

Processes of linguistic accommodation within the Puerto Rican diaspora in New Jersey

Procesos de acomodación lingüística dentro de la diáspora puertorriqueña en Nueva Jersey

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the sociocultural and linguistic experiences of eight Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the state of New Jersey. While previous research has shown how the Puerto Rican diaspora has linguistically accommodated across the United States, this study investigates the role of linguistic attitudes and accommodation processes in the maintenance, reinforcement, or erasure of sociophonological and lexical features in Puerto Ricans who have migrated to New Jersey. Through a Grounded Theory approach, this study discloses how these individuals navigate linguistic norms, maintain cultural identity, and challenge racial and linguistic discrimination. Findings show a range of linguistic accommodation strategies, varying from preserving their Puerto Rican Spanish phonological features to code-switch (Spanish-English) and terminology explanation to have mutual understanding when talking to other Spanish-speaking communities..

Keywords: Linguistic Accommodation, Language Attitudes, Code-switching, Grounded-Theory, Language and Identity

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora las experiencias socioculturales y lingüísticas de ocho puertorriqueños que han migrado al estado de Nueva Jersey. Mientras que investigaciones previas han mostrado cómo la diáspora puertorriqueña se ha acomodado lingüísticamente en los Estados Unidos, este estudio investiga el papel de las actitudes lingüísticas y los procesos de acomodación en el mantenimiento, refuerzo o eliminación de características sociofonológicas y léxicas en puertorriqueños que han migrado a Nueva Jersey. A través del enfoque de Teoría Fundamentada, este estudio revela cómo estos individuos navegan las normas lingüísticas, mantienen su identidad cultural y desafían la discriminación racial y lingüística. Los hallazgos muestran una variedad de estrategias de acomodación lingüística, que van desde la preservación de las características fonológicas del español puertorriqueño hasta el cambio de código (español-inglés) y la explicación de terminología para lograr un entendimiento mutuo al hablar con otras comunidades de hispanohablantes.

Palabras clave: Acomodación Lingüística, Actitudes Lingüísticas, Cambio de Código, Teoría Fundamentada, Lengua e Identidad

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores into sociocultural dynamics and linguistic experiences of eight Puerto Rican people living in New Jersey. Several studies focused on perceptions towards specific Spanish allophones typical of Puerto Rican Spanish, which are often associated with different degrees of sociolinguistic attitudes and stereotypes (Ortiz, 2022; Delgado Díaz, Galarza, & Díaz Campos, 2021; Mack, 2010; Valentín-Marquéz, 2006; López Morales 2004; and some others). Though previous research has shown that speakers may adapt their use forms that carry social stigma as part of a process of accommodation to the dominant varieties when joining new communities (Woods & Rivera-Mills, 2012), less is known about these processes within the context of the Puerto Rican diaspora. This case study analyzes narrative interviews, through a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in order to illustrate some of the complexities of language use, negotiation of identity, processes of accommodation, and responses to social dynamics among Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Understanding their migration experiences, cultural shocks, and encounters with linguistic and racial discrimination provides the chance to further unveil the intricate nature of language and identity negotiation.

In this study, the speakers reflected on their linguistic accommodation processes, in some cases even adapting their speech to fit with “standard” regulations due to the negative interactions faced while living and working in New Jersey. These negative interactions provoked a conscious decision on building a sense of duality while trying to navigate linguistic norms within their contexts. Not only did they experience discrimination/judgement for their use of linguistic features specific to their variety, but some of them were also racialized (Ahmed, 2002). This study contributes to the broader discussion on linguistic stereotypes and discrimination. Through its focus on in-depth analysis of personal narratives, this article highlights the importance of considering participants lived experiences in sociolinguistic analysis. Furthermore, these findings reinforce the need to deconstruct perceptions that find non-standard varieties as “impure” (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Leeman & Serafini, 2016).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Spanish in Puerto Rico

The Hispanic Antilles, an archipelago that extends from the eastern tip of Yucatan Peninsula and the southern segment of Florida to the coast of Venezuela, comprises the Greater and Lesser Antilles. These include Spanish-speaking countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico (Alba, 2016). Despite being geographically dispersed across different islands and, additionally, including diverse cultures, there is a shared perception that they all have the same dialect: the Caribbean Spanish. Alba

(2016) notes that there exists dialectal diversity within Caribbean Spanish, influenced by sociocultural and educational factors, although certain linguistic features are shared among Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.

Since 1992, Spanish and English have coexisted as official languages in Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, Spanish has been the common denominator of general use within its population (Ortiz, 2022). Ortiz (2022) contends that its contact with English has contributed to the emergence of a more bilingual society in Puerto Rico, particularly among the elite, young professionals, and Puerto Ricans who move between both territories: the US. and Puerto Rico (also explore Schmidt 2014; and González-Rivera & Ortiz López 2018). Scholars have examined this phenomenon of language contact from various perspectives (Schmidt 2014; Carroll, Rivera, & Santiago 2015; Domínguez-Rosado 2015; *inter alia*), alongside its political implications and its relation to the U.S colonial project (see Malavet, 2000; and Schneider, 2013 for further insights). The sociopolitical status of Puerto Rico has created perceptions that its Spanish has been significantly influenced by English, unlike other Caribbean islands, with some even suggesting that it has evolved into a “mixed language” (Alba, 2016). Despite this, scholars such as López Morales (2004) argue that research on Puerto Rican Spanish shares linguistic features with other Caribbean dialects while also holding its own distinct characteristics in general.

According to Alba (2016), there are seven general features that may describe the Puerto Rican phonological system nowadays (although not all of them are present at the same time and across different populations: 1) tendency towards fricative realization of /tʃ/ as in *muchacho* > [muʃáʃo] (‘boy’), 2) posterior/velar pronunciation of the multiple vibrant /r/ (erre) – like the Castilian “jota”, as in *carro* > [‘ka.ro] (‘car’), 3) the aspiration of syllable-final /s/ such as *esta* > [ehta] (‘this’) and *propuesta* > [propuehta] (‘proposal’), 4) elision of the post-tonic intervocalic /d/ in words such as *acabado* > [acabao] (‘finished’), 5) velarization of word-final /n/ as in *muy bien* > [muy bien] (‘very well’), 6) aspiration of /x/ as in *ejemplo* > [ehemplo] (‘example’), and 7) lateralization of the simple vibrant syllable-final /r/ to /l/, a phenomenon often called ‘lambdacism’ as in *puerta* > [pwél.ta] (‘door’) and *comer* > [komél] (‘to eat’). In regard to the previous sociophonological feature, it is relevant to mention, as Ortiz (2022) states, that the /r/ in coda position presents, at least, three phonetic variants: the alveolar simple or mixed vibrant /r/: *amor* > [a.‘mor] (‘love’), *comer* > [ko.‘mer] (‘to eat’); the lateral /l/: *amor* > [a.‘mol], *comer* > [ko.‘mel], and the retroflex [ɻ]: *amor* > [a.‘moɻ], *comer* > [ko.‘meɻ], and *porque* > [poɻ.‘ke] (‘because’) (see also Armstrong, 2010 to explore more about Puerto Rican Spanish intonation).

