

Monolingual Multilingualism? Standard Languages and their Impact on Multilingual Policies and Practices in Europe: A Historical Perspective

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K. Anipa (University of St Andrews)
ka17@st-andrews.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The emergence of nation-states in Western Europe from the end of the Middle Ages sped up the rise of non-classical languages, to the detriment of Latin and other ancient languages, and triggered off the language debate regarding the origins, nature and status of local languages in the nascent nation-states. The timing and nature of that development differed from one nation-state to another and was directly related to the period in history in which a given nation-state became a reality in the minds of its citizens, and when standard language ideology and the need for some kind of language planning was felt to be necessary in that socio-political context. Within macro-sociolinguistics, the nature and consequences of the phenomenon have been discussed and debated from diverse perspectives over the past century or so.

The Iberian Peninsula was amongst the emerging European nation-states in which the issue of standard language took a characteristically peculiar form, in terms of chronology.¹ The question as to which local language could be chosen for cultivation did not arise whatsoever. That was because, right from the Middle Ages, there had developed one dominant language in the Peninsula (see González Ollé 1965: 279, Marcos Marín 1979: 95, and Gauger 2004: 689).

The present study is, therefore, orientated along the following premise: any study of language policy, the discourse on multilingualism, and the rise of standard ideology and its impact on other languages in the Iberian Peninsula ought to be carried out within the framework of the peculiar historical sociolinguistic situation in that region. The paper opens with a general outline of the typical processes of standardization (after Garvin & Mathiot 1953, Garvin 1959, and Haugen 1966)² and the status of standard languages, before proceeding to examine the case of Spain, which is envisaged to fall both within and outside the typical framework.

2. Theoretical Parameters

Garvin and Mathiot present three major criteria under which the processes of standardizing a language can be viewed: (a) its properties, (b) its functions, and (c) attitudes towards it. These, in turn, comprise a number of sub-criteria. Haugen has a fairly different scheme, but which overlaps with that of Garvin and Mathiot. The two schemes will be coalesced here and the nomenclature slightly adjusted, with the aim of obtaining an optimum set of criteria for this case study, as follows: (a) selection, (b) codification, (c) elaboration of functions/intellectualization, and (d) promotion/enforcement.

¹ The designation IBERIAN PENINSULA as employed throughout this study, does not include (the Kingdom of) Portugal, which, having established its independence since the late 11th century, has always remained a separate political entity, with the exception of the period of the Iberian Union (1580-1640). I will also use the name SPAIN in the same loose sense.

² These are readily acknowledged as classic works in the field on which later scholars have always drawn in one way or another (see, for example, Marcos Marín 1979, Hudson 1996, and Fernández-Ordóñez 2004).

2.1 The Nature of Standard Languages

Hudson (1996: 20-69) considers, from a sociolinguistic viewpoint, the nature and status of standard languages and observes that they are abnormal and perhaps the least interesting kind of language for anyone interested in the nature of human language (as most linguists do). In any case, language standardization almost always involves the need ‘to make some embarrassing decisions’ (Haugen 1966: 932), for there is no denying that ‘standardisation entails ironing out variability, usually by stigmatising as “non-standard” the forms found in regional or working-class varieties’ (Poplack, *et al* 2002: 89).

Another dimension of standard languages worthy of consideration is the fact that they are largely intangible; even defining them in basic terms is quite a task, and the fact that linguists have not been able to agree on even what constitutes a language does not help the situation in any way. As Milroy & Milroy (1985: 22-23) observe, ‘It seems appropriate to speak more abstractly of standardisation as an *ideology*, and a standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent’.

3. The Birth of a Standard Language Ideology in the Iberian Peninsula

Two of the four criteria of standardization outlined under (2) seem to be pivotal; they are *selection*, since ‘neither codification nor elaboration is likely to proceed very far unless the community can agree on the selection of some kind of model from which the norm can be derived’ (Haugen: 932), and *promotion/enforcement*, because ‘a standard language, if it is not to be dismissed as dead, must have a body of users’ (Haugen: 933).

