

SPEAKING PHRASES **BORICUA!**

A Collection of Wisdom and Sayings from Puerto Rico

Colección de Refranes Puertorriqueños

by Jared Romey

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Dedication

The process of my learning Spanish started in the sixth grade and has continued ever since. I'd like to thank Ms. Gray, Charlezetta, Ms. McPherson, my professor at St. Mary's, Patricia, the staffs at the University of South Carolina and El Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Guadalajara and Bernardo for their perseverance.



My proceso de aprender el español—I empezó en sexto grado y ha continuado desde ese momento. Me gustaría agradecer a Srta. Gray, Charlezetta, Srta McPherson, mi profesor en St. Mary's, Patricia, las facultades de la Universidad de South Carolina y del Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey en Guadalajara y Bernardo por su perseverancia.

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Introduction

While you may see this book as one on language, to me it is also about travel...not travel in the traditional travel-guide sense of who, what, when, where, or how. This book touches on the WHY.

You may wonder how a book about common sayings can be related to the WHY of travel. In preparing this guide I've learned about the history of Puerto Rico, the problems facing Puerto Ricans, Puerto Rican culture, the language and I've also learned to see my own culture differently.

In my experience, language opens the mind to new points of view, teaches a person about culture (both their own and the "foreign" culture) and just, generally, creates new experiences for the traveler. These sayings have the same effect.

To further explain the WHY I have turned to the help of several people. You will see their words on the inside flaps of the cover. Given that I am a somewhat inexpressive person (I've even occasionally been accused of being cold!), I found that they explained in amazing clarity what I could not.

One of my favorites is from Johan Huizinga, a Dutch historian who lived from 1872 to 1945.

"The things which can make life enjoyable remain the same. They are, now as before, reading, music, fine arts, travel, the enjoyment of nature, sports, fashion, social vanity (knightly orders, honorary office, gatherings) and the intoxication of the senses."

This was written in 1921 and almost a century later is still a wonderfully applicable phrase. I can almost even forgive him for leaving out wine.

One of the things that most surprised me about Puerto Rico is the presence of regional differences in the language. For a country that is 100 by 35 miles I find it entertaining that with a 30 minute car ride you can find words with different meanings or sayings that "city folk"

just don't get. As I write this I realize that the same is probably true for most other places, but it just seems to be more noticeable here.

One day I had a friend come up to me and say "I think your definition of X word is wrong. It should say...", referring to an entry in my first book, *Speaking Boricua!* Fortunately two other people were standing nearby and came over. What followed was a humorous debate among the three of them (all Puerto Ricans).

Three people that grew up less than 60 miles from each other had differing opinions on the meaning of a word. For me this was an entertaining experience, highlighting the amorphous nature of language.

As an author perhaps my greatest pleasure is to hear people comment that my book made them laugh. In fact, the comments readers made referring to my first book pushed me to publish this one. I thank those people and look forward to hearing from them again.

I hope this helps you understand WHY.

August 2005
San Juan

Acknowledgments

Every book is a compilation of the efforts of numerous people. In this case, without them this book would never have existed.

First and foremost, I must mention Brenda, who not only helped me understand her language, but also put me in my place when necessary.

I would like to express my gratitude to the people of Right Management: Carlos, Vanessa, Maricruz and Caridad, all of whom spent hours helping me put this together.

Another person dedicated a large amount of her time to helping me understand these sayings and reviewing my work. Thank you, Kitty.

My friends at KOI Publicidad entertained me with their interpretations of Puerto Rican words and sayings, as well as helped contribute to this book.

I would like to thank the publisher, Mr. Andrés Palomares, who took a risk last year and has been pleasantly surprised.

Finally, my sincere thanks to that anonymous element that had no idea it was part of the process.

How to Use This Guide

Most of the sayings in this book are written based on the grammatically correct way, and not based on how they are pronounced. In some situations the pronounced version may be significantly different from how it is written. If you cannot find the saying in this guide and you think it is because of the pronunciation, I would suggest either asking someone about the saying or use the index to look for other key words within the saying.