Alba (2016) also notes morphosyntactic features that are typically shared among the Spanish-speaking islands in the Antilles, including Puerto Rico. In questions, for instance, there is a tendency to not invert subject-verb order: *¿de dónde tú eres?* (‘where are you from?’); the pluralization of the impersonal verb “*haber*” (‘there is/there are’) as in: “*habían muchas personas en el mercado*” (‘there were many people in the market’) (see also Rivas & Brown 2012, and Claes, 2014 for further reference), and so forth. Other morphosyntactic characteristics that are typical of Puerto Rico are related

to word order in expressions such as “*lo más que*” instead of “*lo que más*” (‘the most’), and the use of gerunds with nominal function due to English influence (Alba, 2016). See also Penas (2007) for further information on semantic and lexical aspects of Puerto Rican Spanish. The truth is that, although some studies have identified common linguistic features among the Puerto Rican population, these features are not consistently used across all social settings in the island. It is also worth asking to what extent these features persist within the Puerto Rican diaspora in states such as New Jersey.

2.2. Indexicality and language attitudes

Taking into account the potential for linguistic forms to be associated with particular social means, and the fact that Puerto Rican Spanish has often been linked with low linguistic prestige (Suárez, 2019), and that its linguistic features deviate from the “standard” (Alfaraz, 2014; Long & Preston, 2002; Niedzielski, 1999), it is critical to review the processes by which linguistic can both reflect and convey social dynamics.

The structural focus in sociolinguistics has been on the correlation between linguistic variation and social-structural categories such as class, age, race, and gender. These characteristics do not directly cause any particular linguistic practice but instead structure the conditions and everyday experiences of individuals, leading to variation taking on meaning in local social practices (Eckert, 2019). Social indexicality, as a cornerstone to this article, is used as a reference framework within speech communities; in this way, indexical signs can evoke a series of associations within an ideological field. It is also relevant to mention that over time, these associations can become widely held and enter a new level of indexicality, accumulating multiple associations and forming an indexical field (Eckert 2008).

This process, whether conscious or unconscious, can be accompanied by language ideologies. Irvine and Gal (2000) focus on the ideological dimensions of linguistic differentiation, evaluating the concepts that participants and observers use to shape their interpretations of people, events, and activities that are relevant to them. They also suggest that linguistic ideologies are not exclusive to immediate participants within a local sociolinguistic system but are also embraced by external observers, including linguists and ethnographers. Though linguistic ideologies play an important role in this research; the main focus will be on language attitudes. As explained by Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021), language attitudes research delves at the ideas about specific varieties held by persons from different sociolinguistic groups; language ideology research looks at societal discourses and how they are produced in media as well as public and private speech (p. 66). Dewaele & Pena Diaz (2018), for instance, analyzed how learner-internal sociobiographical variables and linguistic profiles have an effect on linguistic attitudes towards Spanish, Galician, English, and French in a language school in La Coruña, Galicia (see also Pablos Ortega, 2011 to get an insight on linguistic attitudes and perceptions from British and American informants in regard to the absence of thanking in Spanish).

It is also important to note that not only specific dialects and/or languages are stereotyped, but the combination of two or more languages (e.g. Franglais, Fragnol, Portuñol and Spanglish) is also stigmatized; this due to the monoglossic ideology that many people have (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). In fact, Spanglish has been studied from different approaches and contexts (see Lipski, 2015; Montes-Alcalá, 2009; and Rangel et al. 2015 for further reference). Fallas-Escobar (2024), for instance, presents how Latinx bilingual teacher candidates (TCs) have been conditioned by raciolinguistic ideologies that perceive Spanish as a language that needs to be restricted, and Spanglish/code-switching as a disease or a bad habit.

On the other hand, studies on socio-phonetics and language attitudes within the Puerto Rican community to illustrate how certain groups, due to stereotyping, may later linguistically accommodate to fit into the norm. On one hand, perceptual socio-phonetics has been framed within the broader model of linguistic attitudes. Socio-phonetic linguistic attitudes, as a field of study, has focused on perceptions towards specific allophones, which carry different degrees and/or levels of linguistic, social, and sexual attitudes and stereotypes (Ortiz, 2022). Mack (2011) analyzed how the /s/ has been associated with homosexual males among Puerto Rican university students. Valentín-Márquez (2006) described how the occlusive feature of the /s/ could be adopted in Puerto Rico as a source of the population to linguistically uphold their Puerto Rican identity in contrast to Dominican Spanish. On the other hand, López Morales (1983, 2004) demonstrated how the elision of the /s/ and the velarization of the /r/ increased in populations that belong to a low social class and rural areas (see Emmanuelli, 2000 for further reference). This velarization process has been studied deeply and has shown more complex attitudes, varying from unfavorable perspectives (rural, informal, vulgar) to more neutral and favorable references (Puerto Rican, educated, whiteness), all conditioned by social variables such as gender, education, and geographical location (Delgado Díaz, Galarza, & Díaz Campos, 2021; Delforge, 2013; Roig, 2018; and Valentín-Márquez, 2022, 2006).

2.3. Acculturation – linguistic accommodation

Given the attitudes and ideologies often associated with Puerto Rican Spanish and Puerto Ricans, the question remains as to the ways in which speakers navigate different contexts through social/cultural and/or linguistic mechanisms. Acculturation, as a mechanism, refers to the cultural changes that occur when groups with different cultures have continuous direct contact, leading to changes in the original cultural patterns of one or both groups (Redfield, et al., 1936). It is also relevant to note that not all direct contacts are the same, these vary depending on the context, number, and attitudes of the group (see also Redfield, et al., 1936 to know more about types of contacts and situations in which acculturation processes may occur). Assimilation is one of the many acculturation strategies that immigrants and national minoritized groups may adopt as they work to integrate into mainstream society (Bourhis & El-Geledi, 2010; Bourhis, 2001).

Linguistic accommodation, as a linguistic mechanism or strategy, is defined as the adjustments that speakers make to be more or less linguistically similar to an interlocutor or a social environment. Since accommodation processes can vary depending on the linguistic feature and/or the context, research on linguistic accommodation has used different methodological approaches, including dialogue analysis, shadowing tasks, as well as short and long-term analysis (Ruch & Benito Moreno, 2023).

Studies have shown that phonetic characteristics, segmental duration, linguistic style, syntactic complexity, lexical choices (linguistic features), and even social and cultural aspects play a role in linguistic accommodation (see Barón-Birchenall, 2023 for further reference). The present study focuses on linguistic choices and social dimensions, as part of an examination of the ways in which language attitudes can influence processes of linguistic accommodation.

Previous work in this area suggests that certain linguistic features are more readily adopted during accommodation, with perceptual salience predicting the degree of accommodation, all of these contingent upon participants' attitudes towards the interlocutor's dialect and the prevailing social context (Ruch & Benito Moreno, 2023). For example, Amastae & Satcher (1993) study word-final /n/ velarization and spirantization of Honduran Spanish newly residents among speakers of Northern Mexican Spanish (both features differ in both dialects). In this study, the authors find that when Honduran Spanish speakers are in contact with Northern Mexican Spanish speakers, they tend to accommodate their speech patterns towards the local norms in both features; nonetheless, word-final /n/ velarization shows a more significant change within Hondurans. In a different study, Otheguy & Zentella (2012) analyzed subject personal pronouns (SPPs) in the speech of 140 Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Colombians, Mexicans, and Ecuadorians living in New York City. Their findings show that rates of SPP expression increase with time spent in the city for all groups. Moreover, some of the differences in constraints on SPP expression between Caribbean and Latin American Mainland Spanish varieties diminish over generations. Although this study is normally used to discuss convergence between English and Spanish, their findings might suggest that these speakers are adjusting and/or accommodating their use of SPPs to align more with the linguistic norms of the broader Spanish-speaking community in the city. Although some studies may show that accommodation processes happen inevitably, some others indicate the opposite due to ideological tensions and social/professional networks; people might resist to linguistically accommodate because they want to preserve their identity, beliefs or simply state authority, or group membership (see Ramos-Pellicia, 2014; Ghosh Johnson, 2005; Bayley et al., 2012).

