



## THE CONTRIBUTION OF ERASMUS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD\*

### 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work presented here is based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of German Variational Linguistics, which have a strong Coserian imprint. Three models, within this framework, acquire special relevance in the context of the present paper. On the one hand, the model of the linguistic-historical variational space between *communicative immediacy* (*Nähe*) and *distance* (*Distanz*) proposed by Koch and Oesterreicher (1990 [2007]: 15–19). For these authors, the variational space of any historical language (in the sense of Coşeriu 2007: 140) is understood as a *continuum* between the poles of conceptual orality (= communicative immediacy) and conceptual scripturality (= communicative distance), communicative domains determined by various parameters of an extra-linguistic nature (for instance, physical proximity of conversational partners, degree of familiarity, degree of emotional implication, possibility of participation in the conversation, deictic relationships between interlocutors etc.). In other words, the authors advocate overcoming the dichotomous distinction between *oral* and *written* on the medial plane and replacing it with a cline that refers to the type of discourse—medially oral or medially written— which is different according to different communicative parameters. In this sense, a medially written text may contain numerous features of orality or communicative immediacy (such as a WhatsApp message to a friend) just as a medially oral text may contain numerous features typical of scripturality or communicative distance (for example, the solemn speech at the investiture of an honorary doctorate).

On the other hand, German Variational Linguistics has also successfully exploited the model of *Discourse Traditions* (*Diskurstraditionen*), a term first used by Koch (1987) in his unpublished habilitation thesis and developed theoretically and analytically by numerous authors within European and Latin American Romance Linguistics (*cf.* Del Rey 2015a; Vincis/Miotto 2016; López Serena 2007, 2011, 2021, 2023; Kabatek 2018, and Cano Aguilar 2022, among others). The concept alludes to the traditional aspect that should be considered in any historical language (*cf.* Koch 1997: 45) in order to

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understand how it functions, given that there are not only idiomatic rules in a language (referring to phonetics-phonology, morphosyntax and lexicon) but also discourse rules that enable a speaker's linguistic competence to be recognised. The idea of evocation is central to the definition of discourse tradition, since certain elements in texts can function as discourse-traditional marks that evoke particular discourse zones (cf. Kabatek 2018: 220) within texts, genres, textual sequences or particular conceptual profiles – by conceptual profile I mean the place a text occupies in the *continuum* between communicative immediacy and distance. – Thus, for instance, the sequence *once upon a time* has the power to evoke the beginning of a tale (even if the author's intention is not to tell a tale, by using that sequence he/she is evoking that specific discourse zone of that type of discourse with the communicative purpose he/she has set for him/herself). Likewise, the abundance of subordinate sentences and syntactic complexity in a text makes it possible to evoke the conceptual profiles of communicative distance.

Thirdly, a concept proposed by Kloss (1978) within the field of German Studies has proved to be particularly fruitful in Romance Linguistics research in recent decades and will be equally important in the arguments I will defend in the following pages. I refer to the concept of *elaboration* (*Ausbau*). Kloss (1978: 25) employs the term *Ausbausprache* or *Ausbau* languages referring to languages that are configured in such a way that they can serve 'als standardisierte Werkzeuge literarischer Betätigung' 'as standardised tools for literary expression.' The *Ausbau* i.e. *elaboration* processes of Romance languages consist of two complementary aspects of linguistic development (cf. Koch/Oesterreicher 1990 [2011]: 225). On the one hand, extensive elaboration (ibid.) refers to the ability of a language to occupy the domain of conceptual scripturality used in discourse traditions that are typical of communicative distance, in short, in all kinds of textual domains that characterise the languages of culture. And on the other, intensive elaboration refers to the development of specific linguistic mechanisms which enable a language confined up to a certain moment to communicative immediacy to achieve the communicative domain of distance, i.e., mechanisms that lead to extensive elaboration. Languages that have not yet been scripted (cf. Frank-Job/Selig 2016) adopt a specific orthography; in the case of Romance languages, recourse to the Latin alphabet was the most consistent solution. Moreover, elaboration also leads to an increase in the number of nexuses and forms of expression of syntactic relations, as well as an expansion of vocabulary, including the development of a technical lexicon. These mechanisms directly affect elements of the linguistic system. According to Kloss (1978: 28), in order to determine whether a given dialect or *Abstand* language has attained the status of an *Ausbau* language, the widespread use of that dialect or language as a vehicle for the expression of instructional, technical and scientific texts<sup>1</sup> – among which could be included discourses that are often considered characteristic of specialised languages<sup>2</sup> – is more important than the proliferation of literary texts.

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1 An *Abstand* language, a term coined by Kloss (1978: 25), is a language that differs from another language by its immanent qualities (phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical system).

2 A discussion of this controversial term is given in Del Rey (2018: 343–350).

## 2 LATIN AND ROMANCE IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Throughout the European Middle Ages, numerous Romance languages or in Coseriu's terminology "primary Latin dialects"<sup>3</sup> (Coseriu 1981: 14), which had been restricted to oral use for centuries, developed the mechanisms needed to become languages of culture, i.e. languages capable of transmitting knowledge and producing works of literary creation through writing.

