

The Renaissance environment of the first Spanish Grammar published in sixteenth-century England

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The work referred to in the present paper has the following title:

Reglas Gramaticales para aprender la Lengua Española y Francesa, confiriendo la una con la otra, segun el orden de las partes de la oración latina. Impresas en Oxford por Joseph Barnes, en el año de salud M. D. LXXXVI.

The author, Antonio del Corro, a Hieronymite monk who fled from the San Isidoro convent in Seville in 1557 in order to avoid the reprisals of the Inquisition became an exile of the XVI century who was forced to flee from his country and environment because of the prevailing religious intolerance and dogmatism in the Spain of that time. His restless and innovating spirit lead him to travel to different parts of Europe always with a clear idea in his mind; the defence of religious freedom and reconciliation. His independent character and ideological consistency implicate him in constant controversies with the believers of the same Protestant religion among which he carried out his work. Due to the intolerant accusing attitude towards him of some sectors of his own Reforming church he comes to consider them as more dangerous than the Spanish Inquisition itself.²

As mentioned on the cover itself the work was printed in Oxford in 1586. Nevertheless, the RGLS were elaborated in France twenty-seven years before as the author himself states in the dedication to the illustrious Patrician Palavicino.³

... quise servirme de la presente ocasion, en que vn nuevo imprimidor delibero tentar, si sus obreros sabrian imprimir algo en lengua Castellana; y para menor peligro hazer la prueua ma sacaron sus amigos de las manos ciertas reglas de la lengua Española y Francesa, que casi treyenta años pasados recoge, cuando yo aprendia a hablar Frances, y enseñaba el language Español, al rey Don Henrique de Navarra ...⁴

The previous quote could lead us to think that the work only had a sporadic and accidental nature for its author. The act of checking the efficiency of some workers and not the work itself seems to determine its publication. However, he later adds that he wrote for the purpose of teaching Spanish to Prince Henri, which obviously reevaluates the work.

¹ The editor regrets to inform that Mr. Ambrosio López, a very dear colleague and friend, died in september 1996 in a traffic accident in Southwestern France when he was visiting the Archives at Nerac, Pau and Bordeaux in pursuit of documents in relation to his research on Antonio del Corro and 16th century grammatical thought. This posthumous article has been edited by *Sederi* from the main draft presented by the author at the Coruña 1996 Conference.

² Böhmer, Edward 1904: *Spanish Reformers of two centuries from 1520*. Vol III. Strassburg-London: 6.

³ *Las Reglas Gramaticales* will henceforth appear in the abbreviated form RGLS.

⁴ In the RGLS quotes the original spelling is maintained as much as possible.

Independently of the modest judgement of the author himself we have to consider that it is a grammar whose elaboration implied a considerable cultural baggage. The content and structure of the work: classical inheritance, Renaissance spirit and accordance with the grammatical environment of the time show that it is a work prepared to be edited. Adverse political or religious circumstances, easily presumable at the time perhaps prevented a previous edition.

The importance of the RGLS from the historical-philological point of view is beyond all doubt if we consider that because of its scope, structure and content it equals or even surpasses its contemporaries. Furthermore, Amado Alonso says of it that it is a fundamental book for the reconstruction of old Spanish pronunciation and considers Richard Percyvall, greatly indebted.¹

It is also one of the first Spanish grammars, created around the year 60 of the XVI century, coinciding with the impulse experienced throughout Europe by the then so-called vulgar languages and with the edition of the first grammars for the teaching of Spanish edited in the Low Countries (Anvers and Lovaine) with which it has a great similarity as concerns content and structure.

The importance the previous data reveal to us is highlighted especially for the scholars of English Philology, by the fact of being the first Spanish grammar, throughout history, edited in England although it was not conceived for the English.

The previously referred to circumstance gave rise to the fact that four years later the Spanish edition was re-edited and adapted, at least in part, in English, to be useful to the people of that country, as otherwise its correct interpretation, being written in Spanish, presupposed knowledge of the language to be taught.

As far as the content is concerned the work has a first part devoted to pronunciation and the division of letters. It then deals with the apostrophe and diphthongs going on to the noun, pronouns to then deal with the verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection and a brief treatment of Spanish and French syntax. It concludes with a mystic religious sonnet contrasting human miseries with divine goodness and love.

1. SOCIOCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The tendency of religion to cultivate languages in all cultures and at all times as a transmitting vehicle for a transcendental message is especially obvious in sixteenth century Europe and also branching out towards the neighbouring centuries. The religious and political type upheavals encouraged by the rebirth of culture and the consolidation of Renaissance humanism meant a radical change in attitude towards the cultivation of classical as well as modern languages which were then referred to as vulgar languages.

In sixteenth century Europe there did not exist a pedagogical or philological environment behind the Church's back and within the Church, Protestant Reformers were the most innovating due to their interest in taking culture to the people and the direct study of the holy scriptures in their original languages trying to avoid the manipulation to which uncultured people were submitted to by the official Church.

Although, as its author states, the RGLS were produced in the seat of the old kingdom of Navarre, taking into account Corro's trajectory, it is obvious that the sociocultural circumstances of the court's environment were not the only determining factors in their elaboration.

To the didactic environment created by La Gaucherie as the mentor of the prince's education, we have to add to this the author's classical education, his reforming spirit and the pedagogic current inspired by his Protestant masters in the Lausanne Academy where Corro received instruction for a year and a half before arriving to the Court.

1. 2 LUTHER AND CALVIN AS PROMOTERS OF CULTURE

¹ Alonso, Amado 1951: Identificación de gramáticos españoles ... RFE, XXXV: 226.

The first to openly advocate public education was Luther who addressed the magistrates and Councillors of the German people demanding a public education which implied the creation of schools where the poorest could also receive instruction.

The real goodness, health and richness of a people lay for him in the culture, honour and education of its citizens. He even affirmed that ignorance was more dangerous for a people than the arms of the enemy.

Luther's ideas on education were those of all the Reformers. Schools were founded everywhere and books were published calling men to the analysis of their own faith and to assert their intelligence giving them the means to reason, judge and choose.¹ After Luther, it is fitting to point out in our case the pedagogic ideas of Calvin, Mathurin Cordier and Teodoro de Beza as the main inspirers of the pedagogic theory used in the academies of Lausanne and Geneva.

Concerning Calvin, the great inspirer of the Reformation, it is enough for us to briefly consider the letter sent to the King of France, published in Basle in 1536,² in which his accusations of the clergy of the time are not limited to ignorance. He also accuses them of having substituted direct communication with God for purely human and material ceremonies.

The challenge was fundamental: to establish direct relation with God re-establishing the education of the people. From this clear conviction arises the idea of creating schools and academies to instruct the poor and simple in particular and train the clergy for proclaiming the divine word fundamentally based on holy scripture.³ The interest of the Reformers for teaching was quite clear, the people had to be trained so they could make use of their own intelligence in their direct approach to God and the preachers to instruct them in the holy sources. The following quote from Calvin is highly eloquent in this respect:

L'office propre des docteurs est d'enseigner les fideles en saine doctrine, afin que la pureté de l'Évangile ne soit corrompue ou par ignorance ou par mauvaises opinions⁴

2. THE LAUSANNE ACADEMY

The decisive zeal of the Reformers for the instruction of the people and clergy compared with the Orthodox church, more interested in maintaining its power and in a tradition which for the Church was unquestionable resulted in the creation of many schools in different parts of Europe. Of these the Lausanne Academy deserves special mention, impelled by Calvin which had its golden years in the 1550 decade presided over by Mathurin Cordier and Teodoro de Beza as the main people in charge of the Academy and eminent instructors.

With the creation of these centres it was attempted to alleviate the ignorance in which the cultural legacy of the Middle Ages was caught up. The cultivation of classical languages had greatly deteriorated. Latin, upon becoming an oral language had become distant from its classical purity. For more than 400 years the Bible was only known by its translation of the Vulgate. Even the monasteries which up until the eleventh century had produced great wise men degenerated into the deepest levels of unculture. This not only affected the low clergy but also the high hierarchies and even the Popes.⁵

¹ See the introduction to the work of Berthault, E. A. 1876: *Mathurin Cordier et L'enseignement chez les premiers calvinistes*. Paris 1876.

² Let us remember the custom of the most significant reformers of addressing the kings and denouncing the deficiencies and mistakes and asking for an improvement in the state of things. Antonio del Corro also wrote a very long letter to Philip II of Spain to the same end.

³ Herminard, Aimé-Louis 1878: *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*. IV Geneve: 86-91.

⁴ Quoted by Pradervand-Amiet, Brigitte 1987: *L'ancienne academie de Lausanne*. Université de Lausanne: 18.

⁵ Santchi, C. 1987: *Ecoles et vie intellectuelle a Lausanne au moyen age*. Université de Lausanne: 30 f.