The following symbols are located before a saying's entry and are to help make the guide a bit easier to enjoy (NOTE: The symbol may apply to only one definition for sayings with more than one definition).

The symbols are:

★ Commonly used sayings

☹️ Sayings that may not be acceptable in some circumstances, including expletives, insults, crude or politically incorrect words.

😊 Sayings that are the same or similar in English and Spanish.

Each entry follows this format:

① Symbol (if necessary)

② Saying in Spanish

③ Literal Translation into English

④ Definition in English

⑤ Similar sayings in Spanish (if any exist)

⑥ Equivalent or similar saying (if one exists) in English

① ★ ② **Cuando el río, suena agua lleva.**

③ L: When the river sounds, it carried water

④ D: There must be some truth to the rumor.
Used in response...

⑤ S: Cuando el río suena, es porque algo trae.

⑥ E: Where there's smoke, there's fire

Introducción

Mientras quizás ves que este libro se trata de idiomas, para mí se trata también de viajar... no de viajar en el sentido tradicional de las guías de viajes que hablan de quién, qué, cuándo, dónde y cómo. Este libro se trata del PORQUÉ.

Seguramente te estás preguntando como un libro de refranes puede estar relacionado con el porqué viajar. Preparando esta guía he aprendido de la historia de Puerto Rico, los problemas que enfrentan los puertorriqueños, la cultura puertorriqueña, el idioma y también aprendí a ver mi propia cultura de una forma diferente.

En mi experiencia, el idioma abre la mente a nuevos puntos de vista, enseña a uno de cultura (la propia y la cultura “extranjera”) y generalmente crea nuevas experiencias para un viajero. Estos refranes tienen el mismo efecto.

Para explicar en más detalle el PORQUÉ he incluido los comentarios de varias personas. Verás sus palabras en las solapas de la portada y contraportada. Dado a que yo no soy una persona muy expresiva (hasta me han acusado de ser frío!), encontré que ellos explicaron con una claridad extraordinaria lo que yo no podía expresar.

Uno de mis favoritos es del Sr. Johan Huizinga, un historiador Holandés quien vivió del 1872 al 1945.

“Las cosas que pueden hacer la vida agradable se quedan iguales. Ellas son, ahora como antes, la lectura, música, bellas artes, viajar, el placer de la naturaleza, deporte, moda, vanidades sociales (órdenes caballerescas, oficinas honorarias, encuentros) y la intoxicación de los sentidos.”

Esto fue escrito en 1921 y casi un siglo después sigue siendo una frase completamente aplicable. Casi le puedo perdonar el error de no incluir vino.

Una de las cosas que más me sorprendió en Puerto Rico es la presencia de diferencias regionales en el idioma. Para un país de 100 por 35 millas encuentro divertido que con un viaje de 30 minutos en

carro (auto) uno se puede encontrar palabras con sentidos diferentes o refranes que la gente de la ciudad no entiende. Mientras escribo esto me doy cuenta que seguramente lo mismo es cierto para otros lugares, pero parece más notable aquí.

Un día una amiga se acercó y me dijo “Creo que tu definición de X palabra está equivocada. Debe decir...” refiriéndose a una palabra en mi primer libro *Speaking Boricua!* Afortunadamente, dos otras personas estaban cerca y se involucraron en la conversación. Un debate gracioso siguió entre las tres (todas puertorriqueñas).

Tres personas que se criaron a menos de 60 millas de las otras tenían opiniones diferentes en referencia al sentido de una palabra. Para mí, esto fue una experiencia divertida que destacó el estado amorfo de los idiomas.

Como autor quizás mi mayor placer es escuchar comentarios de que mi libro hizo reír a la gente. De hecho, los comentarios de lectores del primer libro, me empujaron a publicar este. Les doy gracias a ellos y espero escuchar sus comentarios nuevamente.

Espero que esto te ayude a contestar el PORQUÉ.

Agosto 2005
San Juan

Reconocimientos

Cada libro es una compilación de los esfuerzos de un sinnúmero de personas. En este caso, sin ellos este libro no existiría.

