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A Political History of Spanish

The Making of a Language

Edited by
José del Valle

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16 Linguistic emancipation and the academies of the Spanish language in the twentieth century: the 1951 turning point

José del Valle

Introduction

As discussed in earlier chapters, the independence of most of Spain's American colonies in the second decade of the nineteenth century resulted in a destabilization of the institutional ecology in which, until that point, the standardization of Spanish had been developing. Within the imperial structure, despite the heterogeneity of the Iberian and American sociolinguistic fields and the difficult implementation of state language policies (Firbas and Martínez in this volume; Solano 1991; Heath 1972), the metropolis had been the principal source for the production and reproduction of the legitimate language (Bourdieu 1991). In the eighteenth century, with the advent of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne in 1701, this metropolitan linguistic centrality had been strengthened even further through institutionalization with the creation, in 1713, of the Spanish Royal Academy (henceforth RAE) (Medina in this volume; Moreno Fernández 2005: 168–73). The independence of most American colonies in the early nineteenth century resulted in the development of new conditions for the deployment of language policies and metalinguistic discourses. In spite of the Panhispanist movement's efforts to perpetuate colonial cultural hierarchies, by the last third of the century it had become clear that the Latin American lettered class had assumed control not only of the political destiny of the new nations but also of the development of autonomous cultural fields.

Within this political and institutional ecology, Spanish became not only a central instrument for the articulation of the nation-state – an instrument that must, therefore, be managed by the agents of the state – but also a disputed symbol of both national and panhispanic identities, an object over whose control – over what it is, what it represents and who has the authority to settle linguistic disputes – fierce battles would be fought with both national and transnational interests at stake. The history of the academies of the Spanish language (Guitarte and Torres Quintero 1968; Zamora Vicente 1999: 345–67) is a privileged object through which to examine these debates. As we saw in Cifuentes's chapter, the foundation of subsidiary academies after 1870 generated tensions that revealed linguistic and political discontinuities internal to the still young Latin American

nations as well as the swampy ground on which the panhispanic community would have to be built (see also Toscano y García in this volume). In this chapter, we will consider the conference that, several decades after the RAE's initiative, brought together for the first time all academies of the Spanish language and prepared the ground for the eventual creation of the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española* (ASALE), a language planning body which to this day plays a central role in the codification and elaboration of Spanish. The 1951 conference became not only, as we would expect, a conspicuous display of verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995) but an explosion of language-ideological debates (Blommaert 1999), a profusion of mutually contested metalinguistic discourses that exposed the multiple cultural and political processes with which the standardization of Spanish is inextricably intertwined.

Mexico's invitation

In 1950, Mexican president Miguel Alemán (1902–83) asked the Mexican Academy (henceforth AM from *Academia Mexicana*) to organize a meeting of all academies of the Spanish language under the auspices of his government. The president's intention to launch this original and ambitious cultural initiative was made public on June 14 during a special session of the AM. The occasion was the induction of José Rubén Romero (1890–1952), Mexican writer and special advisor to the president, as full member of the Academy. After delivering, according to tradition, his inaugural speech and listening to the AM director's response, Romero once again took the floor and publicly declared the Mexican government's plan to organize and fully subsidize the event. He applauded the president's commitment to culture and predicted "a beautiful spectacle . . . [that will bring together] all academies without exception . . . without consideration for relationships among governments and caring only for the common interest and mutual sympathy that springs from language, the spiritual blood of races" (Garrido et al. 2010: 53).

Offering an outline of the program, he highlighted its goals: unifying the lexicon, enriching the language with words commonly used in Latin America, providing accurate definitions for Americanisms already included in the RAE's *Diccionario*, creating academies in countries that did not yet have one (he meant Puerto Rico) and putting the Spanish language – "force of love and spiritual cohesion" as well as "the only weapon available to the weak for understanding each other and earning the respect of others" – at the service of Humanity (Garrido et al. 2010: 53). Romero's speech foreshadowed a series of leitmotifs that ran through the whole conference structuring debates about Spanish – its corpus, status and symbolic value – and struggles over control of the academies' discourse of self-representation: first, a tension between the defense of linguistic unity and the simultaneous affirmation of Latin American agency vis-à-vis language; second, an apparent contradiction between, on one

hand, a conspicuous effort to define the conference as non-political and, on the other, its obvious origin within Mexico's body politic and the recognition of panhispanic unity as a strategic value in a broader geopolitical context.

Alemán's proposal was enthusiastically embraced by the AM. An organizing committee was appointed and the decision was made that the event would begin on April 23 of the following year on the anniversary of Miguel de Cervantes's death. A few weeks later, a representation from the AM flew across the Atlantic in order to personally issue the Mexican government's invitation. The AM's director, Alejandro Quijano, with his colleagues Genaro Fernández MacGregor and José Rubén Romero, landed in Madrid on October 13.

