

5 Menéndez Pidal, national regeneration and the linguistic utopia

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La función histórica de la utopía no consiste precisamente en traducir a la realidad aquí y ahora . . . sus contenidos; sino en ensanchar las posibilidades históricas de un pueblo a través de un enriquecimiento de su conciencia colectiva.¹

(Jover Zamora 1991: 189)

Pidal and the turn-of-the-century crisis

When at the end of the nineteenth century Menéndez Pidal emerged as a distinguished intellectual figure in the Spanish academic and cultural scene, his beloved nation was in the midst of a most disconcerting crisis of identity. As the Spanish Empire finally crumbled, Spain's image in the international arena reached an all-time low. Most of its American colonies had become politically independent a few decades earlier, and their leaders had begun to build their own cultural and political destinies with models from nations other than the former metropolis. Pidal earned his professorship at the University of Madrid in 1899, a few months after the last remnants of the empire were lost in 1898's heart-wrenching defeat against the United States, the new economic and military power that now spread its dominance over the American continent. Within Spain, regionalist and nationalist movements – with both cultural and political fronts – were emerging in parts of the north, in regions such as the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, threatening Spain's cultural and political unity and its viability as a nation, and hurting the pride and aspirations of liberal Spanish nationalism.² In addition to the colonial disaster and the nationalist outbreak, Pidal also experienced how the social order and lifestyle conceived by liberalism – not to mention conservatism – were placed in jeopardy, as the anarchist and socialist movements gained political influence and as the voices of the lower classes found their way to the privileged discursive spaces of politics and literature.³

Knowing that their country was perceived, both inside and outside its borders, as intellectually and politically decadent, Spanish intellectuals

(*regeneracionistas, noventayochistas*, etc.) of the turn-of-the-century generations set out to diagnose the illness and concoct remedies that would allow the nation to overcome the trauma (cf. chapters 4, 6 and 7 on Valera, Unamuno and Ortega).

In this chapter, I will argue that Pidal's linguistic oeuvre can be read as a response to this complex crisis, and as an attempt to help the Spanish intellectual elite – and ultimately the whole nation – overcome its trauma. Pidal's role was rather unique and outstanding among his contemporaries: in contrast to authors who searched for the causes of the crisis, he was interested not so much in making a diagnosis as he was in minimizing the symptoms of the illness in order to boost the morale of the Spanish people. In an interview with his disciple Federico de Onís, he expressed an optimistic faith in the spirit of the Spanish people and in the ability of the selected minorities to liberate the nation from its temporary setback:

A esta idea de la incapacidad originaria y fatal de la raza (madre de un pesimismo mortal e injustificado), sustituyen otros la de que la raza ha degenerado (pesimismo relativo, pues deja la puerta abierta a la posibilidad de regeneración). Yo, más optimista aún, no veo segura esa supuesta degeneración. . . . La virtud, el vigor [de la nación], han quedado atenuados, sí, más bien dormidos, latentes; pero a poco que se acerque uno al pueblo encuentra vivas las fuentes de la energía que esperan ser suscitadas, vigorizadas, encauzadas por elementos directores capaces de representar el espíritu de todo un pueblo. . . . nunca han faltado ni faltan ahora grandes españoles capaces de tomar las riendas y dirigir los esfuerzos espontáneos por los caminos seguros de la reconstrucción nacional.⁴

(quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 147)

Thus Pidal, in his role as linguist, historian and philologist, assumed his share of the responsibility to produce the spirit of leadership that Spain so badly needed. As I will try to argue in the following pages, the ultimate objectives of his linguistic work were to counter anti-Spanish sentiment and secure the loyalty of the Spanish and Latin American intellectual elite to the project of constructing a *modern* Hispanic community in which Spain's leadership would be recognized. More precisely, through his philological investigations he attempted to neutralize the impact of the discourses that disrupted the dominant linguistic order, both in Spain and in the Hispanic community as a whole. He produced an impressive body of scientific work and, with it, a magnificent conceptualization of the Spanish language as a monument that perfectly balances a tribute to tradition and a symbolic representation of modernity.

Pidal and the language battle

Previous chapters have illustrated that language was one of the fronts in which Hispanic intellectuals were waging the prestige war. Debates over which individuals or institutions should control the linguistic norm and over the desirability or inevitability of fragmentation – that is, the language battle – had come to symbolize the argument over Spain's modernity and its potential role in the maintenance and development of a united Hispanic culture. As we discussed in chapter 1, throughout the nineteenth century, the convergence of romanticism, nationalism and linguistics had consolidated the equation language = culture = nation. In this context, it was only natural that language would become one of the privileged platforms from which to launch the project of cultural revitalization that the state of crisis demanded.

We have also seen in previous chapters – and will continue to see in the rest of this book – how acutely aware of the changing nature of language were the participants in the language battle that we are analyzing. However, they held sharply contrasting views regarding the degree to which language change could or should be controlled and about how it could or should be channeled. Some language commentators, as we saw in chapters 2 and 4, identified change with fragmentation. As Velleman indicated, for Sarmiento the fragmentation of Spanish and the development of new languages in Latin America were a desirable goal that would free the American nations' spirit from the constraints of a worthless and antiquated Spanish culture. For Cuervo, as I explained in the previous chapter, the split would be the unfortunate outcome of Spain having lost its power to unify Hispanic nations and of intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic to reach a consensus that would preserve the existing unity. In any event, the idea of the possible fragmentation of the Spanish language, whether it was desired or not, was being interpreted as a practical consequence and as a distressing sign of Spain's cultural decadence and political weakness.

However, acceptance of fragmentation was only one of the many possible responses to the challenge posed by the evidence of a constant evolution in language. In fact, numerous Spanish and Latin American intellectuals desired and believed in the preservation of linguistic unity. Yet, even among them, two key questions still demanded answers. First, who should control change, that is, the selection, codification and elaboration of the Spanish language? Second, who should dominate the public discourse on language and manage the complex web of associations between language and cultural referents? The intensely felt need to preserve linguistic and cultural unity could only be met with an agreement or *consensus* between Spanish and Latin American intellectuals regarding how the Spanish language was to be conceptualized and standardized. However, the tensions surrounding that linguistic consensus (most visible in the Valera–Cuervo controversy or in the Palma episodes; cf. chapters 1 and 4) were often the product of diverging

views by Spanish and Latin American intellectuals regarding the hierarchical configuration of Hispanic culture.

In sum, champions of the Spanish cause, such as Pidal, had to fight the language battle on two fronts. On one hand, they had to neutralize the assault of *fragmentationists* and safeguard the Hispanic community's unified image. On the other, they had to hold the high ground for Spain against the charges of peripheral nationalisms and of those Latin Americans who either proclaimed their linguistic independence or demanded their legitimate share of linguistic power.⁵ In either case, the language battle was being fought over Spain's hegemony – its viability as a nation and its international prestige in the cultural-linguistic map of the Hispanic community.

Regaining hegemony

Pidal's power and prestige, and consequently, his ability to share with his contemporaries his vision of the Spanish language, certainly derived from the resources that he controlled as a result of his association with and leadership role in various cultural institutions of the State. He earned his professorship at the University of Madrid in 1899; became a member of the Board for the Expansion of Studies and Scientific Research (“Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas”) in 1907; directed the Center for Historical Studies (“Centro de Estudios Históricos”) between 1910 and 1936; was accepted into the Spanish Royal Academy in 1902 and directed this institution after 1926; and became a member of the Spanish Academy of History in 1916.⁶

However, Pidal's most efficient source of power – the reason behind his appointment to the above-mentioned positions – was his brilliant and prolific scientific production, that is, the intellectual capital he had so painstakingly earned. As a nationally and internationally recognized scientist of language and history, he earned a level of public admiration that invested him with what Pierre Bourdieu has called *symbolic power*, “that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (1991: 164).⁷ Thus, Pidal entered the language battle well entrenched in the institutions of cultural power, and armed with the finest weapon of language science.

The high quality of his work and his well-deserved stature as a linguist and philologist inevitably predispose us to interpret his linguistic discourse as objective and ideologically neutral. However, it is my contention – as I anticipated in the previous section – that the impulse behind his scientific endeavors was intensely patriotic, as José Luis Abellán has suggested:

Su exaltación de Castilla y su preocupación por todo lo referente al espíritu castellano le sitúan en un lugar privilegiado dentro del 98, que

no sólo no le impidió, sino que de algún modo inspiró su obra científica de historiador y filólogo.⁸

(quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 86)

Pidal firmly believed in the ultimately cultural and political consequences of his scientific work: “[C]onfío mucho en la eficacia del trabajo científico, que lentamente labra la conciencia de un pueblo elevando su cultura”⁹ (quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 244). From the conceptual and methodological frameworks of historical linguistics and philology, and from the privileged position of intellectual and political power that he held, Pidal contributed to the creation of a monumental image of the Spanish language that would symbolize the greatness of Spanish civilization. He used the rhetorical power of science to produce and spread a vision of Spanish as the perfectly harmonious creation of a forward-moving culture and as an instrument of civilization that could only be disdained or rejected while disdaining or rejecting culture and civilization themselves. We will see how, in Pidal’s linguistic work, the trauma narrative that reflected Spain’s misfortunes was gently put aside and the insults to Spain’s honor elegantly yet unforgivingly dismissed. The fear of linguistic fragmentation was dispelled as the contours of the Spanish language were drawn against the backdrop of a well-structured socio-cultural system. The integrity and dignity of this system – Hispanic civilization – were and would always be guaranteed as long as an illuminated and loyal cultural elite assumed the responsibility of safeguarding the traditions that define it (language among them).

Holding the *skeptron*

The discourse of authority . . . exercises its specific effect only when it is *recognized* as such: . . . it must be uttered by the person legitimately licensed to do so, the holder of the *skeptron*, known and recognized as being able and enabled to produce this particular class of discourse.

(Bourdieu 1991: 113)

Throughout the nineteenth century, just before Pidal’s time, linguistics had been rapidly developing in Europe as an independent academic discipline. As linguistics grew in academic prestige and as language matters became more and more prominent in cultural and scientific debates (Robins 1990: 187–8), Spanish intellectuals experienced with much preoccupation their nation’s delay in incorporating this new and successful science to their universities (Mourelle Lema 1968: 155–209). Their concern was not unjustified, since, as late as the beginning of the twentieth century, no historical grammar of Spanish had been produced, and no worthy study of the history of Spanish following the dominant paradigm had yet been published. It would be precisely Pidal who, in 1904, would fill this vacuum by publishing his *Manual de*

gramática histórica española, a most successful text that would be updated in several editions until the last one in 1941.¹⁰

The theoretical development of comparative and historical linguistics in Europe throughout the first half of the nineteenth century had culminated in the 1860s with the formulation of the neogrammarian program by a group of German scholars: Hermann Osthoff, Karl Brugmann and their collaborators (Jankowsky 1972). In the 1904 *Manual*, Pidal demonstrated, as he described the history of the Spanish language, that he was conversant with the most current advances in historical linguistics by following rather faithfully and successfully the neogrammarian model and principles. After a brief introduction of the languages that contributed to the development of the Spanish lexicon, the *Manual* presented the phonetic laws that had shaped the Spanish language, that is the changes that describe the evolution from Latin to Standard Spanish. This section was followed by one dedicated to exceptional changes, explained mainly as the result of analogical processes. A final section was devoted to morphological change, and again analogy played a central role. Pidal’s adscription to the neogrammarian model in the *Manual* is quite explicit, as the following quote – so reminiscent of the regularity principle – illustrates:¹¹

Esta historia nos ha dado a conocer leyes o direcciones que obraron sobre todos o sobre la mayoría de los casos en que cada sonido se daba en igualdad de condiciones dentro de palabras . . . El descubrimiento de esas leyes fonéticas ha sentado el estudio del origen de las palabras sobre una base firme capaz de servir al trabajo científico.¹² (1941: 175)

In sum, the general organization of the book, the methodology it proposed, and the conception of language change that it espoused were highly consistent with the neogrammarian doctrine, that is to say, with language science. The rigidly academic configuration of this text and its compliance with the neogrammarian program underscored its ideological power: the *Manual* demonstrated – in this case, to its Spanish readers – that the Spanish language could, and consequently should, be studied scientifically. By doing it (and by doing it so well) Pidal assumed control of the writing of its history, and took an important step toward the construction of its modern scientifically based public image. But the publication of the *Manual* further demonstrated – in this case to both its Spanish and international readers – the ability of Spanish academics to produce high quality scientific work.¹³

Pidal’s elaboration of a documented history of the Spanish language and his growing international recognition did not stop with the *Manual*. In 1926, the Spanish philologist published the first edition of what would quickly come to be recognized as his linguistic masterpiece: *Orígenes del español: estado lingüístico de la península ibérica hasta el siglo XI*. The book contained four sections: it began with a critical edition of texts through which the preliterary phase of the Spanish language could be studied; it continued with a linguistic

analysis – a grammar – of those texts and was followed by a chapter that discussed the relevance of the previously-presented linguistic evidence for the social and political history of Spain. Finally, the concluding section presented the implications of these findings for language-change theory in general.

The scholarly accomplishments of Pidal in *Orígenes* were many. For example, he intervened in the theoretical discussions in which the polemics between neogrammarians and dialectologists were grounded. As I mentioned above, due in part to the prominence of the neogrammarian school, the concept of phonetic law had become central in linguistic theory. The radical nature of Osthoff and Brugmann's regularity principle was the product of a desire by nineteenth-century linguists to associate themselves with the scientific method and to define their object of study – i.e. language – as highly systematic. However, some contemporary scholars, mainly dialectologists, had voiced their opposition to a method based on such a rigid conception of the phonetic law, on a principle so flagrantly false. In contrast with neogrammarians, many linguists decided to focus on heterogeneity – e.g. Rousselot or Gauchat – or on the protagonism of the word – e.g. Curtius or Schuchardt – (cf. Jordan and Orr 1970: 24–75 for a lengthy discussion of this matter). In *Orígenes*, Pidal responded to the objection of dialectologists; while he accepted their evidence and arguments, he accused them of short-sightedness:

El espejismo . . . no se producirá si afirmamos la existencia de la ley fonética; se produciría si la negásemos, por no considerar el conjunto de una evolución secular sobre un territorio lingüístico de cierta unidad, y por limitarnos a la intensa contemplación de un solo instante del dialecto de una aldea.¹⁴ (1950: 531)

The defective nature of the regularity principle was accepted; however, Pidal's solution was not to discard it but to redefine it. The concept of phonetic law was valid as long as it was not taken at face value or interpreted as "natural." For Pidal, a sound law is a phonetic phenomenon that operates historically under the impulse of social and cultural forces; it is a *symbol* of linguistic trends that can only be understood by taking into account the *socio-cultural* history of the community under consideration.¹⁵

As I have argued somewhere else (del Valle 1999a), Pidal's redefinition of the phonetic law and the historical-dialectological method that he developed – in which the evidence of the evolution of forms in time was crossed with their distribution in space – placed him among the scholars who anticipated some of the conceptions of language change that became prominent in linguistics only after the advent of sociolinguistics and lexical diffusion.¹⁶ *Orígenes* was therefore a linguistic masterpiece, recognized as such by his contemporaries – both in Spain and abroad – that further strengthened Pidal's already-established authority in linguistic matters. His integrative reworking of the phonetic law and its application in *Orígenes* to the writing of a history

of Spanish allowed him to hold on to the *skeptron* of language science while producing an ideologically charged discourse with direct implications for the language battle, that is, for Spain's attempt to regain its hegemonic position.

Spreading the word

While the intellectual magnitude of the Spanish philologist should certainly be measured by his scientific accomplishments – which were many – his acute awareness of the political implications of his linguistic-philological enterprise must not be taken lightly. He clearly understood the need to create a body of knowledge and a school of thought that would elevate the prestige of Spanish scholarship and legitimize a specific view of the Spanish language, the Spanish nation and the Hispanic community. But his vision of the role he had to play did not end there. As we saw in the first section of this chapter – in his own words – he also realized the political significance of his work and saw the need to personally intervene in the social propagation of that language ideology.

