

## 7 A nobleman grabs the broom

### Ortega y Gasset's verbal hygiene

Luis Gabriel-Stheeman

La gente habla muy mal, y cuando habla bien no se le entiende nada.<sup>1</sup>  
 José Luis Coll quoted in *El País*, 28 September 2000)

#### Ortega as a language maven

In 1910, a 27-year-old José Ortega y Gasset dedicated a short essay to the literary style of Spanish novelist Pío Baroja. Focusing specifically on the novel *El árbol de la ciencia*, Ortega began his analysis by pointing out that, no matter where one opened Baroja's book, it would not be long before at least two or three taunts sprang from the page:

llegándonos a la [página] 68 tenemos que "aquel petulante idiota . . . era un macaco cruel este tipo" y "Aracil no podía soportar la bestialidad de aquel idiota".

Pasemos a la 69: "¡Canalla! ¡Idiota!" – exclamó Aracil, acercándose al médico con el puño levantado: "Sí, me voy, por no patear las tripas a ese idiota miserable".

En la página 87: "Julio le presentó a un sainetero, un hombre estúpido, fúnebre" . . . En la 89: "El amante de Pura, además de un acreditado imbécil, fabricante de chistes estúpidos . . . En fin, en la página 100: "Pero usted es un imbécil, una mala bestia".<sup>2</sup>

(Ortega 1910: 104)

According to Ortega, "words that express the greatest irritation are characteristic of Baroja's literature" (105). In order to understand an author's style, and see where they go in search of inspiration, stated Ortega, it is important to determine their preferred vocabulary. In Baroja's case, it was clear to Ortega that he descended "to the dregs of the dictionary."

Why? – Ortega asked himself – how could a writer show preference for words such as "wretch," "stupid," "imbecile" or "repugnant" – words with little or no specific meaning, yet at the same time so hard, so blunt, so excessive? Searching for an answer, Ortega proceeded to sketch a "theory of the insult" which could clarify the role such words play in language. He

concluded that all words can be placed, according to their meaning, somewhere between two extremes: the technical term and the interjection. While the first expresses "a maximum of idea and a minimum of emotion" (106), the second conveys "a minimum of idea and a maximum of emotion" (107). These two poles provided him with the framework for a biological metaphor of language: "Entre ambos extremos flota la vida del idioma; la interjección es su germen, el término técnico es su momia" (107).<sup>3</sup> With their interjectional nature, insults belong to the early, primitive stages of language, although Ortega was careful to point out that their emotional overload does not originate in the words themselves, but rather in the use we make of them:

los improprios son palabras que significan realidades objetivas determinadas, pero que empleamos, no en cuanto expresan éstas, sino para manifestar nuestros sentimientos personales. Cuando Baroja dice o escribe "imbécil", no quiere decir que se trate de alguien débil, *sine baculo*, que es su valencia original . . . Lo que quiere expresar es su desprecio apasionado hacia esa persona. Los improprios son vocablos complejos usados como interjecciones; es decir, son palabras al revés.<sup>4</sup>  
 (107)

I will not reproduce here Ortega's conclusions about Baroja; as the reader might have guessed, they were not very positive. More important to me is the fact that, in Ortega's eyes, *Spaniards* in general tend to use insults much too frequently: "[E]s sabido que no existe pueblo en Europa que posea caudal tan rico de vocablos injuriosos, de juramentos e interjecciones, como el nuestro" (108).<sup>5</sup> Since the abundance of insults in any given language is a symptom of that language's regression into its infancy (107) – a reminder of the aforementioned biological metaphor – it seems safe to infer that Ortega perceived Spain as an enormous and quite unruly verbal kindergarten: "Como para Baroja, suele ser para nosotros los demás iberos cada palabra un jaulón, donde aprisionamos una fiera, quiero decir un apasionamiento nuestro" (111).<sup>6</sup>

The views and concerns expressed by Ortega in the 1910 article are consistent with a significant number of statements he made on language and language use throughout his life. Usually restricted to lexical issues, these remarks were often limited in their scope, offering assessments or reports on the fate of a certain word or expression, or even on the grammatical or lexical incorrectness of another:

La palabra 'amoralismo', usada por algunos escritores en los últimos años, no es sólo un vocablo bárbaramente compuesto, sino que carece de sentido.<sup>7</sup> (1908a: 93)

La palabra 'encanto', tan trivializada, es, no obstante, la que mejor expresa la clase de actuación que sobre el que ama ejerce lo amado.

Conviene, pues, restaurar su uso resucitando el sentido mágico que en su origen tuvo.<sup>8</sup> (1925: 472)

Es irritante la degeneración sufrida en el vocabulario usual por una palabra tan inspiradora como 'nobleza'.<sup>9</sup> (1930: 182)

La palabra 'típico', 'típica' se ha desviado en nuestro idioma e importa mucho corregir su uso que es un abuso.<sup>10</sup> (1939a: 425)

Todas las demás especies viven adscritas a un restringido 'habitat', para emplear esta palabra que han dado en usar todos los biólogos, que me parece una palabra ridícula tomada del alemán, el cual no hace sino emplear torpemente un vocablo latino.<sup>11</sup> (1948: 183)

Y digo española porque no logro acomodarme al erudito término que funciona estos últimos años y que suena 'hispanidad', el cual me parece un error desde el punto de vista de la lengua castellana.<sup>12</sup> (1948: 226)

Frequently, however, Ortega's comments on individual words would lead into broader statements on the general communicative effectiveness of our vocabulary:

No es indiferente que en el repertorio de los nombres con que aludimos a las cosas llegue a ser demasiado grande el número de ellos que no designan con precisión y fuerza denominativa sus objetos. . . . [N]uestra habla reclama una reforma a fondo.<sup>13</sup> (1939b: 358–60)

[N]o es posible . . . seguir usando el habla a la buena de Dios. Urge ya una higiene y una técnica del hablar.<sup>14</sup> (1939a: 434)

[C]onversar sobre cualquier tema importante es hoy sobremanera difícil, porque las palabras mismas han perdido su sentido eficaz. Como acontece siempre al fin de un ciclo cultural, los vocablos de las lenguas están todos envilecidos y se han vuelto equívocos.<sup>15</sup> (1949: 249)

[L]as palabras, como los navíos, necesitan de cuando en cuando limpiar fondos.<sup>16</sup> (1950b: 510)

[E]l vocablo 'individuo' se ha convertido en una palabra opaca, sin vivacidad expresiva. Si esto aconteciese sólo con ella, el mal no sería digno de atención, pero me he servido de este caso como ejemplo de lo que acontece hoy con casi todas las palabras más importantes de la lengua. Todo el que hoy se ocupa en pensar y se arriesga a escribir, se siente deprimido al advertir que la parte más decisiva del vocabulario se ha hecho inservible porque sus vocablos están demasiado cargados de

sentidos anticuados, cadavéricos y no corresponden ni a nuestras ideas ni a nuestra sensibilidad.<sup>17</sup> (1953b: 676–7)

All of these remarks share three essential characteristics: (a) they are, very obviously, evaluative comments; (b) they bring forth a picture of language decay, an image which implies the existence of better times in the past; and (c) they call for immediate corrective action in order to prevent some sort of imminent cultural collapse. Together, these common traits should suffice to inscribe the Spanish philosopher in what James and Leslie Milroy have called "the complaint tradition," that is, a line of thought for which language is "always on a downhill path," and for whose defenders it is "up to experts (such as dictionary-makers) to arrest and reverse the decline" (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 4). Aside from prescriptive lexicographers, it is quite common to find among these "experts" a number of "writers . . . who set themselves up as public guardians of usage" (1999: 10), and who have received such names as *language mavens* (a title given to himself by the *New York Times* columnist William Safire – cf. Pinker 1995: 373; Cameron 1995: vii) or *language shamans* (Bolinger 1980: 1). Due perhaps to the impressively varied range of his intellectual undertakings, Ortega y Gasset was not nearly as dedicated to this task as the aforementioned Safire or as today's most renowned Spanish language guardian, Fernando Lázaro Carreter (cf. chapter 9). Nonetheless, statements like the ones quoted above, together with the following self-description, should grant Ortega, at the very least, the title of part-time maven:

[L]os señores del tópico quieren reducir la política a problemas *particulares o parciales*; por lo tanto, abstractos; pero les llaman 'problemas concretos', maltratando el idioma como podía hacerlo un carabinero – sea dicho sin enojo para este Cuerpo, ya que su misión se limita a evitar el contrabando de cosas, como la mía es a ratos evitar el contrabando de palabras.<sup>18</sup>

(Ortega 1931: 149)

### On understanding Ortega's verbal hygiene

There are a number of models a critic can follow when deciding how to read Ortega as a language maven. One may try for instance Steven Pinker's way, utterly dismissive from its starting point – "Maven, shmaven!" he decries, making good use of the Yiddish word (1995: 373). This approach, excessive and irreverent as it may seem,<sup>19</sup> might be quite understandable if one shares the opinion of most contemporary linguists and endorses descriptivism ("grammars and dictionaries should describe how people talk") over prescriptivism ("grammars and dictionaries prescribe how people should talk"). After all, it can be said that linguists for whom berating the "misuse" of *hopefully* makes as little sense as censuring chickadees for

constructing their nests incorrectly (Pinker 1995: 370), have themselves frequently become the targets of the mavens' wrath (cf. Bolinger 1980: 164; Milroy and Milroy 1999: 7; Cameron 1995: xi), or at the very least of their derision: "Los lingüistas . . . són, después de los aviadores, los hombres menos dispuestos a asustarse de cosa alguna" (Ortega 1937a: 129).<sup>20</sup> In any case, it cannot be ignored that today's linguistic science would be very skeptical of Ortega's urgent summons to restore language. The tendency has been, to the contrary, "to posit speaking subjects acted on by language and largely unable to act upon it themselves" (Cameron 1995: 18).