On the 19th, at a special session of the RAE, the Mexican delegation was able to issue the official invitation. In their speeches, Quijano, Fernández MacGregor and Romero further developed the themes announced in Mexico a few months earlier. Firstly, they gave special prominence to Latin America's Spanish roots and recognized – in a line of thinking reminiscent of Panhispanism and *ariélismo* (see Arnoux and Del Valle in this volume) – a common descent and culture that unites all Spanish-speaking nations, enabling them to commit to joint undertakings: "Today, in America, we all feel our common descent; and that is how awareness of a common destiny has been formed and will be affirmed" (Fernández MacGregor in Garrido et al. 2010: 81).¹ Secondly, the Mexicans' speeches showed significant concern with the language's quality and, reproducing old fears of fragmentation associated with political division² and new ones triggered by rapid changes affecting modern societies in the 1950s, made a call to safeguard unity:

Let's try . . . to care for and purify our language, protect it from contamination in the form of barbarisms and unnecessary neologisms . . . We only want to protect it, in all the countries where it is spoken, from the anarchy produced by unwise idioms and words that, if left unchecked, threaten to leave us one day not with one language but with a series of languages or rather dialects. (Quijano qtd. in Garrido et al. 2010: 77)

It would be inaccurate, however, to characterize the Mexicans' discourse on language as falling squarely within radical purism and uncritical Hispanophilia.

¹ The conference proceedings can be found in Comisión Permanente 1952, published in the form of a *Memoria* by the Standing Committee that emerged from the conference. More recently, in 2010, the Mexican Academy – in collaboration with *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, the *Fundación Miguel Alemán*, and Mexico's *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* – published them again in a different format that includes minutes from the AM's meetings during the period (referenced as Garrido et al. 2010 throughout this chapter).

² The possible fragmentation of Spanish after the collapse of the Spanish empire – a development that would parallel that of Latin – was one of Andrés Bello's justifications for writing his 1847 grammar. Later in the nineteenth century, Rufino José Cuervo would not only fear but also predict the eventual end of linguistic unity. It was this prediction that triggered his bitter polemic against Spanish writer and academician Juan Valera (Del Valle 2002; Ennis and Pfänder 2009). See also Toscano y García in this volume.

Their concern with the quality and unity of the language was nuanced by the recognition of not only the inevitability but, more revealingly, the necessity of change in a context defined by progress – “We do not want the language to become a static organism; on the contrary, it must be a living phenomenon, always in motion in order to respond to the requirements of progress” (Quijano qtd. in Garrido et al. 2010: 77) – and the development of national character:

The language, as it passed through indigenous lips, earned in softness and sweetness what it had lost in brightness, and became richer with small gems, the many words from vernacular languages which remained to name the indigenous animals and plants as well as simple everyday things. That is why we find it so much our own, so intimately linked to the very essence of Mexicanness, that in primary education it is called National Language. (Romero qtd. in Garrido et al. 2010: 86–7)

It must be noted, however, that these affirmations of national self-determination were carefully crafted and in no way undermined the ideal of linguistic unity that had been placed at the very ideological core of the conference. All speeches expressed a desire and commitment to preserve panhispanic unity in a geopolitical context in which blocs rather than individual countries were, if not the legitimate, at least the *de facto* agents in the international arena. The shared Spanish language was, in the academicians’ view, a most valuable asset:

In the United Nations, the principle of collective security, the power of the law, is definitely established; as is a mechanism that will secure the dominance, in every instance, of the equitable will of all powers brought together... the Ibero-American race has to contribute with its ideals to the moral reconstruction of the world. (Fernández MacGregor qtd. in Garrido et al. 2010: 82)

Overall, the AM’s representatives in Madrid dexterously navigated a politically and rhetorically challenging event. Empowered by the Mexican government’s initiative and support, they had taken a bold step towards assuming actual leadership of the institutional network of language academies, and such an action had the obvious potential to raise suspicion, if not to alienate the RAE. The very goal of unity that had inspired the initiative ran the risk of giving birth to a stillborn if the Spaniards – and with them numerous Latin American academicians – were to oppose it. Therefore, while taking such a vigorous language policy initiative, the Mexicans trod carefully to save the RAE’s face, to recognize its seniority and grant the Spanish institution a special distinction within this apparently emerging pluricentric linguistic field: as Quijano addressed the Spaniards, he announced that a draft of the program would be delivered to them for their revision and approval, and asked the head of the Spanish institution, the distinguished philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1869–1968), to officiate as chairman of the upcoming event.

