

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES - LINGUISTICS

LOGICS OF TEN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

5. SPANISH AND THE GRILL

un muro (impávido ante el sol y mis ojos), Octavio Paz

5A. The Language

Whereas Italian is Latin continuously spoken for twenty centuries, whereas French is Latin spoken very early by Germans or at the contact of Germans, Spanish is Latin spoken across from the Arabs.

Imported objects kept their Arab designation: almohada (cushion), alquimía (philosopher stone), alquitrán (tar), almacén (shop); sometimes, the foreign term won over for pre-existing objects: 'aceito' (table oil) supplanted 'óleo'. Still, it is especially the Arab diction in itself that influenced its Spanish counterpart, which became a sort of immediately repressed or compressed leap, almost the opposite of what occurs in German, where the word first digs, condenses, to explode in turn. The Spanish wording erects, tightens on site. It ensconces, almost incarcerates.

5A1. Phonosemics

What sticks out in Italian withdraws here: 'mento' in 'miento', 'porta' in 'puerta', 'bene' in 'bien', 'buono' in 'bueno' or 'buen'. At the heart of the country, in Castillo, the 'z' and 'c' in front of the 'e' and the 'i' are muffled, and we shall not confuse them with the English 'th', which is a sonorous dental. In the same party, the final 's' may be close to the French 'ch', or rather, to the final Portuguese 's'. The roll of the 'r' tightens behind the teeth. The jota is torn violently without freeing itself. Consonants refuse facilitating assimilations: 'inmenso' protects itself from the flatulence of the Italian 'immenso', but they distrust noise, and alongside the 'oscuro' we find 'oscuro', similar to Italian. Latin initials 's + consonant' have become 'es + consonant': 'escala' 'espécimen', 'estar'. In this last case, the transformation perfectly realises the movement of erection, then of repression: es-tar.

The French or Italian ‘b’ and ‘v’ would be too generous, and therefore they stand in their in-between. Similarly, the blowing of the initial Latin ‘f’ has disappeared, ‘facere’ gave way to ‘hacer’ and the ‘fuego’ of ‘focum’ is due to the Gascon influence. The French ‘z’ would introduce an unacceptable softness, and the ‘s’ is always hard, even in between vowels: pronounced correctly, the ‘rosa’ has as many thorns as perfume. With its unique ‘s’, the superlative, instead of bursting forth as with the Italian double ‘ss’, insists from bottom to top ‘a la mismísima puerta’. When the accent falls onto the last syllable, words hit it strongly, and the ‘r’ of the infinitive blocks more than it propagates: comer, tomar, decir. The apocope pursues the same effect: cien(to) muchachos. ‘No lo sé’ or ‘no sé’ contrasts with ‘non lo so’ by the drying up of the ‘non’ into ‘no’, and of the ‘so’ into ‘sé’. Through its sound, the world ‘ejecución’ pronounced correctly does not only designate the execution, it carries it out too.

When all is said and done, the third person of the verbs ‘to be’ is enough to situate the five languages that we envisage here in relation to each other. The dryness of the Spanish ‘es’ contrasts with the French ‘est’, which is orally sliding, of the English ‘is’, voiced ‘iz’, the German ‘ist’ digging into the double consonant, the Italian ‘è’ which is almost nasal because it opens so much. We shall see Russian getting wet with the ‘yèst’.

5A2. *Semantics*

The vocabulary is rough, like with Arab (in this sense contrasting with Hebrew); ‘preguntar’ to ask, ‘contestar’ to reply, ‘tomar’ to take, ‘sacar’ to pull, ‘disgusto’ for regret. Swear words force the same note: “Me cago en tus muertos, hijo de la gran puta!”. The station as an immobilised erection intervenes everywhere. As soon as it is question of spatial or temporal qualities (hence that are not essential) the ‘ser’ is replaced by ‘estar’, the Latin ‘stare’ that marks the firm immobility (like in the original sense of statim: firmly), and that French has only kept for the solemn circumstance of ‘ester’ in legal terms, and in Italian in the etymological sense (‘si stat comunicando’, ‘sta caricando’). We have noted the phonic virtues, bottom-top + top-bottom, of ‘estar’, which also resound in ‘estabilizar’, ‘establecer’.