Consequently, Pidal's linguistic work was not exhausted by academic writings such as the *Manual* and *Orígenes*. He also produced a number of texts for a wider audience of educated readers not necessarily versed in linguistic and philological matters. They were popularizations of Pidal's linguistic ideas, of the conclusions he had reached in his less-widely-read linguistic and philological research. One such text is "La lengua española," published in 1918 in the first issue of the journal *Hispania* of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish. It was presented as a letter to Aurelio Espinosa and Lawrence Wilkins, distinguished founders of this association. Interestingly, several years later, Pidal would publish a very similar piece, *La unidad del idioma*, a speech given at a meeting of the Spanish Association of Book Publishers. It was printed and released in 1944 by that same group, and reproduced a year later in Pidal's *Castilla, la tradición, el idioma*, published in Espasa-Calpe's Austral series – a widely read and fairly inexpensive collection geared towards the general public.¹⁷ The content of both articles is similar: it provides abundant arguments to dissipate any fears of fragmentation and describes Spanish as a uniform and stable language that symbolizes the historical accomplishments and the promising future of Spanish civilization. The deeply rhetorical character of these articles and the highly imaginative nature of the theses and arguments they present are quite evident (as I will try to show below), and *seem to be* in sharp contrast with the nature of his academic texts, which were consistent both in content and structure with the dominant trends in historical linguistics and dialectology. However, the academic and popular texts show a thematic continuity and coherence of argument that allows the latter to draw their legitimacy from the former. They are all in some way alleged descriptions of the Spanish language as unitary and uniform and of its history as an inevitable process

of convergence. Linguistic unity and uniformity are presented as a natural result of the superior vision (civilizing model) offered by Castile first and Spain later to the whole Hispanic community. In sum, the popular texts are surrounded by a halo of respectability and legitimacy that is only possible as a result of the author's symbolic power and their association with the academic texts.

Unity and uniformity: the academic texts

Most of Pidal's linguistic oeuvre pivots around the concept of the past, present and future unity of the Spanish language. Just as the idea of fragmentation, enthusiastically promoted by Sarmiento and sadly predicted by Cuervo, reflected a negative or pessimistic view of Hispanic culture – especially Spanish culture – Pidal's insistence on the unity and uniformity of the language was part of his effort to neutralize the possible spread of the fragmentation theory and to forge a positive image of Spain and the civilization it had created throughout history.

The existence of dialectal differences within Spanish was the material basis for all claims that fragmentation would occur, in conjunction with the new aesthetic trend that was bringing non-standard forms and varieties to the realm of literature. The argument was that, if the educated classes adopted dialectal forms, new standard languages might emerge in each Hispanic nation (cf. Sarmiento's and Cuervo's positions in chapters 2 and 4 respectively). Pidal's stature as a linguist and philologist, his knowledge of the Spanish language in particular and of linguistic phenomena in general, was too sharp to plainly deny the existence of dialects and variation. Therefore, he faced the task of defending unity while acknowledging diversity. He responded to this challenge by opening two fronts: on the one hand, he had to argue that variation was minimal, that is, that there was not only *unity* but also a high degree of *uniformity* among Spanish dialects. On the other, he had to show that the existing variation was consistent with the life of a *normal* modern language and that in no way should it threaten its unity, diminish its value or tarnish its image (cf. Valera's response to Cuervo in chapter 4).

Pidal's stance on unity and uniformity was grounded in his historical-linguistic work. As I have indicated, in the elaboration of these texts, he complied with the most current methodologies and conceptual systems, and met the highest standards of historical linguistic research. But in addition, he took full advantage of the unifying potential of the philosophical principles underlying the historicist outlook.¹⁸ As Julia Kristeva has indicated, historicism was, at least in part, a consequence of the eighteenth-century revolutions that made it necessary to reconcile with those radical transformations the rationalist concept of a natural order (1989: 193–5). This reconciliation produced the idea that order generates evolution: "Historicism gave its reason for the rupture in order to find continuity after division" (ibid.: 194).

But, within the conceptual framework of historicism, the notion that change can be interpreted as permanence is not considered to be universally valid: continuity is only guaranteed by "natural" changes. In other words, since an object contains within itself the seeds of its own transformation, continuity is secured if the impulses of change remain within the organic structure of the object.

In the *Manual*, Pidal's diachronic portrait of Spanish was clearly consistent with the principles of historicism. His description focused on two elements of the language: the continuity of its hereditary traits and its stability which was ultimately accomplished when, under the thrust of Castile, it reached maturity:

Sólo será objeto de nuestra atención preferente el elemento más abundante, más viejo, el que nos puede ofrecer la evolución más rica: el del latín vulgar o hablado, que forma, por decirlo así, el *patrimonio hereditario* de nuestro idioma.

(1941: 30, emphasis added)

Este idioma hispano-romano, continuado en su natural evolución, es *el mismo* que aparece constituido ya como lengua literaria en el Poema del Cid, *el mismo* que perfeccionó Alfonso el Sabio y, sustancialmente, *el mismo* que escribió Cervantes.¹⁹

(1941: 8, emphasis added)

For Pidal, the early stages of the development of modern Spanish begin with the collapse of the unifying force of the Roman Empire. At this point in the history of the language, the seeds planted by dialectal variation within Latin begin to grow. But after the disappearance of the Latin norm, not all Romance languages grew equally. In the Ibero-Romance territory, it was Castile's expansionist spirit and its ability to develop a literary variety that brought the language to maturity and gave it the stability that distinguishes all healthy languages:

El castellano, por servir de instrumento a una literatura más importante que la de otras regiones de España, y sobre todo por haber absorbido en sí otros dos romances principales hablados en la Península (el leonés y el navarro-aragonés), recibe más propiamente el nombre de *lengua española*.²⁰

(1941: 2, emphasis in the original)

As we have seen, stability, according to the principles of historicism and historical linguistics, cannot be identified with immobility. Language inevitably evolves; but while it does, the preservation of its essence – i.e. its stability, mostly manifest in lexicon and grammar – can be guaranteed by what Pidal calls its "natural evolution," that is, the *internal* evolution experienced by

healthy mature languages. For Pidal, Spanish clearly exhibits the power to reject external, unnatural influences:

Lo que el español tomó de otros idiomas extranjeros fué ya en época más tardía, y por lo tanto es menos importante que lo que tomó de germanos y árabes, pues el idioma había terminado su período de mayor evolución y era menos accesible a influencias externas.

(1941: 24, emphasis added)

Llegarán acaso a olvidarse, como se han olvidado ya cientos de palabras que usaban los galicistas del siglo XVIII . . . un idioma, como un cuerpo sano, tiene facultad de eliminar las sustancias extrañas no asimiladas e inútiles.²¹

(1941: 25, emphasis added)

As we know, Pidal further developed his historical image of the Spanish language in *Orígenes*. As he commented on the language of the documents from the period immediately preceding the birth of Spanish, he stated that that they displayed a “disconcerting variety of forms,” a language that lacked a clear self-conscience, a personality, a soul, a life of its own (1950: 517–29). In the middle of this chaotic scenario, he claimed, Castile and its language emerged as a model of order, as a civilizing force to which all others could not but submit:

Ciertos países muestran una orientación más espontánea hacia la estabilización más decididamente que otros. Castilla se adelanta a todos los dialectos hermanos.

(1950: 529, emphasis added)

Castilla muestra un gusto acústico más certero, escogiendo desde muy temprano, y con más decidida iniciativa, las formas más eufónicas de estos sonidos vocálicos.

(1950: 486, emphasis added)

El dialecto castellano representa en todas esas características una nota diferencial frente a los demás dialectos de España, como una fuerza rebelde y discordante que surge en La Cantabria y regiones circunvecinas.²²

(1950: 487, emphasis added)

Thus, from his philological analysis he concluded that Castilian was born with certain inherently superior qualities – stability, a special aesthetic sense, and a spirit of entrepreneurship – offering a superior model to its neighbors. As these neighbor regions adopted the model, or as they were absorbed by it, contributing modestly to its orderly evolution, its sheer superiority functioned as a guarantor of unity.

Unity and uniformity: the popularizing texts

The idea of unity and uniformity also pervades, in an even more explicit manner, Pidal’s popularizing texts; in fact these articles directly address the question of the unity and uniformity of the Spanish language (the title *La unidad del idioma* speaks for itself). In general, in these essays, Pidal insists on Spain’s special loyalty to the true spirit of the language, stresses the existing linguistic uniformity both within Spain and across the Atlantic, and affirms the power of human institutions to control language:

El tipo europeo prolonga más directa y firmemente la línea evolutiva antigua; la sociedad peninsular . . . continúa más fielmente su mismo estilo lingüístico; . . . El tipo americano pertenece a pueblos que se han formado previo el desgarrón de la vida peninsular . . . ; pueblos que . . . sienten con menos viveza la tradición idiomática. (1944: 29)

El español peninsular es entre las lenguas romances la más unitaria; la lengua hablada en la Península, salvo en Asturias y en Alto Aragón, no muestra verdaderas variedades dialectales. (1944: 30)

Ahora nos basta el hecho para comprender que las hablas populares hispano-americanas no representan una desviación extraordinaria respecto de la castellana. (1918: 2)

La conversación de las personas educadas de la América española es, mirada en sus más salientes rasgos, el habla culta de Andalucía. (1918: 6)

Con los progresos de la comunicación y con los de la cultura ya alcanzando nuevos caracteres lo que se llama fijación del idioma . . . La acción del individuo y de la colectividad sobre el idioma se va haciendo cada vez menos inconsciente. (1944: 23)

[L]os medios disponibles para propagar las normas lingüísticas son hoy increíblemente superiores a los de antes.²³ (1944: 23)

The effect of Pidal’s intense insistence on the homogeneity of all varieties in his popularizing texts is that all descriptions and references to dialectal variation – both scientific and popular – are bound to be absorbed or overpowered by the master narrative of unity and uniformity. This is precisely one of the strategies with which he strives to neutralize the fragmentationist interpretation of dialectal variation as potentially divisive.