Of all the monarchs that ruled in the history of the Iberian Peninsula from the Middle Ages to the modern era, perhaps the one best known was Alfonso X the Learned, who reigned from 1252 to 1284. The socio-political situation that preceded his proactive linguistic efforts—i.e., territorial expansion and the spread of Castilian Romance with the Reconquest, resettlements across the territory, especially during the course of the two preceding centuries—creating a fertile ground for a sense of nationalism and an aspiration for a national language is so well known that the details need not be replicated here. As Eberenz (1991: 94) summarizes it,

(1) Desde el final de esta fase expansiva (1050-1250), la lengua presenta un grado de homogeneidad que otros idiomas no alcanzarán sino mucho más tarde.

Haugen categorizes the four fundamental processes into two dimensions—linguistic and social—whereby codification and elaboration correspond to the former, and selection and promotion/enforcement refer to the latter dimension. In effect, those 13th-century language policies amounted to the *selection* of Castilian (in the face of Latin and other local Romance varieties), some *codification* (in the form of orthographic and morphological reforms), *elaboration of functions* (through the expansion of lexical repertoire and syntactic expressivity), and its *promotion/enforcement* (the extension of the use of Castilian in the judiciary, administration, as well as in literature, chronicles and scientific treatises). Consequently, unlike in other parts of Western Europe, by the end of the Middle Ages, the ideology of a standard language had been a commonplace in Spain, more so amongst the intelligentsia.

3.1 The Medieval Picture of Monolingual Multilingualism

From the issues outlined thus far, it becomes self-evident that one crucial element of the unifying force that acted on Castilian was **TIMING**. That force took hold when the various linguistic entities such as Aragonese, Asturian, Catalan, Castilian, Galician, Leonese, Navarrese, Portuguese, and Valencian, amongst others, were but varieties of the same broad entity that we conveniently call Hispano-Romance. As Fernández-Ordóñez (2004: 382) has put it,

(2) En realidad, todas estas variedades [el gallego-portugués, astur-leonés, castellano occidental de Palencia y Valladolid, leonés oriental, castellano oriental de Álava, La Rioja y Soria, navarro-aragonés, aragonés, y catalán] constituían al norte un continuum dialectal, que solo agrupaba algunos de los límites lingüísticos que lo fragmentaban hacia el sur, como resultado de la repoblación y la Reconquista.

A situation of monolingual multilingualism can, thus, be attested, right from the formative times of linguistic varieties that sprang from spoken Latin, due to socio-political circumstances. In the words of Fernández-Ordóñez (382-383),

(3) Tras la unión de los reinos [de Castilla y León] en 1230, Juan de Soria amplió sus funciones al reino de León, como canceller para todos los territorios que dependían de Fernando III, pero mantuvo el empleo del

castellano como modalidad romance preferida de la cancillería. *La suerte estaba echada*, y aunque el leonés comenzó a emplearse en los diplomas privados y locales hacia 1230, perviviendo su uso hasta finales del siglo XIII al menos, su ausencia en los contextos oficiales debió de ser determinante para que se frustrase la posibilidad de su estandarización. (My italics).

That linguistic situation remained largely unaltered for several centuries and was only confirmed and reinforced in the last three decades of the 15th century, with the political unification of Aragon and Castile. That union should be understood as incorporating Catalonia as well, since it had already become part of the Crown of Aragon back in 1258. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that right from the Middle Ages, the only linguistic variety that was so well cultivated as to pose any potential challenge to Castilian (if it equally had the necessary socio-political factors in its favour) was Catalan; the absorption of the Catalonia into the Castile-dominated unified crown, therefore, has enormous symbolic implications for the consolidation of the Castilian language.