The implicit disdain concords with a certain negligence in the way of marking precise movements, right to the floating of prepositions, in contrast with English: ‘por’ renders both ‘for’ and ‘by’. Even delectation and tenderness must accommodate the phonic and semic hardness: ‘Como me gusta tomar el sol con este cielo tan azul!’. Don Iuan’s ‘gozar a Isabela’ is much more distant than Santucci’s ‘Hai mai dubitato di Dio quando godi in una donna’.

5A3. *Syntax*

In that case, the Spanish sentence often has the effect of a gust, of steady, constant, unforgiving firing. This is due to the equality of syllables, which are devoid of any affectation. To some insistences: ‘cincuenta y tres’, ‘ver a Lola’ (adjunction of the Latin ‘ad’ before the personal direct object). To the narrowness of the gaps of height and intensity. To a general melody that slightly goes down, only standing up very lightly towards the end. Hence, in the texts, the interrogation and the exclamation, because they can not characterise themselves by

the final raising, are announced from the very beginning of the sentence, framing it completely, visibly confirming the girdling effect: *Se puede? No sé!*

The prosody confirms the will of preventing any languor. The theatrical verse of *El Burlador de Sevilla* is of 7 feet (the syllable following the last accent is not taken into consideration, like in Italian), therefore shorter of one third than the odd French Alexandrian: “No quiero daros disculpa, / que l(a) auré de dar siniestra; / mi sangr(e) es, señor, la vuestra, / sacald(a), y pague la culpa.” (Text of 1630, Guenoun, Aubier). The disposition of rhymes, ABBACDDC shows a fastening, a settling of the dialogue that is unthinkable in a French tragedy or comedy. The lyrical (mystical) verse of Saint John of the Cross is even, but demonstrates the same striking briefness: “En una noch(e) oscura / Con ansias en amores inflamadas, / O dichosa ventura! / Salí sin ser notada / Estanda mía casa sosegada.”

The syntax does not seek the complicated and distant relations of the French period, but a succession of cuts and thrusts, in very vivacious verbs, such as those of Don Pedro Tenorio in the same *Burlador*: “No prosigas. / Tente. Como l(a) engañaste? / Habla quedo, cierr(a) el labio”; but also in the substantivised bursts of Isabella: “Mis glorias seràn verdades, / promesas, y ofrecimientos, / regalos, y cumplimientos, / voluntades, y amistades”. We can see that the punctuation, which is sometimes weak, can at the opposite become insistent to the profit of the general tightening: “Quien eres? - Quien á de ser? / un hombre, y una mugger”. The spelling is perfectly phonetic, because every accent finds its rule, which is not the case in Italian. Hence, the roughnesses are naked, roughly offered, and the monemes have some rise. The Spanish text is frontal from whichever way you may take it.

The approach of the interlocutor is often done in the third person, as with Italian. But the orientation is completely different. Whereas in Italian this practice reaches an expansion and vicariousness of the individual, here it clasps him, girdling him once again, using the social ritual. ‘Usted’ is the syncope of ‘Vuestra meced’ : ‘your mercy’, ‘your grace’. Contrasting with ‘Je’, ‘I’, ‘Ich’, and ‘io’ (accentuated on the ‘i’) the dryness of the ‘yo’, accentuated on the ‘o’, throws itself phonetically to the face. The tension of the ‘yo mismo’ and the satisfied comfort of the French ‘moi-même’ (myself) contrast just as much.

5B. Cultural consonances

Geographically situated between Islamised Africa and Europe, the landscape does not offer the energy rising from the ground like we find in France (Rodin’s Balzac), or the mirage coming down from the heavens, as with the Arab zone (the Grenada Alhambra). In a double refusal from the sky and the earth, the body stands on its ergots, tensing the belly, feet beating at a rebel earth in the motionless hammering of the Zapateado.