Our author Antonio del Corro arrived to the mentioned academy after fleeing from Spain in the autumn of 1557 following a brief stay in Geneva. There he spent a year and a half (from the beginning of 1568 to July of 1569) devoted to the study of the scriptures in preparation of his religious work and obviously to the study of the French language which he would later complete in Nerac and Pau as he himself states in the dedication of the RGLS.¹

As for the instruction given in the Academy according to the rules of 1547 we see how the emphasis falls on classical languages especially Greek and Hebrew. The Greek teacher gave a class every morning on the classical authors, Demosthenes or Isocrates among the orators, Homer, Sophocles, Pindarus or Eurypides among the poets. Hebrew received similar treatment based on the study of the sacred texts. Other subjects in the field of arts such as rhetoric, mathematics, etc, made up the timetable of six hours per day, as well as the debates which took place on Saturdays, as was done in the Middle Ages. The students of that country had to undergo an entrance exam whereas those from abroad who brought their diplomas did not have to do so and could freely choose their courses. Antonio del Corro would undoubtedly be among these as well as also belonging to the category of pupils called *extraordinarii*, applied to those who had concluded their theology studies. These pupils lived in a kind of seminary in the city under the supervision of a *hospes*, a man of good reputation who watched over their behaviour and gave them board and lodging in return for an agreed price.²

2. 1 MATHURIN CORDIER

The pedagogic guidelines marked out by Cordier who managed to develop a living method for the teaching of Latin based on dialogues and the spirit of Beza, principal and teacher of Greek in the mentioned academy until August of 1558, eminent philologist and outstanding scholar with whom Corro coincided for approximately one year had to form part of the inspiring pedagogic framework of our author.

H. Vuilleumier calls Cordier a model of educators and points out that in a short space of time he manages to make the Academy one of the most flourishing of the time, remaining in it for a period of twelve years from 1545 onwards in which year he had been called from Neuchatel.³ Although the teaching of Cordier was centred on the Latin language, the use of the direct, practical method and the constant insistence on oral repetition reminds us of the reiterated resort by Corro to the correct language use of good speakers in order to remedy the imperfection of the grammatical rules. The basic principles of Cordier on the teaching of languages are clearly reflected in his Colloques; in clear contrast with the Medieval teaching of grammar in itself, he considers Latin a living language applying in his teaching a direct method which can be summarised in the following principles:

The best way to learn a language is to imitate those who speak it correctly, summarised in a Latin adage constantly repeated by him: *Ex bene loquendi usu et consuetudine*. The main teaching emphasis falls on the person teaching the use of the language orally rather than on the method itself in stark contrast with the traditional analytical method. Repetition and constant exercise among the pupils and mutual correction will help these pupils to acquire a knowledge of the language without the exhausting effort entailed in the study of grammar in itself.⁴

2. 2. TEODORO DE BEZA

¹ Böhmer, Edward, 1904: Spanish Reformers ... Vol III: 7.

² See Meylan, Henri 1986: *La haute école de Lausanne 1537- 1937*. Université de Lausanne: 13-21.

³ H. Vuilleumier 1891: *L'Académie de Lausanne 1537-1890*. Lausanne, Edition de l'Université. p. V.

⁴ Bleau, G. 1972: *Mathurin Cordier: son programme, sa methode d'apres les ...* University Microfilms Limited, High Wycomb, England, A Xerox Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA: 173-179.

A direct follower of Calvin and a man of great erudition who was said to possess a very wide knowledge; an accurate historian, well-informed in legal matters, an exegesis philosopher and critic, preacher and confessor who although not as original as Calvin defended and made popular Calvin's doctrine with great skill. He is considered one of the best informed men in Europe. He also maintained extensive correspondence, and was noteworthy for his negotiating capacity in delicate matters. To this we have to add his skills as an educator, not only teaching directly but organising teaching in the Academies of Lausanne as well as later in Geneva, pioneering centres of the Reformation with great efficiency and distinction. He was in charge of the training of hundreds of clergymen carrying the germ of the new ideas. He was the defender of his doctrine against Rome and against the narrow ideas of the people who shared his same religious beliefs, just as against civil power so closely linked to the religious world of the time.¹

Beza and Corro coincided at least for a year in the Lausanne Academy enjoying a great friendship. To his great prestige as a teacher of scripture, Beza added his devotion and zeal for language, editing in 1584 in Geneva a treatise with the following title:

De Francicae Linguae recta Pronuntiatione Tractatus, Theodoro de Beza auctore. - Genevae, apud Eustathium Vignon, M: D: LXXXIII. - 1 vol. in 8.²

This treatise considering the pronunciation of the letters of the French language separately has the same structure as the norms of pronunciation of Corro's grammar and which constitute the main section of this grammar and could easily provide, given the close relationship existing between both, a great stimulation for Corro in the preparation of the RGLS, all the more so if we consider that it was in the Lausanne Academy where Corro must have started to study French possibly helped by Beza and his pronunciation rules. Beza's treatise is also a great testimony of the cultivation of the vulgar languages by the academy, not reflected in its rules.