Franco’s deal-breaker

After obtaining a positive response from their Spanish colleagues as well as from other academies, the conference promised to be a celebration of panhispanic harmony and commitment to the joint defense of the common language, paradoxically, under Spain’s tutelage and Mexico’s sponsorship. Preliminary activities showed that there seemed to be consensus around a less strident form of purist discourse – one that accepted the changing nature of language and its need to adapt to times and circumstances – and around a defense of the language’s unity grounded in the coordinated action of all academies.

However, on February 26, the AM received a telegram from Madrid: “*SURGIDA DIFICULTAD INSUPERABLE EXPLICO CARTA STOP CORDIAL SALUDO CASARES / UNSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEM ARISEN I EXPLAIN IN LETTER STOP CORDIAL GREETINGS CASARES.*” It was signed by Julio Casares (1877–1964), the RAE’s secretary, and was followed by an official letter confirming the Spaniards’ withdrawal from the conference because of warnings from Spanish authorities (“indicaciones de la Superioridad”). Six weeks later, on April 7, the Spanish government, through a statement made by its Education Minister, would make its position public:

Upon receiving the invitation from the president of the Republic of Mexico, the Spanish Royal Academy stated that, for patriotic reasons, it demanded, as a necessary moral pre-condition of its participation, that the Mexican government publicly state that it has ended its relations with the Red government and suspended recognition of the so-called Spanish diplomatic representation in Mexico. Since the Mexican government did not comply with this requirement – which in the present circumstances our national dignity deems indispensable –, the Spanish Royal Academy has decided not to attend. (Pagano 1951: 253)³

The background to this clash is well known. In 1936, during Spain’s Second Republic (1931–9), the democratically elected leftist government of the *Frente Popular* came under siege as a result of a military coup. A three-year civil war ensued that ended with the insurgents’ victory in 1939 and thousands of

³ The fact is that Spanish academicians wanted to attend but were discouraged by the government from doing so. The RAE’s secretary, Julio Casares, sent Quijano two letters: the official letter informing him of the RAE’s absence and a personal and confidential letter that provided further details on the circumstances surrounding their decision. In the latter, we read: “The contents of the attached letter is what the secretary of the Spanish Academy must report to the director of the Mexican Academy. Now, Julio Casares, the friend, wants to say something else to Alejandro Quijano, the friend, even if in a strictly reserved and confidential manner... our director called a secret meeting last Saturday the 24th and informed us on the contents of a note from the Council of Ministers in which, while our attendance as individuals to the academies conference is not explicitly prohibited, it is suggested that our attendance would not be well received.” I thank my colleague and collaborator Bárbara Cifuentes and Mr. Liborio Villagómez, head of the Mexican Academy’s library, for facilitating access to these letters.

Spaniards going into exile and settling in countries such as Argentina and, quite prominently, Mexico (Lida 1997, 2001; Pagni 2011). Spain's political regime became a right-wing military dictatorship led by General Francisco Franco, and a Republican Spanish government, referred to by Francoists as the Red government, was established in exile. While initially Spain was excluded from the United Nations, in late 1950 Franco's diplomats began to succeed in breaking the isolation and a number of countries started to formalize relations with the dictatorship. Mexico, however, which had been the first to recognize Spain's Republican government in exile, remained firm in its refusal to grant diplomatic legitimacy to Franco's government.

The organizers of the 1951 conference were aware that this active fault might very well cause an earthquake. In fact, while the AM representatives were in Madrid in October 1950, Mexico's position in the UN – opposed to lifting sanctions against Spain – had become known and led some Spanish academicians to express disappointment. The minutes of the AM's meeting held on November 27, 1950 – a few weeks after the delegation's return to Mexico – reveal their concern that these political developments might get in the way: "Mr. Romero provides more information and adds that the speech given at the United Nations by our permanent delegate, Mr. Luis Padilla Nervo, who opposed the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Spain by that organization in 1946, caused a poor impression among Spanish academicians" (Garrido et al. 2010: 97). A few months later, at the first AM meeting after receipt of the telegram, the October episode was recalled: while in Madrid, the Mexican representatives had been able to defuse the crisis by insisting on the academicians' non-political intentions and their independence of the respective governments' actions (Garrido et al. 2010: 108). However, as the minutes of the March 30, 1951 meeting of the AM clearly show, the diplomatic imbroglio surrounding Spain's efforts to come out of isolation would only get worse in subsequent months:

Mr. Carreño stated that subsequent events of a political nature had contributed to making that already unfavorable impression even worse. During the recent meeting of the Social and Economic Council of the U.N. in Santiago de Chile, the Mexican delegate supported a motion by the Soviet delegate opposing the Spanish government. (Garrido et al. 2010: 108)

The matter was serious and caused much distress among Mexican academicians, who saw the RAE's absence as possibly devastating for the conference. A debate ensued within the AM in which three resolutions were placed on the table: the first, advanced by Quijano and supported by president Alemán, was to go ahead with the conference; the second, defended by Fernández MacGregor, was to suspend it; and the third, preferred by García Naranjo, was to postpone it by three months. Fourteen votes were cast for the first option and two for the

second. The conference would begin on April 23 without the Spanish Royal Academy.