In addition to the motivators of accommodation, intelligibility also plays a relevant role in accommodation processes. If the phonetic features of Dialect X often lead to misunderstandings with speakers of Dialect Y, then (the) speaker(s) of Dialect X are more likely to participate in an accommodation process (Trudgill, 1986 in Ruch & Benito Moreno, 2023). Nielsen (2011) conducted a significant study on functional constraints in short-term accommodation in two experiments of twenty-five L1 speakers (12 F and

13 M) of American English. She examined how altering voice onset time (VOT) in /p/ affected its imitation, finding that participants imitated lengthened VOT but not shortened VOT. This result is interpreted in light of the phonological implications of VOT in English, where lengthening VOT (i.e., aspiration) does not alter phonological distinctions, while shortening VOT may lead to confusion between /p/ and /b/ in minimal pairs like "pan" and "ban". In addition to that, lexical differences within speech communities can also lead to linguistic accommodation in various contexts even among speakers of a specific community (see Bonomi, 2010; Chambers, 1992).

Although linguistic accommodation is used by interlocutors as a strategy for clarity of communication, other reasons why interlocutors accommodate are determined partly due to the result of language attitudes, which are based on ideologies-created by the dominant group and even maintained by different members within minoritized groups (Ramos-Pellicia, 2014). Latinx people are an increasing population in the continental United States. Ramos-Pellicia asserts that throughout these migration processes, diversity conspicuously expands, as a result of linguistic dynamics within specific regions. These linguistic patterns underscore the imperative for every subgroup within the Latinx community to forge and navigate its own unique identity and negotiate with the other. Woods & Rivera-Mills (2012) found that in Mexican American communities in the Pacific Northwest, Salvadorans and Hondurans developed a strategic approach (ethnolinguistic masking) to ease integration into the established Latinx community. In their study, participants not only made use of *voseo*, to different degrees, as an affirmation of Central American solidarity and identity, but also their use of *tú* was observed as linguistic accommodation and a chance to create a sense of Latino solidarity in Mexican - American communities.

Zentella (2020), on the other hand, discusses the linguistic behavior of 94 Puerto Ricans living in San Diego and how their closeness to Mexico and Mexicans in their context have (not) affected their repertoires. In her study, she finds that although her participants are surrounded by Mexican Spanish, they have not significantly adopted Mexican linguistic features, this due to the strong sense of Puerto Rican identity and nationalism that some of her interviewees have. The author also mentions that even though there is linguistic, cultural, and political solidarity with Mexicans, leading to some instances of accommodation, these processes are fluid and in continuous construction, preventing dialect leveling and koineization. Ramos-Pellicia (2014), on her side, also found that lexical borrowing and phonological convergence was evaded from Mexicans-Puerto Ricans due to power ideologies regarding the inferiority of the other groups' speech and how English has influenced and/or corrupted their Spanish language (See also Rosa, 2019; and Potowski, 2014 to check other cases in high schools). The truth is that the maintenance or the erasure of certain linguistic features are not randomized but are also constructed through relations of power (see Van Dijk 1991 for further reference) that pursue attitudes/ideologies.

2.4. Puerto Ricans in New Jersey

Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. is significantly influenced by economic, political, and social conditions rooted in both Spanish and U.S colonial projects. Following the U.S invasion of Puerto Rico during the Spanish-Cuban-American war on July 25, 1898 (Duany, 2003), the colonial government implemented labor contracts to address issues such as poverty and unemployment. This strategy not only facilitated migration to places like Hawaii, New York, and other U.S. localities, but it also met the demand for low-wage labor in North America's agricultural and industrial sectors (Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006). Thus, the ongoing political, economic, and social linkage between the U.S. and Puerto Rico have drawn significant attention to how Puerto Ricans shape and express their identities (Lamboy, 2011), particularly when it comes to linguistic choices. As Zentella (1990) notes, the maintenance of the Spanish language is intricately linked to the preservation of Puerto Rican identity and nationhood.

This connection between migration and identity is highlighted by demographic trends during this century. According to the Pew Research Center (Moslimani, et al. 2023), from 2000 and 2021 in the United States, the Puerto Rican diaspora grew by 71%, increasing from 3.4 million to 5.8 million. During these two decades, the number of people born in Puerto Rico but residing in the 50 states and D.C. rose by 25%, from 1.3 million in 2000 to 1.6 million in 2021. Puerto Ricans are the main Latinx group in seven states: Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania (Zong, 2022). It is also worth noting that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have been the fastest-growing groups in states with smaller Latino populations, compared to South American Latinos, including Venezuelans, Uruguayans, and Colombians, who have had the most rapid growth in states with already established Latino populations (Latino Policy & Politics Institute, 2022).

The Puerto Rican population in New Jersey is approximately 484,727, with a nearly even gender distribution of 50.4% female and 49.6% male (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2023). The same report indicates that 26.9% of Puerto Ricans living in the state are under 18, and 11.0% are aged 65 and over, with an average age of 34.5 years. Moreover, educational achievement among those who are 25 and older reveals that 19.0% have less than a high school diploma, 34.6% are high school graduates or have a GED, 26.6% have some college education or an associate's degree, and 19.9% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (24.5% females, 15.1% males). Employment status data, on the other hand, shows a labor force participation rate of 65.3%, with 58.6% employed and a 9.9% unemployment rate (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2023).

2.5. Research question

Though previous research has shown that speakers may adapt their use forms that carry social stigma as part of a process of accommodation to the dominant varieties when joining new communities (Woods & Rivera-Mills, 2012), less is known whether the use of specific sociophonological and lexical features persist among Puerto Ricans who have

migrated to New Jersey and have been in contact with other Spanish-speaking communities. Consequently, the following research question is posed:

- What is the role of linguistic attitudes and accommodation processes in the maintenance, reinforcement, or erasure of sociophonological and lexical features in Puerto Ricans who have migrated to New Jersey?

2.6. Hypothesis

Regarding this research question, it is hypothesized that sociophonological and lexical features may persist among Puerto Ricans in Spanish multilingual environments like New Jersey, albeit to varying extents. The degree of variation, whether it be maintenance, reinforcement, or attrition of sociophonological and lexical features, will be tied to the individual experiences of the study participants. In other words, individuals who have had positive experiences, i.e., not encountering judgment for their speech when interacting with other Spanish speakers, are likely to maintain their linguistic features. On the other hand, those with negative experiences, condemned and minoritized by their pronunciation and repertoire, may accommodate into the prevalent linguistic norm, resulting in a dual linguistic identity that prompts code-switching based on context and need.

3. METHODS

In this section, I describe the methods used in this study, including the background and language questionnaire, the data collection process, as well as the approach to delve into discourse analysis across the eight participants of this study.

3.1. Background and linguistic survey check

The participants answered a series of questions adapted from the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) (Marian, et al. 2007) to confirm native-speaker status (Hespos & Piccin, 2009) and measure their exposure to other varieties of Spanish while being in New Jersey.

In the following paragraphs, I outline the profiles of all eight participants. Their real names will not be displayed due to privacy purposes; thus, I select a code to refer to each one of them. It is important to note that the following information was taken from each individual interview and the LEAP-Q.

PR01

PR01, a 29-year-old originally from Humacao, Puerto Rico, spent much of his early life in Las Piedras, a town and municipality in the east of the island. After some years, he moved to the western side of Puerto Rico to do his bachelor's degree. In 2017, upon concluding his undergraduate studies, PR01 relocated to New Jersey to continue his education at a public university. He has been living in New Jersey for the past seven years.

