

GRAMMATIZATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN SPANISH AMERICA, LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE ORIGIN

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0. Introduction

From a perusal of early missionary grammars in Central and South America, it is observable that the grammatization of indigenous languages was influenced by three main factors. One was the belief in a mental language, a rational language, which was supposed to be common and the same for all mankind. This mental language was the source of particular tongues, which developed for the purpose of oral communication. The second was connected to the widely held view that Latin was a logical language in that it enjoyed a great degree of perfection because it reflected the mental language better than other languages. Here the idea that classical languages, older languages appeared to be more natural and rational is also present. These two factors also seem to tie in with the idea of language origin and language development in the course of history. The third factor in this grammatization process involved political, social, religious, and cultural considerations.

1. Mental language and grammatization

By looking both at manuscript and published grammars, it is discernible that missionaries followed the Spanish and the European climate of opinion in a conscious or unconscious manner, and wrote grammars of exotic languages on the basis of a two-tiered theoretical model: the universal level and the level of usage or manifestation of the

universal component in particular ways in the various tongues. This duality is already present in Plato's philosophy in which, we find the distinction between the 'Ideas' of things, unchanging or true reality, and the changing things of the visible world. Aristotle, in his *Categories*, makes a tripartite division of speech into nouns, verbs and syndesmoi or relational elements, revealing the true ways things exist in nature. And Thomas Aquinas's theory of knowledge and his doctrine of the word also allow us to get a better grasp of certain codification traits in early missionary linguistics. In Thomistic thinking, intellectual or intelligible knowledge and sensible or sensory knowledge have their counterpart in human discourse, where we find an inner word (a *verbum interius*) or mental language (the same for all of humanity) and an outer word (a *verbum exterius*) comprising the diverse and changing tongues of the various nations. Medieval grammarians in the 13th and 14th centuries operated within the Aristotelian and the Thomistic framework. In fact, as was the case for a number of Graeco-Roman scholars, medieval linguistic theory seemed to be connected to the debate on the origin of language and appeared as an attempt to account for language genesis. A cursory glance at Thurot (1868) and Pinborg (1967) reveals that Scholastic grammarians frequently resorted to words such *impono*, *impositio*, *invenio*, *invention*, *ad placitum*, thus suggesting that their theory of language was somewhat related to language origin and language creation.

During the Renaissance, the medieval framework survived in the works of a number of logical grammarians and was part of the intellectual climate hovering around at that time. Grammarians such as the Italian Julius-Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) and the Spaniard Franciscus Sanctius (1523-1601) still worked within the medieval philosophical model, a model which viewed human rationality (e.i., *ratio*) as the source or the cause of

the universal principles of language. These general principles assist us in explaining linguistic variation and particular usages in the various tongues in a better light.

Following the previous grammatical tradition, Scaliger (*De causis linguae Latinae* 1540, Book 3, Chap. 72; see 1584) not only included conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositions as the linguistic manifestations of the relative categories of speech, but also the accidents of nouns and verbs such as case, gender, number, tense, and so on (cf. Padley 1976:58-77). In a similar vein, Sanctius (*Minerva seu de causis linguae Latinae* 1587, Book 1, Chap. 2; see 1986) made a tripartite division of the parts of speech into noun, verb, and particles. He argued that this tripartite division is universal and as such is found in all languages. This conception of particle at the level of universal grammar, of the causes underlying the particular usages of the various tongues, helps us to better understand the use of the term particle in the grammaticization of indigenous languages by many missionaries.

In the composition of grammars, missionaries subsumed under the term particle consignifying or relational elements as it had been outlined earlier by some theoretical grammarians in Europe. In his *Arte de la lengua mexicana* (1547), Andrés de Olmos called particles the relational elements in Mexican or Nahuatl. Thus, under this category, he grouped forms which in modern linguistics would be considered derivational affixes (for instance, diminutives), inflectional affixes (such as case, number, and verb tenses), and indeclinable parts of speech (such as adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions), no matter whether the latter occurred in composition or as separate forms. This classification has been viewed as opaque and ambiguous by some modern critics.

However, on this point this Franciscan monk was following an old idea from the grammatical tradition.