Primero que nadie, tengo que mencionar a Brenda, quien no solamente me ayudó a entender su idioma, pero también me mantuvo en la tierra cuando necesario.

Me gustaría expresar mi gratitud a la gente de Right Management: Carlos Vanessa, Maricruz y Caridad, quienes pasaron horas ayudándome a armar este libro.

Otra persona dedicó una cantidad de tiempo enorme explicándome estos refranes y revisando mi trabajo. Gracias, Kitty.

Mis amigos de KOI Publicidad me divertieron con sus interpretaciones de palabras y refranes puertorriqueños, así como a su contribución al libro.

Quiero agradecer al editor, el Sr. Andrés Palomares, quien tomó un riesgo el año pasado y fue felizmente sorprendido.

Finalmente, doy mi agradecimiento sincero al elemento anónimo que no tiene idea que fue parte de este proceso.

Cómo Usar Esta Guía

La mayoría de los refranes en este libro están escritos según la forma gramaticalmente correcta, y no como se pronuncian. En algunas situaciones la versión pronunciada puede ser significativamente diferente de la forma escrita. Si no encuentras un refrán en esta guía y piensas que tiene que ver con la pronunciación sugiero preguntar a alguien o buscarlo en el índice usando palabras claves.

Se encuentran los siguientes símbolos antes del refrán y están para ayudar en el uso de la guía. (NOTA: Los símbolos pueden aplicar solamente a una de las definiciones en aquellos casos que haya más de una definición).

Los símbolos son:

★ Refranes comunes

☹ Refranes que pueden ser inaceptables en ciertas circunstancias, incluyendo malas palabras, refranes insultantes, o palabras que pueden ofender a algunas personas o grupos de personas.

☺ Refranes que son iguales o parecidos en inglés y español.

Cada refrán sigue este formato:

- ① Símbolo (si necesario)
- ② Refrán en español
- ③ Traducción literal al inglés
- ④ Definición en inglés
- ⑤ Refranes parecidos en español (si existe alguno)
- ⑥ Refrán equivalente o parecido (si existe alguno) en inglés

① ★ ② **Cuando el río, suena agua lleva.**

③ L: When the river sounds, it carried water

④ D: There must be some truth to the rumor.
Used in response...

⑤ S: Cuando el río suena, es porque algo trae.

⑥ E: Where there's smoke, there's fire

Wisdom Boricua: Puerto Rican to English

A

☺ **A caballo regalado no se le mira el colmillo**

L: A horse given as a gift, do not look at its eye teeth

D: Don't look for the faults in a gift, just be happy that you received something and accept it for what it is

S: None

E: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth

A cada guaraguo le llega su pitirre

L: For each hawk his *pitirre* arrives

D: The *pitirre* is a small bird that attacks specifically the *guaraguo*, a large hawk. The implication of the phrase is that just because someone is physically large does not mean that he/she will automatically dominate over someone much smaller

E: Brains over brawn

A cada lechón le llega su San Martín

L: To each suckling pig, his Saint Martin arrives

D: The belief that, although a person that deserves punishment has not received it, eventually he will be punished.

S: *A cada puerco le llega su sábado*

E: He'll get his, He'll get what's coming to him, He'll get what he deserves, His time will come

★ **A cada puerco le llega su sábado**

L: To each pig, his Saturday arrives

D: Sooner or later whoever does something wrong will be caught

S: *A cada santo le llega su día, a cada lechón le llega su San Martín*

E: He'll get his, He'll get what's coming to him, He'll get what he deserves, His time will come

★ **A cada santo le llega su día [hora]**

L: To each saint, his day [hour] arrives

D: Anyone's good deeds will be recognized eventually, if at no other time, than when the person faces their Creator

E: His time will come

A cada santo su vela

A cada santo su vela

- L: To each saint his candle
D: Recognizes the positive acts of people that deserve recognition
E: His time will come

A cualquiera se le muere un tío

- L: To anyone an uncle dies
D: Refers to commonplace occurrences that happen to everyone
E: It can happen to the best of us

A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando

- L: To God begging and with the mallet going at it
D: To keep at something. It is fine to ask for God's help, but one must keep working so that the project moves forward

A ése no lo salvan ni las once mil vírgenes

- L: That one cannot be saved even by the eleven thousand virgins
D: To be beyond saving, either in a medical sense or in the sense that someone is so bad, there is no way to pull him out of it.