Elaboration mechanisms represent a crucial stage in language standardisation processes (Haugen 1966, Milroy/Milroy 1985[2012], Maas 2014). The essential model for elaboration processes during the Middle Ages was the classical, postclassical and medieval Latin scriptural production, fundamental material in the *acculturation* (Bossong 1979) of the neo-Latin languages. Therefore, the translations from Latin into the vernaculars that were created to disseminate knowledge and Roman case law (a symptomatic example is that of *Fuerzo Juzgo* in the Iberian Peninsula, a translation of the visigothic *Liber Iudiciorum*, cf. Kabatek 2005, Castillo Lluch 2018), especially in medieval times, were considered a key tool in the development of these elaboration processes (cf. Albrecht 1995: 2017). Both the lexical-semantic and the syntactic-discursive levels have been cited on several occasions as proof that translation represents a catalytic force of linguistic elaboration, based primarily on the interference of the Latin models over the Romance models (cf. Fernández-Ordóñez 2004, Del Rey 2021b).

The consolidation of the Romance languages as languages of culture goes hand in hand with the progressive retreat of Latin in the legal-administrative and aesthetic-literary spheres. A paradigmatic case is that of 13<sup>th</sup>-century Castile in the period between the rule of Ferdinand III (1217–1252) and Sancho IV (1284–1295) (cf. Sánchez-Prieto 2004: 424–426). However, this does not mean that Latin declined in importance as a model of elaborated language.<sup>4</sup> Even in the Early Modern Period, Latin, which had been refined during the Age of Humanism, was still considered a more eloquent, concise and elegant language than the vernaculars, as can be seen from the reading of numerous prologues to the *romanceamientos* (translations from Latin into the vernaculars) produced during this period (cf. Del Rey 2020). Boscán himself, in his translation of *Il Cortegiano* by Baldassare Castiglione – a translation that became a style guide in the Spanish Renaissance – complains about the terrible translators of Latin and justifies his translation by the fact that it is not precisely a *romanceamiento* but the translation from one vulgar language into another vulgar language.

The Early Modern Period, heir to humanism, continued to revere Latin as the most valued language for the transmission of knowledge. In order to carefully re-establish the texts of classical antiquity, the humanists sought to interpret them correctly, based on a rigorous knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the classical languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin), but also on complementary disciplines such as geography, history,

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3 Primary Latin dialects correspond to the direct evolution of Latin in the different territories of the Romance-speaking world, while the secondary dialects are an evolution of the primary dialects themselves (for example, while Castilian is a primary Latin dialect, Andalusian and its varieties can be regarded as a secondary dialect).

4 By *elaborated language* I mean any Romance language that has been developed according to the procedures of intensive and extensive elaboration and is therefore suitable for use in the field of communicative distance.

sociology, religion, etc., specific to the ancient civilisations they admired (*cf.* Flórez Míguez 1994: 348). This scientific fixation with classical languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) led Renaissance humanists in Catholic areas to question the truth inherited by tradition, and even the Bible was subjected to an exhaustive scrutiny in which Hebrew and Greek sources were crucial for determining the original meaning of the Gospels in Latin. Thomas More, Nebrija and Erasmus are clear examples of this intellectual stance of which Latin was the vehicle of expression.

By the 15th and 16th centuries, the European vernaculars had reached a considerable level of elaboration. In the official sphere, Latin was still mainly used as a *lingua franca* in international diplomacy, although creative literature and other manifestations of written culture continued to produce texts in Latin, especially among Europe's intellectual elite. The humanists, however, saw an unparalleled opportunity in Latin to promote the knowledge of antiquity, and to discuss problems that were of considerable concern to Europe's cultured elite. Erasmus is perhaps the figure who best embodies this humanist ideal that placed hope in Latin to unite a Europe separated by languages and particularistic interests which often escalated into wars and diplomatic conflicts of various kinds. In his excellent biography of Erasmus, Zweig states:

Languages, which had hitherto formed an impenetrable wall between nation and nation, must no longer separate the peoples. A bridge would be built by means of a universal tongue, the Latin of the humanists. At the same time the concept of a fatherland for each nation would have to be proved untenable because it formed too narrow an ideal. It should be replaced by the European, the supranational ideal (Zweig 1934 [2015]).

Given his strong leaning towards Latin, one might think that Erasmus' influence on the vernacular languages was minimal. However, nothing could be further from the truth, as I will try to demonstrate in the following two sections.

### **3 ERASMUS: DISSEMINATION OF HIS WORK AND STYLISTIC SIGNIFICANCE**

Erasmus of Rotterdam is probably the most decisive figure of European humanism and one of the most influential personalities in the field of culture and literature of the Early Modern Period. Erasmian humanism has been defined as a 'Christian humanism', understood as an intimate connection between 'Christian wisdom and classical culture: classical education and ethics illuminated, modified, or corrected by Christian truth' (Thompson 1965: xvi, n. 4).<sup>5</sup> Erasmus was a critic and interpreter of the Bible, and his particular form of evangelism found a fertile ground in Europe for the initiatives and reforms of Luther in Germany and Cisneros in Spain (*cf.* Pérez 2013: 12), with notable differences

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5 The Spanish humanist Antonio de Nebrija also occupies a privileged place in this field. Bataillon (1966 [2007]: 25) says of him that he embodies, on the threshold of the Spanish sixteenth century, the autonomous effort of humanism to restore integral, profane and sacred antiquity and that, as far as Christian humanism is concerned, Nebrija is not only the forerunner of Spanish Erasmism but anticipates Erasmus himself (*id.*).