PR02

PR02 was born and raised in the central region of Puerto Rico, San Sebastián. He spent around five to six years at a university in Mayagüez where he primarily spoke Spanish, though he began incorporating more English into his daily life, making him use Spanglish. During his third or fourth year of university, PR02 started participating in internships in the United States. He completed internships in Upstate New York, Florida, and finally in New Jersey with an investment banking company. He enjoyed the experience so much that he decided to move to New Jersey in January 2017 after securing a full-time job with the company.

PR03

PR03 was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She moved from Puerto Rico 17 years ago and has been living in New Jersey for the past 13 years. Currently, she works at a public university in New Jersey.

PR04

PR04, a 31-year-old from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, moved to New Jersey in 2017, right after Hurricane María, although her relocation had been planned before the storm. She spent seven years in New Jersey, including four years at a public university, where she pursued a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering.

PR05

PR05, a 27-year-old from San Juan, Puerto Rico, moved directly from his home island to New Jersey. He has been living in New Jersey for the past four years, soon entering his fifth year. PR05 is currently pursuing his Ph.D. His decision to attend the university where he is finishing his studies comes from a positive experience during a summer research program he participated in while finishing his undergraduate studies.

PR06

PR06 was born and raised in Juncos, Puerto Rico. After completing her undergraduate studies, she moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 2011, where she lived for a year. In 2012, she relocated to Madison, Wisconsin, to attend graduate school. After having finished her graduate studies, PR06 moved to New Jersey to pursue a postdoctoral position at a public university. She has been living in New Jersey since 2019.

PR07

PR07 is a 39-year-old woman from Añasco, Puerto Rico. At the age of 21, she moved to New Jersey to pursue her graduate studies at a public university, where she completed her Ph.D. Initially, PR07 planned to return to Puerto Rico to work at a university after her studies. However, meeting her husband changed her plans, and she has now been living in New Jersey for six and a half years.

PR08

PR08 was born in Puerto Rico, where she lived until she was 11 years old. From the ages of 11 to 15, she lived in Mexico due to her father's job relocation. After returning to Puerto Rico, she began studying accounting at a university there. During her university

years, her father was transferred to the United States, and PR08 decided to move to New Jersey to complete her studies. After having graduated, she got a job and has stayed in New Jersey ever since.

3.2. Interview and interview analyses

Sociolinguistic interviews were performed between March and April in 2024 via Zoom and participants were recruited using the 'snowball method' (Oliver, 2022; Schilling, 2013) in which the first participant introduced a friend of their friend, and so on. Thus, the eight speakers participated in individual 40-minute semi-structured interviews in Spanish, which included open-ended questions on topics such as migration processes, experiences with other Spanish-speaking communities, language attitudes, Spanish use, and racial and linguistic discrimination. The central questions are listed in Table 1. It is also important to note that other questions came up, but were unique to each interview, since they followed the flow of each conversation organically.

1. ¿Qué experiencias positivas y negativas puedes rescatar de tu proceso migratorio a Nueva Jersey?
2. ¿Cómo ha evolucionado o cambiado el español a lo largo de tu vida y qué factores han influido en estos cambios? Considera tu uso del español durante la infancia, la adolescencia y la adultez.
3. ¿Notas alguna diferencia en tu uso del español en comparación con otras personas de tu comunidad (vecinos, amigos, familiares, colegas que hablan un dialecto diferente o similar del español)? ¿Cuáles son esas diferencias?
4. ¿Puedes recordar alguna situación en la que tus vecinos u otras personas de la comunidad hispanohablante no comprendieran el mensaje que querías transmitir? ¿A qué factores atribuyes esta situación: vocabulario, pronunciación, orden de las oraciones,...
5. ¿Te has encontrado con estereotipos lingüísticos o prejuicios sobre la forma en la cual usas el español? Si es así, ¿cómo te afectaron?
6. En contextos académicos y/o más formales, ¿has sentido que necesitas usar una variedad más "estándar" del español?
7. ¿Qué factores/formas lingüísticas son típicas de las personas que vienen de Puerto Rico?

Table # 1 – Interview Questionnaire

After transcribing orthographically the interviews, I utilized a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to identify recurrent themes in participants' narratives. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research methodology widely used in the social sciences and other fields. Unlike traditional approaches, it follows a nonlinear process where theory emerges from the data collected (interviews, as it is the case of this study), letting the data guide the research instead of relying on predetermined frameworks. After having collected data, researchers analyze the information to identify recurrent themes and relationships among variables through a coding process. This exploration allows researchers to classify and conceptualize findings effectively (see the following section).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Interview results

In this section, I review each question (see Table 1) and identify recurrent themes in participants' narratives. I also include excerpts from the interviews that illustrate these recurrent themes. Overall, findings typify that the eight participants accommodate linguistically to their contexts, while some of them prefer to explain the word/phrases they use (lexicon) and/or lower their speech rates, others code-switch (Spanish - English) in order to avoid any type of misunderstanding. Commentaries about the way they use their Spanish have also influenced their linguistic choices (check the discussion section to see more points of intersectionality between language, language attitudes, migration, and accommodation processes).

4.1.1. Migration processes

One recurrent theme in participants' narratives is related to migration processes. Many interviewees valued having a support network of friends or colleagues from Puerto Rico, which eased their transition to New Jersey. Several of them found New Jersey to be a great state to migrate to, whether it was through seeing similarities to their hometowns, speaking their first language, or having exposure to diverse cultures and opportunities. As a matter of fact, one of them, PR02, made an emphasis on how his life has positively changed after leaving Puerto Rico.

- (1) *Lo más positivo ha sido, pues calidad de vida, por más que sea la calidad de vida en Nueva Jersey, es mejor que en Puerto Rico en el sentido de muchas cosas, necesidades, cosas tan sencillas como saber que vas a tener luz y electricidad y agua todo el tiempo, eso pues cambia bastante, en Puerto Rico nunca sabes cuándo vas a tener luz, cuándo vas a tener el agua, pues eso fue bien positivo, me gustó muchísimo. (PR02)*

In (1), PR02 mentions how access to utilities (water and electricity) has improved his lifestyle after having migrated to New Jersey. Negative experiences, on the other side, varied. PR01 mentioned that adjusting to the cold weather and being away from family were significant challenges for him. Financial stress was another subject, PR02 stated that dealing with expenses and loans during the initial months was particularly overwhelming. A sense of isolation from the community (PR03) and difficulties in maintaining connections after the pandemic also contributed to negative stances (PR04). Issues with stereotypes and misunderstandings, mainly regarding personal identity, and background, was another topic. Some of them experienced frustrations due to assumptions and/or stereotypes about their language skills or physical features, which led to feelings of being judged or misinterpreted (PR01, PR04, PR06, PR07). As a matter of fact, PR01 mentioned having to explain others where he comes from, and the relation Puerto Rico has with the United States.

- (2) *Al principio llegué a tener algunas situaciones cuando salía a algunos sitios y me pedían mi identificación y veían que era de Puerto Rico, y me decían que eso no es*

aceptable, que necesitaba tener mi pasaporte y después tenía que explicarles que yo soy ciudadano americano, entonces había, pues a veces, hubo varias veces que hubo esas situaciones donde, pues yo diría que por ignorancia, no, no me, no, pues no me dejaban entrar en algún sitio y tuve que explicarle, obviamente eso era frustrante. (PR01)

In (2), as illustrated by participant PR01, he felt that many people did not accept his American citizenship due to his Puerto Rican origin. Although he links these experiences to people's ignorance, it has caused him a feeling of frustration. PR04, on the other hand, specified not fitting into the "stereotypical spicy Latina" due to her personality. She also mentioned facing situations where people are surprised by her language skills (they do not expect her to speak Spanish because she is white, nor she is supposed to speak good English because she is Latina).