4. A New Nation-State and a National Language

Spain prides itself on being the oldest nation in Western Europe. This was duly acknowledged back in early 16th century by Machiavelli (1988 [1513]: 76) in these words:

(4) Nothing enables a ruler to gain more prestige than undertaking great campaigns and performing unusual deeds. In our own times Ferdinand of Aragon, the present King of Spain, is a notable example. [...] This man attacked Granada at the beginning of his reign, and this campaign laid the foundations of his state.

Consequently, by the end of the 15th century, Nebrija could easily ascertain a *de facto* nation-state with an unequivocal national (and even international) language that had reigned supreme, i.e., selected, promoted and well accepted across all constituent kingdoms. What remained to be taken care of were the linguistic aspects, which are, naturally, less stable. Nebrija, therefore, set himself the task of championing the cause of codifying that language and of intellectualizing it at that crucial time in its history.

4.1 Codification and Intellectualization

It is common knowledge today that the codified norm in the standardization process is ‘contained in formal grammars and dictionaries’ (Garvin & Mathiot: 784). Nebrija delivered to his nation-state the first formal grammar of the Castilian language, and to Western Europe the first formal grammar of any non-classical language, an achievement that he himself was well aware of (‘y será nuestra [gloria], que fuemos los primeros inventores de obra tan necesaria’). Details of his prologue reveal a clear programme of language planning. The other side of the codification coin is ‘the enforcement of the norm by control over speech and writing habits through orthoepy and orthography [...] the enforcement of the norm achieved through the schools’ (Garvin & Mathiot: 784).

4.2 An Uphill Struggle and a Simulacrum of Linguistic Tensions

Notwithstanding his well-meaning efforts, Nebrija was dogged by one unfortunate social problem, which he possibly had underestimated: the snobbery of fellow intellectuals from Castile (Old and New). It is worth mentioning here just a small, representative sample of the issue.

Perhaps the best-known outburst of a Castilian intellectual against the threat from a non-Castilian authority on the language is that by Juan de Valdés (1535) against Nebrija; the following quotes are sufficiently illustrative:

(5) Vos no veis q̄ aunq̄ Librixa era muy docto en la lengua latina, q̄ esto nadie se lo puede quitar al fin no se puede negar q̄ era Andaluz y no castellano? y q̄ escriuio aquel su vocabulario con tan poco cuidado q̄ parece auerlo escrito por burla [...] dexando aparte la ortografia en la qual muchas vezes peca, en la declaracion q̄ haze delos vocablos caſtellanos en los Latinos, se engaña tantas vezes q̄ fois forçado à creer vna de dos cosas o q̄ no entendia la verdadera sinificacion del Latin y esta es la q̄ yo menos creo o q̄ no alcançaua la del Caſtellano y essa podria ser porq̄ el era Andaluz adonde la lengua no ſta muy pura (fols 7^{r-v}) [**Mentira!**]

(6) Nūca penſe tener neçeſidad del [i.e., del *Arte de la gramática castellana*] y porq̄ nunca lo he oydo alabar, y eneſto podeis ver cómo fue reçevido y cómo era prouechoſo q̄ ſegun entiendo, no fue imprevido mas q̄ vna vez (fol. 38^v)

(7) No me alegueis otra uez para la lengua Castellana el autoridad de Librixa andaluz \bar{q} me hareys perder la paciencia (fol. 42^f)

Whilst this remark (i.e., Mentira!) from a near-contemporary of Valdés speaks for itself, it is even more revealing to compare and contrast his subjective pronouncements cited above with the following objective ones from he himself:

(8) La lengua Caſtellana ſe habla no ſolamēte por toda Caſtilla pero enel Reyno de Aragon enel de Murçia \bar{c} toda el Andaluzia y en Galizia Aſturias y Nauarra y eſto avn haſta entre lagente vulgar porque entre lagente noble tanto bien ſe habla en todo el reſto Deſpaña, cada provincia tiene ſus vocablos propios y ſus maneras de dezir, y eſ aſſí que el aragonés tiene unos vocablos propios y unas propias maneras de dezir, y el andaluz tiene otros y otras, y el navarro otros y otras, y aun ay otros y otras en tierra de Campos, que llaman Caſtilla la Vieja, y otros y otras en el reino de Toledo, de manera que, como digo, nunca acabariemos (fols 26^{r-v})

