status to be illegitimate, they would be likely to define encounters with IRPRs in interethnic terms and, therefore, not manifest a strong ethnic identification with them (see discussion of awareness of cognitive alternatives in the section on Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory).

Consequently, the results on the HLB and ACA subscales lead to the proposition that PRRMs may not be disposed to act in terms of ethnic solidarity with IRPRs. In other words, the contradiction stemming from the PRRMs’ responses to the HLB and ACA subscales and their claim of strong ethnic identification with IRPRs may be evidence of an attempt to adapt to the Puerto Rican lifestyle rather than a manifestation of ethnic identification with IRPRs. This situation is congruent with what Deprez & Persoons (1984: 281) called a ‘defence mechanism’ which serves to hide a considerable amount of uneasiness and frustration, thus protecting a vulnerable self that cannot tolerate the confrontation of the outgroup (in this study, the IRPRs). It is this defence mechanism, it is speculated, that leads PRRMs to conform to the societal norms in Puerto Rico. Therefore, for PRRMs, the issue of ethnic identification does not represent a clear-cut construct and cannot be used as a predictor of Spanish proficiency, at least within the theoretical framework of ethnolinguistic identity theory.

As mentioned earlier, PRRMs have found themselves in two different interethnic situations such that the ingroup language in one situation becomes the outgroup language in another, a phenomenon which not only causes a diffuse identity, but makes it difficult to delineate the dimensions of what constitutes ethnic identification and, therefore, the inability to devise a theory regarding ethnic identification which might account for the dispositional tendencies of PRRMs to develop proficiency in Spanish. It is felt that the notion of ethnic identification would be enriched by extending it to include an examination of the subordinate group’s history of living in different interethnic settings since such a history may create an amorphous identity which is likely to interfere with any empirical attempt to establish a relationship with language learning.

Hypothesis 5 was not upheld in that multiple-group membership did not correlate significantly with Spanish proficiency. This finding contradicts the postulations of the ethnolinguistic identity theory since 84% of the subjects
identified with few social groups (only two), a factor which, according to the
theory, is likely to contribute to a strong sense of ethnolinguistic attachment
among PRRMs with the concomitant attachment to the ingroup language
(English) and an associated low motivation to develop proficiency in Spanish.
The lack of correlation between multiple-group membership and Spanish
proficiency can be explained when the nature of the social groups is taken into
consideration: only 20% of the PRRMs were members of groups which were
linguistic/cultural and political in focus. Forty-three per cent belonged to
recreational groups, 19% were affiliated with religious groups, and 18% did not
report affiliation. The fact that only a small percentage of the PRRMs belonged
to linguistic/cultural and political groups may indicate an individualistic
orientation rather than an affiliative one — a phenomenon probably due to a
diffuse identity stemming from exposure to two different interethnic situations.

Another plausible interpretation for the lack of correlation between multiple-
group membership and Spanish proficiency is that the PRRMs’ involvement in
few social groups may not be a factor which contributes to a strong sense of
ethnolinguistic identity, as predicted by the ethnolinguistic identity theory, but
rather, an avoidance of intergroup conflict with IRPRs and particularly, language
conflict. This interpretation is corroborated by Hernández Cruz’s (1994: 152–4)
findings of positive correlations between PRRMs’ low level of integration in the
Puerto Rican society and anxieties stemming from their use of Spanish. He
discussed the relationship between social integration and language conflict by
referring to interviews which he conducted with several PRRMs. Here is an
excerpt from one of the interviews:

My experience was that I didn’t know Spanish and was embarrassed
several times ... I always answered with a yes, yes, yes, without knowing
what I was asked.
My first problem was the language. I had to keep away from long
conversations. People would laugh at me. I had to overcome this ... Reading
in Spanish was of great help.
I enjoy the climate very much, but sometimes I don’t understand the people
or the teachers. Sometimes my cousins confuse me when they talk and they
would make fun of my Spanish ... I get tongue-twisted and they would
make fun of me.

Based on the proposition that PRRMs’ membership in few social groups may
be an avoidance of intergroup conflicts and, thus, avoidance of language conflict,
it seems logical to assert that multiple-group membership cannot be used as a
predictor of Spanish proficiency as hypothesised by the ethnolinguistic identity
theory. This avoidance of intergroup conflict evidenced by low multiple-group
membership would lead to few tendencies for PRRMs to engage in informal
language acquisition contexts beyond the formal language situations imposed
upon them. The PRRMs’ experience of being in two different interethnic
situations may also have led to their heightened sensitivity to intergroup
distinctiveness and, therefore, their motivation to keep group memberships
minimal.

The results depicting a lack of correlation between multiple-group member-
Ethnolinguistic identity and Spanish proficiency have also underscored the importance of re-examining the ethnolinguistic identity theory from this perspective. Contrary to the propositions of the theory, results indicated that for PRRMs, membership in few social groups did not correlate with Spanish proficiency. It was suggested that the nature of the social groups (particularly social groups with cultural, political, and linguistic focuses) might be a better predictor of Spanish proficiency than is the number of social groups to which PRRMs belong. On intuitive grounds alone, one would expect PRRMs who are members of groups which are cultural and linguistic in focus to be more sensitive to such issues as ethnic categorisation and the salience of the ingroup language than PRRMs who are members of groups which are religious and recreational in focus. The former would not only be more concerned about maintaining their ethnolinguistic identity and linguistic distinctiveness, but may also be less disposed to developing proficiency in Spanish. The relationship between multiple-group membership and language proficiency would be greatly elucidated if the notion of group membership (as a dimension of ethnolinguistic identity theory) is extended to include an analysis of the nature of the social groups to which subordinate group members belong.