(3) Creo que, como que, mucho prejuicio de cómo una persona puertorriqueña actúa. Ok. O sea, por ejemplo, yo soy introvertida, no sé bailar, no escucho tantísimo reggaetón. Como cosas que no soy el "stereotypical spicy latina", I guess. Ajá, y la gente entonces, cuando se ve contigo dice como ¿Pero cómo? Si eres el opuesto. He tenido ocasiones que, por ejemplo, en el trabajo le sorprende que mi primer idioma sea el español. Y no sé si eso es un tipo de micro agresión. Sí. Porque a veces como que, oh, hablas buen inglés, no como esas otras personas. (PR04)

PR07 has also encountered people making comments about the way she looks and her language skills, leading to feelings of discomfort due to microaggressions and racism.

(4) Pero como la gente espera que sea un puertorriqueño, pues yo no me veo así. Tengo ojos verdes, soy blanca, mi familia no se ve igual que yo, pero sí que yo me veo. Es difícil, mi apellido casado no es uno típico, obviamente es egipcio, no es latino. Todos estos comentarios como que ay, pero tu inglés... no tiene acento, tú no puedes ser puertorriqueña o tú no te ves puertorriqueña. ¿Tú estás segura que tú eres puertorriqueña? Esas cosas así que uno tiene que estar batallando cada rato, son lo más incómodo que yo he tenido que pasar. Situaciones incómodas con microagresiones y racismo, o la gente trata de hacerme sentir mejor. (PR07)

Only two participants narrated not encountering any kind of issues within their migration processes (PR05, PR08).

4.1.2. Spanish throughout their lives and differences with other Spanish speaking communities

A second theme has to do with how their Spanish has evolved or changed. For some, their Spanish remains largely unchanged, some stated maintaining their accent and fluency (PR01, PR04, PR05). Others have experienced shifts, such as increased use of Spanglish due to the influence of English in their daily lives and work environments (PR02, PR04 PR06, PR07). Here are some of their narratives:

(5) *Ahora hay muchas veces que yo como que estoy hablando en español y de verdad no consigo la palabra en español, y pues ahí es que cambio, cambio a inglés y sigo la oración en inglés, eso es como que mitad español.* (PR02)

In (5), Pr02 feels that whenever he is speaking in Spanish, there are certain words he cannot achieve, meaning that it is hard for him to express what he wants; thus, he chooses to code-switch from Spanish to English.

(6) *Mi padre me dijo que mi acento sigue teniendo mancha de plátano, como le dicen, y no, por ejemplo, nosotros tenemos unos amigos que el acento se escucha como más gringo, I guess, y pues como que más suave, no sé, pero por lo menos mi papá y mi mamá no me ha comentado nada. Si tenía una compañera que era una postdoc chilena que le daba como un poquito de gracia que uso mucho Spanglish, en una oración puedo tener una palabra, uno en español, uno en inglés y uno en español.* (PR04)

In (6), her family does not think her accent has changed, they even suggest that it keeps on having *mancha de plátano*. On the other hand, her postdoctoral classmate found little bit funny the fact that PR04 would use a lot of Spanglish in a sentence. PR06, on her side, also mentioned using specific languages at specific contexts (she uses English at work, Spanish with friends, and Spanglish at home).

(7) *En New Jersey, a veces es hasta 50-50, es como lo que tengo que mi inglés profesional, y tengo compañeras latinas que le hablo en español y en mi casa yo hablo Spanglish.* (PR06)

Some of the interviewees found that their ability to express themselves in Spanish, mostly in professional contexts, has lessened, often because they learned specific terms and concepts in English (PR03, PR04, PR06). A few of them have also noted a more noticeable impact on their written Spanish, feeling less comfortable with grammar and writing productions (PR03, PR07). PR08, on her side, mentioned that previous experiences in other Spanish-speaking countries have influenced her accent, leading to perceptible changes that reflect regional influences from places like Mexico or Colombia.

(8) *Yo creo que el cambio más grande de mi español fue el haber vivido en México, ya yo, cuando regresé a Puerto Rico, mis familiares me decían que tenía un acento mexicano, y cuando entré a la escuela superior, la high school de aquí, mi mejor amiga en la high school era una chica colombiana de Cali, y nos hicimos mejores amigas, y ella pues también tenía su acento caleño, y todo el mundo me decía que yo parecía que tenía acento de Cali, yo fui más con mi amiga que cambié mi acento, y con México.* (PR08)

In (8), Pr08 narrates how living in Mexico influenced her Spanish, to the point that her family in Puerto Rico noticed a Mexican accent when she returned. Later, in high school, people around her would tell that she seemed to have a *caleño* accent. The interviewee, in this case, attributes her accent changes primarily to her time in Mexico and her close friendship with her Colombian friend.

Apart from discussing how their own Spanish has changed, interviewees also examined how their Spanish use differs from that of other Spanish-speaking communities. PR01, for instance, felt he consciously accommodates his language to be more formal or understandable to people from different Spanish-speaking countries.

(9) *Sí, creo que, creo que sí, trato de hacer un poquito más formal el lenguaje, porque a veces cuando en Puerto Rico utilizamos mucha jerga y mucha, este, este, nuestro, este, habla, manera de hablar coloquial, es diferente, así que trato de, como conscientemente, tratar de no utilizar palabras que puedan ser confusas, este, para la gente de otros, de otros países, pero, este, pues creo que sí, eso es lo más, lo más que cambia. (PR01)*

In (9), Pr01 mentions to consciously accommodate his discourse in order to be more formal; thus, he avoids Puerto Rican slang and/or expressions that may confuse people from other Spanish-speaking countries. PR02, on his side, noticed that when multiple dialects and accents from Latinxs intersect, particularly while working in diverse settings, he chooses English over Spanish because he believes it is “more direct”, and it goes straight to the point.

(10) *Bueno, en el trabajo mismo conocí muchos colombianos, venezolanos, tuve amigos mexicanos y ahí fue interesante porque dependiendo de dónde éramos, el español de nosotros es bien rápido, y el de los dominicanos también es bien rápido y había muchas veces que yo diría que, cuando, cuando incluyen muchas distintas como que nacionalidades, el español cambia un montón, los significados de las palabras cambian y lo que, lo que terminaba pasando, que era interesante en el, por lo menos en el setting del trabajo, era que se nos hacía más fácil hablar en inglés porque el inglés de todos era bien neutro, era como que bien directo el grano, esto es lo que hay y ya. (PR02)*

In (10), as stated by participant PR02, working with colleagues from different Latin American countries made a context where meanings of words repeatedly varied across nationalities. As a result, it was easier for them to communicate in English because he felt it was more straightforward for everyone involved in the communication process.

Additionally, differences in vocabulary and expressions related to food or everyday items was also part of the conversation (PR03, PR04, PR05, PR07), as individuals accommodate to learn new terms from different Spanish-speaking contexts (PR06, PR08).