Both Beza and Corro also coincided in Nerac when the author was preparing his RGLS not as tutors of the future Henri IV as Beza was not, but sharing the same faith and ideology and both linked to the Protestant court.

3. THE OLD COURT OF NAVARRE

Henri II of Albret and II of Navarre (1503-1555) inherited from his parents the House of Albret in the year 1522. He was the last king born in the old kingdom. Upon his death, in 1555 in the Castle of Hagetmau, Jeanne, his daughter and Antoine de Bourbon, her husband appeared before the States of Bearne which recognised their rights. Jeanne de Albret in this way became Queen of Navarre and her husband, after long debates was recognised as co-sovereign.

The child who was to become Henri IV of France was born in 1554 to Jeanne and Antoine. The child was left alone at the age of four due to the death of his brother Louis Charles before he was three. This is the prince who was to receive a Spartan education in the royal castles of the Albret House following the guidelines marked out by his grandfather and under the direct supervision of Jeanne, his mother.

The relations of this kingdom with the King of Spain due to mutual claims and tradition were constant. Some historian even affirms that it was a kingdom which only existed because the Kings of Spain had not wanted to annex it.³ This reason had to be what caused Queen Jeanne to look for her own teacher of Spanish for her son Henri.

¹ Bernus, Auguste 1900: *Théodore de Beze a Lausanne*. Université de Lausanne: 6-9.

² Livet, Ch. L. 1967: *La Grammaire française et les Grammairiens du XVI Siècle*. Geneva, Slatkine Reprints: 510 f. quotes the full title adduced to and makes a brief study of its pronunciation. Without going into a detailed comparison with Corro it is fitting to point out, alike him, the emphasis given to the pronunciation of letters, observations in the margin of the content, constant references to Greek and Hebrew and coincidence in the interpretation of some sounds.

³ Babelon, Jean-Pierre 1982: *Henri IV*. Fayard: 19.

3. 1 FROM THE LAUSANNE ACADEMY TO THE ALBRET COURT

Henri IV had been born in Pau (31 Dec, 1553) and so was only seven years old when Antonio del Corro, coming from Lausanne (1560) took charge of instructing him in the Spanish Language. As Corro himself states in the dedication of his Rules, (IIIJ r.) he taught Spanish to King Henri of Navarre. The classes took place from 1559 to 1560.¹

Corro was recommended by Calvin himself with a letter written in May of 1559 to La Gaucherie, then tutor of the child Henri. In this letter he is not recommended as a tutor but rather as a genuinely pious man as the original text affirms: “Hispanus est, in quo genuinum pietatis studium deprehendimus”, to continue further on, “Abs te non aliud peto nisi ut pro solita tua humanitate in eum conferas quae absque tuo incommodo officia poteris.”² Corro took on the role of teacher of Spanish but undoubtedly this was not his only duty as his principal motive was to teach the new faith.

The overwhelming prestige of Calvin as pillar of the Reformation and man of great erudition were enough for his recommendation to become effective. To this we have to add that already in 1534 when he was only twenty-five years old he had already spent time in Nerac (as much the residence of the Court as Pau) and always maintained a special relationship with the court of Navarre being concerned from Switzerland for the spiritual emancipation of its churches, sending pastors and even maintaining a lengthy correspondence with the Queen herself.³ Corro’s arrival at the Court of Navarre was not then the result of chance, but rather something regulated and controlled by the very hierarchy of the new Reformation.

Although the philological concern of the Reformers was quite clear the importance given to the teaching of modern languages in the education of Henri IV is still only relative. To this respect it is only affirmed that he had knowledge of Latin and understood Spanish and Italian quite well.⁴ On the contrary, Jeanne, his mother, is said to have spoken Spanish, something quite credible taking into account that her father had been born in Spanish Navarre in 1503 and the tradition of considering the King of Navarre as an Iberian prince was maintained.⁵

3. 2 THE EDUCATION OF THE PRINCE AND ITS METHODOLOGY

Referring specifically to the education of Henri IV, historians coincide in that he received a Spartan education tending to make a strong and determined man of him. His mother who was said to have known the classical languages and to have spoken various modern ones was the supervisor of his education.