★ A falta de pan, galleta

- L: At the lack of bread, crackers.
D: When one thing is not available, one must make do with something else
E: Make do with what you've got

A grandes males, grandes remedios

- L: For grand bads, grand remedies
D: When you are confronted with large problems, just make sure that you have everything organized and in place to fix it. If it's a big problem, don't come with some small idea to patch over the situation. Make sure your solution will eliminate the problem

A la corta o a la larga con el tiempo todo se alcanza

- L: In the short or in the long, with time everything is reachable
D: Sooner or later problems or difficulties can be overcome or resolved

A la larga todo se sabe

- L: In the long run, everything is known

A otro perro con ese hueso

D: Sooner or later everything is revealed

E: Everything eventually comes to light

A la tierra que fueres haz lo que vieres

L: In whichever land you are, do what you see.

D: When you are visiting an unknown place, just copy what the locals are doing, and you will fit in fine

S: *Si a Roma fueras, haz lo que vieras, ¿Dónde va Vicente? Donde va la gente*

E: When in Rome, do as the Romans

★ A las millas de Chaflán

L: To the miles of Chaflán

D: Extremely fast

A lo hecho pecho

L: What is done, chest

D: If you made a mistake you must confront it and resolve the situation

E: Own up to one's mistakes

★ A mal tiempo, buena cara

L: At a bad time, good face

D: When things do not come out as planned you must remain calm to face the situation

A mala hora no ladra el perro

L: At a bad time the dog does not bark

D: In spite of all the preparations and precautions taken something unexpected always happens, the one thing you never planned for is the one thing that happens

☛ A mi plin y a la madama dulce de coco

L: I couldn't care less and for the madame coconut candy

D: Who cares, I don't care

E: I couldn't give a hoot, I couldn't give a rat's ass, I don't give a shit

★ A otro perro con ese hueso

L: Another dog with that bone

D: Used when someone is lying to you, for example, the homeless person that says he needs money for food when everyone knows he really wants it for booze

S: *No me vengas con ese cuento*

E: I've heard that story before

A palabras necias, oídos sordos

A palabras necias, oídos sordos

- L: For foolish words, deaf ears
- D: If you are going to say stupid or foolish things, I am not interested in listening
- E: To go in one ear and out the other

★ A quien Dios no le da hijos el diablo le da sobrinos

- L: To whom God does not give children, the devil gives nieces and nephews
- D: For the people that do not have kids, they still often share the same problems and pleasures that parents do, through their nieces, nephews or other children that are close to them

☛ ¿A quién le amarga un dulce?

- L: Who is soured by a candy?
- D: Smart aleck answer to any type of dumb question when the answer is obvious.
- E: Does a bear shit in the woods?, Does the pope wear a hat?

★ A rey muerto, rey puesto

- L: King dead, king placed

- D: Phrase meaning that someone, after passing away or leaving, is quickly replaced. For example a widow that quickly finds another partner to maintain him/her. Also implies that the person is taking advantage of the situation.

★ A río revuelto, ganancia de pescadores

- L: Churned up river, benefit of fishermen
- D: During times of uncertainty, there are still opportunities to be had



A río revuelto.
ganancia de pescadores

Ahorcarse con su propia sogá

A su tiempo maduran las uvas

- L: In their own time mature the grapes
- D: Good things take time to develop, be patient
- E: Good things come to those who wait

A ver si es verdad que el gas pela

- L: Let's see if it is true that gas peels
- D: Let's find out if what you say is really true. Apparently at some point, people found out that gasoline can remove your skin after prolonged contact

Admisión de delito, relevo de prueba

- L: Admission of guilt, release of proof
- D: Once you admit to something, there is no further need to prove it. Also, if for example, you are caught in the same room where a vase just broke, it is obvious that you are the person that broke it
- E: Guilt by association