(11) *Durante mi tiempo de vivir en Estados Unidos, he recogido muchas palabras que no eran o no son del dialecto puertorriqueño. So, en la comida, lo más, lo más, este como a mi esposo le digo como que... pues, el choclo, para nosotros es la mazorca, este o cuando hablo con mi suegra también tengo que ver, o le pregunto a mi suegra qué es lo que usted se refiere con x y o z que no sé o tengo que googlearlo para ver cuál es cuál es la foto de esa fruta o la verdura, pero es más como que pues yo aprendo como ella dice las cosas y yo le digo a ella cómo nosotros decimos, decimos las cosas pero yo creo que la mayoría es en la comida. Que encuentras como las diferencias. (PR06)*

In (11), as expressed by PR06, living in the United States has made her use words that are not necessarily related to the Puerto Rican dialect (she mentions *choclo* as a new term she learned through her husband). She also feels that clarifying or looking up for fruit and vegetables names is important, especially when communicating with her mother-in-law. It is important to note that this understanding/clarification process, according to her, is bidirectional.

4.1.3. Language-related misunderstanding across Spanish-speaking communities

PR01 mentioned that Puerto Ricans often speak quickly, shorten words, or they “modify” pronunciations, such as substituting /r/ with /l/, which can lead to misunderstandings. In one case, he remembered coming back to how he linguistically accommodates to his girlfriend while talking about *el fregadero*, so she could understand what he was referring to (he consciously tries not to use the word).

- (12) *Un poco con mi novia, pues ella, lo que yo le digo el fregadero, que es donde uno hace los trastes y lava los platos, ella le dice el caño, entonces yo trato de no decir fregadero conscientemente porque sé que a lo mejor no está tan acostumbrada a esa palabra, por ejemplo, pero sí, creo que sí, hablar rápido y cortar palabras, cortamos mucho las palabras.* (PR01)

PR02 described confusion arising from regional differences in terminology, such as using *parcha* instead of *maracuyá* for passion fruit and noted how using the English word helped bridge the gap.

- (13) *Con la parcha, con la fruta, perfecto. Este, había momentos en los que iba a pedir, por ejemplo, un zapete, qué sé yo, de parcha, o un mojito con parcha. Eso no es parcha en muchos estados, en muchos países, ¿Cómo es que se llama? [Maracuyá]. Sí, maracuyá, nosotros le decíamos parcha, y era como que, parcha, pues, un mojito de parcha, y era como que, ¿Qué? Entonces, pues, en esos momentos era como que, pues, passion fruit, y entonces ahí como que los dos lo entendíamos, porque passion fruit era lo mismo para en inglés.* (PR02)

PR03 felt that while she is understood, she sometimes struggles with translating medical or work-related terms, which can cause her family to notice her difficulties while communicating in specific contexts. PR04 also recounted a case where her use of *zafacón*, word used by many Puerto Ricans to refer to trash can, confused a Mexican neighbor, who was unfamiliar with the term.

- (14) *Pues la semana pasada, yo le pregunté a mi vecino si podía sacar el zafacón y él no supo a qué me refería, entonces yo no, como que le dije pues el trash can, pero el mexicano, eso no sé si era el bote de basura, o algo así, pero yo le dije el zafacón, y pues él no, como que no entendió lo que quería decir.* (PR04)

PR05 also recalled a situation where differing food vocabulary led to confusion during a kitchen task. PR06, on her side, shared that she often has to explain or clarify regional

food names and phrases. Refer at the following transcription of a conversation we had about a particular dessert and the way she linguistically accommodates to specific situations.

- (15) *Ya, creo que en momentos he dicho cosas, y es más creo que va a la comida o alguna costumbre o algo que yo utilice una palabra o una frase, y entonces... pero yo siempre estoy aware most of the time que o asumo que la persona no lo va a entender. Yo explico lo que significa el dicho o explico lo que significa la comida que estoy tratando de explicar. (PR06)*
- (16) *Por ejemplo para los peruanos, para los puertorriqueños este postre se llama brazo gitano. Yo no sé cómo se llama en Colombia. Es un queque que es así. (PR06)*
- (17) *¿El que es por fuera rosado? (Interviewer)*
- (18) *En un rollito. Ajá. Y tiene la cremita adentro. (PR06)*
- (19) *Sí, a eso le llamamos brazo de reina. (Interviewer)*
- (20) *Pues para ustedes brazo de reina, para nosotros brazo gitano y para los peruanos se llama pionono creo que es. (PR06)*
- (21) *So, verdad. Diferente. Yo como que, ah no, que si el brazo y entonces yo le explico. (PR06)*
- (22) *La comida es muy importante. Son todos los ejemplos que te voy a dar de comida. (PR06)*
- (23) *Igual cuando yo le hablo a mi esposo, como el otro día, no me acuerdo a qué lo envié. Necesito que me hagas... no sé qué. Y él...y yo esperando que lo hiciera. Y es, pero es que no entiendo qué es lo que tú estás diciendo. Y entonces me hizo decirlo en inglés. (PR06)*
- (24) *Entonces yo lo digo en inglés, pero le digo, esa palabra significa esto. Para que la aprendas. (PR06)*

In this conversation, Pr06 mentions how she linguistically accommodates, especially when using food terminology. With her husband, the word *brazo gitano*, to refer to a swiss roll, would have to be switched to *pionino* in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding. In some other cases, she code-switches (Spanish - English); nonetheless, she would also teach her husband the word, so he would have a reference on how to use that word in her dialect.

Overall, these narratives feature the challenges of communication within diverse Spanish-speaking communities, emphasizing the importance of linguistic accommodation in order to have mutual understanding.

4.1.4. Stereotypes about Puerto Rican Spanish

Throughout the interviews, participants noted linguistic features that are typical from Puerto Ricans. In this case, PR01 considers that linguistic markers vary a lot, leading to no single feature applying to everyone from Puerto Rico. PR02 highlights the replacement of the /r/ for an /l/ as a strong marker of Puerto Rican Spanish. He also mentions the trend to shorten double R sounds (e.g., *carro* > [ˈkaɾo] ('car')) and a fast, melodic speech pattern, similar to Cuban Spanish but less intense. PR03 identifies phrases associated with Puerto Rico such as "ay, bendito," the shortening of words (e.g., "pal" instead of "para"), and the tendency to replace or drop final R sounds. PR04 mentioned the aspiration of the /s/ sound, changing it to an /h/ sound, to be as a strong marker of Puerto Rican Spanish. PR05 also indicated the /r/ to /l/ swap and the tendency to cut off /s/ sounds at the end of words and transform them into a J sound (e.g., [loh ˈpaxaroh]). He also observes the affinity to shorten words and the generally fast, somewhat melodic speech pattern (similar to PR02). PR07 mentioned the /r/ to /l/ swap, the use of Spanglish, and informal expressions and/or words like "pana" and "mijo." PR08 identifies the R to L substitution and certain specific words as key markers of Puerto Rican Spanish.

While many interviewees mentioned that Puerto Ricans exhibit a rich diversity in their linguistic repertoires, some participants shared their experiences with encountering linguistic stereotypes or biases about their Spanish use. PR01 mentioned that Mexicans sometimes tease Puerto Ricans about not pronouncing the [r] correctly, though he did not find it negative.

- (25) *He sabido hablar con gente mexicana y tratan de, tú sabes, nosotros, otra cosa que decimos en Puerto Rico es pegarte un vellón, es vacilarte, como que make fun of you, pues entonces tratan de pegarme un vellón diciendo como que va a Puerto Rico, diciendo que no pronunciamos la 'R', y ese tipo de cosas, sí lo he visto. No ha sido en una situación negativa, pero pues sí, ese tipo de cosas sí persisten y es una percepción que tiene la gente de cómo hablan los puertorriqueños.* (PR01)

PR02 also mentioned a situation where he was mocked for using specific lexicon of Puerto Rican speech (in this case, the word was *coño*) which felt awkward but later was understood as a stereotype.

