

From dialectology to regional socio-dialectology:  
Linguistic and social history in west-central Puerto Rico

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Based on field research carried out in 1927 and 1928, *El español en Puerto Rico* provides a benchmark for the study of Spanish in Puerto Rico. In this classic dialectological study, Navarro Tomás (1948) describes distinctions between northern and southern, eastern and western, and interior and central regions of the island as they relate to a variety of linguistic features. Much more recently in *Latin American Spanish*, John Lipski asserts that “strictly regional variation in Puerto Rican Spanish has been smoothed out leaving ... vertical sociolinguistic stratification as the significant differentiator” (Lipski 1994: 328). In the context of data collected in the interior of west-central PR from 1993 through 1997, the present study examines to what extent the descriptions of Navarro Tomás and the assertion of Lipski may currently be appropriate. It suggests that if in a geographical area undergoing social and economic change there is found to exist is a continuing link between community ties and economic tradition, on the one hand, and regional dialectal speech, on the other, this relationship may be described best in terms of regional socio-dialectology.

The present study will begin by outlining social and economic changes that have occurred between 1927-28 and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the community of Castañer (pop. 2000). It will show that these changes have encompassed areas of employment, education, religion, and community organization. It will also show, however, that in the face of these changes constants remain relating largely to the cultivation of coffee, the principal crop of the region.

Also described will be a series of changes affecting regional speech. These will be suggested to be present phonologically and morphologically as well as in the lexicon. Data analysis will be based on five phonological features: the preservation of syllable-final *-r̄* and *-l̄*; the use of high, word-final *-ī* and *-ū*; and the fricativization of *rr̄*. Whether or not these features are markers, or even stereotypes, of regional speech as identified in popular lore or in the literature (e.g., López Morales 1979) will be shown to be critical to findings.

The analysis draws on data from two samples of male speakers from the community of Castañer and surrounding mountains. The first is a general sample of 30 local residents representing three generations and a variety of occupation groups, and the second a sample comprised of 25 farmers. Included in the second sample are 5 owners of haciendas, 5 owners of large farms, 5 small-farmers, 5 farm laborers, and 5 return migrants also dedicated to farming. Participants are friends of the family that hosted the investigator. Speech analysis draws on recorded semi-directed conversations; depending on the variable, from 50 to 150 sequential tokens are sampled per speaker.

Results in the form of percentage breakdowns supported by Varbrul analysis will show that striking differences are present for features that are and are not stereotypes of the west-central region of the island. They will also show that clear patterns of both stratification and preservation are present, suggesting that neither strictly regional dialectological nor vertical sociolinguistic explanations are adequate, but that what is needed is the combination of both.

Lipski, John M. 1994. *Latin American Spanish*. London and New York: Longman.

López Morales, Humberto. 1979. Velarización de /RR/ en el español de Puerto Rico: Indices de actitudes y creencias. In H. López Morales (Ed.) *Dialectología y sociolingüística: Temas puertorriqueños*. Madrid: Hispanova de Ediciones.

Navarro Tomás, Tomás. 1948. *El español en Puerto Rico: Contribución a la geografía lingüística hispanoamericana*. Rio Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico.