

LANGUAGE

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**Word count:** 999

**Date:** 10-24-02

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Joseph,

This is an excellent idea for a story and with a lot more reporting and digging it could probably even be a topic for an enterprise story or a master's project.

You've done some good reporting here, finding people on both sides of the issue and you show them as human faces.

That said, I think you could dig deeper. I'd like to hear more examples from people about their experiences. I'd like to hear about how this issue affects their emotions. I'd like to hear from non-Hispanic people in the neighborhood about how they feel about Hispanic people speaking Spanish. I'd like to know if there are any advocacy groups that encourage people one way or the other. Are there any organizations that help parents teach their children Spanish or that help people who as adults decided they wanted to learn Spanish?

And I think that in your reporting you might have used the question, "Why?" a little more. You can use that in probing the link between the language and the culture. Also, do people who do not use Spanish lose other aspects of the culture?

This story reminds me of a food story that ran in The Times years ago. It was about how Latino people taught their young children to eat spicy food. In editing the story, I asked the writer, why do people want their babies to eat food that sets their mouth on fire. Coming from an area where bland food is the norm, it seemed very curious to me. So she went back and asked the question and got a wonderful answer. The answer was – this is the food of our culture and of our heart so of course we want our children to eat it and enjoy it.

I think you can sharpen both the lede and the nut graf to really zero in on the focus of your story.

And pay attention to AP style. You should know by now that ages should be numerals.

Carla

## **To Speak or Not To Speak... Language as a Cultural Identity**

///Jose Rivera was born in ~~East Harlem, East Harlem,~~ [NO HYPHEN IN EAST HARLEM] also know as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio, and he chooses to live there now with his wife and three children. As a hobby, he is the webmaster for [www.east-harlem.com](http://www.east-harlem.com), a website dedicated to preserving and promoting the Hispanic cultural identity of El Barrio./// [THIS LEDE DOESN'T ZERO IN ON YOUR STORY ENOUGH. THIS COULD BE THE OPENING TO A STORY ABOUT HISPANIC CULTURE, OR INTERNET SITES OR FAMILY MEN WITH HOBBIES. YOU WANT TO HAVE THE READER TUNED IN TO WHAT YOUR FOCUS IS FROM THE START.]

To many in the neighborhood, Jose Rivera is a model Puerto Rican living in New York—a successful businessman who adores and keeps his cultural roots alive.

///Every Sunday he attends the Spanish language mass at St. Cecelia's, but he goes alone./// [I THINK THIS SHOULD BE THE SEED OF YOUR LEDE. IT ILLUSTRATES HOW STRONGLY HE FEELS ABOUT THE LANGUAGE ISSUE.]

“I specifically decided to not teach my kids Spanish,” Rivera said ///while eating his favorite after-church breakfast, a bacon egg and cheese sandwich from McDonalds.///[I'M NOT SURE THAT THIS DETAIL REALLY PROPELS YOUR STORY FORWARD. I THINK YOU COULD LEAVE IT OUT.] “When I was young I had a really hard time learning to read in English because my first language was Spanish. I did not want the same thing to happen to them.”

///Rivera is not alone./// [THIS TRANSITION IS WEAK. YOU COULD LEAVE IT OUT OR COME UP WITH SOMETHING MORE SUBSTANTIVE. AFTER ALL, IN NEW YORK CITY NOBODY IS ALONE.] Many other first- and second-generation Puerto Ricans who live in New York have consciously decided to teach their children only English. They feel two languages can confuse a child early in their education, which will hold them back later in life. Moreover, they do not want their children outcast by mainstream American culture because of a heavy Hispanic accent. Conversely, other Puerto Ricans who live in New York feel language is an important anchor to their cultural identity and being bilingual fosters success in the modern business world. [IN ESSENCE, THIS IS YOUR NUT GRAF, BUT IT NEEDS TO BE SHARPER AND IT NEEDS TO BE LINKED TO RIVERA. IT'S NOT THAT RIVERA IS NOT ALONE. IT IS THAT HE IS ON ONE SIDE OF A GROWING DEBATE IN THE PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY – SHOULD CHILDREN LEARN TO SPEAK AND READ SPANISH?]

///~~“Many people base decisions to not teach their children another language because of their own personal experiences, if they had troubles in school growing up for example.”~~ said Federico Subervi, ~~chairman of who chairs~~ the ~~C~~ommunications ~~S~~tudies department at Pace University. Subervi was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the United States when he was ~~six~~6 [AP STYLE] months old. He was taught both languages as a toddler. He moved back to Puerto Rico when he was 7 ~~seven~~ [AP STYLE] years old and spoke mostly Spanish until he came to the United State for college. “In other parts of the world, though, it’s normal for children to be raised with two, three, even four languages;”///  
[THIS PARAGRAPH IS A BIT RAMBLING. HE GIVES HIS OPINION, THEN THE READER HAS TO JUMP BACK AND FORTH WITH HIM FROM PUERTO RICO AND NEW YORK. IT NEEDS TO BE SIMPLIFIED.]

Angelina Carrasquillo understands the importance of language in culture. She was born in Puerto Rico and moved to New York when she was ~~nine~~9 [AP STYLE] months old. She works as an administrative assistant at El Museo del Barrio, a museum dedicated to Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Latin American art. She uses both English and Spanish to communicate ~~everyday~~. every day. [AS AN ADJECTIVE, EVERYDAY IS ONE WORD. BUT AS A NOUN, IT’S TWO WORDS.] But, she too chose to teach her two sons—~~one is~~17, the other 13-- English only.