in both cases. His reputation as a humanist earned him esteem in academic circles and his works began to be widely translated into Romance languages. The Kingdom of Castile took the lead in this endeavour; in fact, Bataillon (1966 [2007]: 279) describes the proliferation of translations on Spanish soil as a veritable ‘Erasmian invasion’.<sup>6</sup> The *Colloquia familiaria*,<sup>7</sup> the author’s most famous and most translated work in the whole European continent during his lifetime, helped, as Prosperi notes, to spread

un tipo di moralità fondata sui Vangeli e sulla sapienza antica, che si oponeva in tutto alla religione dei frati. Le dispute teologiche, l’ossessiva insistenza su voti, pelegrinaggi, culto dei santi, digiuni, la concezione della castità femminile, la pratica della confessione e degli altri sacramenti erano realtà viste da Erasmo come superstizioni, sopravvivenze pagane o ebraiche, lontane dalla pietas cristiana a cui si dovevano educare i giovani lettori dei Colloquia. (Prosperi 2002: XLIII)

[a type of morality founded in the Gospels and ancient wisdom, which was opposed in every way to the religion of the friars. Theological disputes, the obsessive insistence on vows, pilgrimages, the cult of saints, fasting, the concept of female chastity, the practice of confession and other sacraments were all seen by Erasmus as superstitions, pagan or Hebrew leftovers, far removed from the Christian piety in which the young readers of his *Colloquia* were to be educated.]

The linguistic question was not alien to the concerns of humanism and was manifested in two somewhat contradictory attitudes. Erasmus, who stated *Ego mundi civis esse cupio* ‘My own wish is to be a citizen of the world,’ showed a universalist attitude which was materialised in his attempt to revive Latin as a language of effective

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6 Burke (2010: 43) highlights that Erasmus’ reformist ideas had more impact in Europe through his translations than through his original works.

7 Translations of the *Colloquia* in Castile began with the version of the *Uxor mempsigamos* by Diego Morejón in 1527, of which a new anonymously revised version appeared in 1528. From the same year date the translation of the dialogue *De rebus ac vocabulis*, also anonymous, and that of the dialogue *Proci et puellae*, written by Luis Mejía. The first collection of translated Erasmian colloquies was also printed in 1528. This collection consists of the Spanish versions of the *Pietas puerilis*, the *Colloquium senile* and the *Funus*. However, the most widespread volume of colloquiums of the time is the one published in 1529, which includes eight versions by Alonso Ruiz de Virués (*Puerpera*, *Pietas puerilis*, *De visendo loca sacra*, *Uxor mempsigamos*, *Convivium religiosum*, *Militis et carthusiani*, *Abbatis et eruditae* and *Franciscani*), Mejía’s translation of *Proci et puellae* and two anonymous translations (*Senile* and *Funus*). A new anonymous translation of the *Funus* was printed in Seville in 1529 in a collection that also incorporated earlier versions already published in collections or in an exempt form. We have to wait until 1550 to find a new translation of the *Uxor mempsigamos*, not presented as such, in Pedro de Luján’s *Coloquios matrimoniales*. The last known Castilian translation of a colloquy by Erasmus in the Golden Age is that of the *Charon* (manuscript of 1617), by Juan de Aguilar Villquirán. Italian translations are later: in 1537, Antonio Brucioli included a partial version of the *Uxor mempsigamos* in his *Dialogi*. Ortensio Lando was the first to translate and print this complete dialogue in Venice in 1542. In 1545 the first integral translation of the Erasmian *Colloquia* appeared, the work of Pietro Lauro, who reprinted this collection in 1549 with some notable modifications in the versions. In French, we know the verse translation of the *Uxor mempsigamos* attributed to Berthélemy Aneau (1541). On the Erasmian tradition of the *Colloquia* in Castilian and other Romance languages, cf. Del Rey (2017, 2020).

communication in Early Modern Europe. A humanist concerned with the teaching of Latin to young people, he understood that the language of the classics was no longer a forever fixed, static language, but a dynamic one, still susceptible to change and development. In short, a vibrant language that should be presented as such to the literate youth of Europe. Thus, as an educator, he ventured to write formulae aimed at offering numerous strategies to students for linguistic interaction (greetings, offers, expressions of good wishes etc.), based primarily on exercises in synonymy and verbal abundance (Bierlaire 1977: 21), which would help the interlocutor to converse in fluent Latin. This is how he conceived his *Colloquia*, to which, in the successive editions published between 1518 and 1533, scenes and passages were incorporated where the moralising content became more and more explicit. So much so in fact, that in the March 1522 edition, the volume already indicated the author's guiding purpose: *non solum ad linguam puerilem expoliendam, verum etiam ad vitam instituendam* 'not only to perfect the language of boys, but also to prepare them for life'. Consequently, from the earliest years, the *Colloquia* were conceived as 'un manuel latin, pour apprendre, à la fois, les bonnes manières et le beau langage' 'a Latin manual to learn good manners and beautiful language at the same time' (Halkin/Bierlaire/Hoven 1972: 5).

Erasmus recognised that Latin was becoming an increasingly obsolescent language even among the European intelligentsia of his time. Indeed, throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, a Latin proper of conceptual scripturality continued to exist (*cf.* § 1) but it hardly went beyond the domain closest to the pole of communicative distance within its own variational space, in other words, it was a language which, even when used in oral contexts within cultivated circles, was alien to the familiar and informal spheres for which Romance languages were reserved. At the other extreme, the Vulgar Latin of both antiquity and the Middle Ages offered greater possibilities for variation in usage; however, it would never cross the conceptual spheres close to immediacy, as would be the case in early Romance texts. As explained in Section 2, Romance, while continuing to be a vehicle of communication in communicative situations of communicative immediacy, progressively increased its presence in other areas of the continuum until it entered the domain of communicative distance by virtue of the processes of extensive and intensive elaboration (*cf.* Section 2). This was largely owing to the influence of Latin models at the other end of the variational spectrum, on the continuum between communicative immediacy and communicative distance. Although increasingly weaker in Europe since the 16th century, Latin would continue to exist as a language of distance near the end of the continuum until around the 17th–18th centuries. However, also in the 16th century, Erasmus began a process of counter-elaboration (*cf.* Del Rey 2015b) to consciously make Latin a language capable of not being exclusively associated with the sphere of communicative distance, to which it had been limited throughout the Middle Ages, in order to move towards the domain of communicative immediacy. However, this 'new Latin' proposed by Erasmus for conversation was not intended to produce texts characterised by the presence of linguistic elements marked by low diastratic – i.e. motivated by the social affiliation or cultural level of the speakers – and diaphasic – motivated by

