

The anniversaries of births or deaths of authors or those of the publication of a classic work often serve as the perfect excuse for the scientific community to produce numerous publications and conferences on a given author or book. However, it sometimes happens that a proliferation of work on a specific period, figure or event appears unprompted following a gap or time lag of work on the subject. This is the case of Seville grammarian Antonio de Nebrija (1441/44?–1522). Major contributions on his work appeared around 1992 (also an important year for publications on Spanish in America), celebrating the 500th anniversary of the publication of his “Gramática castellana” (hereafter: GC). Currently we are pleased to see numerous studies on his life and work with no official trigger for commemoration. Hence we welcome recent publications on the subject such as the posthumous compilation of studies by José Perona (2010), the book by Casas Rigall (2010) on Nebrija’s writings, the reedition of the “Gramática castellana” in the Biblioteca Clásica collection of the Real Academia Española (Lozano 2011), and the work of René Pellen (2011) on grammatical categories in Nebrija’s “Vocabulario”. This last author collaborated with Francis Tollis on the work reviewed here. Of all the new contributions mentioned above, this two-volume publication on Nebrija is perhaps the one which offers the most specific profile of Nebrija’s work in terms of critical perspective. This specific nature is highlighted by the authors themselves in their initial pages (“Nos propres recherches nous ont depuis bien longtemps convaincu qu’il y a place pour une lecture interne et autonome de la GC” [p. 23]). This is not a global presentation of Nebrija’s work, a new edition or an in ‘extenso’ analysis of the “Gramática castellana” (GC) in comparison to other writings of its time and tone, but we find that the GC has been used as a corpus to source data that will lead to conclusions on the author’s metalinguistic awareness. This is a compilation in two weighty volumes by Pellen and Tollis of work on Nebrija’s GC (mostly previously unpublished), based on the digital transfer of the work’s palaeographic transcription.

The second volume includes an alphabetised list of entries from the GC divided by frequency, as well as an index of non-lexical segments and other materials. However, this review will concentrate exclusively on the seven texts compiled in the first volume, the first three of which are by Tollis, the next three by Pellen, and a final epilogue is signed by both. As well as featuring a very brief biography of Nebrija, the first chapter (“Reduzir en artificio”, une description entre tradition et innovation”) gives an account of the reasons that led Nebrija to write his “Gramática” and the potential incorporation of this work into a possible Nebrija linguistic program. An interesting hypothesis formulated by the authors is that the other works published by Nebrija close to the time of publication of the GC (the “Lexicon latino-castellanum et castellano-latinum” and the “Vocabulario”) were written at the same time, as the authors deduce from the formal proximity of the grammatical discourse of the GC to the lexicographical discourse of the other writings. This serves to justify the repeated contrasting of features of the GC and those of the other texts by Nebrija, particularly in the final chapters of the book, thus reinforcing the theory that the GC is one more part of a coherent ensemble of research and metalinguistic production on the part of the grammarian. This contradicts the observations of authors like Lozano (2011) who considers the GC to have a merely ‘marginal’ character within Nebrija’s intellectual project. Even according to Pellen and Tollis, the GC has a triple objective that would transcend that of the other books by the author: the normalisation of the vernacular, the attempt to transform it into propaedeutics for Latin, and the extension of Castilian as a second language in territories that would eventually be under the powerful

rule of the Catholic Monarchs. In the words of the authors: “Pour Nebrija, le vernaculaire est ainsi tout à la fois une fin et un moyen, un objet en soi et un instrument d'accès au latin” (p. 19).

Given that Nebrija's was the first complete grammar of a Romance language, a key issue, both in this text and others stemming from it which are partially or totally about Latin, is the matter of how Nebrija created a specifically Romance metalinguistic language, one which had no prior translation tradition. And so Nebrija coined terms such as 'aumentativo', which became part of Castilian grammatical tradition, as well as many others which did not survive, such as the 'nombre participial infinito' for compound tenses. The numeric count of Nebrija's terminological preferences carried out by Pellen and Tollis is very interesting, as is the comparison with the uses of earlier authors, such as Enrique de Villena (1384– 1434) whose terminology is less systematic and more ambiguous. However, this chapter occasionally seems too general and it is striking that the anonymous Royal Palace “Gramática” (see Gómez Moreno 1989), which precedes the GC, is not even mentioned, so that the two texts are not contrasted.

The second chapter (“Donner des règles au castillan”) carries out a systematic analysis of the occurrence and meanings awarded in the text of the GC to terms such as 'lengua', 'lenguaje' and 'habla', paying special attention to usage as prescribed and described by Nebrija in relation to what he writes (following the useful distinction made by Girón Alconchel (1997), which is not mentioned by the authors). The result is a sort of commented glossary of Nebrija's grammar which the authors use as a starting point, eventually reaching the conclusion that Nebrija advocates speech as the centre of usage, above any style prescription or demand. Usage in Nebrija emanates from the vernacular, rather than from what he terms 'peregrino', that is to say, what is extravagant or out of the ordinary. Here the authors perhaps rely excessively on commenting and paraphrasing what was said by Nebrija, without insisting on the ideology and the linguistic behaviour that is being rejected: the extreme tendency of some 15th-century authors to highlight cyclic Latinising tendencies in all the Romance languages. Even so, the study is highly relevant and exemplary in analysing each and every occurrence of key terms in the linguistic explanation of Nebrija.