(9) De los \bar{q} os he dicho me he acordado, por auerlos oydo dezir, \bar{q} udō caminava por Caſtilla por \bar{q} en camino andando por meſones eſ forçado platicar con Aldeanos y otras pſonas groſeras, Pero eneſto podeis conſiderar la riqueza. de la lengua Caſtellana, \bar{q} tenemos enella vocablos en \bar{q} eſcoſer. cómo. Entreperas (fol. 73^v)

Moreover, the claim in quotation (6) about Nebrija's grammar has, as many other declarations in the *Diálogo*, always been taken too lightly, without being subjected to psychological and discourse analyses. His claim of having never read the grammar is not verifiable as an objective knowledge; and the real social reasons behind the overall lukewarm reception of the grammar have never been sought before.

Cristóbal de Villalón (who also claimed never to have read Nebrija's grammar, but whose own grammar clearly betrays him on that claim) was another intellectual from Castile who laid bare his snobbery against the authority of Nebrija, claiming that the original sin of barbarism that had befallen his nation-state was Nebrija's grammar: 'Agora digo que no me maravillo que todos los españoles sean bárbaros, porque el pecado original de la barbarie que a todos nos ha tinido es esa arte' (1557).

These two examples constituted a prelude to an eventual explosion of open hostilities between intellectuals from Castile and Andalusia, triggered off by the commentaries of Fernando de Herrera on Garcilaso de la Vega's poems. Infuriated by the fact that a non-Castilian intellectual should comment on the Castilian of a Castilian, one intellectual wrote a rather aggressive reaction to Herrera's commentary. The hefty title of that reaction—*Observaciones del Licenciado Prete Jacopin, vecino de Burgos. En defensa del Principe de los Poetas castellanos Garcilaso de la Vega, vecino de Toledo, contra las Anotaciones que hizo a sus obras Fernando de Herrera, Poeta sevillano*—speaks for itself; but Herrera was not a person to be silenced like that. He responded in the form of a written disquisition; and it is worthwhile reproducing just a tiny sample of Herrera's response to the attack:

No ſe puede ſufrir que la embidia caſtellana (no ſea eſto ofenſa á los que no la conozen,) quiera dar á entender, ſabiendo todo lo contrario, que no ay coſſa buena en toda la grandeza d'Eſpaña, ſino en el Reino de caſtilla. (p. 71) [...] Pensais que eſ tan eſtrecha el Andaluzia como el condado de Búrgos, ó que no podremos uſar bocablos en toda la grandeza de eſta prouincia, ſin eſtar atenidos al lenguaje de los condes de Carrion, i los ſiete ynfantes de Lara? (p. 92) [...] **Pero dezid por vueſtra vida, ¿que ſon dicion eſ cortezanas? ¿ſon de otra naturaleza que las que ſe uſan en todo el reyno? ¿Tienen maior preuilegio, ó ſon las que todos ſavemos i nos ſirven para el uſo de hablar y eſcriuir?** (My boldface).