the specific communicative – components, but rather by elements corresponding to the standard variety as specified in Del Rey (2021a). In other words, Erasmus’ conversational Latin was envisaged as a language that was not marked conceptually – i.e. a type of Latin at the centre of the *continuum* between communicative immediacy and distance – and, therefore, able to function at any point on the continuum between communicative immediacy and communicative distance.<sup>8</sup>

Erasmus’ attempt to revitalise a spoken Latin that would be suitable for use even in informal situations, and to restore an everyday Latin to the European intelligentsia, unfortunately fell on deaf ears. Throughout the Middle Ages, Latin had been the common, everyday language of science and intellectuals in European universities. However, Pérez (2013: 81) states that by using the language in such professional realms it was transformed into a jargon full of words and turns of phrase that only masters were able to understand. Aware of this transformation, Erasmus took it upon himself to revitalise Latin. Notwithstanding, according to Pérez most humanists were, in general, very strict in censuring the degeneration of the language of Virgil and Cicero in the hands of the scholastics and took great pains to restore Latin to its pristine dignity (*ibid.*), though they forgot the communicative capacity of the Latin colloquy that Erasmus emphasised in his work. As a result, many humanists turned Latin into what it is said to be today: a dead language (*ibid.*).<sup>9</sup>

However, literary creation in vernacular languages was also flourishing. Works such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) in Spain, authors such as Antonio Brucioli (1498–1566) and Pietro Lauro (c. 1510–1568) in Italy, and Rabelais (1494–c. 1563) and Montaigne (1533–1592) in France were exponents of a type of natural language that spread as a stylistic model throughout Europe.<sup>10</sup> Especially in 16th-century Spanish and Italian Literature, prose aspired to the ideal of ‘writing as one speaks’, although the interpretation of this aspiration is controversial. In his famous work *Il cortegiano*, Baldassare Castiglione makes the following statement: ‘e dico aver scritto nella mia (lingua), e come io parlo, ed a coloro che parlano come parl’io’ ‘and I say I have written in my [language], and as I speak, and to those who speak as I speak’ (*apud* Gauger 1996: 342). It should be noted that Castiglione does not seem to allude here to a stylistic question (diaphasic in Coseriu’s terminology 1957 [1968]), but rather seems to take sides in the debate concerning the *questione della lingua* (question of language), showing his preference for the variety that is common to him as a user of a regional form of Italian (*cf.* Gauger 1996: 342).

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8 On Renaissance Latin and, specifically, on the Latin of Erasmus, cf. Thompson (1965), Thomson (1970), Fontán (1974), Chomarat (1981), Ijsewijn and Dirk Sacré (1998) and Tunberg (2004), among others.

9 As one of the best Latinists of the Castilian 16th century, Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas (known as *El Brocense*), stated: *latine loqui corrumpit ipsam latinitatem* ‘speaking Latin corrupts Latinity.’ Cf. also Zweig (1934 [2015]): ‘even Latin, the language of a united Europe, the language of Erasmus’s very heart, was dead. Die thou, likewise, Erasmus!’

10 On the influence of Erasmus on Italian Renaissance rhetoric, cf. Cotugno (2019) and Cotugno/Sgarbi (eds.) (2022). The wake of Erasmism in France has recently been studied in the volume coordinated by Perona and Vigliano (eds.) (2017). For Spanish, the work of Marcel Bataillon (*cf.* Bataillon 1966[2007], 1977) remains a reference.

Juan de Valdés' (1982 [2003]: 233) famous maxim, which embodies his own linguistic ideology, 'el estilo que tengo me es natural, y sin afetación ninguna escribo como hablo' 'the style I have is natural to me and unaffected. I write as I speak' constituted a precept of style that shaped the Spanish Golden Age of literature decisively. Indeed, this quotation has given rise to various interpretations of not just the writer from Cuenca's stylistic ideal but also that of many other authors from the first third of the 16th century onwards. As Bustos (2011), Oesterreicher (1996), Gauger (1996, 2004) and Rivarola (1998) observe, the affirmation 'escribo como hablo' 'I write as I speak' cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural context in which it appears, the rhetorical currents in force since the dawn of Humanism, and the variational reality of the texts that evolved into diverse discourse traditions (*cf.* n. 2). I believe that the importance of Erasmus of Rotterdam's writings in Europe regarding the conception of the prevailing style in the first third of the 16th century has not yet been given the importance it deserves. Although, from an ideological point of view, authors such as Bataillon (1966 [2007]) and Seidel Menchi (1987) have already given well-founded reasons to underline the debt owed by the European intelligentsia to the Early Modern Period, its influence on the theories of style and rhetoric has been less frequently contemplated, despite studies such as those by Chomarat (1981) and López Grigera (1986).