The Spanish government's attitude not only upset the academicians' plans but also, as one might expect, caused indignation throughout Spanish America and most intensely in Mexico. The daily press filled its pages with articles reporting on the episode and expressing outrage at what was felt to be Spain's slap in the face to the Mexican people. An editorial in *El Universal*, entitled "El Congreso de Academias," insisted that the conference had been planned as a purely cultural endeavor that had been politicized by Franco, and responded to the Madrid press's questioning of the event's legitimacy:

But suddenly, close to the date of the inauguration, the RAE informed the Mexican Academy that "because of orders from the authorities" they would not be able to attend. We know well what those orders were and where they came from! Politics had gotten in the way! The regime currently dominant in Spain, with which Mexico does not have relations, was banning the Spanish Academy – which is a statutory body in Spain – from taking part in the conference. They even wanted something else, ignoring the elevated spiritual and cultural goal pursued: to sabotage the Academies Conference. Some Madrid newspaper, unquestionably speaking for the current regime, explicitly declared that the conference could not take place without Spain and that, with regard to language, it is there and not in America that things are decided and legislated. (*El Universal*, 21 April 1951, section 1, page 3, columns 3–6)

In the days immediately preceding the inauguration of the conference, the Mexican press forcefully condemned Franco's government for its decision (while, in general, exonerating Spanish academicians), consistently praised president Alemán's initiative, expressed pride in Latin America's cultural accomplishments, recognized the need to protect the language, and declared Latin America's preparedness to do so.

The inauguration

The inaugural ceremony, on April 23, offered an opportunity for the organizers to discursively manage the disruption caused by the RAE's absence and, once again, to frame the event in order to control its meaning and secure its success. Two texts in particular can be singled out as representative of this effort: President Alemán's speech at the inauguration ceremonies (Garrido et al. 2010: 143–8) and Mexican academician Nemesio García Naranjo's (1883–1962) at an official conference banquet on the same date (ibid. 169–76).

President Alemán maintained that, on one hand, the language exhibited great unity and resilience – "with the hardness of a diamond whose essence and character have resisted the changes imposed by time, geography and customs" (143) – and, on the other, a healthy degree of variation that allowed for the expression of national idiosyncrasy – "and, with the sparkle of a diamond, it

reflects the essential richness of our peoples with their multiple manifestations" (145). Elements of this type of discourse – that embraces simultaneously the language's unity and its internal diversity – appeared throughout the speech and echoed the conceptual structure of traditional Panhispanism. In this tradition, Spanish was not simply a valuable instrument for communication but a shared cultural frame worthy of special care, a position also advanced by Alemán: "If after the four centuries since Spanish came to America more than twenty peoples still jointly cultivate it, this indicates that, in spite of differences that may be found among those peoples, something fundamental unites them permanently, deep bonds constituted by identical ways of conceiving and expressing thought, of experiencing and manifesting feeling, that we must strengthen in our minds and our affections" (145).

However, the new context – a conference tarnished by Spain's absence – lent itself to a more robust affirmation of Latin America's proud ownership of Spanish. In contrast with Panhispanism's assumption of Spain's preeminence over its former colonies, as he recognized the cultural unity grounded in the common language Alemán was also careful to reclaim the historical agency of Latin Americans: "In its development, Spanish American nations and the Philippine peoples have contributed, alongside Spain, to strengthening the Spanish language" (Garrido et al. 2010: 143). He embraced unity among the peoples who speak Spanish but granted no single country any right to claim superiority and forcefully argued for the uniqueness of American Spanish – "with the different rhythms affectionately imposed by our indigenous peoples throughout the colonial period" (146) – and, in a rhetorical move that conspicuously brought politics and language together, for its nobility associated with freedom, knowledge and the highest forms of literary expression:

Spanish has been for the American people a language of freedom and human dignity. In this language, Hidalgo delivered his harangues and Bolívar his speeches; Morelos issued the decrees that abolished slavery and distributed the land... Also copious is the manifestation of the highest thinking that shapes the unmistakable style and nobility of our writers... In literature, the American idiom stands out perhaps for its subtlety, which don Juan de Alarcón took to Spain itself. (146–7)

For his part, Nemesio García Naranjo further pursued Alemán's affirmation of Latin America's ability to actively and competently engage in matters related to language standardization. However, the central purpose of his speech – namely, tackling the thorny issue of the RAE's absence and responding to questions regarding the legitimacy of the conference – led him to reveal a position much more ambivalent than Alemán's and ultimately to fumble in his effort to claim the achievement of linguistic emancipation. He insisted that, in planning the event, the AM had at all times respected the RAE's authority by granting the Spanish institution its due leadership position. Recalling his colleagues' trip to