- (26) *Fue una vez, estábamos en uno de las paradas de los trenes, y nosotros estamos hablando, y nosotros, pues, usamos la palabra con C mucho en nuestro, like, day to day. Entonces, pues, otra persona nos para, y como que, nos empieza como que a decir la palabra muchas veces, y nosotros nos quedamos como que, ¿Pero qué está pasando? Y él, ustedes son puertorriqueños, ¿verdad? Y pues, como que ese, como que se tiró el estereotipo de que nosotros decimos la palabra mucho, y para referirnos a nosotros, y como que, fue medio raro, pero pues lo entendemos, porque pues, es lo que, es de la manera que hablamos.* (PR02)

PR03 and PR04 have not experienced linguistic stereotypes in New Jersey, nonetheless, PR04 has noticed that Mexicans joked about Puerto Ricans replacing /r/ with /l/ when she was living in Mexico.

- (27) *Cuando yo hice como un apartelamiento en México, y como que, pues a veces que cambiamos la R por la L, y pues el chiste era como que cada vez que pasaba alguien de Puerto Rico, decían... Puelto Lico.* (PR04)

PR05 noted that while he does not feel judged, there is awareness among Puerto Ricans about their distinctive use of /l/ and /r/. PR06 highlighted stereotypes about Puerto Ricans speaking with a "reggaeton" accent.

- (28) *Ya, y para el puertorriqueño es que habla cantado, que se come las erres, como que habla como los reggaetoneros, o esos estereotipos.* (PR06)

PR07 has also encountered comments from Spanish-speaking communities that suggests that Puerto Rican Spanish is less cultured or *matado* ('broken'), and that people can immediately identify her as Caribbean due to her accent.

- (29) *Es decir, gente de pronto ,que dice como no, que el español de Puerto Rico no es español o cosas por el estilo. Hay comentarios así, como que el español de Puerto Rico es tan inculto o matado, como dicen. La amiga mía que era de España me decía, es que a ustedes se les nota súper rápido que no son de aquí, porque si tú eres de España y hablas así, saben rápido que tú eres caribeño y es otra cosa. Yo, ok, yo ni sabía. Con las setas, yo puedo hacer las setas también.* (PR07)

PR08, who in the past changed her accent to avoid the Puerto Rican /r/ sound, has not faced any issues with her Spanish since then, although she recalls receiving criticism for her accent when she was younger and living in Mexico.

- (30) *No yo creo que lo que me pasó a mí fue el cambio... lo tuve cuando era joven y lo incorporé de una manera que yo no tengo mi acento puertorriqueño, entonces creo que fue de muy joven que recibí esa, ese mensaje de que los puertorriqueños o que no hablaba correctamente el español ¿verdad? Y al yo haberlo cambiado me quedé así, ya, yo sí tuve, no sé si tú notas, pero mucha gente me dice que yo no tengo acento puertorriqueño. Yo siento ciertos matices.* (PR08)

- (31) *Pero yo creo que de seguro tendré muchos matices, pero la R, que es lo número uno de hablar con la L ,eso yo lo eliminé... entonces eso ya no es parte de cómo yo hablo, entonces cuando yo hablo en la escuela con alguien que habla español, no, nadie se ha burlado, no he tenido problema, nadie me ha dicho que no entiende lo que digo, no he tenido ese problema... lo tuve de jovencita. En México, claro, ya llegando ya a la comunidad mexicana.* (PR08)

4.1.5. Using "standard" Spanish

In addition to pointing out linguistic stereotypes, another recurrent theme was related to the setting in which participants used English or Spanish. interviewees mentioned

using English in most of their “formal” contexts, so there was no Spanish involved. However, some of them recalled specific situations where they had to accommodate to their audience. For instance, PR01 feels that whenever he is presenting a poster, he tries to formalize or to make more formal the way he speaks.

(32) *Dando una presentación o estoy en una presentación de un póster, digamos, y viene una gente que habla español, a donde mí, trato de conscientemente no utilizar tantas, a veces se me escapa un poquito, pero se me sale un poco lo informal, pero siempre trato de, por lo menos, tratar de formalizar un poco el lenguaje.* (PR01)

PR06, on her side, tries to avoid any slangs or words that will have a different meaning in specific contexts. In the following excerpt, she mentions that whenever she is in front of Colombian or Mexican students, she would avoid using the word *coger*, which in her dialect means to grab something, but for others it may have a different connotation.

(33) *No, trato de, he aprendido a estar más consciente de no utilizar palabras que son slang o que yo he aprendido que tienen otro significado. So, si sé que el estudiante es colombiano o es mexicano, pues sé que algunas palabras no debo de decir, como coger con un mexicano, porque para el puertorriqueño es agarrar algo versus que para el mexicano es otra cosa.* (PR06)

Interestingly, more than half of the interviewees mentioned that Spanish was used in more “informal” contexts: family and friends, such was the case of PR02 where he normally uses English at work, because he feels it is more neutral, and Spanish to socialize in other settings.

(34) *Por lo menos en el setting del trabajo, era que se nos hacía más fácil hablar en inglés porque el inglés de todos era bien neutro, era como que bien directo el grano, esto es lo que hay y ya, y pues cuando salíamos a hacer actividades sociales y eso, pues entonces hablábamos español, pero, pero como que en ese setting de trabajo nos quedábamos en inglés mayormente por eso, por tratar de como evitar decir algo que significa otra cosa o que no podíamos entender.* (PR02)

PR08 is the only one who interacts with Spanish speakers all of the time in “formal” contexts (she is a social worker), although she says that, in her case, she tries to accommodate to people’s dialect.

5. DISCUSSION

Overall, all of these narratives feature a variety of experiences related to participants’ migration, acculturation, and accommodation processes from Puerto Rico to New Jersey. In these interviews, participants re-counted positive and negative livings while arriving to their new place, and how each one of them linguistically and culturally accommodated to their contexts, especially when being in contact with other Spanish-speaking communities.

In terms of their migration experiences, many participants expressed appreciation for the improved quality of life in New Jersey, which, in general terms, in their view, includes better access to utilities and a stable work environment. As a matter of fact, PR02 expresses appreciation into how much his daily life has improved. This echoes the general feeling from the other interviewees who also find perks in living in New Jersey (see also Palmer, 1990, for more narratives/perspectives on migration from the Caribbean, and Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014 for more information about *lifestyle migration* research).

On the other side, some participants also reported difficulties such as adapting to the cold weather, missing their family, facing financial anxiety (PR01 and PR02), feeling isolated (PR03), maintaining connections after the pandemic (PR04) were some notable concerns, not to mention general stereotypes and misunderstandings about identity. PR01 experienced issues with identification and citizenship, a well-documented issue among Puerto Ricans living in the continental U.S. due to unequal U.S. citizenship (Valle, 2019). PR04 encountered stereotypes about how Puerto Ricans should look like and speak a language. Similarly, PR07 reported microaggressions and racial biases based on her appearance and English accent, due to the fact that she did not sound as a "Latinx" according to others. Despite Latinxs' heterogeneous linguistic, historical and, therefore, cultural background, the never-ending stereotype that links them to the Spanish language and makes them sound like Latinx while speaking English depicts processes of indexicality. Rosa (2019) highlights the continued nation-state project that homogenizes Latinx (Latinx panethnicity) all over the US. territory, making them look like a language, and sound like a race (as some interviewees stated). In the end, although many interviewees reported problems after having migrated to New Jersey, positive experiences seem to outweigh migration challenges.