In the same way that Juan de Valdés' precept 'escribo como hablo' 'I write as I speak' is considered fundamental as a statement that presupposes the cultivation of speech itself in accordance with the humanist ideal (*cf.* Gauger 1996) or, conversely, as an ideal of style that requires speech to reflect a natural form of writing (*cf.* Bustos 2011), the importance of Erasmus of Rotterdam also needs to be highlighted. This question has already been understood and highlighted by other scholars (*cf.* for example, Cano Aguilar 1991: 50) who recognise his influence in the shaping and success of this stylistic maxim. They highlight the figure of Erasmus not only as a hugely influential literary author on the history of European ideas, but also as a master of natural style who was followed by many other writers in later centuries, as well as a genuine inspiration for the precept that should be discussed in more detail in the light of his work. He wrote in one of his epistles:

Ego nec hos probo qui neglectis in totum praeceptionibus, ex autoribus petunt loquendi rationem, nec hos qui praeceptis addicti non versantur in euoluendis autoribus. Praecepta volo esse pauca, sed optima: quod reliquum est arbitror petendum ex optimis quibusque scriptoribus, aut ex eorum colloquio qui sic loquuntur vt illi scripserunt (OEDER: number 1115 –Letter from Erasmus to George Halewin, 21 June 1520–, lines 28–34, page 290).

[I do not agree with those who, totally unconcerned with the precepts, seek the art of speaking in the authorities, nor with those who, abandoned to the precepts, do not stop to read the authorities. I want the precepts to be few, but the best; what remains, I consider, is to be sought in the best writers or in the conversation of those who speak as they wrote.]



It is not, therefore, a matter of careless or informal speech, but the conversational ideal rests on a model of everyday Latin that demands dialectical effort and careful discourse awareness. I said above that this was a frustrated and unfulfilled endeavour in Erasmian idiosyncrasy, but his stylistic concern for careful conversation, for elaborated orality (*cf.* Del Rey 2019), did find wide acceptance in the Romance languages, as we shall see below. It is in this sense that I consider that Erasmus contributed to the development of Romance languages, by promoting strategies for the textualization of orality that had an enormous impact on the writing of the time and on the rooting of discursive techniques that contributed to the representation of orality in writing in a much more advanced manner than that which had taken place during the Middle Ages.

#### **4 TRANSLATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PRECEPT OF NATURAL STYLE**

The important impact that Erasmus' works had on the European milieu of his time, not only through his works originally written in Latin but also through his translations into the different vernacular languages, explains why his worldview became so deeply rooted among Erasmian intellectuals in the 16th and 17th centuries. Bataillon (1966 [2007]) already emphasised the importance of the Dutch scholar's writings among the reading public. Erasmus himself was not opposed to translations into the Romance language as long as they led to piety and put an end to people's ignorance (Bierlaire 1978: 111). The case of the vulgarisation of Erasmus' works in the Iberian Peninsula is particularly striking for its precocity and intensity (*cf.* Burke 2010: 28). Although Erasmus proposed a programme of translations for the Spanish public giving priority to his devout works to appease the exalted spirits of his Hispanic detractors, the public wanted more, and the Spanish versions of the *Colloquia* soon came to light (Bataillon 1966 [2007]: 279–315). Before 1527, some *Colloquia* manuscripts (perhaps by the hand of Alonso de Virués) passed from hand to hand among the literate public, and between 1527 and 1532 at least six single *Colloquia* and six compilations of *Colloquia* were published (Bataillon 1966 [2007]: LII-LIII). This was undoubtedly made possible through the help of the powerful people at the court of Charles V, who were followers of Erasmus's ideas. Donnelly (1979: 137) notes, 'at a period when, in other countries, the *Colloquia* in Latin were heavily under attack, or even under censure, in Spain versions in both Latin and Spanish were in free circulation'.

Erasmus realised early on that his works were beginning to penetrate the literate society of the Iberian Peninsula, which is why he was determined to write his *Apologia adversus articulos aliquot per monachos quosdam in Hispaniis exhibitos* 'apologia against several articles presented by certain monks in Spain' in an attempt to defend his work against the fierce attacks of the Church. One of Erasmus' objections to his detractors was their dismissive attitude towards the literary character of his work, given that he was usually held responsible for everything that appeared in the *Colloquia*, without his critics considering whether what was said was in jest or in earnest, or who the speaker was (*cf.* Augustijn 1986: 181).

However, from 1532 onwards, the Inquisition became more stringent than in previous years, and the *Colloquia* did not go unnoticed under its gaze. In Spain, as in the rest of Europe, there was opposition to the fact that questions of great philosophical weight, which were in fact normally discussed within universities (Prosperi 2002: XLIV), were presented to students of grammar (*grammaticulis*). There was also opposition to the topics that were presented in different *Colloquia*, such as criticism of monks (*monachus non est pietas* ‘the condition of monasticism is not synonymous with piety,’ Erasmus states in his *Enchiridion* of 1505), criticism of the vows, criticism of the nobility, the defence of sexual pleasure as a means of love, the defence of work (it should be remembered that both monks and nobles scorned manual labour).