Chapter 3 (“Une stratégie didactique et argumentative”) follows the same line of internal systematic analysis of the work analysing the presence of the author in the text. This is an interesting enunciative study of the GC, the uses of 'yo', the inclusive implications of the use of 'nosotros' (Greeks versus 'nosotros', the speakers of other languages versus the 'nosotros' of Spanish-speakers, the ancients versus 'nosotros, nosotros' Christians versus others ...). They also indicate when and how Nebrija resorts to the extremely useful impersonal 'se', who the ideal recipients and readers of the GC are and how the modalisation (a term that is not used in this book despite its existence in French tradition) of Nebrija's discourse makes him a constant presence within the text without presenting himself as a voice of authority. In this sense, the lack of mediaeval character of the GC is revealed, and comparison with other treaties of its time might have been useful. The authors quite rightly look to another genre of that time, the dialogue, which was experiencing a resurgence in the Renaissance, to point out that: “En forçant le trait, on dirait que Nebrija crée l'illusion d'un débat, mais en garde la totale maîtrise. Par cette technique, il ne fait aussi bien que renouer avec la tradition la plus ancienne de la structure dialogique savante à prétention didactique” (pp. 94–95).

Chapter 4 (“Réunion graphique: lexique et grammaire dans l’écriture”) opens the second part of this first volume (“Le témoignage du texte”). The bulk of this second part is devoted to the analysis of the graphic features of the print version of the GC. This obviously prompts the initial relevant question posed by the authors: Who was responsible for the graphic choices of the GC? Was it Nebrija, or perhaps the proofreader of the text who worked on typography, or even the compositor of the printing press? The authors briefly mention the idea of the existence of “pratiques héritées” that justify graphic decisions but pay scant attention to a practice that has been explained in depth by Francisco Rico (2005): workers at the press could decide to add or remove words or spaces in some lines.

The authors specifically studied the matter of the union of words (in Chapter 4) and their separation (in Chapter 5: “Séparation graphique du mot: l’identité du mot et sa représentation”) in the printed text of the GC. Little attention is paid to other graphic choices, apart from the odd mention in Chapter 2, which could doubtless be described more specifically: “les graphies et <v> sont moins mal utilisées dans la GC que dans d’autres écrits contemporains” (p. 59). This statement is based on the ideas of orthographic prescription and spelling mistakes which were already obsolete in the 15th century (note 25, which mentions the conclusions on this subject reached by editors in the mid-20th century is highly erroneous). As is known, there was no orthographical norm of the Spanish language until the 18th century and this only became official in the 19th century. Up until then there had been writing traditions in which the use of b and v complied with practices inherited or reformed from Latin and Nebrija’s practice was in no way abnormal or unheard of within these practices.

The behaviour displayed by the printed version of the GC in terms of the union and separation of words is not that different from other writings (printed and manuscript) of its time: a tendency to join the sequence <preposition + article>, occasional separate or joint writing of certain adverbial compounds, etc. It is a great credit to the present study that it has systematised this sort of analysis, providing figures, specific cases, and an exhaustive analysis of the most recurrent entries and compositions. However, GC has been selected as a corpus in the same way as any other work could have been chosen, and Nebrija’s work is not seen as particularly representative or different to other texts from the same period. The only saving grace for this paradoxical representation is that the authors insist on relating the graphic behaviour of the printed version to Nebrija’s ideas on the synthetic and analytic nature of some parts of the sentence and to the treatment his dictionaries give to syntagms which are joined together in writing or divided into two segments in the GC. Thus, the joined-up writing of a set of letters confers the element with a sense of unity, making it into a word. As the authors state: “Chaque mot identifié comme palabra devrait, en bonne logique, coïncider avec une entrée de dictionnaire et une seule; à l’inverse, aucune entrée de dictionnaire ne devrait être pluriverbale” (p. 114). This, as the authors themselves predict, is not usually the case, and the headwords in Nebrija’s lexicographic production can follow parameters that differ from those of his writings in the GC. This subject is specifically dealt with in Chapter 6 (“Les textes et le mot: De la Gramática aux dictionnaires”) which studies the concept of the word as part of the sentence in the GC. In contrasting the graphic habits of the GC and the decisions taken in the operation of creating the headwords in Nebrija’s dictionaries, a description is also given of

the lexicographic discourse of the Seville grammarian and its distancing from mediaeval encyclopaedic definitions.

The epilogue of the book ("Bilan et perspectives") consists of a single chapter (Chapter 7: "Description d'un état de langue et enjeux théoriques"). Despite its fairly general epigraph "Un bilan nuancé et encore provisoire", an assessment is carried out on Nebrija's GC, taking into account its achievements and drawbacks (p. 315):

"En tant que gramática, même si elle voulait embrasser toute la complexité du cas- tillan, la GC reposait, plus que sur un système théorique cohérent, sur un en- semble de traditions qui ne fournissaient pas, malgré l'effort de clarification et de synthèse de Nebrija, d'outils suffsants pour l'identification des diverses structures que le grammarien appréhendait dans les deux langues qu'il comparait."

The book thus ends with interesting proposals evaluating the GC and the metalinguistic awareness of its author.

As opposed to the extraordinary recognition and proliferation of editions of the "Introductiones latinae" by Nebrija, paradoxically his "Gramática castellana" was not reprinted until 1744. Luckily, this neglect of its diffusion in the Golden Age (let us recall how Juan de Valdés (c.1495–1541) despised it) was corrected in the early stages of the scientific study of the history and the historiography of the Spanish language. The present volume by Pellen and Tollis is yet another contribution to a long line of scientific research on the time, texts and figure of Nebrija. Perhaps a lesser degree of immanence would have helped to understand the work better in relation to its time. Even so, the systematic and exhaustive way in which all issues (i.e., graphic, terminological, and discursive issues) are analysed by the authors is worth highlighting, and the book will be taken into account as an exemplary linguistic analysis of an historical text.

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