In regard to their Spanish use, interviewees reported diverse changes in their Spanish as a result of migration. Some of them stated that they maintain their original accents and fluency (PR01, PR04, PR05). These self-reported characteristics align somewhat to the results from Ramos-Pellicia, 2014; Ghosh Johnson, 2005; Bayley et al., 2012, and Zentella, 2019 where even though participants have been in contact with other communities, there is no linguistic accommodation due to ideological tensions and social networks. Other interviewees, nonetheless, have experienced shifts towards more Spanglish usage due to the predominance of English in their daily lives and work environments (PR02, PR04, PR06, PR07). In fact, PR02 reported doing code-switching between Spanish and English within sentences when he did not know the target word in Spanish (Torres, 2010). PR08, on the other side, mentioned how living in Mexico and Colombia has led to linguistic changes due to accommodation processes, this shows the impact of different cultural contexts on linguistic identity within Spanish speakers. These actions aligned with what Ruch & Benito Moreno (2023) mentioned about degrees of accommodation and how these processes are contingent upon participants' attitudes towards other interlocutors, and the prevailing social context. In this case, PR08 accommodated discursively to avoid judgement from her Mexican peers (as the local norm was not related to her idiolect). This finding also aligns with what Amastae & Satcher (1993) discovered in Honduran Spanish speakers while they were in contact

with Northern Mexican Spanish speakers (refer to the theoretical framework for further information).

The results of the interviews also validated how communication within diverse Spanish-speaking communities often involves linguistic negotiation, especially when there is difference in terms of terminology and linguistic habits such as speech rate. PR01 and PR02, for instance, both mentioned occasions where regional differences in terminology led to confusions. PR02 noted misunderstanding over the term *parcha*, as they would call it in Puerto Rico, versus *maracuyá* for passion fruit. PR03 and PR04 also encountered difficulties due to differing regional terms, such as *zafacón*, as they would call it in Puerto Rico, versus *bote de basura* for trash can. Interestingly, these speakers chose to use English rather than Spanish to accommodate linguistically in these situations, citing that English was “more direct” for their purposes. Interviewees like PR06 and PR07, on the other side, have become more conscious of lexical differences while talking to other Spanish speakers, thus they provide explanations or accommodate their language to bridge gaps in understanding.

Participants’ reported willingness to linguistically accommodate to other Spanish speakers was not only based on lexical and speech rate intelligibility but also due to linguistic stereotypes and their role in certain social spheres. In fact, PR01 and PR02 mentioned facing stereotypes related to Puerto Rican Spanish, such as the perception of not pronouncing the /r/ sound and swapping to an /l/ or using specific Puerto Rican lexical items. PR01 described how Mexicans sometimes tease Puerto Ricans about their pronunciation, while PR02 told being mocked for using Puerto Rican expressions. These experiences underline how linguistic features, linked with Puerto Rican Spanish, can be subject to stereotyping and mockery. PR04 and PR06 also mentioned similar issues, PR04 listened to jokes about the /r/-to-/l/ substitution in Mexico, and PR06 encountered stereotypes about Puerto Rican Spanish being like the one used by “reggaetoneros”. PR07, on her side, heard comments saying that Puerto Rican Spanish is less cultured or *matado*, which reflects deeper biases about linguistic and cultural legitimacy. Although PR08 mentioned not facing any stereotypes about her Spanish nowadays, she did mention facing mockery many years ago while living in Mexico, leading to adjust her accent to align with the norm, and have a “standard” Spanish (see also Palomares et al, 2016; and Gasiorek, 2016 for further reference on types of intergroup accommodation).

Thus, to address the question of this article, sociophonological features such as lambdacism, rhotacism, and /s/ and /d/ elision (which were found by interviewees to be linguistic features from Puerto Ricans) persisted among most of the interviewees while narrating their stories. Although the study did not quantify the frequency of these features, it was evident that most participants, except for PR08, exhibited these traits during conversations. Interestingly, lexical features typical of Puerto Ricans varied in each participant when in-contact with other Spanish speakers. Some of them decided to accommodate by code-switching whenever their peers did not understand what they were saying, and some others explained words and/or expressions (terminology) to come to mutual understanding. It is also important to note that during the interviews, interviewees did not use any of the words they mentioned to be typical of the Puerto

Rican repertoire, this may have happened due to the nature of the interview, and my role as an interviewer with a different dialect. Consequently, these findings indicate a nuanced spectrum of language adaptation within the Puerto Rican diaspora in New Jersey. As hypothesized, individuals with positive experiences, where their linguistic repertoires were valued and accepted, exhibited a strong tendency to maintain sociophonological features and lexical choices related to their Puerto Rican linguistic background. This might suggest that favorable attitudes towards a dialect not only enable dialect maintenance but also the reinforcement of specific linguistic markers as a form of identity assertion. On the other hand, participants who encountered negative attitudes or criticisms from other Spanish-speaking communities reported a conscious accommodation process in their speech. Thus, this study demonstrates that in such cases, linguistic attitudes play an important role, where accommodation might serve as a mechanism to navigate spaces that are perceived to be less inclusive of linguistic diversity. This directly supports the hypothesis that processes of accommodation are context-driven, as in the case of this study, existence of lexical and sociophonological features that index Puerto Ricanness fluctuate based on perceived judgement or acceptance in specific settings of interaction. These findings also highlight how language use becomes a tool for social navigations, facilitating individuals to affirm cultural identity while adapting to linguistic expectations.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the interviews in this study disclosed the complex landscape of how Puerto Rican Spanish speakers interact with other Spanish-speaking communities in New Jersey. While some interviewees self-reported maintaining their accents, and speech rate, others mentioned a shift towards an increased use of Spanglish due to their exposure to English in their daily lives. In their cases, the way they linguistically accommodated varied depending on the social context and language attitudes of both themselves and those around them. In fact, most of them specified the way in which they negotiated with other Spanish-speaking communities. Some narrated occasions where difference in terminology led to confusion and/or misunderstandings, this opened spaces for some of the participants to code-switch to English as a "more straightforward" mechanism to facilitate communication between interlocutors. Others, on the other hand, became more aware of lexical differences and explained words and/or accommodated their discourse. Throughout the use of the interviewee's answers, it was also possible to perceive the presence of certain sociophonological features associated with Puerto Rican Spanish (lambdacism, rhotacism, and /s/ and /d/ elision). Interestingly, these features were prominent in seven participants despite having faced negative stereotypes about Puerto Rican Spanish. These results suggest that while phonological features may be more resistant, vocabulary use is more flexible and subject to linguistic accommodation. All in all, for participants with positive experiences, sociophonological and lexical features remained intact, underlining how supportive environments encourage linguistic resilience and reinforce cultural markers. Nonetheless, interviewees with less positive interactions exhibited varying degrees of accommodation, suggesting a strategic linguistic and social adaptation rather than a full

assimilation process. These findings also highlight that language maintenance is not purely individualistic, but rather linked to social acceptance of one's linguistic identity and background. Thus, the implications for linguistic acculturation within this community indicates that language does not fall into a binary of preservation or abandonment; it is, rather a process (or not) of adaption to suit sociocultural needs.

Overall, this study contributes to the broader discussion on how Puerto Ricans linguistically accommodate in the Northeast of the United States, and how language attitudes are another indicator on processes of accommodation. It also contributes to a broader understanding of acculturation, where linguistic features serve as both adaptive mechanism of resistance. This article also expands on the need to deconstruct purists' ideologists that perceive certain dialects as undesired.

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