Some of the worst propaganda against Erasmus of Rotterdam concerned his alleged ideological affinity with Luther’s theses. As Bataillon (1966 [2007]: 159–160) highlights, the Dutch scholar was considered a staunch Lutheran, which led to the name of Erasmus becoming associated with the risk of heresy, which contributed to increased suspicion of and hostility towards him in the following decades (cf. Pinto Crespo 1986: 290). This was, however, based on an unwarranted misperception of Erasmus, who never departed from the Catholic Church, despite the criticism received from the most anti-Erasmian section of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Moreover, the relationship between Luther and Erasmus had been profoundly damaged by the publication of the *Colloquia*, a work that the German theologian described as impious. As his last wish, he even forbade his children to read them. Despite this, the Latin manual became well established in Lutheran Europe and achieved huge success.<sup>11</sup>

Be that as it may, the accumulation of misgivings and fears about the alleged Erasmian heterodoxy meant that the *Colloquia* was the first of the author’s texts to be banned in Spain, which happened in January 1536 (Donnelly 1979: 138); its reading in Latin was, further, condemned in 1537. Thus, throughout Europe, the *Colloquia* became a ‘cursed book’, which would remain on the index of banned books until the 19th century (Bierlaire 1978: 302), along with other translations and works by the Dutch scholar.

This did not prevent the *Colloquia* from shaping European dialogical literature in such a way that it became a model of natural style and conversational verisimilitude (cf. Del Rey 2015a, Vian 1988) in the vernacular languages through translations. Thus, Spanish, Italian, French and other Romance languages developed mechanisms for the construction of literary dialogue which had been unheard of before the decisive contribution of Erasmus.<sup>12</sup> The Dutch scholar had incorporated numerous conversational strategies – most notably turn-initiation formulas (cf. Del Rey 2016) – that were already

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11 His influence in schools was equally strong. Burke (1989: 8) recalls that the *Colloquia* were performed by pupils in the classroom as a pedagogical tool that enabled the conversational formulas of his work to be put into practice.

12 The translation from one Romance language to another (what Folena (1991) calls *horizontal* translation, as opposed to vertical translation, which refers to the translation from Latin into Romance languages) also contributed to the consolidation of the natural style that prevails in the literary dialogues of the time. In this way, Erasmus’ stylistic guide was also disseminated indirectly through the Romance translations of his *Colloquia* and other Renaissance dialogues that were widely circulated at the time (cf. Del Rey 2022b).

found in Plautus and Terence but had never been exploited, or very little, during the Middle Ages. Fragments, such as the one below, demonstrate the perfect union between the scathing criticism of ecclesiastical institutions, typical of Christian humanism, and the spontaneous, almost colloquial style in which Erasmus, and subsequently his translators, presents such criticism. The extract comes from the colloquy *Senile*, in which a group of elderly men meet to talk about their life experiences, which Erasmus uses to present different models of morality and religiosity at the time. At the end of the colloquy, the carriage where the old men have been talking along on their way to Antwerp meets another carriage head-on, a circumstance that allows the coachmen to exchange light-hearted words. The text (1a) corresponds to the Erasmian original, (1b) to an anonymous Spanish translation in 1528 and (1c) to the Italian translation in 1545 by Pietro Lauro, amended by the same translator in 1549.<sup>13</sup>

(1a)

HVGVITIO AVRIGA. Vnde tam miseram sarcinam nactus es, lusce?

HENRICVS AVRIGA. Imo quo tu defers istud lupanar, ganeo?

HV. Debueras istos frigidus senes alicubi effundere in vrticetum, vt calescerent.

HE. Imo tu istum gregem cura vt praecipites alicubi in profundam lamam, vt refrigerentur. Nam calent plus satis.

HV. Non soleo praecipitare sarcinam meam.

HE. Non? Atqui nuper vidi te sex Cartusienses deiecisse in coenum sic, vt pro candidis emergerent nigri. Tu interim, quasi re bene gesta, ridebas.

HV. Nec iniuria. Dormiebant omnes ac multum ponderis addebant carrui meo.

HE. At mei senes egregie subleuarunt currum meum, per totum iter perpetuo garrientes. Nunquam vidi meliores.

HV. Non soles tamen talibus delectari.

HE. Sed hi seniculi boni sunt.

HV. Qui scis?

HE. Quia per eos ter bibi per viam ceruisiam insigniter bonam.

HV. Ha ha he. Sic tibi boni sunt (*Colloquium Senile*, lines 437–456, *apud* Hallin/Bierlaire/Hoven 1972: 387–388).

‘HUGO COACHMAN: Where did you get such a miserable load, old one-eye?

HENRICO COACHMAN: Likewise, where are you taking that whorehouse, you libertine?

HU: You ought to throw those cold, old men into a nettle patch for them to warm up.

HE: Likewise, you should rather throw those cattle into some deep swamp, so that (they) can cool off. For they are warmer than would be sufficient.

HU: I don’t usually dump my load.

HE: Don’t you? For not long ago I saw you throw six Carthusians into the mud

13 The edition of the Romance texts standardises the spelling of consonants — except for the etymological *h-* in the Italian text — and the punctuation marks to make it easier to read.

in such a way that from white they came out black. You, meanwhile, as if it were something well done, laughed.

HU: And rightly so: they were all asleep and weighing down my carriage.

HE: In contrast, my old men have lightened my carriage to perfection, chatting non-stop all the way.

HU: But you don't usually have a good time with such men!

HE: Yes, but these old men are good people.

HU: Why do you say that?

HE: Because thanks to them, I've drunk some really good beer three times on the road.

HU: Ha ha ha! That's why you think they're good people'. [My translation]

(1b)

H: ¿Adónde hallaste tan miserable carga, tuerto?

En: ¿Mas adónde llevas tú esa putería, frecuentador de tabernas?

H: Debieras echar estos fríos viejos en algún ortiguero para que calentasen.

En: Más ten tú cuidado de despeñar ese ganado en un hondo lodo, para que se resfríen, porque están mas calientes de lo que es menester.

H: No suelo despeñar mi carga.