The careful reader, on the other hand, may also consider the view held by different scholars who are fonder or at least less disdainful of Ortega's remarks on language. These critics – who, by the way, would favor terms such as "language reformist" over "maven" or "shaman" (cf. Rosenblat 1958: 32) – prefer to interpret Ortega's concern for language in the light of the philosopher's sociohistorical context. Born in 1883, Ortega belonged to a generation of intellectuals – the "novecentistas" – who imposed on themselves and demanded of their society a "doble imperativo de rigor y precisión" (Senabre 1964: 29), in order to overcome the pervasive crisis of the turn of the century. In their eyes, to achieve this goal Spain required drastic improvements in all areas, from science and technology to the very language spoken by the people. Seen from this perspective, then, Ortega's efforts to modernize Spanish can be interpreted not merely as a hygienic mission but also as a patriotic one:

[Ortega] revitaliza el valor originario de algunas palabras y expresiones desgastadas atendiendo a su etimología, ya que "la vida del lenguaje, por uno de sus lados, es continua degeneración de las palabras," [Ortega 1943: 355] y hay que evitar la desaparición de lo que en ellas haya de castizo y positivo.<sup>21</sup>

(Senabre 1964: 36; cf. also Huerta 1956 and Rosenblat 1958: 33–4)

The Pinkerian critic would probably set about the long and painful task of dismantling Ortega's warnings and complaints, all the while maintaining a strictly linguistic perspective and ultimately rejecting the maven's claims. His more benign readers, however, have not been so keen on double-checking the legitimacy of the maestro's specific assertions. On the contrary, they tend to be rather acritical in their approach, keeping their thorough and detailed studies bound to a descriptive account of Ortega's ideas on language. Their primary purpose is to explain these linguistic views within the general philosophy of the author and to place them in the context of his cultural milieu. Testing the soundness of any of Ortega's complaints, however, has been considered secondary or even irrelevant to the understanding of what they see as the thinker's master mission: "hacer apto el castellano para la faena filosófica" (Maldonado 1957: 125; cf. also Senabre 1964: 35 and Pascual 1985: 74).<sup>22</sup>

Finally, there is a third possible line of analysis, one in tune with the ideas laid out by Deborah Cameron in her 1995 book, *Verbal Hygiene* – note the fortunate coincidence between the title and Ortega's words as quoted above (1939a: 434). This "third way" situates itself somewhere between the two preceding views. In contrast with Pinker and the descriptivist tradition, for example, Cameron is reluctant to censure all evaluative considerations of language. Instead, she aligns herself with other linguists and philosophers such as Baker and Hacker (1984), Harris (1980, 1981) or Taylor (1990), and exposes the "instability of the descriptive / prescriptive opposition" (Cameron 1995: 8) – a binarism which "sets the parameters of linguistics as a science concerned with 'objective facts and not subjective value judgments'" (5). In the first place, as Cameron proves, "value-laden attitudes" are common to both sides of the contention, neither of them being "neutral with respect to what is 'good' linguistically speaking": *perfection* as a value that needs to be pursued or protected (prescriptivists) or *naturalism* – that is, unguided *variability* – as a concept that is incompatible with tampering or preservation (descriptivists) (4). In the second place, Cameron and the authors mentioned above seriously doubt that the objective facts investigated by linguists can be reduced to "descriptive rules." As Talbot Taylor pointed out, there is a critical mistake

in assimilating the assertion of the truth of normative statements such as "Soporific" means *tending to produce sleep*" to the assertion of the truth of a descriptive statement like "Grizzly bears hibernate in the winter". Asserting the truth of a normative statement is asserting that that statement is normatively enforced (within some context, by some individual or group) . . . Such statements are not descriptions of facts, but rather citations of norms.

(Taylor 1990: 24)

What follows from this argument is that if Pinker's tenets are not as solid as they appear, his disregard of language mavens may need other reasons to prevail. For Deborah Cameron, on the other hand, the blurring of the borders between descriptivism and prescriptivism justifies a careful analysis of verbal hygiene: "practices like these, born of an urge to improve or 'clean up' language, . . . {are} as basic to the use of language as vowels are to its phonetic structure, and as deserving of serious study" (Cameron 1995: 1). Actually, even if one supported *naturalism* – the descriptivists overriding value – it would turn out to be just another good reason to consider prescriptivism seriously: "If 'natural' here means something like 'observed to occur in all speech communities to a greater or lesser extent', then the kind of norm-making and tinkering linguists label 'prescriptive' is 'natural' too" (5).

The view synthesized above would thus reject any swift dismissal of Ortega's evaluative comments on language, calling instead for a careful consideration of his writings on the matter. In contrast with those critics closer

to Ortega, however, it would also reject any acritical kind of attention. If it is true that, as Cameron warns, we cannot escape normativity (1995: 10), then we can neither avoid the questions of authority nor the ideologies behind it. Who decides and enforces or tries to enforce these norms? What justifies these norms? Why should these norms be accepted and followed? (cf. Taylor 1990: 24–5). The fact that there are different answers for each of these questions only proves that “all attitudes to language and linguistic change are fundamentally ideological” (Cameron 1995: 4) and that, in consequence, there is no reason to accept uncritically any given set of norms (11). This is precisely why it is so important to subject verbal hygiene practices to a scrupulous analysis, carrying out an active and critical search for what Cameron calls their “unspoken assumptions” (11) or even their “hidden ideological presuppositions” (232). Any statement on what is “wrong” about language (or about *a* language), as well as any suggestion on how to “fix” it, are ultimately based on a particular vision of what society is or should be. The authors of such statements assume there is a portion of that society more prone to do what is “wrong” and another portion that is either more apt or better prepared to do what it takes to “fix” it (cf. also Kroskrity 2000: 8). Inevitably, then, these linguistic statements will shape a discourse that favors a certain social hierarchy.

The kind of critical inquiry proposed by this “third way” is basically the same as the one formulated by students of language ideologies. For Bauman and Briggs the goal is “to identify ways that key texts seek to delegitimize particular practices of discourse production and reception while promoting others” (2000: 139–40). And that is exactly the purpose of this chapter. In the pages that follow I will pursue a critical approach to Ortega’s linguistic reasoning as it relates to his calls for verbal hygiene. Many of these statements are rather impersonal in the phrasing of their demands: “conviene, pues, restaurar . . .” (1925: 472), “importa mucho corregir . . .” (1939a: 425). By exploring the ideological framework that supports them, I intend to find the faces Ortega imagined on the agents of his proposed changes, as well as those he painted on the “culprits” of verbal decay. This probe will also require assessing the soundness of the philosopher’s arguments. For if it is true that “there is scope, albeit not unlimited scope, for effective intervention in language” (Cameron 1995: 18), an appraisal of Ortega’s complaints and of the feasibility of his proposed solutions should be quite illuminating about the present situation in his own country; one must not forget that Ortega is a model for our contemporary language mavens and authorities (cf. chapter 9).

### Ortega’s linguistic reasoning

Desde hace tiempo – y aunque de lingüística sé poco más que nada – procuro, al desgaire de mis temas, ir subrayando aciertos y fallos del

lenguaje, porque, aun no siendo lingüista, tengo, acaso, algunas cosas que decir no del todo triviales.<sup>23</sup>

(Ortega 1943: 357)

One shortcoming that linguists perceive in language mavens refers to the limited knowledge the latter usually have of the subject, being as they are for the most part *amateurs* or professionals whose expertise is not directly related to linguistics – “professional language users” is how Cameron describes them (1995: 14; cf. also ix, xi and Bolinger 1980: 5–6; Milroy and Milroy 1999: 10; Pinker 1995: 372, 398–9). This reproach, however, does not seem to apply to José Ortega y Gasset. As a postdoctoral student in Germany, and already prepared with a prolonged and very solid philological education in both Latin and Greek (cf. Díez del Corral 1968), he decided to dedicate himself professionally to linguistics (Ortega 1991: 599–601). Granted, this resolution did not survive the test of time – he gave up on the idea only a few months later (Díez del Corral 1968: 275) – but it did signal the beginning of a close and extended contact with the discipline. The lengthy list of linguists that appear throughout the pages of his complete works should be evidence enough of this life-long interest in the discipline: Bréal, Bühler, Brugmann, Hronzn, Humboldt, Lapesa, Lerch, Meillet, Menéndez Pidal, Paul, Saussure, Sievers, Trubetzkoy, Vendryès . . . (cf. Araya 1971: 83; Pascual 1985: 79; and Martín 1999: 303). This close contact, however, should not be mistaken for a sustained respect towards the profession. Even before being admitted into a seminar led by Brugmann in Leipzig, the young Ortega had chosen linguistics only as a “scientific springboard towards subsequent intellectual endeavors” (Díez del Corral 1968: 276), and he did not intend to spend his life absorbed by its inner details: “[E]l filósofo tiene que buscar su materia en una ciencia especial . . . Ahora que hace falta mantener siempre el espíritu a temperatura filosófica y no ser un erudito o un mero botánico o geólogo” (Ortega 1991: 600).<sup>24</sup> The study of phonetic laws and other neogrammarian principles, therefore, must not have particularly impressed him. From this moment on, Ortega’s ceaseless interest in the question of language coexisted with a growing skepticism toward the science of linguistics, a progressive falling-out that lasted until the end of his life. Ten years after making the statement just quoted, the still young university professor questioned during an academic lecture the boundaries between the linguistic discipline and his own, thereby suggesting that a linguist’s scope fell short of addressing the *whole* question of language, and reclaiming his stake in the matter: “¿Hasta dónde llega en el fenómeno ‘lenguaje’ la jurisdicción del lingüista y dónde empieza la del filósofo?” (Ortega 1915: 445).<sup>25</sup> Twelve years after posing that question, in a book review of Menéndez Pidal’s *Orígenes del español*, the critic warned once more against the futility of mere erudition, urged for a reform in linguistics and expressed a glimmer of hope that mostly underlined the wide discrepancy between his views and those of this discipline:

Al complicar con la evolución de cada sonido en el tiempo su traslación en el espacio, la vieja lingüística renace convertida en *cinemática* o ciencia de movimientos. Ya está, pues, más cerca de lo que debe ser una ciencia de realidades. Sólo le falta un paso para transformarse en la física del lenguaje. Ese paso consistirá en añadir a la determinación de los movimientos o cambios tempoespaciales del lenguaje la investigación de las fuerzas que los engendran. La lingüística cinemática de este libro demanda, como su coronación, una lingüística dinámica. (Algún que otro germen de ella asoma en las postreras páginas.)<sup>26</sup>

(Ortega 1927: 517; underline added)

Clearly, Ortega was not very interested in a descriptive account of a language's history. "La laboriosidad de un erudito empieza a ser ciencia cuando moviliza los hechos y los saberes hacia una teoría," he stated in the same article (516).<sup>27</sup> Linguists, therefore, would not be real scientists until they focused on theorizing, that is, on going *beyond* phonetic and lexical evolution and inquiring into the *forces* that generate language change. In this light, Pidal represented for Ortega a promising yet still uncertain case. On the one hand, the philosopher recognized in the linguist "un gran talento combinatorio, compuesto en dosis compensatorias de rigor y de audacia" (516),<sup>28</sup> and he celebrated this boldness whenever it manifested itself (519). On the other hand, not only was this audacity still a little weak – "Descaríamos, sin embargo, que Menéndez Pidal se explayase un poco más" (519)<sup>29</sup> – but it was also hampered by a most unscientific trait: insufficient curiosity. Having stressed the notion that a theory must open to doubt any received or unquestioned knowledge (516–17), Ortega made sure to point out that Pidal was less surprised than him by what he himself saw as a striking fact: the relative linguistic uniformity of the Iberian Peninsula during the ninth century (518). I will return to this criticism later, but for now the following quote should suffice to illustrate Ortega's reservations concerning the linguist:

Un hombre tan cuidadoso, tan riguroso, tan *científico* en el tratamiento del detalle, parte siempre de dos enormes supuestos que contrajo en la vaga atmósfera intelectual de su juventud, y que usa sin previo examen, sin precisión.<sup>30</sup>

(Ortega 1927: 519)

Sadly for Ortega, the few seeds of hope he observed in Pidal's work did not seem to grow and bear fruit. Ten years after his book review, Ortega wrote the joke quoted earlier on linguists' incapacity for surprise (1937a: 129). The reason for his likening of linguists' "lack of fear" to that of aviators was that none of the former seemed to turn pale in the face of Latin's blatant lack of diversity throughout the territories of the Late Roman Empire. This homogeneity was, according to Ortega, Vulgar Latin's most terrifying

characteristic (we will see the others later), and a telling sign of that language's sudden incapacity for innovation. Again, the fact that linguists did not care to explain *what* had arrested those innovative *forces* made them deserving of Ortega's intellectual contempt.