In addition to insisting on homogeneity, Pidal’s main strategy for countering the fragmentation theory was integrating variation in his language image:

La separación que media entre el español culto común, representante de la unidad, y el español popular de las varias regiones, representante de la diversidad, no puede simbolizarse en la creciente divergencia, cuya diferencia llegue a ser tanta que el español literario quede ininteligible para el pueblo, sino que debe figurarse por dos líneas ondulantes que caminan a la par en la misma dirección y cuyos altibajos tienden frecuentemente a la convergencia y se tocan muchas veces, sin llegar nunca a confundirse. El habla literaria es siempre la meta a que aspira el lenguaje popular, y, viceversa, la lengua popular es siempre fuente en que la lengua literaria gusta refrescarse.²⁴ (1944: 10-11)

In order to respond to the claims of fragmentationists, Pidal resorts to a conceptualization of language in general and the Spanish language in particular that views variation – at least a certain degree of variation – as consistent with the life of a healthy and stable language. The chosen metaphor is most revealing in this sense: the language is visualized as a two-tiered structure in which the standard is on top and popular varieties or dialects underneath. The life of the language is represented as two wavy lines (standing for the educated and popular varieties respectively) with the bottom one (the dialects) running parallel but always tending to move closer and closer to the top (the standard) without ever merging. Guided by this image, Pidal's readers are more likely to perceive variation not as a wild and disruptive phenomenon, or as an inevitable symptom of fragmentation, but as a process actually controlled by the laws that govern the life of language.

But perhaps the most surprising aspect of Pidal's language image is that he manages to create a positive notion of variation: not as a lesser evil, as one might expect, but as an essential component of the language. As we saw earlier, one of the legacies of linguistic historicism is that language can only be conceived as a dynamic entity, one that necessarily evolves over time. However, in the dominant linguistic culture of modern society (cf. chapter 1), variation and change are supposed to be, on the one hand, moderate and controlled and, on the other, organic (i.e. internal). External influences coming from other languages, from other cultures – are usually seen with suspicion and considered to be most dangerous for the preservation of the language's identity. They must therefore be curbed. Similarly, internal variation, while recognized as inevitable, is only accepted with great reluctance. Pidal addresses the issue of internal variation in the dialects of the uneducated classes by distinguishing between *popular* and *vulgar* speech: "Lo popular supone la compenetración del elemento culto con el pueblo en general; lo vulgar supone la mayor iniciativa del pueblo inculto"²⁵ (1918: 5). Thus, external influences and vulgar forms – those which, in the language of the uneducated, significantly deviate from the established norm – constitute a serious threat to the integrity of the language and the culture it represents, especially if they are adopted by disloyal or unqualified

members of the speech community who may somehow gain undue protagonism. Yet languages, even the healthiest ones, must change. What better source of innovation for the language than the language itself? Here resides the crucial value of dialects, of variation, of the *popular* speech represented in the lower tier: still part of the same tradition, of the same history, popular forms offer to the language "the fountain in which the standard is to refresh itself." In other words, change from within.

But there is still something missing for this linguistic picture to be perfect. As stated above, for Pidal, variation is not to be feared as long as it is subject to the laws that control the life of healthy languages; evolution – change from within – is normal as long as it is "natural." But what are those laws of linguistic gravity that keep the popular language always running parallel to the standard preventing it from making any sudden turns?

Laws of linguistic gravity

Pidal insisted that, contrary to the dominant views developed within linguistics in the nineteenth century, language is not a natural phenomenon controlled by inevitable laws totally independent from human will:²⁶ "La historia del lenguaje . . . pareció estar regida por leyes independientes de la voluntad humana" (1944: 17); "Debemos ahora insistir en desechar toda semejanza de los principios que rigen el lenguaje como función del espíritu, con las leyes naturales"²⁷ (ibid.: 16). Instead, he maintained that language is a social activity, one of the traditions that define a *community's* identity. As such, it must be the result of a collective consensus:

Si volvemos nuestra consideración a la canción popular y tradicional, una actividad social también muy extensa, . . . vemos que la participación del individuo es libérrima dentro de ciertos límites que la tradición le señala: . . . jamás un romance se repite exactamente de igual modo, sino con variaciones individuales, aunque, sin embargo, a pesar de tantas modificaciones, *el texto tradicional se conserva sin esencial alteración, ajustado al patrón heredado que a todos recitadores se impone como modelo ejemplar y superior.*²⁸

(1944: 17, emphasis added)

The development of folk songs and traditional ballads is therefore connected with human will. In their origins, we find the efforts of the human beings who created the tradition: the "patrón," the "modelo ejemplar y superior." Throughout their lives, we find the compliance of the individuals, who, in spite of their superlatively free ("libérrima") participation, maintain the tradition unaltered. Language, also a social phenomenon and a defining element of a community's identity, is subject to the same forces that explain the history of folk songs and traditional ballads:

La lengua está en variedad continua y en permanencia esencial. Cada hablante moldea los materiales que en su memoria ha depositado la tradición . . . pero a pesar de eso, la lengua permanece en su identidad esencial.²⁹ (1944: 17)

We see then that the linguistic image produced by Pidal is characterized by an essential tension – almost by an internal contradiction. On one hand, language lives in the variable actions of superlatively free individuals; but on the other, it retains its essential identity. Such conception of language contains a built-in frailty: individual freedom, as much as it is natural, is also dangerous, since individuals may be exposed to and adopt undesirable linguistic forms such as external influences or vulgar speech. It is therefore essential for the guardians of the community's identity to keep them at bay, lest these undesirable forms generalize and enter the common patterns of linguistic behavior changing the essential identity of the language:

El individuo por sí solo es impotente para alterar el curso de las modificaciones que el lenguaje tienda a sufrir; pero también es evidente que los cambios que se produzcan en el lenguaje, siendo éste un hecho humano, serán siempre debidos a la iniciativa de un hombre, de un individuo que, al desviarse de lo habitual, logra la adhesión o imitación de otros, y éstos logran la de otros.³⁰ (1944: 17–18)

For this very reason it is necessary to summon the loyal linguistic elite. These individuals are granted special status, since, as long as they are capable of earning the consent of the people, they can control the life of language – its formation, evolution and maintenance. Therefore, for Pidal, control over a language's identity cannot be taken for granted; it requires securing the loyalty of all members of the community both to the proposed linguistic norm and to the proponents of that norm. The power of the linguistic elite to generate collective loyalty to a given language and to the culture it represents – to create the social will to preserve a certain view of tradition – is the force that maintains the hegemonic vigor of the top tier – the standard – always pulling the lower tier – the popular dialects – towards it.

We have thus come to a crucial point in Pidal's dispute with the fragmentationists. The prestige and dignity of the Spanish language and the conditions of its future existence rest solely on the *will* of the members of the Spanish and Hispanic communities. After a long rhetorical trip through the land of historical linguistics, dialectology and the history of ballads and folk songs, Pidal is back where he started, standing next to Juan Valera (cf. previous chapter) telling his contemporaries – a very select group among them – that nothing bad will happen if *we* do not want it to happen:

Mientras la sociedad *quiere* conservar su lengua, la vitalidad de ésta es perdurable, y si bien la sociedad recibe de la lengua una conformación

mental dada, antes la voluntad social conformó la lengua y sigue conformándola.³¹

(1944: 9, emphasis in the original)

The future of the Spanish language and Spanish culture depends therefore not so much on *what it is* as on *what we say it is, what we want it to be*. If the members of the intellectual elite construct a linguistic utopia, a united and harmonious image of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture, and if they demonstrate their loyalty to it, the people will follow suit and unity and harmony will be guaranteed.