In accordance with her Calvinist faith, Jeanne de Albret looked for a tutor of the new religion for her son, Francois de la Gaucherie, of austere customs and a great wise man on which she bestowed all her authority. She did not aim to make a scholar of her son but to avoid him becoming an illustrious ignorant man. The religious education affected all the pedagogic environment, being a question of a Christian prince who had to set an example of carrying out his religious duties.

As the well-known present day historians Tucoo-Chala and Desplat reiterate, in perfect harmony with their predecessors, the education of the prince had a popular touch not oriented towards the instruction of a wise man and even less towards that of a feeble child. Even his food

¹ McFadden, W. 1953: *Life and Works of Antonio del Corro*. PhD. Thesis, Belfast: 112.

² See Böhmer, E. 1904: *Spanish Reformers...* III: 8-9 where the original text of the letter is reproduced in Latin.

³ See Forissier, Marc (s. d.): *Nérac, ville royale et Huguenote. Histoire de l’église réformée de l’origine à la révolution de l’édit de Nantes*. Editions D’Albret, Nerac (L+G): 41-47.

⁴ Druon, H. (s. d.) *Histoire de l’éducation des princes dans la maison des Bourbons de France*. P. Lethielleux libraire-éditeur, Paris: 29).

⁵ Babelon, Jean-Pierre 1982: *Henri IV*. Librairie Artheme Fayard: 22-23.

was totally natural and normal among the people; brown bread, cheese and meat and he was made to walk barefoot and with his head uncovered. Desplat expresses in a very concise way what made up the nucleus of the education of Henri IV by La Gaucherie:

Former un homme plutôt q'un savant en faisant largement appel a son libre arbitre. Lui donner quelque teinture des lettres, non par les regles de la grammaire, mais par les discours et les entretiens.¹

The previously mentioned corporal austerity was accompanied by an education which was not at all bookish. La Gaucherie almost totally excluded books from his education, certainly with the idea of not making him hate them. Freedom was the inspiration behind this type of education based on the affection between educator and pupil. This was the only condition which the tutor made upon taking charge of the child, that he would love him.²

As concerns other subjects it is said that he received some lessons in Spanish and Italian without any reference to the tutor and the study of French had a limited place; practice and frequent dealing with educated and illustrious people were considered the best teachers to learn how to speak and write well.³ The importance given to the use of language as opposed to rules, a recourse frequently used by Corro in his RGLS again becomes obvious.

In the teaching of Latin and Greek, La Gaucherie used a method which undoubtedly had to influence the didactic theory of Corro when he taught him Spanish. Recognising that he did not have to make a scholar of the Prince he did not spend too much time, as Druon says, on the grammatical rules, rather he tried to give him instruction based on practice, without rules just as we learn our mother tongues. He made him learn selected phrases by heart without writing or even reading them but reciting them frequently.⁴ Therefore it was an education more oriented towards practice as opposed to theory, very much in harmony with the RGLS of our author.

CONCLUSIONS

The RGLS of Antonio del Corro constitute a simple and clear work created according to the style of the times, in which the constant reliance on classical languages stands out as well as the constant resorts to practice and illustration with examples from daily life of religious nature.

The Reforming environment in which Corro moved upon leaving Spain, characterised by the promotion of culture, especially biblical and with this the cultivation of the classical and vulgar languages, as channels for the study and dissemination of their message has to be considered as a determining factor in Corro's cultural evolution and the culture medium of his RGLS.

Being entrusted with the role of teacher of Spanish in the old Court of Navarre gave Antonio del Corro the immediate occasion for the creation of his RGLS, devising as the tutor of the future king his own method in accordance with the didactic environment which his education inspired.

The work presented here formed part of more extensive research on the first Spanish Grammars edited in England, their implications and interferences. In a near future we hope to offer an article on the figure of del Corro in England and the consequences of his work among his immediate followers.

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¹ Desplat, C. 1983: Le bon roi Henri ou la pédagogie du mythe. *Revue des Sciences Politiques* 9: 16.

² Tucoo-Chala, Pierre & Desplat, Christian 1980: *Principatus Bearnia. La principauté de Bearn*. Pau, Societe d'editions regionales: 243-248.

³ Druon, H. o. c. LXV.

⁴ Druon, H., o. c. 18-19.