Madrid, he reminded the audience that the Mexicans "confirmed once more our hierarchical subordination, our a priori compliance, our filial respect" (Garrido et al. 2010: 170). The family metaphor implicit in "filial respect" was prominent throughout García Naranjo's speech and articulated a two-sided argument that, on one hand, recognized the existence of a hierarchy between Spain and Latin America (mother–children) and, on the other, identified a critical period of emancipation triggered, in the case at hand, by the absence of the maternal figure:

In such conditions, we feel the joy of the child who manages to take her first steps. But, oh, our joy can never be as big and intense as that of the mother who sees her children already able to stand on their own!... One cannot tell a mother that she is not needed; but one can promise that, in her absence, the sacred obligations that the orphan life will impose will be fulfilled. (172)

While he indeed defended the personality of American Spanish and the right of American academies to participate in the standardization process, García Naranjo's representation of the conference – trapped by the implications of the familial metaphor – ended up being only moderately liberating, if liberating at all:

We wanted a Hispanism that was fitting and logical, an integral Hispanism led by the Motherland. But since that has been impossible to achieve, the only thing that can be done is what we are trying to do: a self-governed Hispanism... Provisionally self-governed, it should be understood; because neither the Mexican Academy nor the other academies from this hemisphere nor that of Malaysia have thought for one second of disregarding the authority of the Royal Spanish Academy. (171)

In keeping with the tone set in Madrid, in Alemán and García Naranjo's speeches purism was always moderated by recognitions of language's dynamic nature and the discourse of panhispanic unity nuanced with statements that proudly declared Latin America's readiness to actively engage in the management of a language that they considered very much their own. However, in spite of these commonalities each speech had its own effect. While Alemán decidedly linked language to politics and language policy to the spirit of the Mexican revolution, García Naranjo ultimately reproduced the intra-academic hierarchy inherited from the previous colonial relation.

The not-so-harmonious side of the conference

Owing, perhaps, to this profound contradiction, neither the efforts to separate Spanish academicians from their government's decision nor the inaugural speeches that insisted on the value of unity were enough to prevent the tension from affecting the development of the conference. During the first plenary session, on April 27, Mexican writer and academician Martín Luis Guzmán

(1887–1976) used the incident to force all delegations to reconsider the suitability of the current institutional structure and to take a truly emancipatory stand. The RAE's absence, he maintained, was, first, an insult to Mexico and all other Spanish-speaking countries; second, a flagrant violation of the statutes that, since 1870, had regulated the relationship among the academies;⁴ and, third, an irresponsible act that jeopardized the academies' mission of protecting the nature and integrity of the language. If the problem created by the RAE were not remedied, he asked, "what hope can we have that our indispensable cooperation will protect us from the danger that already looms on the horizon: the disintegration of Spanish?" (Guzmán 1971: 1377). We would risk, he went on, "because of Spain and Mexico today or any other two tomorrow, practical and cooperative unity . . . being rendered impossible; this dangerous fragmentation becoming chronic" (Guzmán 1971: 1380).⁵

In sharp contrast with García Naranjo's position, he argued forcefully against the notion that linguistic unity could only be safeguarded through the current hierarchical model and claimed that, in fact, the opposite was true: real unity could only be achieved through an agreement among equals that imposed on no one a humiliating oath reminiscent of feudal relations and colonial ties:

[T]he unity that you are trying to defend does not exist. But the one that we should be advancing has already begun to emerge: the one that would spring from an honorable agreement between equals, between peers, not one based on an oath of service, a humiliating pledge after the existence of feudal lords ended with the end of feudalism and after our status as colonies ended with the end of the Spanish empire. (Guzmán 1971: 1383)

Guzmán maintained that, through its actions, the RAE had exposed the weakness of the system and, most importantly, surrendered any possible credentials it might have had to act as the cultural leader of the Spanish-speaking world. He concluded by proposing a resolution according to which the American and Philippine academies would renounce their association with the RAE, reconstitute themselves as autonomous entities and reorganize as equals in a "clear, egalitarian and fruitful association" in which the RAE would also take part as an equal partner (Garrido et al. 2010: 187).

The discussion that ensued was spirited. While Guzmán had insisted that his proposal did not entail breaking away from the RAE but rather restructuring

⁴ Article 11 of the 1870 statutes stated: 'Since the purpose for which the Associated Academies are created is purely literary, their association with the Spanish Academy must be isolated from any political objective and, consequently, independent of the actions and relations among the respective governments' (Zamora Vicente 1999: 363).