The nature of linguistic change, thus, the *reasons* behind it, lie at the core of Ortega's interest in language, and ultimately explain most of his specific reproaches to the members of the linguistic discipline. Through the years, as a reaction to their indifference toward the matter, Ortega went from merely calling for a new linguistics to actually setting up the principles on which this reformed science could be founded. Bolstered by a rediscovery of Humboldt's ideas on language (a source of inspiration that many critics have revealed – cf. Martín 1999: 302–9), the Spanish philosopher intensified his reflections on the subject from 1937 onward, producing an increasing amount of material which culminated in his 1949–50 course on *Man and People*. The last two lessons or chapters of what would later become his posthumous sociological treatise, contain a number of linguistic propositions that are usually formulated after related attacks on linguists. As anybody should expect after having read thus far, the first of these charges constitutes a return to and an elaboration of what Ortega saw as the language professionals' inability to properly understand their subject in its whole, dynamic nature:

La lingüística . . . ha estudiado bajo el nombre de lenguaje una abstracción que llama la "lengua" . . . [Pero] eso que llama lengua no existe en rigor, es una figura utópica y artificial creada por la lingüística misma. En efecto, la lengua no es nunca "hecho" por la sencilla razón de que no está nunca "hecha", sino que está siempre haciéndose, o, dicho en otros términos, es una creación permanente y una incesante destrucción. . . . [La] llamada "historia de la lengua" no es, en verdad, sino una serie de gramáticas y léxicos del aspecto que, en cada estado pre-térito, la lengua hecha ya en aquella fecha mostraba. La historia de la lengua nos muestra una serie de lenguas sucesivas, pero no su hacerse.<sup>31</sup>

(Ortega 1950a: 247–8)

The postulation of language as a process and not as a product – a notion completely in tune with Humboldt's *enérgeia* as opposed to *érgon* – lead Ortega to suggest that linguistics should study its object at a deeper level, that is, "antes de estar hecha la palabra, en sus raíces, en sus causas genéticas" (248).<sup>32</sup> These roots, naturally, reach back to the origins of language, a subject whose consideration had been long dismissed by linguists. However, as Ortega readily pointed out, the reasons for this dismissal were based on the erroneous assumption that language was a *datum* – without enough primitive data, linguists had decided it would be impossible to trace its origin. If one considered language as a process, instead, it would only be logical to assume the same *forces* that originated it should also be at work at

the present time (251). Ortega's understanding of these "potencias genitricas" drove him to dissociate the idea of language into two different concepts: *to speak* ["hablar"] and *to say* ["decir"].

To *speak*, for Ortega, is "to use a language as constituted and as our social environment imposes it on us" (Ortega 1957: 243; 1950a: 248). When we *speak*, we benefit from a "vast system of verbal usages established in a collectivity" (1957: 251; 1950a: 253). We absorb that system in our childhood by listening to the others, by learning it unconsciously. Consequently, we also use it in a very mechanical way, more or less "like a series of phonograph records" at our disposal (1957: 258; 1950a: 259). To *say*, on the other hand, is "to invent new modes of the language . . . because those that exist and that it already possesses do not satisfy, do not suffice to say what needs to be said" (1957: 243; 1950a: 248). When we *say*, we try to externalize something we have inside and we look for any possible way to express it – for Ortega, all the fine arts are ways of *saying* (1957: 258; 1950a: 259). To *say* represents thus the creative, innovative force behind language: "[It] is a deeper stratum than speaking, and it is to this deeper stratum that linguistics should now apply itself" (1957: 243; 1950a: 248). In fact, as Ortega argued, this energy constantly exposes the inherent inadequacy of grammars, since, in order to *say* something new, we need to find expressive ways that are not already registered by those texts. In other words, we cannot say anything new without "offending against grammar and outraging the dictionary" (1957: 240; 1950a: 246). Although Ortega did not mention it explicitly in this work, it is clear that by "outraging the dictionary" the author could not have meant the careless utterance of a solecism but rather a more elegant and wilfully creative act. To illustrate this act, he gave his audience the example of *manda-más* ("commands more," "top boss"), an expression whose origin he dated back to the recent Spanish civil war, when somebody had decided to refer ironically to the abundance and diversity of people "in command" (1950a: 260; 1957: 259–60). For Ortega, though, there are many ways of *saying* in language, and a mere compound like the one just quoted did not belong to his favorite kind. More than twenty-five years before *Man and People*, he had already defined *metaphor* as an "improper use" of a pre-existing word, a deliberate inaccuracy chosen to convey a new concept that was difficult not only to express but also to conceive without the trope (1924: 390). Ortega considered metaphor as an invaluable tool in science and philosophy, but it is certain that he also deemed it a language's strongest engine. Otherwise he would not have called it "la comparación menuda y latente que dio origen a casi todas las palabras" (1909: 454);<sup>33</sup> nor would he have referred to "esas venerables metáforas que se han convertido ya en palabras del idioma" (1929: 418–9);<sup>34</sup> nor would he have stated that "toda la lengua es metáfora, . . . toda lengua está en continuo proceso de metaforización" (1947: 284).<sup>35</sup>

Ortega's conceptual dissociation between *to speak* and *to say* provided him with a powerful argument against another tenet held by linguists: the

equality between all languages. The author answered specifically to Meillet's statement of 1922 – "Every language expresses whatever is necessary for the society of which it is the organ. . . . With any phonetics, with any grammar, anything can be expressed" (Meillet quoted in Ortega 1957: 246; 1950a: 250). According to Ortega, the error in this assertion lies in assuming that language is "the expression of what we want to communicate and manifest, whereas the fact is that a great part of what we want to manifest and communicate remains unexpressed" (1957: 244; 1950a: 248–9). Otherwise put, linguists mistake the words people *speak* for what they truly want to *say*, thereby missing the real question: "whether all languages can [formulate every thought] with the same ease and immediacy" (1957: 246; 1950a: 250). For Ortega, the answer to this question is flatly negative. Language does not allow us to say everything we want and, since it is impossible to say it all, "each people leaves some things unsaid *in order* to be able to say others." This "equation between manifestations and silences" gives each different language its own, peculiar shape, and constitutes an excellent source of information about the collectivity who uses it (1957: 246; 1950a: 250). Ortega's line of thought thus points to the identification between language and culture, another idea that he shared with Humboldt and which he held from the beginning of his career: "Como no se abren todas las puertas con la misma llave, no todos los pensamientos se pueden pensar en una lengua . . . Un espíritu de gran potencialidad se creará un idioma multiforme y sugestivo; un espíritu pobre, un idioma enteco, reptante, sin moralidad ni energía" (1911: 548; cf. Pascual 1985: 74–5).<sup>36</sup>

To *say* and *to speak* are, in the eyes of the philosopher, two facets of language tied together in a seemingly endless cycle. What somebody succeeds in *saying* only enters language once it is accepted by the *speaking* collectivity, that is, once it becomes a mechanized usage (1950a: 254; 1957: 252). The dynamic system thus revealed works as the engine that keeps language alive and "it is the normal form in which a language exists" (1957: 252; 1950a: 254). This "normal form," nevertheless, is not exactly balanced:

El individuo, prisionero de su sociedad, aspira con alguna frecuencia a evadirse de ella intentando vivir con formas de vida propias suyas. Esto se produce a veces con buen éxito, y la sociedad modifica tales o cuales de sus usos adoptando formas nuevas, pero lo más frecuente es el fracaso del intento individual. Así tenemos en el lenguaje un paradigma de lo que es el hecho social.<sup>37</sup> (1950a: 254)

For Ortega, the disproportionate tension between the forces of *saying* and those of *speaking* implied that an eventual halt in language evolution was not inconceivable. In fact, according to him, this had already happened in History. As I already pointed out, what he saw as the pervasive uniformity of Latin throughout the Late Roman Empire was proof that its speakers had become unable to reinvent it. According to him, this could only be

explained by one reason: "los hombres se han vuelto estúpidos" (1937a: 128).<sup>38</sup> In other words, people had run out of new things to *say*, and had fallen from then on into mere repetitions and stereotypes, stuck in a persistent state of stupor that left no one out: "¿Cómo podían venir a coincidencia el celtíbero y el belga, el vecino de Hipona y el de Lutetia, el mauretano y el dacio, sino en virtud de un achatamiento general, reduciendo la existencia a su base, nulificando sus vidas?" (1937a: 129-30).<sup>39</sup>

We do not need to reach such extreme situations in order to be accused of stupidity by the Spanish philosopher, for the very act of *speaking* is, according to him, already stupid: "La vida del lenguaje, por uno de sus lados, es continua degeneración de las palabras. Esta degeneración, como casi todo en el lenguaje, se produce mecánicamente, es decir, estúpidamente" (1943: 355).<sup>40</sup> When we *speak*, we use words in a manner that is progressively unaware of the meaning those words had when they were *said*. This ever-increasing distance finally breaks the connection between the word and its origins, and reduces our use of it to an ignorant, mechanical repetition (1950a: 260). Our stupidity, therefore, resides not only in not innovating but also in not realizing to its full extent the wealth of knowledge left to us by those who over the ages have had something to *say*: "Como buenos herederos, solemos ser bastante estúpidos" (1937b: 445).<sup>41</sup>