Agua pasada no mueve molino

- L: Past water moves no wind-mill

- D: Forget about the past and focus on the present
- E: Water under the bridge

Agua que no has de beber, déjala correr

- L: Water that you have not drunk, let it run
- D: Do not get involved in situations that do not affect you
- E: Don't stick your nose where it does not belong

Ahí sí hay mucha tela de donde cortar

- L: Here there is a lot of cloth from where to cut
- D: A topic of much interest, a subject with a wide range of possibilities to discuss

Ahogarse en un vaso de agua

- L: To drown oneself in a glass of water
- D: To over-worry about simple things
- E: To make a mountain out of a molehill

Ahorcarse con su propia sogá

- L: Hang oneself with one's own rope

Al mal paso, darle prisa

- D: To suffer the consequences of a problem that was created by oneself
- E: You've made your bed, now lie in it

Al mal paso, darle prisa

- L: At a bad step, hurry it up
- D: When facing a difficult situation, try all the alternatives or solutions as quickly as possible

★ Al mejor cazador se le va la liebre

- L: From the best hunter, the hare gets away
- D: Even the experts or best people make mistakes sometimes
- E: Everyone makes mistakes, It happens to the best of them

★ Al pan, pan y al vino, vino

- L: For bread, bread and for wine, wine
- D: Tells someone to speak directly without engaging in flowery conversation
- E: Cut to the chase, Get to the point, Call a spade a spade, Don't talk in circles

★ Al perro flaco, todas las pulgas le caen

- L: To the thin dog, all the fleas fall

- D: The same people always have all the problems in life, someone with one problem often has lots of other problems piled on

- E: When it rains, it pours

Al que a buen árbol se arrima, buena sombra le cobija

- L: He who draws close to a good tree, good shade will cover
- D: Working with good or positive people can rub off

Al que Dios se lo da, que San Pedro se lo bendiga

- L: For whom God gives it, San Pedro should bless it
- D: Used by a less fortunate person (referring to looks or money) about someone that is better off, and means that the more fortunate person is lucky and should enjoy what they have

Al que le caiga el sello [sayo] que se lo ponga

- L: To whom the seal [smock] falls, put it on
- D: Used when someone wants to identify a negative action without identifying the person committing it. For example,

Amigo en la adversidad

mentioning that whoever stole the chocolate bar from your desk should return it

E: If the shoe fits, wear it

Al que madruga, Dios lo ayuda

L: He who rises early, God will help.

D: Advice that he who arises early will be rewarded

E: The early bird catches the worm

★ Al que no le gusta el caldo, le dan tres tazas

L: He who does not like the broth is given 3 cups

D: If you do not like something you can be sure you will get a lot of it

Al son que le toquen, bailan

L: For whatever beat one gets, dance

D: A person responds in a similar manner to how he/she is treated

★ Alábate pollo que mañana te guisan

L: Praise yourself chicken for tomorrow they stew you

D: This phrase is often used for a self-centered or stuck-up

person. The meaning is that the person will get what he deserves

E: To get what's coming to you

Allá ellos que son blancos y se entienden

L: There they are whites and they understand each other

D: A sarcastic phrase saying "I don't belong, but I don't care" often used by people who are poor and are looking at rich people

Allá Marta con sus pollos

L: There Marta [Martha] with her chickens

D: Who cares what she is doing?

E: I couldn't care less

Amigo, de cien uno y de mil ninguno

L: Friend of a hundred, one and of a thousand none

D: Really close, trustworthy friends are extremely hard to come by

Amigo en la adversidad es un amigo de verdad

L: A friend in adversity is a true friend

D: A real friend is one that stands by you, even in bad times

Amigo es un peso en el bolsillo

E: A friend in need is a friend indeed

Amigo es un peso en el bolsillo

L: Friend is a weight in the pocket

E: Friends can sometimes bring problems

Amigo mío que nos perdemos, tú para más y yo para menos

E: My friend that we lose each other, you for more and I for less

D: Let's break things off, since in everything but name, our relationship is already over (generally refers to partners or friends)