⁵ I have discussed this polemic in Del Valle 2011b. I am grateful to Nils Langer, Steffan Davis and Wim Vandenbussche for the feedback they gave me on that article. See also Goodbody 2010 (especially section 1.2).

the association on an egalitarian basis, his critics immediately framed the resolution as a threat not just to institutional peace but to linguistic unity and, therefore, as an attack on the conference itself (Comisión Permanente del Congreso de Academias de la Lengua Española 1952: 381–3). Opponents of the resolution tackled the matter by declaring it outside the purview of the conference and by refusing to discuss it. At the end of the debate, two motions were on the table: some endorsed the outright refusal to discuss Guzmán's proposal (a position that came to be known as "*inhibición*") while others suggested that it be sent to a special committee for further consideration. The Philippines abstained, four delegations – Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay – voted to allow further discussion, and a large majority of thirteen – including the host academy, of which Guzmán was a member – voted to kill the initiative.

There were other instances in which, as in this case, a proposal was perceived by a majority of academicians as a threat to unity. On the fourth plenary meeting of the assembly, for example, Antonio Castro Leal, a Mexican academician, proposed a resolution that, if approved, would direct the academies to undertake two lexicographical projects: a dictionary of Americanisms and a new dictionary of Spanish (*Gran Diccionario*) that would benefit from the "sensible work of the Spanish Royal Academy" but, at the same time, present "a complete picture of the popular and literary language with all the words, expressions and meanings current among the Spanish-speaking peoples" (Garrido et al. 2010: 203). During the ensuing discussion, Martín Luis Guzmán, Germán Arciniegas (from Colombia), David Vela (from Guatemala) and Max Henríquez Ureña (from the Dominican Republic) spoke in favor of the resolution. Vela, for example, stated that

[i]n America we are better equipped to work on that which is fundamental: expressing Spanish American culture . . . the problem is not just to add words to the RAE's Dictionary but also to revise meanings and look for correct definitions, and incorporate a little of the American way of life into this dictionary, which sometimes does not say what we feel or think in America since it is a little behind with respect to the process followed by American life. (206)

Several academicians, however, vehemently opposed the idea of a new dictionary: Alberto María Carreño (from Mexico), Rubén Vargas Ugarte (from Peru) and Guillermo Hoyos Osorio (also from Peru) defended the RAE's dictionary and the protocols through which this institution collaborated with American academicians in its elaboration. Hoyos Osorio even blamed the latter – American academicians who neglected their responsibilities – for the existing dictionary's possible peninsular bias, and insisted that the creation of a new dictionary of Spanish would violate the spirit of the conference by conspiring against unity: "If, in addition to the Spanish Royal Academy's

Dictionary, another one were produced, a decisive step towards the disintegration of the language would be taken. If the RAE's Dictionary has flaws, it is, to a great extent, due to the lack of an effective collaboration from the subsidiary academies" (208). When the matter came to a vote, only six delegations were in favor of the resolution (the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Paraguay, the Philippines, Uruguay and Venezuela) and eleven against it (Argentina and El Salvador's votes are not registered in the proceedings). The initiative to write a new *Gran Diccionario* of Spanish was soundly defeated.

During the sixth and final plenary session, new discussion of a proposal previously made by Adolfo Mejía Ricart, of the Dominican delegation, in the context of a special committee triggered yet another tense debate. Mejía Ricart had "proposed the foundation of an Institute for the Unification of the Teaching of the Spanish Language, in which each academy would be represented by one member, that would be charged with preparing a grammar that could be adopted by all Spanish-speaking countries" (225). In response, Vela, who had presided over the special committee, stated that several academicians had argued against the initiative stating that, "in their respective countries, the Spanish Royal Academy's Grammar is the official text; finally, others opposed it because they considered that such an agreement would contribute to driving a wedge between the Spanish Royal Academy and its subsidiaries" (226). The Dominican's proposal had been defeated within the special committee and was rejected again at the plenary session when the head of his own delegation, Max Henríquez Ureña, withdrew the Dominican Academy's original proposal, putting an end to the discussion. In consequence of his defeat, Mejía Ricart expressed outrage in revealing words:

[Dr. Mejía Ricart] is distraught to think that in America there are still sediments of cultural colonialism and [said] that it causes him great pain to see that in matters of culture America is still subjugated by Europe... "There is a true attitude of subordination in the Conference"... participants should not continue to be absolutely subordinated in all questions to the Spanish Royal Academy, as if they did not have a head to think... a person following the conference from the margins will think that colonialism has not ended. (Garrido et al. 2010: 227)