Ortega's accusations of stupidity, not surprisingly, were also meant for those who dedicated themselves to the study of linguistics. They were, in the first place, critically aloof regarding one of the worst consequences of verbal degeneration as just described: "el fenómeno de la equívocidad, multiplicidad de significaciones de las palabras o polisemia" (1946: 763).<sup>42</sup> In our author's eyes, polysemy constituted a congenital sickness of language, while linguists in contrast considered its ubiquitous presence as the most natural thing in the world, not one ounce stranger than metasemia or change of meaning (763). To make matters worse, linguists could not even admit that words have a "true" meaning: "Es increíble que la lingüística actual ignore todavía que las cosas tienen, en efecto, un 'nombre auténtico'" (1943: 386; cf. also 1953a: 637).<sup>43</sup> For Ortega, the only meaning that deserved such a designation was the one received by the word when it was first *said*, when it signaled a creation that made sense "to its inventor and for its immediate recipients" (1957: 259; 1950a: 260). In his eyes, thus, the search and recovery of this authentic meaning or *etymology* represented a most valuable practice, not only for historical and philosophical inquiries,<sup>44</sup> but also, and more importantly in the context of this chapter, for *verbal hygiene*:

Todo el que lea a Heidegger [another well-known friend of etymologies, cf. Adkins 1962: 236] tiene que haber sentido la delicia de encontrar ante sí la palabra vulgar transfigurada al hacer revivir en ella esa su significación más antigua. Delicia, porque nos parece como si sorprendiésemos al vocablo en su *statu nascendi*, todavía caliente de la situación vital que lo engendró. Y al mismo tiempo recibimos la impresión de que

en su sentido actual la palabra apenas tiene sentido, significa cosas triviales y está como vacía. . . . Más aún, nos parece que su uso cotidiano traicionaba a la palabra, la envilecía, y que ahora vuelve a su verdadero sentido.<sup>45</sup>

(Ortega 1953a: 636-7; underline added)

For our language maven, then, not everything *said* was irreversibly stained once it had been *spoken*. In spite of linguists, etymology could still provide the kind of deep, thorough cleansing needed to bring the shine back to words.

### The social dimension

As the above mentioned diagnosis of polysemy illustrates, Ortega's evaluative statements on language often seemed to refer to it as an autonomous entity, with its own virtues and downfalls (cf. also, for example, 1943: 355). In these cases, consequently, all humans, and not just some of them, appeared equally responsible for the inherently degenerative nature of *speaking*. Hence Ortega's use of the first person plural when alluding to "us the inheritors" (cf. 1937b: 445), or when explaining that "nuestro ordinario lenguaje [usa las palabras] sumaria y mecánicamente, sin entenderlas apenas. . . *las manejamos* por de fuera, resbalando sobre ellas velozmente, sin *sumergirnos* en su interior abismo" (1935: 210; emphasis added).<sup>46</sup> In light of other comments made by Ortega, however, the actual scope of this "we" needs to be reconsidered. In fact, after reading the following assertions, taken from the beginning and the end of his career, it should become clear that, in the author's opinion, some of "us" tend to use language more stupidly than others:

El hombre vulgar e ineducado acentúa preferentemente, al conversar, las partes semimuertas, casi inorgánicas de la oración, adverbios, negaciones, conjunciones, al paso que el discreto y culto subraya los sustantivos y el verbo.<sup>47</sup> (1908b: 99)

[H]ay los que hablan sin reflexionar sobre su modo de hablar, en puro abandono y a como salga; es el grupo popular. Hay los que reflexionan sobre su propio hablar, pero reflexionan erróneamente, lo que da lugar a deformaciones cómicas del idioma. . . . Hay, en fin, el grupo superior que reflexiona acertadamente. . . . Lerch nos hace ver cómo el "culto", que suele pertenecer a las clases superiores, habla desde una "norma" lingüística, desde un ideal de su lenguaje y del lenguaje en general. El plebeyo, en cambio, habla a la buena de Dios. . . . [L]os selectos, las aristocracias, al ser fieles a aquella norma fijan y conservan el idioma impidiendo que éste, entregado al mecanismo de las leyes fonéticas que rigen sin reservas el hablar popular, llegue a las últimas degeneraciones.<sup>48</sup> (1950a: 240)

In complete agreement with Lerch, Ortega tied “degenerative” change – in both its semantic *and* phonetic dimensions – to a habit he attributed mostly to the common, uneducated person: carelessness. Negligent phrasing of one’s ideas *entailed* inattentive pronunciation, which in turn led to a “language of ambiguous monosyllables, many of them identical” (1957: 233; 1950a: 241).

The linguistic dismissal of common people was present too in Ortega’s description of the decadence of Latin throughout the Late Roman Empire. In this case, the author also made them responsible for what he perceived as a rudimentary grammar, an aspect which completes the portrait of the commoner as a verbally inept individual:

La sabrosa complejidad indo-europea, que conservaba el lenguaje de las clases superiores, quedó suplantada por un habla plebeya, de mecanismo muy fácil, pero a la vez, o por lo mismo, pesadamente mecánico, como material; gramática balbuciente y perifrástica, de ensayo y rodeo como la infantil. Es, en efecto, una lengua pueril o gaga que no permite la fina arista del razonamiento ni líricos tornasoles.<sup>49</sup>

(1937a: 129, underline added)

This rendition of the lower, uneducated classes as linguistically immature and irresponsible complemented quite adequately Ortega’s idea of *saying* as a precious, invaluable creation. Brilliant metaphors that transfigured older words, deliciously complicated structures that allowed for subtle and penetrating thought, were gems that should not be left in the careless hands of a child. Plebeians, like infants, were not yet far enough from the primitiveness of animals – hence their fondness of the “almost inorganic” parts of the sentence, or their penchant for monosyllables. Like children, also, they were to be watched and monitored by mature and well-prepared individuals, guardians who could lead them by example while ensuring the safety of their language. As the reader has surely noticed in the preceding quotes, Ortega attributed to the refined, cultivated and usually aristocratic minorities the ability to fight and contain the people’s leveling of language by acting precisely as its custodians: through a thoughtful use of words and an exemplary commitment to the established norm. In all fairness, however, a caveat must be expressed regarding the role Ortega gave to the common person in the life of language. Like children, again, uneducated people can also be very creative. Although incapable of configuring a language fit for thought and poetry, as we saw above (1937a: 129), once in a while they can have inspired glimpses of reality that drive them to *say* something, thereby creating a new word or expression. Poets (1918: 16–17) and philosophers (1943: 384) are the sublime *sayers*, but it is the “anonymous mind” (1926b: 584), the entire “Humanity” who shapes in words the experience of life and builds the treasure of a language (1947: 292). A treasure that, naturally, needs a few, select keepers.

Ortega’s evaluative thoughts on language, and particularly his attribution of positive and negative energies to socially defined speakers, are quite consistent with the social tenets he formulated in his landmark work, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1926–8). According to the author, any type of society, whether democratic or authoritarian, “is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses” (1932a: 13; 1998: 132). The minorities, identified here as “individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified,” *stand out* in their communities for constantly aiming at self-improvement, that is for imposing on themselves higher standards and expectations. The masses, in contrast, are defined as a uniform collectivity – so uniform, in fact, that Ortega refers to them as *the mass*: “The mass is the average man . . . man as undifferentiated from other men, but repeating in himself a generic type” (1932a: 13–14; 1998: 132). To summarize this lack of personal distinction in an effective and decidedly pejorative manner, Ortega referred to the common people with a term laden with negative connotations: “lo *mostrenco* social” (1998: 132, emphasis added),<sup>50</sup> a scornful expression which is echoed in the following quote:

Y es indudable que la división más radical que cabe hacer en la humanidad es esta en dos clases de criaturas: las que se exigen mucho y acumulan sobre sí mismas dificultades y deberes, y las que no se exigen nada especial, sino que para ellas vivir es ser en cada instante lo que ya son, sin esfuerzo de perfección sobre sí mismas, *boyas que van a la deriva*.<sup>51</sup>  
(1998: 133, emphasis added)

In principle, Ortega denied any correspondence between the division into masses and select minorities on the one hand, and the division into upper and lower social classes on the other. One can find, he argued, “unqualified pseudo-intellectuals” among the higher levels of society, while it is also possible to identify “nobly disciplined minds” among the working class (1932a: 16; 1998: 134). However, as the author readily admitted, the latter are far more likely to be found among “these ‘upper’ classes, when and as long as they really are so . . . whereas the ‘lower’ classes normally comprise individuals of minus quality” (1932a: 15–16; 1998: 133), a fact that necessarily excludes them from higher social responsibility. Indeed, under normal circumstances, the masses should understand that

existen en la sociedad operaciones, actividades, funciones del más diverso orden, que son, por su misma naturaleza, especiales, y, consecuentemente, no pueden ser bien ejecutadas sin dotes también especiales. Por ejemplo: ciertos placeres de carácter artístico y lujoso, o bien las funciones de gobierno y de juicio político sobre los asuntos públicos.<sup>52</sup>  
(1998: 134)



Taking into consideration Ortega's linguistic reasoning as presented thus far, there should be no doubt that nurturing and safeguarding a society's language was for the philosopher one of those special functions that should be reserved for the qualified minorities. One can easily realize that, in Ortega's mind, those select individuals who demand more of themselves and have a higher purpose in life will experience much more often than the rest the need to *say* something, thus becoming the main lifeline of language: as Francisco José Martín put it, Ortega's select person is constantly "remonstrando la caída de la lengua en *hablar* para portarla al *decir*" (1999: 398).<sup>53</sup> Conversely, the mass of ordinary people who live quite happily, feeling themselves to be as "one with everybody else" (Ortega 1932a: 15; 1998: 133), will be less likely to experience that same need to *say*. Far from testing the limits of language, thus, these passive *speakers* constitute the homogeneous community that, if left alone, could bring language to a halt.

### The Spanish dimension: society

In *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega's opposition between mass and minorities provided him with a theoretical framework for his interpretation of the modern world's crisis. To put it in a nutshell, the author perceived and indicated an alarming change of attitude in the masses. Traditionally, the latter had recognized and accepted their submissive role in society's more important functions, realizing that, if they wanted to participate in them, they would have to become qualified and therefore stop being "mass." Modern democracy and the economic progress that accompanied it during the nineteenth century, however, had altered that "healthy dynamic social system" (1932a: 16; 1998: 134). Given access to the security, comfort and pleasures that were once reserved for the select few, the masses had overlooked the responsibilities and moral obligations that those benefits historically entailed. As a result of that negligence, "the mass, without ceasing to be mass . . . [was] supplanting the minorities," imposing on them by sheer pressure, not only its sociopolitical desires and aspirations, but also its esthetic and intellectual likes and dislikes, as well as its shallowly conceived opinions in all orders of life (1932a: 17–18; 1998: 135–6). Moreover, the masses were imposing themselves on society *believing* they had the right to do so: "*The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will*" (1932a: 18; 1998: 136, emphasis in the original). In this context, Ortega's book was to be understood as an urgent call to restore society's sanity in the wake of a more than likely disaster.<sup>54</sup>

Ortega's concepts of the "mass" and the minorities did not appear for the first time in *The Revolt of the Masses*, however. In 1921, the Spanish philosopher had already used them in *Invertebrate Spain* to offer his diagnosis for a previous, more immediate crisis: that of his own country. The image that resulted from this earlier analysis was substantially gloomier than the one

that followed. Whereas the crisis delineated in *The Revolt of the Masses* was historically recent – a vintage of modern democracy – the one that afflicted Ortega's land was not only much older: it was endemic. The people of Spain had always been "aristophobic" (1921: 108), that is, they had felt "puro odio y torva suspicacia frente a todo el que se presente con la ambición de valer más que la masa y, en consecuencia, de dirigirla" (122).<sup>55</sup> This hatred, frequently mistaken for a democratic impulse (122), had had its origin in the effective absence or dire scarcity of the "country's best." Deprived of the opportunity to interact with a truly select minority, the people had become blind and could not distinguish the better individuals, who in consequence were often annihilated (121). The reason Ortega gave for the "absence of the best" can be called, at the very least, highly peculiar: The "embryonic stage" of the Spanish nation, in his opinion, had been defective (119).