En: ¿No? No ha mucho que te vi echar en un cieno seis frailes de la Cartuja, de tal manera que de blancos salieron negros y tú reíste y estabas gozoso como de hecho muy señalado.

H: No sin causa; dormíanse todos y acrecentaban mucho peso a mi carro.

En: Mis viejos notablemente aliviaron mi carro parlando por todo el camino: nunca los vi mejores.

H: ¡No sueles tú deleitarte con los tales!

En: Sí, mas estos viejos son buenos.

H: ¿Cómo lo sabes?

En: Porque a su causa bebí tres veces en el camino cerveza muy buena.

H: ¡Ha, ha, he! Y por eso te parecieron buenos (Anonymous, *Colloquio de viejos*, 1528, f. 29r).

(1c)

Hugutio carettere: Óve hai pigliato si tristo peso, ò losco?

Henrico: E tu óve hai tolto coteste meretrici?

Hu: Dovevi gittare cotesti freddi vecchi nelle ortiche, che si scaldassero.

He: Anzi sia meglio, che tu gitti in qualche profonda acqua cotesta greggia, acciò che si raffreddi, perché sono le meretrici troppo calde.

Hu: Non sono avezzo di precipitare il mio carico.

He: Io poco fa ti vidi precipitare nel fango sei Certosini, i quali riportarono neri gli abiti candidi, et tu smasciellavi delle risa, come se havesti fatto qualche buona opera.

Hu: Io ne haveva ragione, perché dormivano tutti, et gravavanmi il carro.

He: Questi miei vecchietti sono venuti ragionando piacevolmente: non mai ho veduto i migliori.  
 Hu: Non ti sogliono piacere tai cose.  
 He: Questi vecchietti sono da bene, e mi hanno fatto bene tre fiare per viaggio.  
 Hu. Ha, ha, he: per questo sono da bene (Pietro Lauro, *Colloqui famigliari*, 1549, f. 213).

The style is fast and lively, an effective manifestation of a spoken everyday Latin, suitable for informal situations, which was Erasmus' dream. Numerous strategies contribute to exploiting the conversational verisimilitude of the fragment in Latin and in the corresponding Romance versions. The vocatives *lusce*, *ganeo/tuerto*, *frecuentador de tabernas/losco*, are used with humorous intent; the discourse units, like Henrico's question that initiates the turn *Non?/No?* affects, by repetition, an element of the previous intervention in order to question it, presupposing the falsity of what has been said; the counter-argumentative markers typical of conversational discourse, such as *imo/más/anzi*; the interjective units such as *ha ha ha!*, which refers to a specific extralinguistic context in which the interlocutor is provoked to laughter and which, therefore, increases the degree of expressiveness and spontaneity of the communication (parameters c) and i) which Koch/Oesterreicher (1990 [2011]: 7) ascribe to communicative immediacy, cf. n. 1), and, in general, the speed of turn-taking, which enhances the level of dialogism (parameter h)). Moreover, in the colloquy as a whole, the episode is merely digressive and functions as a textual colophon. Thus, in part, it contributes to the thematic deviation that had remained uniform during the dialogue of the elders (parameter j). However, a comparison of the Spanish and Italian translations shows that the Spanish prose is more permeable to assimilating these types of strategies, which were consolidated in later dialogic literature, not only in translated texts.<sup>14</sup>

In some previous works (cf. Del Rey 2016, 2022) I have investigated numerous conversational formulas at the beginning of the dialogical turn in Castilian, Italian and French that are closely related to Latin formulas used in Erasmus' *Colloquia*. Among them, for the 16th century I have found the link between Sp. *Yo te lo diré*, It. *Dirollo/Dirotelo/Te lo diro*, Fr. *Je le diray* and Lat. *Dicam* 'I will tell you' as a presentational cataphoric formula; between Sp. *Qué (es lo que) oigo*, It. *Che odo io/Che cosa chiedo*, Fr. *Qu'est ce que j'entendz?* and Lat. *Quid (ego) audio* 'What do I hear?' as an expression of surprise; between Sp. *Verdad dices*, It. *Tu di(ci) il vero*, Fr. *Tu dis (bien) vray/la verité* and Lat. *Verum narras/praedicas* 'You speak the truth' as a formula of acceptance; between Sp. *(Muy) Bien dices*, It. *Rettamente ammonisci*, Fr. *Tu dis tres bien* and Lat. *Recte mones* 'You advise well' with the same sense, or between Sp. *Mira (bien) lo que dices*, It. *Non dire cosi/Non parlare in tal guisa*, Fr. *Hé parle mieulx* and Lat. *Bona verba* '(Say) good words' with recriminative intention on the part of the interlocutor. The tradition of this type of formulas, motivated by the exercise of translation in the

14 Note the absence of the initial interrogative *Non?* in Italian or the elimination of the rude and/or offensive vocative *ganeo* (meaning 'glutton') in Pietro Lauro's text. This translator also eliminates the reference to the alcoholic beverage at the end of the fragment.

first half of the 16th century, is documented in later dialogical works which do not respond to the exercise of translation and which show the trail of Erasmian influence in the writing of Renaissance dialogue.