Olmos (1574, Second Part, Chap. 7, “Los verbos activos y algunas partículas que se juntan a ellos”; see 1993) discussed a number of elements incorporated into the verb, which mark, *te*, the animate and, *tla*, the inanimate nature of the argument. Thus, he stated “que esta partícula *tla* denota que la acción del verbo a quien se junta puede generalmente convenir o pasar a cosas inanimadas *nitlatlaçotla*” (where *ni* is ‘I’, *tla* indicates the ‘indefinite nature of the object’, and *tlaçola* is the ‘present indicative of love’), which he translates as ‘yo amo algo’. In brief, Olmos showed that both *tla* and *te* are particles revealing the active (transitive) nature of a verb with either an indefinite inanimate object in the case of *tla* or an indefinite animate object in the case of *te*, expressed or understood “sub intelecto [sic]”. By referring to particles rather than to pronouns, Olmos was stressing the relational character of those elements.

2. Language origin and grammatization

Another pillar supporting this codification edifice touched on language origin and its development in history. Relying on Genesis Chaps. 10 and 11, scholars believed both in the existence of a first language as well as in linguistic diversity resulting from the confusion of tongues in the episode of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent dispersion of nations. A number of authors felt that the primeval language must have been perfect in that it reflected the rationality of the language of the mind. In the Prolog to the Reader of his *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* (1555; see 2001), Alonso de Molina (c.1514-1585) referred to this first language as follows, “Luego después del diluvio en toda la tierra no se hablaba más de una lengua, en la cual se trataban, se comunicaban y

se entendían [...]”. Nevertheless, in the stream of history, the original language became figurative, diversified, and changed into other languages, even if the basic rational principles of that first language still remained in the tongues of the various nations. Older languages (Hebrew), classical languages (Greek and Latin) were supposed to have changed less than others. In the 13th century, some authors still expressed the view that only Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were rational languages as all the others were considered to be ‘barbarian’. In Europe, Latin grammar was perceived as a referential system from which the ‘rational’ and expressive qualities of vernacular languages could be evaluated. Latin became a tool which enabled the simplification and systematization of American languages. With the emergence of national languages in the Renaissance, Italian, Spanish, French, and other European languages also acquired a certain aura of respect. Within this context, in his Quechua *Gramática o arte* (1560, Prolog; see 1951), Domingo de Santo Tomás boasted about the fact the he managed to arrange and enclose the Quechua language “debajo de las reglas y los preceptos de la Latina”.

Probably consciously or unconsciously embracing the previous view on language and its development in history, Andrés de Olmos (*Arte de la lengua mexicana* 1547; see 1993:61) wrote:

Primeramente se porná la conjugación, no como en la gramática [meaning Latin and Spanish grammar], sino como la lengua lo pide y demanda, porque algunas maneras de decir que nosotros tenemos en nuestra lengua o la Latina, ésta no las tiene [...]”.

Olmos suggests that Latin and Spanish are more perfect and keep more rational traits than Nahuatl. Hence, “esta no las tiene” implies a lack of tenses in the indigenous tongue and a value judgment resulting from his philosophical and educational background.

Within language and its development in history, Latin was believed to better mirror the traits of the common or original language. In the grammatical tradition, it was widely accepted that Latin had eight parts of speech (noun, verb, participle, preposition, adverb, interjection, and conjunction). Now, these eight notional parts of speech manifested in the structure of Latin could be found or identified in other languages, even if their formal embodiment may not correspond to that of Latin. For this reason, in his *Quechua grammar* (1560:19; see 1951), Domingo de Santo Tomás writes:

En esta lengua [Quechua] como en la Latina y en las demás, ay todas las ocho partes de la oración, o habla: porque en ella hay nombres que significan cosas, y pronombres que se ponen en lugar del nombre. Ay preposiciones que determinan los nombres [...]. Ay verbos, que explican y significan sus acciones y passiones [...].”

In his codification of Quechua, the Dominican friar attempted to mold the structural manifestations of some universal notions in Quechua into those of Latin or of Spanish. For instance, any preposition altering or modifying the value of a noun independently of whether it appeared as a preposition, a postposition or an affix was called a preposition. There is also a cultural and utilitarian explanation for this type of grammatization, which will be discussed later on.

Traditionally, in the analysis of Latin, a language endowed with a degree of perfection, the parts of speech were eight, a division repeated by Nebrija in his *Introductiones Latinae* (1481, a.i.). Consequently, missionaries attempted to mold exotic tongues into those eight parts, at least, with regard to the notional values of such a division. However, within the domain of individual languages, the categories of discourse constituted an open class and could vary from one to another. In his *Gramática castellana* (1942), Nebrija (see 1980:132) had stated that contrary to Greek, “los latinos no tienen artículo, más distinguen la interjección del adverbio”, and that Spanish “tenía

diez partes”. This analysis provided missionaries with sufficient latitude to group the parts of speech of American Indian languages according to their own particular idiosyncrasies, even if subsequently they sought to explain and resolve such specific traits on the basis of Latin due to their doctrinal views and for practical reasons.