According to Ortega, the genesis of the European nations was not a product of the fusion between different peoples but the result of the conquest of the various autochthonous populations by different Germanic tribes after the fall of the Roman Empire. These tribes had imposed their "social style" on the "subjugated mass," they had been the "mold" that had shaped the indigenous, "formless matter." The qualitative differences between the various conquerors, and not those between their respective native subjects, determined therefore the different nature of the European nations (1921: 112). In this distribution, the Iberian Peninsula could not have suffered a worse lot. Whereas the Franks who settled in the old Gaul possessed the highest degree of "historic vitality," the Visigoths who entered the former Hispania had already lived side by side with the Romans, sharing the latter's "most corrupt hour." As a result, they had been irreparably tainted: "Eran, pues, los visigodos germanos alcoholizados de romanismo, un pueblo decadente que venía dando tumbos por el espacio y por el tiempo cuando llega a España, último rincón de Europa donde encuentra algún reposo" (113).<sup>56</sup> For Ortega, there was a strong similarity between what the feudal minority represented for the germinal stages of the European nations and what the intellectually superior minority represented for his own time (117). While the Franks' energetic nature yielded a myriad of powerful feudal lords – foreshadowing, we have to assume, *la grandeur de la France* – the exhausted, degenerated Visigoths were not able to engender a strong, select minority. Swept away from the Peninsula by a mere "African breeze," they left behind a handful of Christian kingdoms that never developed the necessary "few good men" – a fact which, in Ortega's opinion, explains why the Reconquest took no less than eight centuries to complete (118). After that, the lapse between Spain's discomfiting gestation and its present times can be summarized in just one sentence: "[L]a historia de España entera, y salvas fugaces jornadas, ha sido la historia de una decadencia" (118).<sup>57</sup>

A clear corollary to this historical rendition is that, in Spain, "lo ha hecho todo el 'pueblo', y lo que el 'pueblo' no ha podido hacer se ha quedado sin

hacer" (1921: 109).<sup>58</sup> Since, as the philosopher argued, "the people" are unable to realize sophisticated feats such as science, high art, advanced techniques or solid, cohesive political states, it is no wonder that none of these are to be found on Spanish soil (110). From a linguistic point of view, it should not take much time to realize the implications this line of thought has in regard to the birth and development of the Spanish language. As a Romance tongue it was mothered by Vulgar Latin which, as we saw, Ortega derided as childish, rudimentary and stereotypical; and as a medieval dialect it was fathered by the offspring of the tired, impotent Visigoths. The remains of a plebeian, intellectually vacant language, spoken by a people with no enterprising, distinguished and exemplary minds: that was the Spanish Visigothic vernacular of the ninth century, the very same vernacular Menéndez Pidal unquestioningly characterized as uniform. Not surprisingly thus, Ortega hailed Pidal's philological findings of 1926 as a confirmation of his own theory, while regretting at the same time the linguist's lack of curiosity: a trait that, in Ortega's eyes, not only would have made Pidal a real scientist, but would have put them both in agreement about the Spanish problem. Furthermore, Ortega's kind of curiosity would have helped the linguist to reconsider what the philosopher called one of his two groundless assumptions: "la sobreestima de lo 'popular'" (1927: 519).<sup>59</sup> Indeed, from Ortega's point of view, Pidal's rendering of the Spanish language as a monument and a symbol of Spain's modern *grandeur* (cf. chapter 5) would be nonsensical: if everything in Spain had been done by the people, and what the people could not do had not been done, that also meant that everything in Spanish had been *said* by the people and what the people could not *say* had not been *said*. Given Ortega's lack of confidence in what the people can *say*, his pessimism about what happens to what they *say* once they start to *speak*, and given the fact that, for the author, the entire history of Spain had been that of a constant decadence, his 1910 consideration of Spain as a verbal kindergarten – inferred at the beginning of this chapter – was only logical.

Somber as it was, Spain's outlook as painted by Ortega was not entirely hopeless. According to the philosopher, History is a process moved by a perpetual alternation of two periods: one in which the aristocracies are formed (and thus society is formed); and another one in which those same aristocracies degenerate, causing society to stagnate and dissolve. In this last period, the masses rebel against the old minority and, identifying that particular aristocracy with *any* type of aristocracy, try to live without exemplary leaders. Once this is proven "positively impossible," the masses, humbled by their failure, recognize again their need to follow the best, and a new exemplary minority appears (Ortega 1921: 97–8). In the last pages of *Invertebrate Spain*, Ortega claimed to have perceived a few – albeit weak and sporadic – signs of "spontaneous repentance" in the Spanish "mass." If this was true, the author ventured, then one could still hope for a "radical

conversion" of the people and a glorious, rapid revival of Spain (1921: 125–6). Although Ortega did not offer any information that might help ascertain what those specific "signs" were, the warning at the end of his book was loud and consistent with his lifelong, patriotic thought: the recovery of the Spanish nation could only be accomplished through the creation of a select, solid and beloved minority, a group of excellent individuals who would then educate, by example, the rest of the population. From what has been presented thus far, it should be clear that one of the responsibilities Ortega's leading minority would have to assume was the improvement and safeguarding of the Spanish language. As a distinguished member of that minority, Ortega himself needed to be a role-model. He had to set an example with his own use of language,<sup>60</sup> and he had to keep a shepherd's eye over his speaking flock: thus his contributions as a language maven.

### The Spanish dimension: geography

Ortega's analysis of the Spanish crisis, and the project he proposed as its solution, were not limited to the sociopolitical sphere. As Andrew Dobson has stated, the philosopher "was well aware that the disintegration of Spain was not only social but also geographical" (1989: 91). *Invertebrate Spain*, in fact, began with a historical reading of the peripheral separatism that was progressively jeopardizing the nation's unity. Inspired by the German historian Theodor Mommsen, Ortega posited two complementary principles: on one hand, the history of a nation can be understood as a vast process of incorporation; on the other – and this was the Spaniard's own addition – the history of a nation's decadence can be read as a process of disintegration (Ortega 1921: 51–4). A nation, therefore, does not need to be built on any kind of ethnic identity but rather depends on what Ortega called a people's "nationalizing talent" (55): a non-intellectual quality that the philosopher recognized in Rome and that he defined as the ability some peoples have to present their neighbours with a "*proyecto sugestivo de vida en común*" (56, emphasis in the original). Enticing as it may be, though, in Ortega's eyes this project did not preclude the use of force. Without the slightest mention of oppression, injustice, massive destruction and the like, the author offered the following explanation:

Por profunda que sea la necesidad histórica de la unión entre dos pueblos, se oponen a ella intereses particulares, caprichos, vilezas, pasiones, y más que todo esto, prejuicios instalados en la superficie del alma popular que va a aparecer como sometida. Vano fuera el intento de vencer tales rémoras con la persuasión que emana de los razonamientos. Contra ellas sólo es eficaz el poder de la fuerza, la gran cirugía histórica.<sup>61</sup>

(Ortega 1921: 57)

The application of these ideas to the history of Ortega's own country had rather remarkable implications. Not only was Spain the exclusive work of Castile but, since *no other people on Spanish soil* had its "nationalizing talent," it followed that, in general, "sólo cabezas castellanas tienen órganos adecuados para percibir el gran problema de la España integral" (61).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, if Castile was solely responsible for the creation of Spain, it was equally accountable for its undoing (69). After its finest hour (the sixteenth century) Castile soon slipped into a "perdurable modorra de idiotéz y egoísmo" (70)<sup>63</sup> and practically abandoned its "seductive project." If Catalonia and the Basque country had really been the "razas formidables" they now claimed to be, wrote Ortega, they would have grasped that opportunity to pull away from Castile and start their own national projects (70). The fact that they had not done so proved that peripheral nationalism was not truly *the* problem but only a specific symptom of the illness that afflicted the Spanish nation: "particularism." With this term, Ortega referred to a pervasive phenomenon in which "cada grupo deja de sentirse a sí mismo como parte, y, en consecuencia, deja de compartir los sentimientos de los demás" (68).<sup>64</sup> Note that the expression "cada grupo" encompasses all the different groups that can be perceived within a large community: territorial, ethnic, social, political and even professional. The challenge posed by regional nationalism was thus diminished, dissolved in Ortega's argumentation, and, in consequence, its self-justification was effectively dismissed. That in turn allowed the philosopher to present his own antidote for the Spanish problem – "nacionalización" – as a process above any kind of difference, be it social, political or territorial. Based on Renan's definition of a nation as a daily plebiscite (71), "nacionalización" would be the process by which all those different groups would become actively involved in the resumption of that forsaken "*proyecto sugestivo de vida en común*." And this enterprise, as we have seen already, could not be undertaken until a strong, respected, exemplary minority was created.

Once again, Ortega's reasoning, as summarized above, allows for some important inferences regarding his language ideology. If, in general, only "Castilian heads" are apt to comprehend the problem of Spain as a whole, and if the formation of a motivated, truly involved national consciousness can only be achieved through the exemplary guidance of a minority, it is a necessary conclusion that, in general at the very least, the minority must be Castilian-minded. Likewise, the language in which the Spanish nationalizing project is articulated must necessarily be Castilian, and that language must be used by anyone who wishes to contribute significantly to the project.