Virtually the same terms would reappear minutes later, still within the sixth plenary session, when a new feisty discussion broke out surrounding a proposal made earlier in the conference by the Ecuadorian academician Julio Tovar Donoso. The initial paragraph in Mr. Tovar Donoso's proposal stated that the conference should "request that the Spanish Academy hint to National Academies that they should introduce all necessary modifications in their statutes in order to adapt them to the new circumstances in these countries, to their structure and psychology" (Comisión Permanente del Congreso de Academias de la Lengua Española 1952: 316). Martín Luis Guzmán once

again took the floor and, ridiculing the terms of Mr. Tovar Donoso's proposal (the convoluted sequence of "requesting" and "hinting" that barely hid a servile attitude towards the RAE), suggested that many academicians might be suffering from a fault inherent in their status as members of purely subsidiary academies ("la deformación *académico-correspondiente*"), "a kind of morbid pleasure drawn from subordination, from submission" (Guzmán 1971: 1392). Guillermo Hoyos Osorio (from Peru) responded, first, by denying the servility with which Guzmán charged them and proceeding then to affirm the RAE's inherent entitlement to occupy a leadership position: "although the American academies may have people of considerable formation, they lack the prominent technicians that advise the Spanish academy. Its experience and immense intellectual richness are reason enough for American academies not to break the bond" (Garrido et al. 2010: 232). Chile's Pedro Lira unequivocally affirmed the same position with a statement that, as the minutes reflected, was received with noticeable applause: "I believe, and I say it out loud, that the language's meridian runs through Madrid" (233).⁶

Making sense of the debate

Analysis of the conference – of its organization and development as well as of the various discourses on language it produced – reveals how Spanish – its representations and the institutional struggles within which they were generated – operates as a discursive site where various cultural, political and social processes affecting the nations involved in the 1951 event were being worked out. First, the deeply political nature of the conference revealed itself paradoxically in its constant negation. From the outset, as we saw above, José Rubén Romero announced a beautiful spectacle, "without consideration for relationships among governments," in which academies and academicians would naturally bond through their shared love for the common language. And yet, the politically neutral role of the language academies' gathering was difficult – if not impossible – to sustain in light of the very events that led to their development: the conference was indeed initiated by a head of state even if his ultimate intention is open to interpretation. His initiative may have been an effort to approach Franco's Spain outside of regular diplomatic

⁶ In the sixth plenary session, Guzmán – softening the terms of his original speech – renewed his proposal to revise the status of American academies vis-à-vis Spain's. On this occasion, five delegations voted against and seven in favor of creating a Standing Committee (*Comisión Permanente*) that would "study the advisability of revising the regulations that currently govern the relation between the Spanish Royal Academy and the American subsidiaries" (*Comisión Permanente* 1952: 368). The creation of the Standing Committee – which was joined by a member of the RAE immediately after the conference – ended up being the basis for the eventual articulation of the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española*, in which the Spanish institution has continued to occupy a position of preeminence.

pathways and through the allegedly ideologically neutral space constituted by culture and language (Pérez Montfort 2001). It may have been a compensatory attempt to affirm Mexico's "hispanicness" in the context of a presidency that had allowed the country's economy to depend more and more on the United States (Pérez Montfort 2001: 95–6). It could easily be seen also as a strategy – not incompatible with the previous ones – to position Mexico in a leadership slot and to gain visibility and influence in the international sphere through activation of the Spanish-speaking world as a politically and economically relevant bloc. In any case, in a political context in which Franco's Spain was striving to come out of isolation, the fact that the conference would be organized by Mexico, precisely the country that most vehemently opposed lifting the sanctions and that continued to take firm stands against Franco's government in international forums, could not but render ineffective any effort to erase the ultimately political nature of the conference and, by association, of the role that language academies play in their respective societies. Once the RAE's absence was confirmed and the conference began, President Alemán did not hesitate to identify Spanish as a valuable instrument in the historical trajectory of the Mexican Revolution, thus unmistakably placing the initiative within the realm of politics: "A voice of freedom, our language is also an instrument of democracy. In this regard, the Mexican Revolution has been determined to spread it as much as possible and Revolutionary governments have engaged in a tenacious campaign – strengthened since 1942 – to bring literacy to the whole population" (Garrido et al. 2010: 147).

We should also recall that Alemán's original project, as reported by José Rubén Romero, had a significant Latin Americanist thrust: it was, as it were, a double affirmation vis-à-vis both Spain and the United States. The goals of enriching the language with words commonly used in Latin America and of properly defining Americanisms already included in the RAE's dictionary were prominently displayed, as we saw above, as central to the conference's meaning. Mexican academicians were acutely aware of the provocative nature of their gesture, of the fact that it challenged the linguistic order inherited from colonial times and reproduced through the institutional arrangement that, while creating language academies in Latin America, had consolidated the RAE as the main agency for language standardization, hence the care with which they navigated these rough waters when they visited Madrid, apparently striking a good balance between a rhetoric that was respectful of traditional hierarchies and a claim of ownership over the language, of their legitimate right to manage it within the confines of their national territory and of their ability to perform a leadership role at the international level.