“The younger one wishes I had taught him Spanish,” Carrasquillo said. “But it was so hard for me in school. I wanted the boys to have an edge getting the good jobs.” [GET HER TO ELABORATE ON THIS. WHAT JOBS DID SHE THINK THEY WOULD GET IF THEY SPOKE SPANISH? WHAT JOBS DID SHE THINK THEY WOULD GET IF THEY SPOKE ONLY ENGLISH? ARE THEY HEADED IN THAT DIRECTION?]

Subervi said this outlook frustrates him because in today’s world, with ~~the North American Free Trade Agreement taking shape and the~~ Latin American markets opening up, it is a valuable ~~skill~~ to be bilingual. But, he said he ~~does understand~~ understood the perspective that Carrasquillo and Rivera expressed because American culture has stigmatized people with Latino accents and has assigned negative stereotypes to them. [GIVE SOME EXAMPLES.] Even so, he said, without the language, Puerto Ricans miss out on many important aspects of their culture, like the music, poetry and literature. “Translations are okay, but they don’t capture the essence of the people,” Subervi said.

East Harlem artist James De La Vega ~~agrees with Subervi and~~ said he preferred ~~s~~ to read poetry written in Spanish. “There are ways to express emotion in Spanish that English can’t even begin to capture,” he said.

De La Vega, who was born in East Harlem, said that he experienced difficulties learning to read and encountered negative stereotypes because of his accent early in life; but that he ~~is was~~ glad his mother ~~had taught~~ made sure to teach him both languages. ~~He was born in East Harlem and his first language was Spanish. He~~ De La Vega, whose first language

was Spanish, won was awarded a scholarship to study at the prestigious York Preparatory School on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

“When I first went to the school, the kids would make fun of me because of my accent,” De La Vega said. “It was frustrating at the time, but I ended up working hard and graduating valedictorian of my class. I’m happy that I kept both languages because I do believe that Spanish is an important part of the Puerto Rican identity and culture.”

Preserving the culture is of utmost importance to many Puerto Ricans who live in East Harlem. On any given day salsa music echoes off worn tenement walls, patriotic banners hang from fire escapes and old men roll down the streets on bicycles adorned ed with Puerto Rican flags.

“We must represent,” said Julio Nieves, a doorman on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Nieves was born in Puerto Rico but moved to East Harlem when he was a year old. He was brought up to speak only Spanish in the home and said feels it helped him maintain strong the family values. [FAMILY VALUES IS A BIT OF A VAGUE TERM. IT WOULD BE BETTER TO BE MORE SPECIFIC.] associated with life in Puerto Rico. He chose to teach his children Spanish because a strong sense of family structure strengthens their identity as Puerto Ricans.

“Here, in the U.S., it’s all about the individual,” Nieves said. “But because we speak Spanish in the home, it teaches my kids to address their elders with respect. It shows them the importance of their culture. It gets dug into their heart.”

Nieves’ son Jason, 21, said his grandmother only spoke speaks to him in Spanish. He is not as fluent as he would like to be because “out in the world” he doesn’t does not use it all the time, but he is glad his grandmother keeps him involved with his roots. He said most of the time the women keep the language alive.

Nieves backeds up his son’s perspective and said because the language wasis focused on around the home, women played do-play a major role especially in the food they cook. The real Puerto Ricans are not the ones eating at McDonald’s or “eating pasta and lasagna, they prefer arroz con gandules.” [OK, NOW THAT I GET TO THE END I SEE WHY YOU MENTIONED MCDONALD’S HIGHER UP. BUT THE CONNECTION IS PRETTY LOOSE AND THE FOCUS OF YOUR STORY, LANGUAGE, DOES NOT REALLY CONNECT UP WITH FOOD.]

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Story ideas:

POLITICS: Jose Rivera pointed out that though East Harlem is predominantly Hispanic, the majority of the board members on Community Board 11 are African American. He blames this on a lack of voter activity in the Hispanic culture in America and the mobilization of African American political movements. He said when most Puerto Ricans came over, they did not think they would stay for a long time so chose not to get involved

with politics. Because of this, he said there are no party organizations centered ~~on around~~ Latino issues, which act as feeder programs for Hispanic politicians. In looking at the board, his claims are correct, most of the members are ~~made-up from~~ African Americans who reside in the Manhattan Valley. I would like to study Rivera's claims more closely and find out what impact such an imbalance has in a community. Does the majority governed by a minority suffer?

**BILINGUAL EDUCATION:** In reporting this story many subjects claimed that they had difficulties learning to read in English because their first language was Spanish. I would like to study the effect bilingual education has had on this issue. Has it helped keep the learning rate at a comparable rate to English speaking children only or does it further confuse students and create a "Spanglish" environment?

**PILOTS:** Since 9-11 it has been reported that air traffic in and around the New York area has been restricted and tighter guidelines have been put in place, especially in highly volatile areas like nuclear power plants. I have spoken with a small plane pilot who said this was true to an extent. He can no longer take "joy rides" over Manhattan on the weekends but he said the power plant issue is completely different. He said the FAA has told pilots that if they fly over power plants that fighter planes will escort or shoot them down, but he also noted that the typical pilot does not know where the plants are located and the FAA has not made them easily visible. He in fact has flown over a few without anything happening to him. I would like to find out the specifics of the rules imposed by the FAA and explore how easy it is for a plane to make a mistake and what the consequences are.