In his *Arte y vocabulario de la lengua guaraní* (1640), resorting to the Latin model, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (1585-1652) stated (Prelude to his work; see 1993), “Tiene esta lengua las ocho partes de la Oración, nombre, pronombre, verbo, participio, posposición, adverbio, interjección, conjunción”, where he introduced a necessary change in guaraní, substituting the postposition for the preposition. However, we must assume that for Ruiz de Montoya the postposition would not be considered a natural part of speech. On those grounds, in the opening paragraph of Chapter 7 “De la Posposiciones”, after enumerating them, adds that “las cuales [postpositions] se irán explicando y reduciendo a las preposiciones Latinas” (p. 71). Likewise, in his *Arte en la lengua michuacana* (1574), Juan Bautista Lagunas (died in 1604) named interpositions the particles placed between the initial element of that agglutinating language and the infinitival suffix marker *-ni*. Interpositions, between five and seven per language unit, are mainly derivational and inflectional markers. Lagunas realized that interpositions constitute an abundant and important class in Michoacan. Consequently, he asked the rhetorical question (2002:240):

“Empero a las otras segundas [particles], y a las demás que siempre se interponen entre estas inseparables [...] raíces de los verbos, y el *-ni* que termina el infinitivo, ¿Por qué razón no serán partes *particulares* [emphasis mine] de la oración y se llamarán interposiciones?”

It is easily discernible that Ruiz de Montoya and Lagunas grammaticalized American Indian languages following the theoretical model outlined here. On the one hand, they posited a

rational and historical level connected to language origin and embodied, to a great extent, in Latin, and, on the other, they set up a level of analysis involving the diverse and idiosyncratic features of the various tongues.

Political, social, economic, and cultural factor also influenced the institution of American Indian languages. In his “Prólogo al rey don Felipe” of his *Grammatica o arte* (1560; see 1951), Domingo de Santo Tomás makes a fervent apology of the Quechua language and attempts to defend its rational nature and its similarities with Latin and Spanish.

[...] tan conforme a la Latina y española; y en el arte y artificio de ella, que no parece sino que fue un pronóstico que españoles la avían de poseer. Lengua pues, S.[u] M.[ajestad], tan polida y abundante, regulada y encerrada debajo de reglas y preceptos de la latina como ésta (como consta en esta arte) no bárbara, que quiere decir (según Quintiliano y los demás latinos) llena de barbarismos y defectos, sin modos, ni tiempos, ni casos, ni orden, ni regla, ni concierto, sino pulida y delicada.

In this quotation, the Dominican monk was, indirectly, advocating the position held by the clergy, and opposed by secular authorities and landowners, that the conversion of Indians to Christianity should be carried out in the local languages rather than in Spanish. At different times, the Spanish Crown issued edicts enforcing compulsory learning of Spanish by the Indians for political and economic reasons and as a means of exercising a greater sway over them. The missionary was informing King Philip II that Quechua was not an unprincipled or irrational tongue and as a consequence it was an adequate and convenient tool for embodying and expressing the creed and mysteries of the Christian doctrine (cf. Suárez 1992:248 and 253). In a way, the missionary was promoting the institution of an American Indian language, of a Quechua grammar, and of a body of religious texts in the local languages for the purpose of speeding up the evangelizing efforts and the saving of pagan souls, while secular authorities were interested in the

acculturation and hispanization of Indian and in showing that local tongues were 'barbarian', irrational and inadequate for transmitting the Christian message.

Regarding this issue, some missionaries did not hesitate to resort to the argument of language origin to try proving the rationality and propriety of the local languages. Thus, they marveled at the propriety with which the words of some indigenous tongues explained the nature of the things they signified, an attribute which incited them to establish a connection between those tongues and the original language, i.e., the one that had been spoken by Adam in Paradise. In this respect, Alonso de Mondragón wrote concerning Mayan:

Tan propio que aún sus voces explican la naturaleza, y propiedades de sus objetos; que parece fue el más semejante al que los labios de nuestro primer Padre dió a cada cosa su esencial y nativo nombre [In Alonso de Mondragón's "Dedicatoria" to *Arte de la lengua maya* (1684) authored by Gabriel de San Buenaventura].