“We”

But who is the implicit “we” in Pidal's linguistic image? Who embodies the tradition that defines the community? Who has the responsibility of establishing the norm and safeguarding it against any possible illnesses by serving as an active model of behavior? The criteria on which Pidal based his choice of the select group did not differ greatly from the ones Bello had used several decades earlier (cf. chapter 3). In the Spaniard's language ideology, social, educational and geographic factors also combined to produce a fairly precise sketch of the ideal speakers:

En Madrid la «l» suele articularse entre *las clases más educadas*, y el yeísmo domina completamente en *las clases populares*.

(1944: 26, emphasis added)

Es forzoso que una reacción correctiva empiece por *las clases educadas*, pero de ellas se propaga a *las clases que tienen menos tiempo para su educación*.

(1944: 20–1, emphasis added)

La escuela chilena, siguiendo las enseñanzas de Bello, había conseguido que el “tú” predominase sobre el “vos” en *la clase culta* de la sociedad; veinte años después, el “voseo” había desaparecido por completo de *la clase media* y se estaba perdiendo aún entre *la clase obrera*: los trabajadores de Santiago, observaba un sabio lingüista alemán, se tratan de “usted” aunque a veces cuando se acaloran en disputa echan mano del “vos.”³²

(1944: 21, emphasis added)

Education and intellectual sophistication are therefore crucial criteria for determining who is to be included in the linguistic elite, in the group that carries the highest responsibility to monitor their speech and to launch the “reacción correctiva” that would trickle down to reach the less-educated members of society. We must take additional notice of the fact that Pidal associates the use of standard forms not only with individuals who have had access to a high level of formal education; his reference to the German

linguist's statement – pointing out the association of the “undesirable” *vos* with the rowdy behavior of the working class – also links the linguistic elite with what we might refer to as civilized behavior, with the controlled and rational conduct that is expected of the ideal citizen of the modern nation (cf. “Spanish: a *modern* language” below).³³

As we have seen, for Pidal, while a certain degree of variation was deemed normal in popular speech, the educated variety had to exhibit the highest possible level of uniformity. In the case of the Spanish-speaking community, Pidal insisted that the differences in the speech of the educated classes in Latin America and Spain were few; however, he saw them as constituting two separate norms and threatening the unity of the language.³⁴ Therefore, as in Bello's, in Pidal's linguistic model the socio-educational criterion did not suffice to precisely define the ideal speaker, since, by itself, it did not guarantee the level of uniformity required of the standard. In order to resolve this inconvenience, Pidal resorted to historical and geographic reasons that favor one of the educated varieties: the educated speech of Castile:

[E]l tipo etimológico [the Castilian norm], válido de sus razones históricas y prácticas, hará importantes *reconquistas* en el terreno que le ha hecho perder el tipo derivado [the Andalusian and Latin American norm].³⁵

(1944: 28, emphasis added)

The practical motives adduced by Pidal for the adoption of the Castilian variety as the Spanish norm – multiple homonyms caused by *seseo* and *yeísmo* – were, in reality, very few (“multitud de homonimias enfadosas que el *seseo* y el *yeísmo* ocasionan” (ibid.: 27)). Instead, he allowed the historical reasons to carry greater weight in the justification of his choice. For Pidal, Spaniards, inhabiting the soil where the language was born, naturally had closer ties with it, and displayed stronger loyalty to its essence – as the preservation of an etymologically correct variety proves. In contrast, the Latin American norm had emerged among “pueblos que . . . sienten con menos viveza la tradición idiomática” (ibid.: 29). The circumstances of the colonization were such that a relative disruption of the linguistic order in America could not but be expected:

España llevó a América sus instituciones religiosas, sus colegios, universidades y academias, su imprenta, su literatura, su civilización entera; pero las dificultades de administrar un territorio inmenso . . . imponían inevitables deficiencias a la obra gigantesca. En la colonización abundaron las clases bajas.³⁶ (1918: 5)

In order to properly describe the function of the linguistic elite in Pidal's language image, we must insist on the *necessarily active* role that he assigned

to them. We have just seen how he selected a fairly specific group whose speech should serve as a model for grammarians or language planners in the process of elaborating the standard; but he also insisted that the members of this group should play an active role in the spread and maintenance of the selected variety. Spaniards (educated Spaniards) must be active agents in the process, and it is incumbent on them to do what it takes to deserve the privileged position they occupy. The loyalty of the educated elite to the language and to the model of civilization that it represents is the first step in the direction of securing its prestige and continuity:

Castilla habría de emprender la corrección de su habla corriente, que no es modelo y guía más que cuando tiene razones para serlo. (1944: 30)

Todo esto [Castile-based standardization] implica un esfuerzo grande, . . . para que no salga verdad la frase de un cineasta allá en California: “España ha perdido el *control* del idioma castellano”. No pretendamos vivir en pereza fatalista, dejando el trabajo de corrección sólo a los otros.³⁷

(1944: 28, emphasis in the original)

Let us recapitulate. Pidal's linguistic ideology is based on the following assumptions. Since languages are inevitably bound to change, the linguistic elite must channel the evolution of the Spanish language: they must maintain control of the selection, codification and elaboration of the standard. As a general rule, changes are to be curbed: foreign influences must be avoided and changes from within encouraged only when they contribute to furthering uniformity. The general *acceptance* of the standard in the Hispanic community as a whole is the responsibility of the linguistic elite, who must secure linguistic control by earning the consent of the people. The construction of social consent depends on the linguistic elite's ability to create an appealing image of the language and to present themselves as the true interpreters of the community's collective will and linguistic identity: Grammarians, linguists and philologists – as holders of the *skeptron* of language science – are in a privileged position to claim that title. In sum, for Pidal, the unity and dignity of the Spanish language ultimately rested on the ability of the linguistic, cultural and political elite to control change by creating a linguistic utopia, and by selling it to the community, like “any political idea.”

Cabe la propaganda en favor de tal o cual uso lingüístico, lo mismo que cabe en favor de tal o cual idea política, económica, jurídica o literaria cuyo triunfo se desea; así que un individuo puede influir poderosamente en el lenguaje de la comunidad hablante lo mismo que puede influir en una propaganda electoral: captándose adhesiones.³⁸ (1944: 18)

Erasing dissent

A crucial element in Pidal's construction of his language vision, and a key strategy for guaranteeing the dominance of his language ideology, is the minimization of the value and cultural weight of the perpetrators of linguistic subversion. Sarmiento and Cuervo (cf. chapters 2 and 4) are the main two such figures that Pidal discredits.

The Argentine's position on fragmentation is mentioned in passing by Pidal, and is easily dismissed as simple resentment in the aftermath of the bitter process of independence: "En vano Sarmiento, en quien los rencores que la emancipación dejó tras sí eran muy vivos . . ." (Menéndez Pidal 1944: 19).

However, Cuervo's fragmentationist ideas were more difficult to discard since the Colombian had presented his views at the beginning of the twentieth century, long after the wars of independence (cf. chapter 4 on the Valera-Cuervo controversy). Pidal's handling of Cuervo takes place primarily in his 1944 article. His concern with the Colombian's views had to do less with the ideas themselves than with the fact that a linguist, someone *holding the skeptron* had produced them:

No hay duda de que en esta polémica entre el sabio colombiano y el insigne don Juan Valera el mayor interés brotó bajo la pluma del gran lingüista y no bajo la del gran literato; . . . los extremados conocimientos que Cuervo poseía sobre la historia lingüística de América, dan a su razonamiento una densidad que todavía pesa sobre nuestros ánimos como amenazadora nube y reclama nuestra atención después de cuarenta años.⁴⁰ (1944: 4)

As we can see, Pidal was concerned with Cuervo's legitimacy, which was a direct result of his reputation as a linguist and philologist. The strategy that Pidal used to discredit such a well-regarded linguist — one that he himself much admired — was to create two Cuervos and deal with them separately. First, he praised the younger Cuervo, the great linguist who had gloriously worked for the unity of the Spanish language, and who had acknowledged Castile's dominance by opening his *Apuntaciones* with Puigblanch's famous words:

[E]l avance de éste [criollismo] es considerado por Cuervo con noble melancolía, sin olvidar nunca, como lema de todos sus trabajos, el dicho de Puigblanch: "Los españoles americanos, si dan todo el valor que dar se debe a la uniformidad de nuestro lenguaje en ambos hemisferios, han de hacer el sacrificio de atenerse, como a centro de unidad, al de Castilla, que le dió el ser y el nombre."⁴¹ (1944: 7)