The word "significantly" is especially relevant to Ortega's argumentation as it relates to Spain's linguistic diversity. In fact, after reducing the disquieting elements of peripheral nationalism to particularism, which he also perceived at every other level in his entire country, Ortega added the following observation:

Lo demás, la afirmación de la diferencia étnica, *el entusiasmo por sus idiomas*, la crítica de la política central, me parece que, o no tiene importancia, o si la tiene, podría aprovecharse en sentido favorable.<sup>65</sup>  
(1921: 71; emphasis added)

From *La redención de las provincias* (1927–8), as well as from many articles dating all the way back to 1917 (Dobson 1989: 91), it is quite clear that the philosopher considered political decentralization as one of the fastest ways to engage individuals from all regions in the revival of the Spanish nation: involvement in local politics, even if not "having more than a minimal influence on national policy" (Dobson 1989: 93), would be effective in creating the sense of civil responsibility that the country lacked. In contrast, ethnic differences and – more importantly for this chapter – love for one's autochthonous language did not seem to be of any importance for the construction of a national project. A latter confirmation of this idea in Ortega's work can be found in his staunch opposition to the establishment of a bilingual university in Catalonia:

[E]l Estado no puede abandonar en ninguna región el idioma español; puede inclusive, si le parece oportuno, aunque se juzgue paradójico, permitir y hasta fomentar el uso de lenguas extranjeras o vernaculares, es decir caseras (eso es lo que significa la palabra), . . . pero lo que no puede es abandonar el español en ninguno de los órdenes, y menos que en ninguno en aquel que es el que tiene mayor eficacia pública, como el científico y profesional; es decir, en el orden universitario.<sup>66</sup> (1932c: 505)

For the author, there should be no question about the monopoly of Spanish as *the* language of the Spanish state: "el Estado español, que es el Poder prevaletiente, tiene una sola lengua, la española" (505).<sup>67</sup> Since the intellectual elite was the fundamental piece in the process of *nacionalización* that Spain must undergo in order to heal, and since the linguistic vehicle for that *nacionalización* was the Spanish language, it was imperative that the future elites from every corner of the Peninsula receive their instruction in Spanish. To invest a local language with more significance than it deserved (according to Ortega) would necessarily hamper the national project the Spanish philosopher so adamantly defended.

A careful look at Ortega's statements regarding the question of the Catalan language can open a new interpretive window on the author's linguistic argumentation. The adjective he used to allude to the Mediterranean tongue – *casera* – has almost the same meaning that the word *vernacular* had in its origin: *vernaculus* in Latin was a homeborn slave, whereas *casero/a* is anything that is home-made or relates to the household. However, as I have already pointed out elsewhere (Gabriel 2000a: 129), *casero/a* carries in Spanish strong connotations that cannot be detached from its meaning, and

which can no longer be found in *vernacular*. While the latter means “indigenous” and simply refers to the language of one’s native country, the former brings to mind images of home-made pies, household chores, slippers and pyjamas. Thus, to call Catalan a “lengua casera” – instead of “autóctona” or “nativa” – when discussing the possibility of its coexistence with Spanish in the university, effectively diminishes, nullifies even its stature *vis-à-vis* “la lengua del Estado español.” In other words, Ortega’s choice of words fulfilled a strongly rhetorical function. It equated Catalanian linguistic aspirations with the “intereses particulares, caprichos [and] vilezas” of those too short-sighted to comprehend the Spanish nation, and it sought to bring them down, if not with the power of force (1921: 57), at least with a forceful argument.

### The rhetorical factor

The fragment quoted above (Ortega’s reference to Catalan as “lengua casera”) belongs to one of his parliamentary speeches, thus to the kind of discourse where persuasive stratagems such as the one just analyzed are common, even expected. Yet, they are not in the least an exclusive trait of our philosopher’s political writings. On the contrary, rhetoric permeates his entire oeuvre to such an extent that the latter cannot be fully comprehended without taking into consideration the former. As Thomas Mermall has indicated (1994: 73–4), there is a constant tension between *episteme* and *doxa* in Ortega’s work, that is, an ambivalence between his aspiration to create a rigorously scientific discourse and the call he felt to promote cultural enterprises and to encourage the intellectual revival of his own country. The Spanish author himself provided a fundamental clue to understanding his printed legacy from this perspective:

He aceptado la circunstancia de mi nación y de mi tiempo. España padecía y padece un déficit de orden intelectual. . . . Era preciso enseñarla a enfrentarse con la realidad y transmutar ésta en pensamiento, con la menor pérdida posible. . . . Ahora bien, este ensayo de aprendizaje intelectual había que hacerlo allí donde estaba el español: en la charla amistosa, en el periódico, en la conferencia. Era preciso atraerle hacia la exactitud de la idea con la gracia del giro. En España para persuadir es menester antes seducir.<sup>68</sup>

(Ortega 1932b: 367)

A rhetorical reading that limits its scope to Ortega’s graceful expression, however, will merely scratch the surface of the matter, and will in the end only serve to confirm the patriotic mission alleged by the Spanish philosopher. To avoid this, the reader should refrain from making any conclusions until analyzing, not only the *elocution*, but also the *invention* and *disposition* of Ortega’s arguments. In other words, to be minimally probing, one should

try to identify how the author organized and/or manipulated ideas and opinions that, while not being ultimately supported by empirical evidence, were likely to be shared by the community to which the author belonged (cf. Mermall 1994: 75).

It is from this standpoint that rhetorical analysis can yield results very similar to those sought by students of language ideologies. In fact, much of Ortega’s linguistic reasoning owes its apparent coherence to two semiotic processes mentioned in the introduction to this book and defined by Irvine and Gal as *erasure* and *iconization* (2000: 37–8). The workings of erasure are plainly visible in Ortega’s description of the Late Roman Empire as a linguistically stagnant territory. Irvine and Gal point out that, by disregarding or transforming “facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme . . . a social group or a language may be imagined as homogeneous, its internal variation disregarded” (2000: 38). This is exactly what the Spanish philosopher did with Vulgar Latin. For Thomas Mermall, Ortega’s tendentious or distorted interpretation clearly ignored that the quick transformation of that language into the different romance tongues was “testimonio de su naturaleza *heterogénea*” (Mermall 1996: 188; emphasis in the original). Likewise, in order to correlate linguistic uniformity with a supposedly pervasive social stupefaction (Ortega 1937a: 128), the Spanish philosopher needed to be oblivious to “las diferencias entre el idioma oral y el escrito, entre clases sociales, de formación intelectual, etc” (Mermall 1996: 188).

Ortega’s totalizing vision of language required other notorious erasures. His conceptual dissociation between *to say* and *to speak*, for example, paid no attention to most of the ways in which *new* things can be *said*. In fact, in order to claim that we can only say something new by creating an entirely new expression (Ortega 1950a: 246), one must first ignore something as essential to language as its combinatory nature: the power of a limited number of elements to generate virtually endless permutations. But Ortega’s hyperbolic distinction was a necessary step towards another rhetorical maneuver. Through *iconization*, “[l]inguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). The identification of “positive” and “negative” forces in language change and, subsequently, their respective attribution to (intellectual) noblemen and plebeians, allowed Ortega to depict phonetic and semantic negligence (1950a: 240) – as well as grammatical primitiveness (1937a: 129) – as *icons* of the commoners. Likewise, it ultimately justified his representation of the careful, creative and selected few as the exemplary guardians of language.

I stated earlier in this chapter that, being a prominent member of Spain’s enlightened minority, Ortega y Gasset regarded himself as a linguistic role-model, that is, he felt the responsibility to improve and safeguard the Spanish language by setting an example with his own work. In this sense, aside from

his impressive mastery of the language (cf. Senabre 1964), it was the philosopher's abundant etymological inquiries and arguments that earned him his prestige as a linguistic renovator. As the reader will recall, etymology was for Ortega the true, authentic meaning of all words (1943: 386), a meaning that their present usage falsified and even vilified (1953a: 636-7). It is not surprising then that he thought of etymology as the way to restore clarity and authenticity to the Spanish language; or, in other words, as the ultimate tool for verbal hygiene. A closer look into Ortega's etymological labor, however, reveals a more mundane aspiration next to his quest for rigor and clarity: the commitment to persuade his interlocutors. This bent, in fact, is so powerful that it often annuls his explicit purpose, contradicting even his own theoretical premises.

Rhetorically, etymology acts as a *legitimizer*. Its presence strengthens the apparent validity of an argument by offering as proof a conceptual "birth certificate:"

[D]oxa significa la opinión pública . . . ¿No parece más verosímil que el intelectual existe para llevar la contraria a la opinión pública, a la *doxa*, descubriendo, sosteniendo frente al lugar común la opinión verdadera, la paradoxa?<sup>69</sup>

(Ortega 1937b: 441)

At the same time, though, by revealing the disparity between the word's root and its current meaning, etymology highlights the "degradation" suffered by the word, its loss of authenticity in the hands of *usage*. Moved by these joint forces, readers will feel strongly inclined to adhere intellectually to what the text is asserting, much in the same way Ortega described himself when reading Heidegger (as quoted earlier in this chapter – cf. Ortega 1953a: 636-7).

More than occasionally, however, the Spanish philosopher also used the legitimizing technique just described to reinforce arguments that were *not so legitimate*. It so happened, for example, that common usage – the biggest villain in Ortega's linguistic ideology – could serve him explicitly as a scapegoat and implicitly as a very convenient support. We already saw, for example, how Ortega's description of Catalan as a "lengua casera" was in fact a sly connotative manipulation of *vernacular's* etymological meaning. The following quote should serve as an additional case in point:

[L]as gentes protestan inmediatamente contra la verbosidad parlamentaria, obstáculo a todo mejoramiento nacional. Porque estaba reservado a la perspicacia española descubrir que es intolerable que el Parlamento parle. Por lo visto, la misión de los parlamentarios es más bien hacer gimnasia sucia o cualquier otro mudo menester.<sup>70</sup> (1922: 15)

In order to counter effectively the accusation made by "the people" against parliamentary verbosity – that is, the habit of speaking excessively – Ortega resorted to the etymological connection between *parlar* and *parlamento*. But, in all strictness, the *parlar* that gave birth to *parlamento* meant simply "to speak," which is what it still means in its language of origin – French (Corominas 1983: 434). In contrast, the sense in which Ortega used *parlar* ("to speak a lot and without any substance," according to the dictionary of the RAE) was acquired by this word only much later, precisely through the people's *usage* of it once it became a Spanish word (Corominas 1983: 433). As it turns out, then, Ortega dismantled the people's arguments by offering as "authentic" a meaning that, from the standpoint of his own theory, was nothing but "degeneration," *usage*. If, according to what the word *parlament* "says," its members meet to speak (*parler*) and not to chatter (*parlar*), one must conclude that the philosopher did not properly reject the people's accusation.