Amor con amor se paga

L: Love with love is paid

D: You can achieve more by being nice to people than being rude

E: You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar

☹️ Amor de lejos, amor de pendejos

L: Love from afar, love of idiots

D: Long distance relationships are a bad idea. You shouldn't trust your partner from afar

Antes de que te cases mira lo que haces

L: Before you marry look at what you are doing

D: Make sure you are aware of what you're doing before making an important decision like getting married

★ Aparecer hasta en la sopa

L: Appear even in the soup

D: To be everywhere, all over the place

Aprende a nadar y guardar la ropa

L: Learn to swim and guard the clothing

D: Always be sure to keep something to yourself. It is best to be reserved in one's personal affairs

Aquí paz y en el cielo gloria

L: Here peace and in Heaven glory

D: To put an end to an argument or feud and to begin a new stage in the relationship, to start anew

E: Wipe the slate clean, Start afresh

★☹️ Arroz, que carne hay

L: Rice, what meat there is

Bien predica, quien bien vive

D: Comment made when you see a hot chick in reference to her body

★ **Aterrizo que no hay tocón**

L: Land for there is no stump

D: This is a goofy phrase used when someone stumbles, but there was nothing in their way or on the ground to cause their stumble. They just stumbled for no reason

Ay Dios, mándame más si más me merezco

L: Oh God, send me more if more I deserve

D: Phrase that expresses resignation to the negative things that are happening in a person's life

Ayúdame que Dios te ayudará

L: Help yourself that God help you

D: A person that works to overcome his own problems will be helped along by God. This implies that a person that sits around and waits for solutions to be handed to them by others, will not be in God's good graces

S: *Dios dice ayúdame que yo te ayudaré*

E: God helps those who help themselves

B

Barco grande, ande o no ande

L: Large ship, working or not

D: Means that someone is attracted by the size or quantity of something but ignores the quality of the item or its ability to function

Barco que no anda no llega a puerto

L: Ship that does not work does not arrive to port

D: You will never achieve your objective if you don't take steps towards it

E: A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step

Barriga llena, corazón contento

L: Tummy full, heart content

D: By having fulfilled a need, a person enters a period of happiness

Bien predica, quien bien vive

L: Preaches well, who lives well

D: A person that lives a healthy life preaches simply by his acts. In other words if the person is a good example to others, there is no need to go

Borrón y cuenta nueva

out and talk about it, others will see how he lives

E: Practice what you preach

Borrón y cuenta nueva

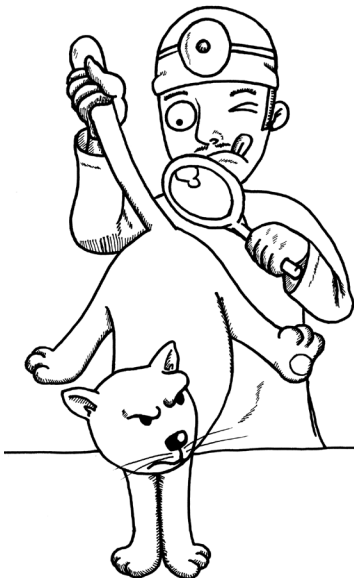
L: Erased and new account

D: To forget about everything bad in the past, and to get a fresh start

E: Start from scratch, Let bygones be bygones, Wipe the slate clean

★ **Buscar las cinco patas al gato**

L: Look for the five paws of the cat



Buscar las cinco patas al gato

D: 1. Attempt to solve an insolvable situation, 2. To waste time looking for something that does not exist

C

☺ **Cada cual a lo suyo**

L: Each one to his own

D: Everybody is different. Each person has unique preferences, tastes and needs

E: To each his own, Different strokes for different folks

Cada cual cuenta de la feria como le va en ella

L: Each one tells of the fair how it goes for him

D: Each person's opinion of something depends on how well or poorly they did. For example, one merchant might think that the economy is really bad because his sales are low, but the other, who sells a lot, thinks that the economy is growing strongly

Cada cual sabe de la pata que cojea

L: Each one knows of the leg with which he limps

D: This phrase means that each person knows his own weaknesses and faults