He then went on to criticize the older Cuervo, linking his pessimistic attitude with his senility — "La naturaleza del sabio colombiano se vio minada prematuramente por los achaques de la senectud"⁴² (5) — and with the possible influence of *El idioma nacional de los argentinos* written by Lucien Abeille, a French immigrant who settled in Argentina (cf. chapter 2). In this book, Abeille had presented a description of Argentinean Spanish that emphasized the differential features of this dialect. Abeille had also pointed out, even with his suggestive title, that such considerable differences justified speaking of the possible development of an Argentinean language. Pidal said of this book that it was stillborn, "un libro muerto al nacer"; and of the author: "en todo se mostraba falto de los conocimientos científicos y prácticos pertinentes, y sobre todo, falto de buen gusto"⁴³ (1944: 7).⁴⁴

But the crucial criticism with which Pidal tackled Cuervo's position was the latter's conception of language, that is, the linguistic theory underlying his work. According to Pidal, "Cuervo, en la senectud, erró su camino científico sumándose a una teoría de 'fatal evolución' que ya entonces comenzaba a caer en descrédito"⁴⁵ (Menéndez Pidal 1944: 10). Let us return briefly to Cuervo's pessimistic prognosis for the Spanish language (cf. previous chapter for more details). Although Cuervo, in keeping with dominant trends of nineteenth-century linguistics, did maintain the inevitability of change in language, he never claimed that constant evolution *necessarily* entailed fragmentation. His pessimistic outlook was the outcome of his having lost faith in the ability of Spanish and Latin American intellectuals to build the necessary consensus to preserve a common standard. For the Colombian, the force that would keep the popular dialects running parallel to the educated norm was simply exhausted. His moderately stated position on fragmentation was grounded in his view that the conceptions of Hispanic culture and attitudes toward its construction held by Spaniards on the one hand and Latin Americans on the other were outright irreconcilable. Consequently, Cuervo and Pidal — contrary to the latter's statements — did in fact share the same conception of language and disagreed only about their beliefs concerning the preservation of the common social will. When Pidal claimed that he would respond to Cuervo's linguistic arguments from a linguistic perspective, he was manipulating both Cuervo's and his own discourses. On the one hand, he distorted the Colombian's position by claiming that it was based on an obsolete theory of language; and on the other — as I argued earlier — he used exactly the same arguments Valera had used against the Colombian, although, granted, camouflaged with the rhetoric of language science.

Thus, Sarmiento and Cuervo's dissent was explained away by attributing it to unique, individual circumstances: Sarmiento was angry in the post-colonial fever, and Cuervo was under the effects of a premature senility. What is the place then, in Pidal's linguistic oeuvre, for the claims made by some Latin American intellectuals, such as Sarmiento or Gutiérrez in the nineteenth century (cf. chapter 2) and Arguedas or González Prada in the

twentieth (cf. chapter 8), that Spain did not offer an appropriate cultural and linguistic model for the young nations? And what about the complaints by authors such as Ricardo Palma and Cuervo who, willing at first to construct a pan-Hispanic future, became skeptical as a result of the paternalistic and dominating attitude of Spaniards? In order to sustain the linguistic utopia, these claims must be dismissed and never openly addressed.

Spanish: a modern language

The centrality of the notion of progress in the discourse of modernity has given this mode of social organization an unquestionable future-oriented character. At the end of the nineteenth century, this modern condition must have posed a serious problem for a nation such as Spain whose greatest glory seemed to be a question of the past. Yet Pidal – displaying a lucid intuitive understanding of the requirements of modernity – did not respond to the present crisis by simply basking in the nation's glorious history, by constructing a “monument” to its past; instead, he constantly projected national history onto the future, defining the Spanish language not only as the symbol of a great old civilization, but as an instrument that could build the bridge of progress for the Hispanic community. For example, as he rejected Cuervo's comparison between the collapse of Latin and the possible fragmentation of Spanish, he subtly portrayed the latter as the instrument that would open the gate for the Hispanic community's participation in the activities of modern times:

[C]uando la intercomunicación de las Repúblicas americanas llegue a hacerse tan difícil que para los negocios importantes se practique con intervalos de un año, cuando en ellas la producción literaria enmudezca por espacio de un siglo o más, entonces podremos entristecernos sobre una suerte de la lengua, semejante a la del latín . . . Cabe en lo posible que la Humanidad caiga otra vez en la barbarie, que pierda la *universalidad* de su *ciencia* y de su *comercio*, que el *aeroplano* se olvide y la *locomoción* se reduzca al asno. Pero estamos tan lejos de esto que no es sensato pensar en ello más que en el enfriamiento del sol y el apocamiento de la vitalidad en la especie humana.⁴⁶

(1944: 14–15, emphasis added)

Similarly, as he justified the hierarchical distinction between educated and popular speech – which brilliantly foreshadowed contemporary discourses on the need to face the challenges of globalization – he reminded his readers, once again, that they must embrace the norm if they are to have access to the universal thought of modernity: “La lengua culta y literaria es tan connatural al hombre cuando quiere universalizar sus pensamientos, como la lengua local lo es cuando piensa las cosas más cotidianas y caseras”⁴⁷ (1944: 20).

In Pidal's history of Spanish, the language's association with the forces of civilization and with their universalizing tendencies was not a recent development. The language's history demonstrated the presence of Spain's – more precisely, Castile's – courageous spirit from quite early. As indicated above, in his historical-linguistic works, Pidal insisted that Spanish had its roots in the speech of Castile, which had emerged at a time when this kingdom, rebellious and energetic, offered its neighbors a *future*, an ambitious political project and the spirit to bring it to completion. In Pidal's linguistic oeuvre, the birth of Spanish in medieval Spain was presented as the emergence of the paradoxical combination of socio-cultural stability and rebelliousness that would provide the Hispanic community with a sense of identity, with an *hecho diferencial*. The birth of Spanish symbolized the establishment of a solid identity that would give impulse to an inexorable march towards modernity:

La falta de una norma romance sentida con gran eficacia por los hablantes es falta de un *alma* o principio personal en la lengua nueva, falta de un *vivir* propio, apartado del de la lengua latina. Ese espíritu propio va formándose lentamente en la lucha de las varias tendencias o fuerzas. Ciertos países muestran una orientación espontánea hacia la *estabilización* más decididamente que otros. Castilla se adelanta a todos los dialectos hermanos . . . también fue la que primero desarrolló una literatura propia.

(1950: 529, emphasis added)

El dialecto castellano representa en todas esas características una nota diferencial frente a los demás dialectos de España, como una *fuerza rebelde y discordante* que surge en La Cantabria y regiones circunvecinas.⁴⁸

(1950: 487, emphasis added)

In Pidal's language ideology, the inherently superior qualities of the dialect of Castile explained its projection not only in time but also in space, as it spread outside its original territorial boundaries. Spanish, therefore, while rooted in a specific place and time, established its truly modern nature by overcoming temporal and spatial limitations, by proving to be endowed with the superlatively modern quality of universality:

La lengua culta . . . se difunde donde quiera que llega la actividad de los hombres de acción o el brillo de las inteligencias más eficaces que se sirven del mismo idioma. *Aventureros, comerciantes, magistrados, capitanes, tribunos, pensadores* . . . cualquiera que necesita hacer vivir una idea, útil y bella, . . . se esfuerza en crear y conservar ese lenguaje de más poderosa virtud . . . logrando el mayor alcance en el espacio y en el tiempo.⁴⁹

(1918: 2, emphasis added)

Entrepreneurship (“aventureros”), commerce (“comerciantes”), order (“magistrados, capitanes, tribunales”), knowledge (“pensadores”) . . . catchwords of modernity, universally admired activities and aspirations that the Spanish language has made possible and that it has come to symbolize.

Throughout history, it has been customary for great political and military powers to symbolically show off their strength by building architectural masterpieces and engineering wonders. Such displays of national discipline, technological prowess and, often, aesthetic sensibility became particularly conspicuous in modern times when technology reached an unprecedented peak and communications expanded the potential ideological impact of those awesome structures. Could Pidal’s construction of an image of the Spanish language have performed a function analogous to that of those architectural and engineering feats? As a Spanish intellectual of the turn-of-the-century generations, he did not merely engage in the objective description of the language, but in the construction of a spectacular icon: glorious symbol for the nation’s past and sophisticated vehicle for its race towards a brilliant future.