Conclusions

This study focused on the unusual interethnic experience of PRRMs who are faced with the task of developing proficiency in Spanish, which in one interethnic situation (the United States mainland), represented the ingroup language, the symbol of solidarity among Puerto Ricans, while in the other interethnic situation (on the island of Puerto Rico), it represents the outgroup language, the symbol of divisiveness.

The study has shown that certain dimensions of ethnolinguistic identity, namely, perceived hardness of linguistic boundaries, awareness of cognitive alternatives to the status quo, and perceived ethnolinguistic vitality are directly related to PRRMs’ development of Spanish proficiency. Operationally, it seems safe to assume that PRRMs do define their encounters with IRPRs in interethnic terms and are likely to view the ingroup language, English, as a cue for interethnic categorisation. In fact, responses to the hardness of linguistic boundaries subscale, suggest that PRRMs’ linguistic behaviour in encounters with IRPRs is indicative of a desire to accentuate a distinctive ethnolinguistic identity. Arguably, then, these results partially underscore the fact that PRRMs’ strength of ethnolinguistic identity can be used to explain their degree of success in achieving proficiency in Spanish.

It was also shown that two hypotheses of the ethnolinguistic identity theory, namely, ethnic identification and multiple-group membership, although not significantly correlated with Spanish proficiency, did point to some very interesting results regarding the unusual interethnic situation in which PRRMs have found themselves. Firstly, it became apparent that the PRRMs’ experience of finding themselves in two different interethnic situations may have led to the inability to compromise two different ethnic orientations causing a diffuse sense of ethnic identification. Secondly, it was argued that regarding PRRMs, the notion of ethnic identification is not really tantamount to ethnic solidarity as defined by the ethnolinguistic identity theory, but a defence mechanism used by PRRMs to
disguise a considerable amount of uneasiness and frustration and to insulate a vulnerable self that cannot tolerate the confrontation of the IRPR outgroup. Thus, this defence mechanism leads PRRMs to be disposed to act in terms of conformity to the Puerto Rican lifestyle rather than in terms of ethnic solidarity with the IRPRs. Thirdly, with respect to multiple-group membership, the study revealed that the PRRMs’ involvement in few social groups may not be a factor which contributes to a strong sense of ethnolinguistic identity as predicted by the ethnolinguistic identity theory, but rather an avoidance of intergroup conflict with IRPRs, particularly, language conflict. Such an interpretation was corroborated by Hernández Cruz (1994). It was asserted that this avoidance of intergroup conflict and, thus, language conflict is likely to lead to few tendencies for PRRMs to engage in informal language acquisition contexts beyond the formal language situations imposed upon them.

Once again, these results illustrate that the degree of Spanish proficiency is clearly related to the intergroup situations in which PRRMs have found themselves. This state of affairs leads PRRMs to define their encounters with the IRPR outgroup in interethnic terms and adopt strategies for ethnolinguistic differentiation as well as psycholinguistic distinctiveness. In turn, the adoption of such strategies is likely to promote tensions with the IRPR outgroup and hinder the development of Spanish proficiency.

Undoubtedly, it would be a serious oversight not to speculate that the tensions and language conflicts stemming from the PRRMs’ encounters with IRPRs may be further exacerbated by Puerto Rico’s language controversy concerning English and Spanish. English, which is the dominant language of the PRRMs, enjoys a great deal of prestige among Puerto Ricans on the island, particularly in the domains of business, technology, science, medicine, and finance. However, there has been constant resistance to the spread and use of English throughout this century. According to Resnick (1993), a major source of resentment toward English comes from its association with efforts to reduce islander identification with Spanish. It is the belief of many (though no empirical evidence exists) that the learning and use of English are responsible for the growing deterioration of Puerto Rican Spanish and the erosion of Puerto Rican cultural identity. Schweers & Vélez (1992: 14) aptly describe the tense relationship between the two languages: ‘English and Spanish are metaphorically paired off as irreconcilable adversaries and Puerto Ricans are challenged to defend their heritage and vernacular’. Thus, the PRRMs who are Americanised and English-dominant find themselves in the midst of a language and culture conflict since they represent the epitomy of what constitutes a genuine threat to the survival of the Puerto Rican vernacular and culture.

Due to the anxiety and tension stemming from ethnolinguistic differentiation and psycholinguistic distinctiveness, the avoidance of interethnic conflict and language conflict with the IRPRs, as well as the tense relationship between English and Spanish on the island, it appears that the majority of PRRMs between the ages of 18 and 27 will tend to do most of their learning of Spanish in the formal context of the classroom, rather than in the naturalistic setting, at least initially. It is recommended, therefore, that the classroom be used as the starting point in
dealing with some of these conflicts and tensions that are likely to influence the development of Spanish proficiency.

The testing of the ethnolinguistic identity theory with PRRMs does emphasise the need to examine Spanish instruction in an interethnic framework. This study does not imply that the problems associated with the development of Spanish proficiency by PRRMs are restricted to ethnolinguistic identity factors. However, these factors do demonstrate that even the most concerted attempts to provide quality Spanish instruction may not be successful if language instruction is not conceived in an interethnic framework. The study also demonstrates another important point: the ethnolinguistic behaviours which showed no relationship to second-language learning (but which were predicted to do so by the ethnolinguistic identity theory), could be construed as a phenomenon endemic to PRRMs who have found themselves as subordinate members in two distinct interethnic situations where the Spanish language has been the symbol of unification in one situation, yet, the symbol of divisiveness in the other. It is, therefore, recommended that other groups with historical interethnic experiences similar to those of the PRRMs be studied using the ethnolinguistic identity theory along with the reformulations that have been proffered in this study. In this way, ethnolinguistic identity theory can have explanatory power for second language learning in a variety of interethnic contexts.

References


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