There is enough evidence that Ortega's open disparagement of usage ran parallel to his covert exploitation of it (Gabriel 2000b: 199-203). Moreover, his adamant vindication of the original meaning of words lies in sharp contrast with the large quantity of pseudo-etymologies that appear throughout his works (Gabriel 2000b: 203-8). Ortega's fondness for words with clearly recognizable roots often drove him to follow too blindly his own intuition, and to fall prey to popular etymology:

Pero si todo es importante, no lo es en la misma medida. Vayamos alegremente, pero con seriedad. No hay contradicción. Seriedad no es lo que suele decirse. Seriedad, como el vocablo indica, es sencillamente la virtud de poner las cosas en serie, en orden, dando a cada problema su rango y dignidad.<sup>71</sup>

(Ortega 1926a: 94)

This statement offers a perfectly reasonable and coherent point of view: seriousness does not imply lack of cheer, inasmuch as an organized soul is not necessarily devoid of joviality. But this perspective – which, if taken as an opinion, would question the austere connotations of the word – is not posited as reasonable but *imposed as necessary* and *legitimized* by its own "origin." There is, however, no etymological relationship between "serio" (<SERIUS) and "serie" (<SERIES) (Corominas 1983: 532). Ironically, therefore, the ultimate fallacy of this origin disavows the philosopher's argument.

Ortega's passion for suasion did not only lead him to venture into daring etymological explanations; occasionally, it also led him to metathesize the process and change etymology into . . . *emythology*. An adequate example of this would be the account he offered for *carnaval*. This word comes, according to Corominas, from the old Italian form *carnelevare*, a compound of *carne* ("meat") and *levare* ("to remove," "to confiscate") that referred to the

onset of fasting at Lent (Corominas 1983: 134). However, the explanation offered by Ortega – and for which I have not been able to find any sources or support – is radically different:

El carnaval, hoy ya moribundo, ha sido la perpetuación en las sociedades cristianas occidentales de la gran fiesta pagana dedicada a Dionysos, el dios orgiástico que nos invita a despersonalizarnos y a borrar nuestro yo diferencial . . . [S]egún el mito helénico, Dionysos llega . . . de Oriente en un navío sin marinería ni piloto. En la fiesta, este navío, con la figura del dios, era transportado por calles y campos en un carro, en medio de la muchedumbre embriagada y delirante. Este *carrus navalis* es el origen de nuestro vocablo *car-naval*, fiesta en que nos ponemos máscaras para que nuestra persona, nuestro yo, desaparezca.<sup>72</sup>

(Ortega 1950a: 195–6)

If one forgets, for one moment, *carnaval's* correct etymology, the coherence of Ortega's tale will be undeniable; the idea of an orgiastic and pagan origin of dance cannot be discarded as inconsistent or unreasonable. That is, the story is verisimilar . . . but its etymological confirmation is false. With respect to the possibility of an honest, unintended mistake from Ortega, one question should suffice: if he was discussing a Hellenic myth, why did he offer a Latin etymology? An indirect source, perhaps? None is given and none is known.

### The question of authority

By reading Ortega in Ortega's terms – that is, by looking at the exemplary practice of his own linguistic reasoning – the observations laid out in the previous section have fulfilled an important purpose of rhetorical analysis: to “detect the tensions between figural scheme and propositional content” (Mermall 1993: 164). These tensions, we have seen, do not arise from minor conflicts or ambiguities, but from major discursive contradictions – one should not forget, for instance, that the *em mythology of carnaval* appeared in the same volume where Ortega denounced the crime of usage and invoked its redemption through etymology. It is indeed perplexing to surprise such a distinguished individual – and one who insisted so fiercely on the exemplarity of the selected few – in the act of benefiting from what he publicly despised, and even in the middle of forging his own example. This bewilderment, however, should give way to some conclusive inferences, not the least of which – but certainly the most obvious – are the questioning of Ortega's linguistic authority and the dismissal of his verbal hygiene. How much credibility can we now bestow upon his complaints about the trivialization, degeneration, abuses and misuses of words? How will we trust his promise to honor and protect our language? How can we lend our blind confidence to anyone of Ortega's kind?

“In order to challenge verbal hygiene practices we find objectionable,” Deborah Cameron has written, we must “pose searching questions about who prescribes for whom, what they prescribe, how, and for what purposes” (1995: 11). Throughout the present chapter, it has become clear that Ortega y Gasset advocated for a linguistic hierarchy that faithfully replicated his own vision of a “healthy society.” This image placed the common people at the bottom, looking toward the top, where a few individuals – with a striking resemblance to the philosopher's persona – indicated the way to be followed. Ortega's very interest in proclaiming his authority in a persuasive manner, however, led him to hyperbolize his own discourse, and to incur contradictions that ultimately annulled its alleged legitimacy. Curiously, Ortega's case – that of his illegitimate exemplarity – might still be exemplary. After finishing the last chapter of this book, the reader should be able to decide.

### Notes

- 1 “People don't know how to speak properly and, when they do, nobody understands them.”
- 2 “if we look at page 68, we find that ‘that petulant idiot . . . that guy was a cruel buffoon’ and that ‘Aracil could not stand that idiot's stupidity.’  
Let's move on to page 69: ‘You swine! Idiot!’ – Aracil cried out while approaching the doctor with raised fist: ‘Yes, I'm leaving so I don't have to kick that miserable idiot's guts.’”  
On page 87: ‘Julio introduced him to a farceur, a stupid lugubrious man,’ . . .  
On page 89: ‘Pura's lover, on top of being a certified imbecile, a stupid teller of stupid jokes . . .’ Finally, on page 100: ‘But you are an imbecile, a great idiot.’”
- 3 “The life of a language fluctuates between both extremes; interjections are its seed and technical terms are its mummy.”
- 4 “Taunts are words that refer to a specific, objective reality, but we use them to express our personal feelings rather than this objective reality. When Baroja says or writes ‘imbecile,’ he does not mean to say that somebody is weak, *sine baculo*, which is its original valency . . . What he wants to convey is his passionate contempt for that person. Taunts are complex terms used as interjections; that is, they are words backwards.”
- 5 “It is a known fact that there is no other people in Europe with a wealth of offensive terms, swearwords and interjections as rich as ours.”
- 6 “In the same way as for Baroja, for the rest of us Iberians, each word is a cage where we lock up a beast, I mean, a passion of ours.”
- 7 “The word ‘amoralism,’ used by some writers in the last few years, is not only a barbarically created term, but it also makes no sense.”
- 8 “The word ‘charm,’ so trivialized, is nevertheless the one that best expresses the type of action exerted on the lover by the loved one. It is therefore important to restore its usage, reviving the magical meaning it had in its origin.”
- 9 “It is annoying to see the degeneration suffered in ordinary speech by a word so inspiring as ‘nobility’” (Ortega 1932a: 64).
- 10 “The word ‘typical,’ has gone astray in our language and it is very important to correct its use, which is an abuse.”

- 11 "All the other species live assigned to a restricted 'habitat,' to employ this term that all biologists have gotten into the habit of using – in my opinion, a ridiculous word borrowed from German, which in turn is clumsily using a Latin term."
- 12 "And I say 'españolía' [Spanishness] because I cannot get accustomed to 'hispanidad' that learned term which has been used in the last few years and which is, in my opinion, a mistake from the point of view of the Spanish language."
- 13 "It is not indifferent that, among the words with which we refer to things, the number of those not designating precisely and powerfully their objects has become too big . . . Our way of speaking demands a thorough reform."
- 14 "We cannot . . . keep on using language any old way. Verbal hygiene and a proper speaking technique are urgently needed."
- 15 "Nowadays it is extremely difficult to talk about any important topic, since words themselves have lost their effective meaning. As at the end of any other cultural cycle, words in all languages are degraded and have become ambiguous."
- 16 "Words, like ships, need to have their hulls cleaned from time to time."
- 17 "The term 'individual' has become an opaque word, one with no expressive vigor. Had this happened to this word alone, the fact would not be worth mentioning. But I have used it precisely as an example of what is happening today to the most important words in the language. Those who think and dare to write today become depressed when they realize that the most decisive part of the vocabulary has become unusable because its terms are overloaded with outdated, cadaverous meanings that do not correspond to our ideas nor to our sensibility."
- 18 "The lords of the commonplace want to reduce politics to *particular* or *partial* problems; therefore abstract problems; yet they call them 'concrete problems,' mistreating language like only a revenue guard would – this said without wanting to offend this Body, since, after all, its mission is limited to preventing people from smuggling goods, just as mine is, from time to time, to preventing people from smuggling words."
- 19 Pinker does make a point of keeping an informal, rather "unscholarly" tone throughout his book.
- 20 "Linguists . . . are, after aviators, the people least prone to being scared of anything."
- 21 "Ortega revitalizes the original value of some worn-out words and expressions attending to their etymology, since 'the life of a language is, in one aspect, the continuous degeneration of its words' and we must prevent the loss of their authentic and positive qualities."
- 22 "to make Spanish a language fit for philosophical endeavours."
- 23 "For some time now – and even though I know next to nothing about linguistics – I have tried in a most incidental way to point out accomplishments and errors of language, since, even though I am not a linguist, I have, perhaps, some things to say that are not utterly trivial."
- 24 "Philosophers need to find their subject matter in a specialized science. . . . Nevertheless, they also need to maintain their spirit at a philosophical temperature and be careful not to become a pedant or a mere botanist or geologist."
- 25 "How far does the linguist's jurisdiction extend in the phenomenon called 'language'? Where does the philosopher's jurisdiction begin?"
- 26 "By interrelating the evolution of each sound in time with its progress across space, the old discipline of linguistics is reborn as *kinematics* or science of motion. It is thus closer now to what a science of reality must be. It only needs one more step in order to develop into the physics of language. This step will consist of adding to the determination of a language's movements or changes in space and time an inquiry into the forces that generate those changes. The kinematic linguistics that this book offers, demands as its culmination a dynamic linguistics. (One

