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## **PUERTO RICAN SIGN LANGUAGE: THE UNPOPULAR OPINION**

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This presentation examines Puerto Rican Sign Language (PRSL), a language that has become almost nonexistent due to colonization. Once widely used in the Puerto Rican Deaf community, PRSL is now considered moribund, losing popularity to the more ‘standardized’, international American Sign Language (ASL). Nonetheless, PRSL is believed to still be maintained deep in the island. Although ASL has become the mainstream signed language, ASL is only taught in deaf schools in the northeastern part of the island. PRSL may possibly still be used in the western and central parts of the island (which are considered harder to reach areas due to being mountainous and country regions), meaning that only 20 of the 78 municipalities in Puerto Rico (approx. 25.6%) are being serviced with the language and the resources, leaving the other 58 municipalities with little to no communication outlet.

This presentation argues that just as many indigenous spoken languages are threatened by the global spread of the English language (Phillipson 1992, 2009, *inter alia*), so are many local signed languages threatened by the spread of ASL. Due to the contact among the languages (PRSL and ASL, Spanish and English), it is increasingly difficult to determine the nature of origin of PRSL. Is it indeed a dialect of ASL or is it its own stand-alone language that has fallen through the cracks due to colonization. This *pidgin* or perhaps *creole* language is a form of communication that has been established by both communities Puerto Rican deaf people without any resources, and Puerto Rican deaf people who have been exposed to ASL on and off the island. ASL has had a very strong influence on the culture and the language in Puerto Rico, and sooner or later it might completely replace PRSL. The new generation might be more influenced by the abundance of resources for ASL that are not only in larger, more populated cities but also on the internet. This includes, but is not limited to, online ASL resources, social media, news media, etc. Slowly but surely, ASL will altogether wipe out the use of PRSL.