As may be observed, the humanists' project towards elevating vernacular and 'barbarian' tongues to the condition of languages of culture was carried over to the New Continent and advocated by missionaries who made it their own personal goal. They saw in this idea a good reason for furthering the advancement of Christianity in the local languages against the hispanization of natives and the destruction of their languages and their culture for political and economic reasons.

3. Outer history and grammatization

Educationally, the best tools for the grammatical endeavors of the missionaries came from their knowledge of the European linguistic tradition. Early Spanish missionaries learned Latin mainly with the help of Antonio de Nebrija's (1444-1532) *Introductiones Latinae*. Nebrija's Latin grammar was a standard text in Spanish universities and the various religious orders considered it a model to follow in the

description of indigenous languages (Aguirre 1983:207). In addition, the utilization of Nebrija's grammar had a utilitarian dimension since it was the model in which friars had received their training: it contained metaterms with which evangelizers (i.e., the main readers of those grammars) were well acquainted. On this matter, Domingo de Santo Tomás (1560, Prolog to the Reader; see 1951) noted, "porque esta arte [...] se hace para eclesiásticos que tienen mucha noticia de la lengua Latina, va conforme al arte de ésta". Nebrija's Latin grammar placed great emphasis on the study of formal traits due to the humanists' concerns for the study of usage in Latin authors. However, conceptual definitions also had a relevant position in his grammar. This notional nomenclature was useful for missionaries because it was applicable to the study of languages in general. It included terms such as noun, verb, active or transitive verb, case, root, particle, and composition; the latter term, for instance, was quite useful for the grammaticization of agglutinating languages.

Latin was also essential in the composition of grammars in that up to Nebrija's time grammar meant Latin grammar, since practically no grammars of vernacular languages were on hand. Issued as *Introducciones Latinas contrapuesto el romance al latin* (c. 1488), this bilingual text of Nebrija's *Introducciones Latinae* (1481) was significant for the reason that in addition to being a kind of Latin-Spanish contrastive grammar, it contained grammatical nomenclature printed in Spanish. Throughout the 16th century, after Nebrija's death, Latin terminology in Spanish continued appearing in Latin grammars written in Spanish for beginners. Moreover, in another of Nebrija's treatises, his *Gramática castellana* (1492), missionaries had Spanish terminology in a vernacular language, which, as its author stated (see 1980, Prolog), was loose and needed to be

reduced to rules. Domingo de Santo Tomás also expressed himself in similar terms in his Prolog to the Reader of his Quechua *Gramática o arte* (1560; see 1951), where he pointed out his effort “en querer reducir la lengua general de los reynos del Perú a arte, queriéndola encerrar debajo de preceptos y cánones”. Even though it was not reprinted for two centuries, Nebrija’s *Gramática castellana* must have been useful for missionaries (cf. title of Book 5, “De las introducciones de la lengua castellana para los que de estraña lengua querrán deprender”), as it revealed how languages different from Latin could be reduced to rules.

Missionaries also tapped on native resources in their institution of the local languages. Indians used a pictographic writing system to record folk tales, customs, and traditions. Some missionaries resorted to such pictographic writing to divulge the Christian message among the Indians. For instance, in his *Catecismo de la doctrina cristiana con jeroglíficos* (c. 1525; see 1970), Pedro de Gante (1479-1572) used the pictographic system and the symbols common among the Mexican Indians to paint on canvases the principle mysteries of the faith (cf. Suárez 1992:12).

Educated Indians were also of great help in the composition of grammars, in the production of dictionaries and in the translation of catechisms, the Christian doctrine and other texts. Several outstanding students from the Imperial College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, to whom Franciscan friars had taught Latin and the art of grammar, contributed to the literary and linguistic codification of Nahuatl. The students produced texts which contained folk stories from their oral tradition, common expressions, and phrases uttered by old people. Many of the Indian writers, generally of noble ancestry, were trilingual in that, besides Latin, they had learned Spanish in their daily contact with

the Spaniards and had improved their knowledge of that language with the help of dictionaries, since Spanish grammar as such was not formally taught in those days.