## 5 CONCLUSION

As is evident from the arguments and examples given in the previous section, writers in the Early Modern Period preferred (although not always) to employ Erasmian stylistic potential when writing dialogues in the vernacular to reach a wider readership. In other words, Erasmus' frustrated attempt to revitalise conversational Latin led not to its revival but to the specialisation of dialogic discourse in the vernaculars. Indeed, mechanisms leading to textualisation of orality were adapted with astonishing dexterity in the Romance languages. These mechanisms affect various planes of discourse construction (selection of verbs of utterance and perception, use of dialogical formulas and conversational markers, exploitation of politeness strategies etc.) which, as far as the writing of *elaborated orality* to which I have referred in this paper is concerned, will have enormous currency in Romance literature until well into the Modern Age (cf. Del Rey 2019). Natural style can be conceived as a translinguistic precept that fits perfectly with the humanist ideal that evolved in literature towards the individualisation of the dialogical *I* and *you*, as well as communicative context. This evolution is fundamental in explaining the 'qualitative leap' that occurred between medieval and Renaissance dialogues concerning the mechanisms used for textualisation of orality, according to Bustos (2007: 208). This is one of Erasmus' major contributions to Romance literature, which increased its potential for the construction of an elaborated orality with a secular validity. Erasmus' everyday Latin, the frustrated dream of a humanist who was opposed to frontiers of any kind, even linguistic ones, did somehow remained alive through the dialogic discourse in Romance and in the precept of natural style, which is one of the literary hallmarks of the Early Modern Period throughout Europe.

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#### Abstract

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF ERASMUS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

The influence of Latin, since the Middle Ages, in shaping Romance languages as vehicles for the expression of discourse traditions characteristic of conceptual scripturality (*cf.* Koch/Oesterreicher 1990 [2011]) has been analysed from different perspectives by Romance Linguistics scholars. Elaboration processes (*Ausbau* in German, *cf.* Kloss 1978) are responsible for the development of the mechanisms needed in vernacular languages to access the domain of communicative distance, which remained for many centuries exclusively reserved for Latin. During the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the use of Latin became increasingly restricted and was already limited in the 16th century mainly to liturgical manifestations, science, learned literature and international diplomacy. As Latin was excluded from oral communicative interactions, Erasmus’ Christian humanism advocated the recovery of Latin as an effective instrument of communication among Europe’s cultivated youth. The author’s most famous work during his lifetime, the *Colloquia familiaria*, was conceived as a manual of conversational formulas and motifs to encourage the use of Latin among the European cultured elite of the early 16th century. Although the Erasmian endeavour did not succeed, the influence of the Dutch scholar on vernacular literatures propitiated the triumph of strategies suitable for the textualisation of orality based on the Erasmian Latin model, which led to a manifestation of the ideal of ‘natural style’ (*cf.* Del Rey 2015b) that is common to numerous European Renaissance authors. In this paper, we reflect on the importance of Erasmus’ influence on the shaping of literary dialogue in the Romance languages of

the Early Modern Period (*cf.* Burke 1989). Important metalinguistic reflections of some of the most relevant authors of the time, such as Baldassare Castiglione and Juan de Valdés (*cf.* Gauger 1996, Bustos 2011), are also considered with the aim of understanding the influence of Erasmus on their writing and, consequently, the importance of the Dutch author in the evolution of style in vernacular languages in Early Modern Period Europe.

**Keywords:** Erasmus, translation, Romance languages, dialogue

#### Povzetek

### ERAZMOV PRISPEVEK K RAZVOJU ROMANSKIH JEZIKOV V ZGODNJEM NOVEM VEKU

Vpliv latinščine od srednjega veka dalje na romanske jezike kot izrazna sredstva diskurzivnih tradicij, značilnih za konceptualno pisnost (prim. Koch/Oesterreicher [1990] 2011), je bil v romanskem jezikoslovju predmet raznovrstnih analiz. S procesi širitve (nem. *Ausbau*, prim. Kloss 1978) vernakularni jeziki lahko pridobijo mehanizme dostopanja v območje komunikacijske distance, ki je bila stoletja dolgo izključno v domeni latinščine. V srednjem veku in v zgodnjem novem veku se je raba latinščine močno zžila in je bila že v 16. stoletju omejena pretežno na liturgične kontekste, znanost, učeno slovstvo in mednarodno diplomacijo. Spričo izključenosti latinščine iz ustne komunikacije je Erazmov krščanski humanizem zagovarjal vrnitev k latinščini kot učinkovitemu sporazumevalnemu sredstvu med kultivirano evropsko mladino. Erazmovo za časa njegovega življenja najbolj znano delo *Colloquia familiaria* je bilo zasnovano kot priročnik s konverzacijskimi vzorci in temami, ki naj bi spodbujal rabo latinščine med evropsko kulturno elito zgodnjega 16. stoletja. Čeprav Erazem s svojimi prazdevanji ni uspel, je njegov vpliv na književnosti v ljudskih jezikih privedel do uveljavitve strategij, primernih za tekstualizacijo ustnosti, ki so temeljile na erazmovskem latinskem modelu. Tako se je izoblikoval ideal "naravnega sloga" (*cf.* Del Rey 2015b), ki je skupen številnim evropskim renesančnim avtorjem. V prispevku razpravljamo o pomenu Erazmovega vpliva na formiranje literarnega dialoga v romanskih jezikih zgodnjega novega veka (prim. Burke 1989). Pomudimo se tudi ob važnih metajezikovnih razmišljanjih nekaterih ključnih avtorjev tega časa, kot sta Baldassare Castiglione in Juan de Valdés (prim. Gauger 1996, Bustos 2011), da bi tako razumeli, kakšen je bil Erazmov vpliv na njihovo pisanje in nato kako pomemben je bil nizozemski avtor za razvoj sloga v evropskih ljudskih jezikih zgodnjega novega veka.

**Ključne besede:** Erazem, prevajanje, romanski jeziki, dialog