And around this body, affronting it, the very high, omnipresent railings ensconce the naves of Burgos and Seville from all parts. The windows have grids, from the Sierra Nevada to the Pyrenees, allowing to see outside from the inside, but not from outside to the inside. The Escorial is a grill, that of Saint Laurent’. The ‘sila de hiero’, the most constrictive of tortures, works through the progressive strangulation between the metal of the back of the chair and the

meal of the halter, in contrast with the sliced and smooth executions of the guillotine. The corridas, which are always good said Picasso, are ultimate face-to-faces, intensified by the fact that the provincial arena is smaller. Sometimes, the benches in parks are turned towards the hedges, not towards the garden.

It is not insignificant that the Spanish painting par excellence should be *Las Meninas*, which is not a model of classic representation in general, but of the classic representation in the Spanish manner, which is prison-like, and where the royal couple and the royal children who are welcoming them, as well as the painting painter (in another confrontation) are all taken face to face in a closed shot reframed from all parts by upright rectangles, both from the left to the right, but also from the front to the back and from the top to the bottom. The other exemplary Spanish painting is the *Tres de Mayo*: a man suddenly appears from the darkness of the night, Goya white, the white of nothingness, and is immediately blocked by the wall of guns assailing him. The first phrase of *Cien años de soledad* puts us at the “frente al pelotón de fusilamiento”.

The Spanish nothingness, ‘todo y nada’, all and nothing, is not the dialectical nothingness of Hegelian negativity, or the Sartre nothingness. It is pessimism of the emptiness, or rather of the pure interchangeable, where Italian, who only knows ‘Nulla’ practices pessimism of the full. A Toledo tomb bears the inscription ‘Hic est homo, et pulvis, et nihil’. The muckheap of El Escorial, the Podridero, solemnised the decomposition of kings for five years.

Therefore, true philosophers had to be the mystics. *Castillo interior o Las Moradas*, the title given to one of Theresa of Avilla’s tract, was written ‘upon the request of her superior and confessor’. Sinking into the ‘obscure night’, thinks John of the Cross, for whom the ‘vivacious flame of love’ holds in passionate anxieties. Don Quixote’s fiery head and Sancho Pança’s fat belly go nowhere in the same stride.

As soon as he enters, Don Iuan Tenorio stands like a nameless man ‘un hombre sin nombre’, or like a body-less man in the night: ‘mataréte la luz yo’. The Spanish man is a costume looking for a body, said painter Pedro del Aguila, in a formula enlightening even Basque couturier Paco Rabanne. The tradition of the scarecrow, of the ‘esperpanto’, is vivacious from Velasquez to our contemporary Saura.

In this atmosphere, classical music had to restrain to a few sounds that were infinitely repeated, not for their accuracy, like in Italy, but for their locking in by dry modulations. The Spanish Italian Domenico Scarlatti produced sonatas for piano that stand amongst the most played pieces ever written. For instance, the sequence of the concord: G-C-D-G-D-G (modulated flat E for the high D) followed by the concord: flat A-C-F-C-F (modulated B for a high C) prepared the accents of flamenco, and that of classical guitar, the monotonous insistence for the listener, and ‘silla de hieiro’ for the hands of the interpreter.

Just like there is a ‘satori’ of Japanese, there is a ‘duende’ of Spanish, which Garcia Lorca described in his *Juego y teoría del duende* (1933). It is not a muse (that he deems German), nor is it an angel (that is Italian), but a Socratic daimôn wounding the contours of every form, enjoying the edges of the wound made by a blow (‘ehrida’ from ‘herir’, Latin ferire): “el duenda ama el borde de la herida y se acerca (roams around) a los sitios donde las formas se funden en un anhelo (desire) superior a sus expresiones visibles”. Death elsewhere is like a falling curtain, here it is a rising curtain: “En todos los países la muerte es un fin. Llega

y se corren las cortinas. En España no. En España se levantan. (...) Un muerto en España está más vivo como muerto que en ningún sitio del mundo.”