La tarea que históricamente nos toca es, primero, la de no menoscabar, por desidia, la vigencia de esa forma [the Peninsular Spanish norm]; después, el llevarla constantemente a nueva perfección literaria, con el oído siempre atento a los pueblos hermanos . . . tendiendo a un futuro en que aparezca más espléndida la magnífica unidad lingüística creada a un lado y otro de los mares, una de las más grandiosas construcciones humanas que ha visto la historia.⁵⁰

(Menéndez Pidal 1944: 33)

Notes

I want to express my gratitude to my friend and colleague Alberto Medina Domínguez for his careful reading and insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

- 1 “The historical function of utopias is not the immediate realization here and now . . . of their content, but the broadening of the historical possibilities of a people through the enrichment of their collective conscience.”
- 2 By Spanish nationalism I refer to the nineteenth-century liberal project of construction of a modern nation – as described for example by Hobsbawm (1990); cf. chapter 1. The political ideas and practices associated with liberal nationalism – of which Pidal, in my view, was an important ideologue – must be clearly distinguished from the fascism-inspired Spanish nationalist movement. Unfortunately, the cultural dimensions of both projects, while not identical, bear some uncomfortable resemblances (which, I must insist, do not justify their identification).
- 3 “Desde mediados del siglo XIX se da franca entrada en la literatura al habla dialectal . . . Y ya en 1882 Juan Ignacio de Armas . . . hacía notar el hecho de que la literatura costumbrista adquiría una extensión mayor cada día” (Menéndez Pidal 1944: 2; “From the middle of the nineteenth century, dialectal speech is

brought into literature . . . As early as 1882, Juan Ignacio de Armas . . . pointed out the fact that *costumbrista* literature spread more every day.”

- 4 “While some hold the idea of the race’s original and fatal unfitnes (source of an unjustified and deadly pessimism) others suggest that it has degenerated with time (a relative pessimism that leaves the door open for regeneration). I am even more optimistic; I do not see any degeneration . . . The virtue and vigor [of the nation] have weakened, or rather, have become asleep and latent; but as soon as one approaches the people, one finds the live sources of energy waiting to be aroused, strengthened and channeled by leaders capable of representing the spirit of a whole people. . . . we have never lacked – and we do not lack now – great Spaniards able to take control and direct spontaneous efforts along the sure paths of national reconstruction.”
- 5 The emergence in the late nineteenth century of regionalist and later nationalist movements in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia constituted serious challenges to Spain’s status. How could the prestige of the nation be maintained when its value as a modern national entity was being questioned both from the outside (by the former colonies) and from the inside (by Basque, Catalan and Galician separatists)? Pidal’s position with respect to the Catalan question was fairly clear: in the 1920s, he signed, with other Spanish intellectuals, a manifesto in defense of the Catalan language in response to General Primo de Rivera’s restrictive measures. He also publicly expressed his sympathy towards the Catalan cultural revival and even his support of a reconfiguration of the state that would grant some regions a certain degree of autonomy (Pérez Pascual 1998: 233–49). However, he vehemently opposed any regional demands that in any way denied or undermined the unity and relative uniformity of the Spanish nation, “el hecho magno y secular de la pacífica y perdurable penetración del castellano, desde la Edad Media, tanto en Galicia como en Cataluña y Vasconia” (Menéndez Pidal quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 248; “The magnificent and historical fact of the peaceful and durable penetration of Castilian, from the Middle Ages, in Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country.”)
- 6 For Pidal’s biography cf. Hess (1982), Malkiel (1970), the already-mentioned Pérez Pascual (1998), and Pérez Villanueva (1991).
- 7 A clear example of the symbolic power with which Pidal, as a linguist, was endowed was Miguel de Unamuno’s expression of satisfaction when Pidal – a linguist, one truly equipped to deal with language – was elected to the RAE.
- 8 “His intense praise of Castile and his concern for everything that had to do with the Castilian spirit give him a prominent position among the members of the generation of 98; this did not hamper in fact it somehow inspired his scientific work as a historian and philologist.”
- 9 “I greatly trust the value of scientific work, which slowly cultivates the conscience of a people elevating their culture.”
- 10 “Pocas obras de este tipo pueden vanagloriarse de haber resistido tan bien el paso del tiempo, hasta el punto de que aún hoy en día es un texto de obligada consulta para especialistas y estudiosos de la evolución del castellano” (Pérez Pascual 1998: 81; “Few works of this kind can boast of having resisted so well the passage of time; even nowadays it is an essential text for scholars and specialists in the history of Castilian.”)
- 11 The most crucial element of Osthoff and Brugmann’s theory of language change is the so-called regularity principle: “[E]very sound change, inasmuch as it occurs mechanically, takes place according to laws that admit no exception” (Osthoff and Brugmann [1878] 1967: 204).
- 12 “This history has allowed us to see laws or directions that were effective in all or the majority of cases in which a sound occurred in the same context within a

- word . . . The discovery of those phonetic laws has established the study of the origin of words on a firm basis capable of serving scientific work."
- 13 Pidal was greatly concerned about the quality of Spanish academic life: "La Universidad ha mejorado algo, quizá bastante; pero en rigor no ha habido en ella una mejora esencial, que la haga levantarse de la decadencia en que hace siglos ha caído (como otras tantas manifestaciones de la vida nacional)" (Pidal quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 132; "The University has improved a little, maybe a lot; but in reality there has not been an essential improvement that will help raise the institution from its long decadence (like many other aspects of national life).")
- 14 "The illusion . . . would not be to state the existence of a phonetic law; the illusion would be to deny it, and not consider the complete historical evolution in a relatively united linguistic territory; the illusion would also occur if we limited ourselves to the intense contemplation of one single instant in the dialect of a village."
- 15 "Propendí a considerar inseparables la historia lingüística con la historia literaria (crónicas métricas, poesía épica) y con la historia política y social (personajes, instituciones, sucesos)" (Pidal quoted in Pérez Pascual 1998: 36; "I tended to treat as inseparable linguistic and literary history (chronicles and epic poems) and political and social history (characters, institutions, historical events).")
- 16 Cf. Lloyd (1970) for the connections between Pidal's doctrine and sociolinguistics and del Valle (1999a) on his foreshadowing of lexical diffusion.
- 17 Pidal's renewed intervention in the fragmentation debate may have been stimulated in the 1930s and 1940s by the publication of *El problema de la lengua en América* by Amado Alonso (1935) and *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* by Américo Castro (1941). In these books Alonso and Castro, two of the most distinguished disciples of Menéndez Pidal, discussed what they considered to be the linguistic chaos of Argentina (cf. del Valle 1999b). Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borges, responded to Castro's book with an article that has become a classic: "Las alarmas del doctor Américo Castro." For the ideological dimension of these dialectological discussions cf. del Valle (1998).
- 18 The political use of the unifying potential of linguistic history was a widespread phenomenon, to which Tony Crowley - studying the development of the history of the English language in England - has referred in the following terms: "the history of the language' belonged to the discourse of cultural nationalism which stressed continuity, that which is known, a sense of history, and gradual evolution. . . . 'the history of the language' and discourses like it were centripetal" (Crowley 1996: 152).
- 19 "We will only pay special attention to the more common and old elements, the ones that may offer us the richest evolution: spoken or vulgar Latin, which is the *hereditary patrimony* of our language, so to speak" (emphasis added). "This Hispano-Roman language, continued in its natural evolution, is *the same* found as a literary language in the 'Poem of the Cid,' *the same* brought to perfection by Alfonso the Sage and, essentially, *the same* in which Cervantes wrote" (emphasis added).
- 20 "Castilian, having been the instrument for a literature more important than that of other regions of Spain, and having absorbed the two main Romance languages spoken in the Iberian Peninsula (Leonese and Aragonese), receives the more appropriate name *Spanish*."
- 21 "What Spanish borrowed from foreign languages came at a later date, and it is therefore less important than what it took from Germans and Arabs; *the language had completed its period of more intense evolution and was less accessible to external influences*" (emphasis added). "They may even be forgotten, just like the hundreds of words