Concerning the graphic system, missionaries thought that Latin graphemes and those of other European languages could be used for reducing indigenous languages to writing. Indeed, they quickly discovered that the “savages” employed the same recurrent strings of sounds to designate the same objects and that many such sounds were similar to those uttered by European speakers. Hence they felt that Latin characters could be used to capture and reduce the local tongues to writing. However, they had to resort to “nuevas letras” and to the doubling of letters “para sacar por ellas la pronunciación diferente”. For instance, Lagunas introduced a *k* to represent a strong type of velar stop in Michoacan, and Diego González Holguín (*Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Perú, llamada lengua qquichua o del inca*, 1608; see 1952) distinguished an unaspirated consonant in the word *caca* ‘uncle’ from *kacca* ‘the rocks’ with a guttural aspiration in the first syllable and from *kaka* ‘open-mouthed container’ with two aspirations, by replacing grapheme *c* by *k*, to indicate an aspirated sound. He also proposed double letters such as *cc*, *chh*, *pp*, *qq*, and *tt* for sound involving new pronunciations which he attempted to describe. Finally, in his *Vocabulario de la lengua Aymara* (1612), Ludovico Bertonio suggested that the best way for learning new sounds was by directly listening to native Indians and “criollos” (i.e., Europeans born in America) (cf. Suárez 1992:48-50).

Testimonies of the assistance Indians provided in the upsurge of native literature and the production of native texts are not scarce. This body of literature constituted an important source for the writing of vocabularies and dictionaries. The models for the composition of dictionaries were Antonio de Nebrija and Ambrogio Calepino (1440-

1551). Nebrija was the author of a *Dictionarium latino-hispanum* in 1492 and of a *Dictionarium hispano-latinum* in 1495, and Calepino published his Latin dictionary under the title of *Cornucopiae* in 1502; these works reappeared in numerous editions in the course of the 16th century, and Calepino's dictionary was extended to incorporate many European languages into the original Latin version. In his *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* (1555), the first dictionary ever printed in America, Alonso de Molina chose the same methodology and order as that followed by Nebrija, and so did Domingo de Santo Tomás in his Quechua *Lexicon o Vocabulario de la lengua general del Perú* (1560).

However, in dictionary building, missionaries also had to innovate due to the peculiar grammatical structures and expressions found in the local languages. Such unexpected features had to be taken into consideration in the lay-out of lexicographical works. Thus, Molina argued (“Aviso Tercero” of the Prolog to his *Vocabulario*) that in Nahuatl all verbs should be entered in the first person of the present indicative (i.e., the root form), even if “el romance de los verbos se pondrá en el infinitivo, como lo pone Antonio de Lebrixa en su vocabulario”. Following a similar approach, Domingo de Santo Tomás (Prolog to his Quechua *Lexicon*) claimed that verbs are entered in the first person singular of the present indicative, because such forms do not depend on other forms and “las demás se forman de ellas”. As regards the contents of dictionaries, these included new terms in both languages due to the differences existing between cultures, meaning clarification of new words through extensive paraphrasing, the introduction of foreignisms and barbarisms in both directions, and the use of neologisms to designate new concepts, principally those that constituted the core of the Christian religion,

“vocablos de lo espiritual, vicios, virtudes, de la otra vida y estados de ella; y este vocabulario es necesario para predicar y catchizar”, as stated by Diego González Holguín in his *Vocabulario de la lengua de todo el Perú, llamada lengua qquichua o del inca* (1608:10; see 1952). It was also common to omit many terms referring to the religious beliefs and practices from pre-Hispanic times.

Dictionaries in the Calepino tradition based on quotations from native texts and native literature were also written. The dictionary or “copia verborum”, under the title of *Dictionario* (1574; see 2002) of the Michoacan language, composed by Juan Bautista Lagunas, appeared to use the criteria established by Calepino. Calepino’s work was based on the usage and authority of Latin writers, while Nebrija was a mere recording of semantic equivalents. Religious lexicographers mainly composed vocabularies of the latter type with some exceptions. Lagunas considered that the doctrinal texts that had been translated into Michoacan were sufficient to state that his brief dictionary had been made “casi al modo del Calepino”. In *Historia de las cosas de Nueva España* 1988, Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) conceived the idea of putting together a kind of Calepino in Nahuatl. For about thirty years and with the help of native Indians, who were experts in grammar, that Franciscan monk had collected a fine body of texts (drawn from an oral tradition and from old people’s speechways) which constituted the first step in the production of a bilingual Calepino. From those texts one could extract “los vocablos con sus propias y metafóricas significaciones y todas las maneras de hablar y las más de sus antiguallas buenas o malas” (Prolog to Book 1). (cf. Acuña 1983 and Suárez 1992:39-47).

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