Lorca's images in this one essay retrace the entire Spanish fantasy. The erection on the feet: “por el solo hecho de levantar los brazos, erguir la cabeza, y dar un golpe con el pie sobre el tabladillo”. The wall: Goyanesque contemplators of death lean over the balustrade of saltpetre flowers (“la imagen de la baranda, o barandilla, o barandal, es frecuentísima en la obra de F.G.L.” insists the publisher). The spurting blood: ‘chorro de sangre’. The knife: this ‘cuchillo’ that crosses every one of Borges’ *Milongas* to conclude its *Ficciones* by the stubborn revenge of El Sur, sharpening here the profile of the man like the edge of the barber razor; “hiere su perfil como el filo de una navaja barbera”. Finally, we go back to the girdling, that this time goes to the Milky Way, if it is true that behind the dark rumours of the back of the universe (the blacks of Velasquez, Goya, Rivera, Zurbarán), there is the transcendent nature, whose divinity is only a symbolisation that is itself mortal: “Sonidos negros detrás de los cuales estan ya en tierna intimidad los volcanes, las hormigas, los céfiros, y la gran noche, apretándose la cintura (tightening the belt, both literally and figuratively) con la Vía Láctea”.

Stirred by the duende, the corrida is not a business for death-dodgers, for “jugarse la vida”, but “una lección de música pitagórica”. In short, nothing casts a better light on the demon of this language than the clever soaking of the famous blades of Toledo. Like a Japanese blade lightens the Japanese satori. Where Italian always reminisces, in the manner of the Santucci's Kapellmeister, Spanish “con insistencia sobre las cabezas de los muertos” appears from instant to instant towards the unprecedented “que anuncia el constante bautizo (baptism) of las cosas recién creadas”.

It is classic to speak of passion about Spanish, and we shall see that Pessoa contrasts Portuguese and Spanish on this point. All that comes before is probably necessary to understand the nature of the quality of the passion.

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We could thereby think that this linguistic situation that is so particular should be restrained to one people, in other words that it should be inexportable. However, amongst the European languages envisaged here, Spanish is the only one to have been assumed by non-Indo European people, who spoke Maya or Nahuatl for instance, to the extent that it conveyed adequately their pre-Columbian claims.

Indeed, after 1500, a historic coincidence occurred. One that was even more formidable and improbable than that which conjugated the ‘numeration’ and ‘concord’ of Italian with that of classical music. It was, on the American soil, the meeting of the greatly constrictive Spanish with pre-Columbian civilisations that were equally constrictive, as testified by their sculptures and architectures, but also by their languages. The dried blood of Aztec pyramids had the most stifling, the most suffocating of smells. And it is, we can believe, an extraordinary crossbreeding of diversities and similitude that made Spanish literature one of the greatest today, even producing three original states of constriction.

In Argentina, which is at the end of the world, since after it there is only *El Sur*, it was the logical constriction. Thousands of kilometres from Spain, the Universe of the Spanish speaker Borges is the railing of a multidimensional El Escorial: “El universo (que otros llaman la Biblioteca) se compone de un número indefinido, y tal vez infinito, de galerías hexagonales (...) interminablemente. La distribución de las galerías es invariable”. Still, the confinement would be nothing if there remained a sense, but the only movement there is that of pure combinatory according to the calculation of probabilities of 1945, hence antecedent to the thermodynamic philosophy. “Explicar (o juzgar) un hecho es unirlo a otro ; esa vinculación, en Tlön, es un estado posterior del sujeto, que no puede afectar o iluminar el estado anterior. Todo estado mental es irreductible”.

In Columbia, with Gabriel García Márquez, it is an imagetic constriction that remains faithful to its El Escorial. From the first phrase of *El Otoño del Patriarca*, the gallinaceous destroy the metal mesh of the windows “las mallas de alambre de las ventanas”, flapping their wings ‘el tiempo estancado en el interior’ (that Couffon superbly translates into French by ‘le temps stagnant intra muros’ - ‘time stagnating intra muros’), while the city awakes from a secular lethargy to a noisy, semic and syntactic chiasmus of death, rot and greatness, of “de muerto grande y de podrida grandeza”. Spanish publishers were right; their cover is of the most abrupt wall in the world, the side of the Andes (the French cover is an image of Pinochet, as a political and moralising countersense).

The third constriction takes place at the north of the Isthmus, on the volcanic ground of Mexico, in the jaw of the sky and the earth. It is where Juan Rulfo disembarks us w

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