However, the sectors of Latin America's cultural elite represented by the academies were obviously split with regard to how to manage the affirmation

of a Hispanic legacy and the relationship with Spain.⁷ Many, as we saw, confirmed their loyalty to the existing organization as the vehicle for managing the language and continued to rely on the familial metaphor to structure the present and future relations among Spanish-speaking countries. For others, such an arrangement impaired their ability to generate a more consequential emancipatory discourse on language. When faced with the challenge posed by the proposal to reconstitute the relationship, to produce a new dictionary or to create a new coordinating agency, a majority of academicians rejected it flatly. In spite of facing optimal conditions for broaching a new, more egalitarian compromise, they voluntarily chose the neocolonial status quo.

The terms in which both the emancipating and the conservative stances were defended indicate that fears of linguistic fragmentation – well known in the nineteenth century – had not disappeared. The conference had been organized on the premise that the nature and integrity of the language needed protection. In fact, the need to protect Spanish was linked to fears of fragmentation that haunted academicians just as they had haunted Spanish and Latin American men of letters at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. In those days, these fragmentation anxieties had been deeply entangled with the crises produced by the fall of the Spanish Empire and the nation-building projects undertaken not only by the former colonies but by Spain itself. At the same time, however, the argument that justified those fears was predominantly linguistic: if dialectal forms were to percolate to the speech of the educated in each Spanish-speaking country the language would soon meet the same destiny as Latin and evolve into a number of related but independent tongues. These arguments, however, were almost absent from the 1951 conference. In fact, one could very well conclude that, by this date, although the language of fragmentation was still in play, the threat of actual linguistic divergence was no longer a serious concern. What we witness instead is a fractal projection of disintegration anxieties from language itself to language academies, in a reincarnation of the fragmentation discourse in which the nature and unity of the panhispanic linguistic field is threatened not by the possible divergent evolution of linguistic forms but by alternative – and contradictory – conceptualizations of the body politic of the language.

Guzmán's opponents believed the current institutional arrangement to be the appropriate framework for defending the nature and unity of the language and, in keeping with the spirit of Panhispanism, accepted a language community built under Spain's tutelage. There was to be no questioning of the

⁷ Although the academies are significant sites for the production of cultural values and arrangements, it is crucial to insist that academicians cannot be uncritically considered to represent all of Latin America's cultural and intellectual elite.

RAE's authority, no challenging of its dictionary and its grammar's value as the only tools of standardization. Not only was Latin America's linguistic identity being grounded in a form of monolingualism inherited from colonial times, the post-colonial management of the language was being trusted to an institutional infrastructure that reproduced colonial hierarchies. Guzmán, however, stood against the traditional model of interacademic relations and the type of panhispanic community that it mirrored. As for all the academicians attending the conference, for Guzmán Spanish was in need of protection as the linguistic, cultural and political influence of Mexico's powerful northern neighbor loomed on the horizon. But a unified institutional approach to this defensive strategy was only possible if the institutions involved renounced a relationship that the RAE's absence had revealed as tarnished by the imprint of bygone colonial hierarchies. The competent defense of Spanish, claimed Guzmán, had to be grounded in an institutional arrangement in which all Spanish-speaking nations converged as equals.

Conclusion

More than a century after the creation of the first associated academies and more than half a century after the first conference that brought them all together for the first time, the ASALE can claim to be a solid institution and to hold, still under the unchallenged leadership of the RAE, a prominent position in the standardization of Spanish. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, languages such as Spanish have acquired, as Alemán suspected, renewed value in the constitution of regional alliances and become important commodities in international linguistic markets. In this process, the RAE and the ASALE, under the sponsorship of governments and mostly Spain-based corporations, have become more relevant than ever (Del Valle 2007). In this context, since their public image is central to their effectiveness, they must engage in the constant production of self-representations that are consistent with and useful to their current mission, and that, crucially, include a historical narrative that naturalizes their form and function.

In 1995, Humberto López Morales – who had been appointed ASALE's general secretary the previous year – wrote an essay in which he presented a brief history of the Latin American academies. He described the creation of the ASALE in the following terms:

1951 is a landmark in the history of the academies: Miguel Alemán . . . calls a meeting of academies in his country. On this occasion, on American soil, and under the auspices of the government of one of its largest countries, the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language was born. President Alemán was demonstrating superior discernment. The unity of all was needed to operate with strength among the powerful cultural-political blocks into which the world was splitting. (López Morales 1995: 283)

From here, the plot quickly moved to 1956, to the second conference, held in Madrid, and to the successful sequence of meetings that have kept the association alive until the present. López Morales's story – basically replicated on the ASALE's web page – was one of seamless progress towards a harmonious panhispanic linguistic space. And yet, as the previous pages have shown, the plot is thicker, a lot thicker, and it is the responsibility of historians of the Spanish language to reveal not only the multiple layers of its history but also the ideological roots of historical writing.