- used by gallicists in the eighteenth century . . . a language, like a healthy body, has the ability to eliminate foreign substances that are not assimilated and useless" (emphasis added).
- 22 "Certain countries display a more spontaneous inclination towards *stabilization* more decisively than others. Castile was faster than its brother dialects" (emphasis added). "Castile shows a *more proper acoustic taste*, selecting rather early and *with greater initiative*, the more euphonic variants of these vocalic sounds" (emphasis added). "The Castilian dialect displays in all its characteristics a unique character in comparison to the other dialects of Spain, as a *rebellious and dissenting force* that emerges in Cantabria and adjacent regions" (emphasis added).
- 23 "The European type is more directly and firmly consistent with the old line of evolution; Peninsular society . . . maintains more faithfully its linguistic style; . . . The American type belongs to peoples that developed after breaking away from peninsular life . . . peoples who feel less intensely the linguistic tradition." "Peninsular Spanish is the most unitary of all Romance languages; the language spoken in the Peninsula, with the exception of Asturias and High Aragon, does not have any true dialectal varieties." "This fact suffices to understand that Spanish American popular speech does not significantly deviate from Castilian." "The speech of the educated in Spanish America is, if we look at its most prominent features, the educated speech of Andalusia." "With the progress of communication and culture the stabilization of language acquires a new character . . . Individual and collective influence on language becomes less and less unconscious." "The means to spread the linguistic norm are today incredibly superior to what they used to be."
- 24 "The distance between general educated Spanish, which represents unity, and the popular Spanish of various regions, which represents diversity, cannot be interpreted as a process of growing divergence, whose differentiation will be such that literary Spanish will be unintelligible to the people. Instead, it should be conceived of as two wavy lines that run side by side in the same direction and whose peaks and valleys frequently tend towards convergence, often touching but without ever merging completely. The literary language is always the goal towards which popular language aspires, and, vice versa, the popular language is always the fountain in which the literary language likes to refresh itself."
- 25 "The *popular* always entails the mutual understanding between the educated and the people in general; the *vulgar* a greater initiative on the part of the uneducated people."
- 26 Cf. Joseph 1995: 221.
- 27 "The history of language . . . seemed to be governed by laws independent from human will." "We must now discard any similarity between the principles that govern language as a function of the spirit and natural laws."
- 28 "If we turn our attention to traditional and folk songs, another very common social activity, . . . we see that the individuals' participation is free within certain limits established by tradition; . . . a romance is never repeated exactly in the same manner; instead it is reproduced with individual variations, although, however, in spite of so many modifications, the traditional text remains without essential alterations, respecting the inherited standard imposed on all singers as a superior and exemplary model" (emphasis added).
- 29 "The language lives in a state of constant variation and essential permanence. Each speaker moulds the materials deposited in his mind by tradition . . . but in spite of that, the language remains with its essential identity."
- 30 "The individual by himself is unable to alter the course of the modifications that language will tend to suffer; but it is also evident that the changes that affect language - being as it is a human phenomenon - will always be the product of an

- individual's initiative, of an individual who, deviating from what is usual, manages to earn the support of others; they imitate him, and subsequently others will imitate them."
- 31 "While society *wants* to preserve its language, its vitality is guaranteed; and while society receives from language a given mental conformation, before, social will conformed language and continues to conform it" (emphasis in original).
- 32 "In Madrid, 'l' is usually pronounced [as a lateral sound] among *the most educated classes*, and *yeísmo* [the non-lateral pronunciation] is widespread among *the popular classes*" (emphasis added). "It is necessary that a corrective reaction begin with *the educated classes*, and from them spread to *the classes that have less time for their own education*" (emphasis added). "Chilean schools, following Bello's teachings, had imposed the pronoun 'tú' over 'vos' among *the educated class* of society; twenty years later, the 'voseo' had completely disappeared from the *middle class* and was being lost even among the *working class*: workers in Santiago, said a German linguist, use "usted" to address each other, although sometimes in the heat of a dispute they resort to 'vos'" (emphasis added).
- 33 I have discussed the role that grammar and language planning play in the configuration and domestication of the ideal subject of the modern nation-state in del Valle (1999b) (cf. also González Stephan 1995).
- 34 Any consideration of Pidal's use of the geographic criterion must be placed in the context of *hispanismo* (cf. chapter 1) since his firm belief in the indisputable cultural unity between Spain and Spanish America is central to his linguistic ideology: "Simper la onda vital de España y de Hispano-América vibrará con misteriosos unísonos, y responderá al común atavismo. Toda la civilización hispano-americana descansa principalmente en su base española" (Menéndez Pidal 1918: 9). As was the case with *hispanismo* in general, in Pidal's view of the Hispanic community Spain, and more specifically Castile, is the *alma mater* of the Hispanic world which also justifies the special position it occupies and the major responsibility it has: "Lengua española, creada por cima de todas sus variedades dialectales, aunque con la colaboración más o menos sensible de ellas. Claro es que la *variedad castellana* fué *principalísima* en esa labor" (Menéndez Pidal 1918: 3, emphasis added).
- 35 "The etymological type [the Castilian norm], legitimized by practical and historical reasons, will *reconquer* the terrain lost to the derived type [the Latin American norm]" (emphasis added).
- 36 "Spain brought to America its religious institutions, its schools, universities and academies, its printing presses, its literature, its entire civilization; but the difficulties of governing such a vast territory . . . produced inevitable deficiencies in the gigantic enterprise. In the colonization, the lower classes were abundant."
- 37 "Castile should begin to correct its speech, since it will only be a model and a guide when it deserves it." "All of this [Castile-based standardization] requires great effort, . . . so that that statement made by a famous movie personality over there in California doesn't turn out to be true: 'Spain has lost *control* of the Castilian language.' Let's not live in fatalistic laziness, leaving the corrective work only for others."
- 38 "It is possible to campaign for a type of linguistic usage; just as it is possible to campaign for a political, economic, legal or literary idea whose success we want: therefore an individual may powerfully influence the language of a speech community just as he can have influence during an electoral campaign: by gaining the support of others."
- 39 "In vain Sarmiento, for whom the resentment left by the emancipation was great . . ."
- 40 "Undoubtedly, in this polemic between the Colombian scholar and the distinguished Juan Valera, the most interesting views were produced by the great

- linguist and not by the great writer; . . . Cuervo's breadth of knowledge of the linguistic history of America gives his ideas great weight; a weight that we still feel over our spirit as a threatening cloud, and which demands our attention after forty years."
- 41 "The advance of this *criollismo* is considered by Cuervo with a noble melancholy, without forgetting, as the epigraph to his works, Puigblanch's words: 'Spanish Americans, if they value as they should linguistic uniformity in both hemispheres, must sacrifice and respect Castile as the center of unity, since it gave the language its being and name.'"
- 42 "The nature of the Colombian scholar was prematurely mined by the ailments of senility."
- 43 "He lacked the necessary practical and scientific knowledge, and especially, he lacked good taste."
- 44 Again, we must take notice of the fact that Pidal is concerned not so much with refuting Abeille's ideas as with discrediting him, with pointing out that he could not speak legitimately: he did not hold the *skeptron*.
- 45 "Cuervo, in his old age, went the wrong scientific way by subscribing to a theory of fatal evolution that was beginning to be discredited."
- 46 "When communication among the American Republics becomes so difficult that important businesses take a year to complete, when literary production disappears for over a century, then we may be sad about the destiny of our language, similar to that of Latin . . . It is perhaps possible that Humanity will fall again into barbarism, that it will lose the *universality* of its *science* and of its *commerce*, that the airplane is forgotten and *transportation* is limited to donkeys. But we are so far from this that it is not more sensible to think about it than it is to think about the freezing of the sun or the fainting of the vitality of the human species" (emphasis added).
- 47 "The educated and literary language is as natural to man when he wants to universalize his thoughts, as the local language is when he thinks about the more mundane and domestic."
- 48 "The absence of a Romance norm intensely felt by speakers is the absence of a *soul* or personal principle in the new language; absence of a life of its own, separate from Latin. That unique spirit slowly develops in the struggle among different tendencies or forces. Certain countries show a more spontaneous inclination than others towards *stabilization*. Castile is faster than its brother dialects . . . it was also the first one to develop a literature of its own" (emphasis added). "The Castilian dialect displays in all its characteristics a unique character in comparison to the other dialects of Spain, as a *rebellious and dissenting force* that emerges in Cantabria and adjacent regions" (emphasis added).
- 49 "The educated variety of the language . . . spreads as far as the activities of men of action or the spark of the most efficient intelligences which use the language go. *Adventurers, traders, magistrates, captains, tribunes, thinkers* . . . anyone who wants to give life to an idea, useful and beautiful, . . . strives to create and preserve that more virtuously powerful language . . . reaching as far as possible in space and time" (emphasis added).
- 50 "The task that has been handed down to us by history is not to destroy, out of neglect, the validity of this form [the Peninsular Spanish norm]; then, we must constantly bring it to a new literary perfection, with our ear always open to our brother nations . . . moving towards a future in which, more splendid, will appear the magnificent linguistic unity created on both sides of the ocean, one of the grandest human constructions that history has ever seen."