While all this inter-regional fighting was going on amongst intellectuals, the intellectualization of the language continued unabated (evidenced in the well-known designation 'Golden-Age of Spanish literature'); and, to a certain extent, its codification also proceeded, as dozens of grammars, lexicographical works and the like were produced during the course of the 16th and 17th centuries (see Ramajo Caño 1987). It must equally be pointed out that the intellectual rivalry and declarations from such a sociolinguistic-minded figure as Gonzalo Correas (1954 [1625]: 144) that 'a cada uno le está bien su lenguaxe' did not constitute any genuine issue of the need to select some language for codification. As Gauger (2004: 689) rightly observes in that respect, 'Casi se podría decir (y no lo digo yo por primera vez) que Valdés *inventa* aquí, empujado otra vez por la situación en Italia, una "questione della lingua" que, de hecho, no existía en España' (my italics). The Renaissance linguistic tension in Spain can best be characterized as a simulacrum, because it was not a linguistic tension *per se*, as it was all happening within the confines of one and the same Castilian language.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, therefore, the sociolinguistic history of Spain can be broadly conceptualized and represented as a number of alternating unifying and dividing forces that created a paradoxical linguistic situation:

- The Reconquest, resettlements and subsequent, unchallenged spread of Castilian Romance (**centripetal**)
- Proactive, royal linguistic policies of the 13th century (**centripetal**)
- The unification of Castile and Aragon (and Catalonia), the fall of Granada and centralizing policies of the Catholic Monarchs (**centripetal**)
- Early Renaissance efforts to codify the *de facto* national language (**centripetal**)
- Social hostility from Castilian intellectuals towards Andalusia and Nebrija's efforts (**centrifugal**)
- Sociolinguistic consciousness that threatened to counter the tendencies towards 'embarrassing decisions' of ironing out some linguistic variants (**centrifugal**)
- The policies of the Bourbons and subsequent establishment of the RAE (**centripetal**)
- The resurgence, from the 19th century, of regional consciousness and the importance of other languages (**centrifugal**)

It becomes quite clear that the unifying forces that have shaped the diachronic macro-linguistic picture of the Iberian Peninsula over the centuries well outweigh the dividing ones. In reality, the eventual reaction against (linguistic) centralism was, in part, the product of Romanticism (a cultural movement that could easily have been designated another Humanism). At the dawn of the Early Modern era, Nebrija had a genuine ideological vision for a well-codified national language. He provided a credible plan and concomitant rhetoric for the task, appropriately backed up with the necessary basic resources—a well-structured formal grammar and lexicographical works. None the less, more than two centuries had had to elapse before his vision was consummated, in the form of adequate enforcement, beginning with the accession to the Spanish throne of the Bourbons. As a result of the war of Spanish succession, King Philip V quickly put in place a number of decrees aimed at centralizing all aspects of Spanish society. His reign saw the birth of the Spanish Royal Academy (Real Academia Española), apparently to parallel the Académie française. Two of its best-known linguistic pillars—the dictionary (1726-1737) and the grammar (1771)—have played their role in the further codification of the language as we have it today.

The current relative strengths of the regional languages in Spain only arose in the second half of the 19th century (see Brumme 2004) as an eventual reaction against the legacy of the centralist and absolutist policies of the Bourbons. Thus, the only worthwhile tension between Castilian and other languages in the Iberian Peninsula arose very late, to the extent of appearing somewhat anachronistic. Having said that, the development is understandable because, naturally, the socio-political circumstances of the various regions have evolved over time.

The successes in the resurgence of regional languages in Spain, confirmed in the current Spanish Constitution of 1978, must be viewed within the background of the peculiar, centuries-old, monolingual multilingual situation in the Iberian Peninsula. In that context, it can be surmised that, had that not been the case, resistance (or at least, reluctance) on the part of the Spanish State would have been stronger and, consequently, thwarted or significantly weakened and slowed down the process; that did not happen, because the potential risk of the regional languages ever dethroning or usurping Castilian as a national and international language has always been negligible, if not non-existent. Thus, on the one hand, the cries for (proper) multilingualism in the land would not have occurred without the long-standing stifling, dominant status of Castilian; on the other, without that virtually guaranteed status of Castilian, those cries would not have been heeded as promptly as they have. In other words, rather than mainly damaging the dominant position of Castilian, the regional linguistic strengths also serve to consolidate the phenomenon of monolingual multilingualism in Spain, by rendering official the centuries-old superordinate-subordinate relationship.

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