- or two glimpses of that science can be seen in the last pages of the book.)" (Underline added.)
- 27 "An erudite's diligence begins to turn into science when it mobilizes facts and knowledge towards a theory."
- 28 "A great talent for combination, formed by complementary doses of rigor and boldness."
- 29 "We would wish, however that Menéndez Pidal used that talent a little more."
- 30 "A man like him, so careful, so rigorous, so *scientific* in his handling of details, starts always from two tremendous assumptions that he made back in the vaguely intellectual environment of his youth, two assumptions to which he recurs imprecisely and without previous examination."
- 31 "Linguistics . . . has studied an abstraction that it *calls* 'language' . . . [But] what it calls 'language' really has no existence, it is a utopian and artificial image constructed by linguistics itself. In effect, language is never a 'fact' for the simple reason that it is never an 'accomplished fact' but is always making and unmaking itself, or, to put it in other terms, it is a permanent creation and a ceaseless destruction. . . . [The] so-called 'history of language' is really nothing but a series of grammars and dictionaries of the aspect that the language as constituted at each of its previous stages exhibited at that date. The history of a language shows us a series of successive languages, but not their making" (Ortega 1957: 242-3).
- 32 "before the word is made, at the roots, in the genetic causes of language" (Ortega 1957: 243,).
- 33 "the brief and latent comparison that gave birth to almost every word."
- 34 "those venerable metaphors which by now have become part of the language" (Ortega 1960: 222).
- 35 "the entire language is a metaphor, . . . every language is in a constant state of metaphorization."
- 36 "In the same way as not every door is opened with the same key, not every idea can be thought in one language . . . A spirit of great potentiality will create for itself a suggestive and manifold language; a poor spirit will generate a frail language, a crawling one, without any morality nor energy."
- 37 "The individual, prisoner of his society, frequently aspires to escape from it in order to live by forms of life that are his own. This is sometimes brought off successfully, and the society alters one or another of its usages and adopts the new forms; but what usually happens is that the individual attempt is defeated. Thus we have in language a paradigmatic example of the social" (Ortega 1957: 252).
- 38 "men [people] have become stupid"
- 39 "How else could a Celtiberian and a Belgian, a neighbor from Hipona and one from Lutetia, a Mauritanian and a Dacian coincide if not by virtue of a general loss of intellectual fiber that reduced their existence to its base and nullified their lives?"
- 40 "The existence of language is, in a way, a continual denigration of words. This denigration, like almost everything in language, is produced mechanically, that is, senselessly" (Ortega 1967: 21).
- 41 "Like all good heirs, we tend to be quite stupid."
- 42 "the phenomenon of ambiguity, multiplicity of meanings in words or polysemy."
- 43 "It seems incredible that current linguistics still ignores the fact that things do have 'authentic names'" (Ortega 1967: 63).
- 44 "Universal history [appears] as a gigantic etymology. 'Etymology' is the concrete name for what is usually and abstractly called 'historical reason'" (1957: 203; 1950a: 220).
- 45 "Anyone who has read Heidegger must have been delighted to witness how the vulgar word is transfigured as its most ancient meaning is revived in it. We are

- delighted because we feel as if we had caught the word in its *statu nascendi*, still warm from the vital situation from which it originated. And at the same time we get the feeling that, in its current meaning, the word hardly has any sense, it means trivial things and it looks empty. . . . Even more, we feel that the word was betrayed, degraded by its daily usage, and that only now it comes back to its true meaning."
- 46 "our ordinary language [uses words] summarily and mechanically, hardly understanding them . . . we handle them from the outside, quickly sliding along them, without *immersing ourselves* in their inner depths" (emphasis added).
- 47 "In their conversations, vulgar and uneducated persons tend to accentuate more the semi-inert, almost inorganic parts of the sentence – adverbs, negations, conjunctions – while discreet and cultivated individuals underscore nouns and verbs."
- 48 "[T]here are those who speak without thinking of how they speak, in pure freedom and just as they happen to; this is the lower-class group. There are those who reflect on their own speech, but reflect erroneously, which gives rise to comic deformations . . . Finally, there is the upper group, which reflects and reflects correctly. . . . Lerch shows us how the 'cultivated man,' who usually belongs to the upper classes, speaks *from* a linguistic 'norm,' from an ideal of his language and of language in general. The people, on the other hand, speak as the good God puts it in their hands to speak. . . . [T]he select, the aristocracies, by being faithful to the norm, fix and preserve the idiom, and thus prevent it from reaching the final degeneracy at which it would arrive under the phonetic laws that completely govern popular speech" (Ortega 1957: 231-2).
- 49 "The delicious Indo-European complexity, which was maintained by the language of the upper classes, was supplanted by a plebeian dialect, very simple in its mechanism but, at the same time or because of it, clumsily mechanical, material-like; a babbling and periphrastic grammar, one of trials and circumlocutions, very much like that of children. It is, in fact, a puerile, gaga tongue that does not allow for sharp reasoning nor for lyrical effects" (underline added).
- 50 When applied to an object, "mostrenco" means "crude, roughly made," although in an informal conversation it can also be used to refer to ignorant, dense or slow people; in addition, "mostrenco" alludes to homeless or rootless persons (cf. Smith 1992: 491).
- 51 "For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties; and those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection; mere *buoys that float on the waves*" (Ortega 1932a: 15, emphasis added).
- 52 "There exist, then, in society, operations, activities, and functions of the most diverse order, which are of their very nature special, and which consequently cannot be properly carried out without special gifts. For example: certain pleasures of an artistic and refined character, or again the functions of government and of political judgment in public affairs" (1932a: 16).
- 53 "rescuing language from its fall into *speaking* and bringing it back to *saying*."
- 54 The argumentation in *The Revolt of the Masses* is much richer and more elaborate than my rough synthesis suggests. Cf. Mermall's introduction in Ortega (1998).
- 55 "pure hatred and fierce mistrust against anyone wanting to become better than the mass and, consequently, to lead it." NB: this fragment did not appear in the English translation of *Invertebrate Spain*.
- 56 "The Roman influence was the alcohol of the German Visigoths, a decadent people who came stumbling down across space and time until they reached Spain, the farthest corner of Europe, where they found rest" (Ortega 1937c: 76).
- 57 "[E]xcept for a few fleeting moments, the whole of Spanish history had been the history of a long decay" (Ortega 1937c: 81).
- 58 "Everything in Spain has been done by the people, and what they did not do has been left undone" (Ortega 1937c: 85).
- 59 The other one, less important for Ortega, was "la creencia, perfectamente arbitraria, de que lo español en arte es el realismo" (1927: 519; "the perfectly arbitrary belief that, in art, only realism is Spanish.")
- 60 Ricardo Senabre's thorough inventory of Ortega's "language and style" (1964) offers an accurate picture of the author's overwhelming mastery in this respect.
- 61 "However deep may be the historic necessity for a union between two peoples, it will be opposed by special interests, whims, passions, infamies, and above all, by collective prejudices on the surface of the popular soul [of the conquered people. It would be useless to try to overcome such obstacles with persuasive reasoning]. . . . The only effective weapon against them is that form of political surgery, the power of force" (Ortega 1937c: 26-7). NB: the text between brackets did not appear in the English translation of *Invertebrate Spain*.
- 62 "only Castilian heads contain organs capable of perceiving the great problem of Spain as a whole" (Ortega 1937c: 28).
- 63 "long coma of egotism and idiocy" (Ortega 1937c: 39).
- 64 "each group ceases to feel itself part of a whole, and therefore ceases to share the feelings of the rest" (Ortega 1937c: 36).
- 65 "As for the rest – the affirmation of ethnic differences, *the enthusiasm for their own languages*, the criticism of Madrid's politics – it seems to me that, either it is of no importance or, if it is, it could very well be used in a favorable way" (emphasis added). NB: this fragment did not appear in the English translation of *Invertebrate Spain*.
- 66 "The State cannot abandon in any region the Spanish language; it can still, if it deems it opportune – even if it looks like a paradox – allow for and even promote the use of other languages, foreign or vernacular, that is, domestic ["home-made"] (for that is what the word means), . . . but what it cannot do is to abandon Spanish in any of its fronts, much less in the one that is most effective in the public sphere, like the scientific and professional; that is, in the university front."
- 67 "The Spanish State, which is the prevalent Power, has only one language: Spanish."
- 68 "I have accepted the circumstance of my nation and my time. Spain was and is afflicted with an intellectual deficit. . . . It was necessary to teach the country how to confront reality and turn it into thought, with the slightest possible delay. . . . But this intellectual training needed to be attempted there where the Spaniards were: in informal conversations, in newspapers, in lectures. It was necessary to attract them to the realm of exact ideas by means of the clever turn of phrase. In Spain, in order to persuade, one needs first to seduce."
- 69 "*Doxa* means public opinion . . . Is it not more likely that the intellectual exists to go against the public opinion, against the *doxa*, while revealing, holding up in the face of the commonplace, the true opinion, the paradox?"
- 70 "People complain immediately against parliamentary verbosity, which is, they say, an obstacle against any national improvement. Only Spaniards could be so shrewd as to discover that it is intolerable that members of the Parliament meet to parley. It seems that the mission of these politicians is in reality to do Swedish gymnastics or any other mute activity."



- 71 "But even if everything is important, not everything is equally important. Let's proceed joyfully, but in a serious way. There is no contradiction in this. Seriousness is not what is commonly said. Seriousness, as the word itself indicates, is simply the virtue of putting things in a series, in sequence, giving each problem its true weight."
- 72 "The carnival, which is moribund today, has perpetuated in the Christian societies of the West the great pagan festival dedicated to Dionysus, the orgiastic God who summons us to depersonalize ourselves and blot out our differentiating I . . . [A]ccording to the Greek myth, Dionysus arrived from the East . . . in a boat without sailor or pilot. In the festival this ship, with the image of the God, was borne through streets and fields in a cart amid the intoxicated and delirious crowd. This *carrus navalis* is the origin of our Spanish word *car-naval* ['carnival'], a festival in which we put on masks so that our person, our I, will disappear" (Ortega 1957: 169).

## 8 José María Arguedas

### Peruvian Spanish as subversive assimilation

*John C. Landreau*

Estamos asistiendo aquí a la agonía del castellano como espíritu y como idioma puro e intocado. Lo observo y lo siento todos los días en mi clase de castellano del colegio Mateo Pumacchagua, de Canchis. Mis alumnos mestizos, en cuya alma lo indio es dominio, fuerzan el castellano, y en la morfología íntima de ese castellano que hablan y escriben, en su sintaxis destrozada, reconozco el genio del kechwa.<sup>1</sup>

(Arguedas 1939a: 33)

#### Introduction

Intellectual and political debates about Spanish – both in Spain and in its former colonies – have played an interesting and important role in the creation, representation and dissemination of collective identities, both national and transnational. As the previous chapters have shown, during the nineteenth century, after the constitution of the new Spanish American nations, significant discussion occurred on both sides of the Atlantic over the question of whether Spanish would (or could or should) remain unified, or whether it might undergo a process of change and fragmentation analogous to the development of the vernacular Romance languages after the fall of the Roman Empire. Much of this debate was underwritten by concepts and vocabulary that emerged from the newly-formed science of linguistics.<sup>2</sup> By the early to mid-twentieth century, however, the fear that Spanish would become fragmented in America had largely subsided.<sup>3</sup> This was due in no small measure to the development of an international web of regulatory linguistic institutions such as state educational systems, grammars, textbooks, and the activist role of the *Spanish Royal Academy*. In any event, it is the case that most twentieth-century intellectuals share the assumption that a more or less unified Spanish language is (and will be) the common tongue of the nations of *Spanish America*. While there are disagreements about the specific contours of what constitutes "standard" Spanish, nonetheless it is clear that regional or national variations no longer occasion a serious threat to its unity. In fact, since dialectal differences are constructed against a