

THE CONCEPT OF MAN AS «HOMO LOQUENS» IN THE SPANISH RENAISSANCE

Until comparatively recent times, most educated Europeans viewed the structure of the universe in terms of what has come to be known as the Great Chain of Being, a concept whose genesis and development has been described in a classic work by A. O. Lovejoy¹. Lovejoy traces the emergence of the concept in the basic Platonic division of the universe into two realms of otherworldiness and thisworldiness; its transformation in Aristotle into the idea of a hierarchy, a *scala naturae*, according to the degree of perfection possessed by each created thing; the adoption, articulation, and propagation of this system by the Neoplatonists; and how, in short, the Chain of Being became one of the great commonplaces of Western thought from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, pervading many diverse realms of scholarship.

Thinkers in Classical times already concerned themselves with differences of rank in created nature, and the criteria governing their establishment, and we can discern in many of the statements of scholars the germs of what were later to become major problems when the notion of the Chain of Being was elaborated more fully. The varying degrees of development reached by offspring at birth led Aristotle in his *Generation of Animals* to establish eleven grades of being, with man at the top and the zoophytes at the bottom².

¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1957.

² *Generation of Animals*, with an English translation by A. L. Peck, London/Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1943, rev. 1953, 732a25-733b16.

Elsewhere, by way of contrast, the «powers of soul» possessed by organisms constitute the fundamental criteria, with man's rational soul causing him to be placed above, for example, plants, which possess only a nutritive soul³. Thus, man is characterized already as the quintessentially «rational creature», though his distinctiveness in this respect is blurred within Aristotle's totally animistic universe. This characterization was to become the most widely accepted one in the Western tradition⁴.

It is significant, however, that from the first scholars also drew attention to language as a distinctively human skill. Aristotle is quite specific: «...man alone of the animals possesses speech»⁵. Likewise, he writes elsewhere: «The different viviparous quadrupeds utter different voices, but they have no power of speech; this power is peculiar to man»⁶. Man's capacity for speech is certainly based on his possession of a soul⁷, but the fact that certain animals possess «voice», which is defined as significant sound, accompanied by a «mental image», indicates that these creatures are similarly endowed⁸. Thus, the categories of nature again overlap. Elsewhere, Aristotle is even more concessive:

But articulated voice, which one might describe as a sort of «speech», differs in different animals, and also within one and same kind of animal according to locality...⁹.

Here we see in embryo what was to be an ever-recurrent problem regarding the notion of the Chain of Being: the conflict between the attempt to portray the natural hierarchy as characterized by blurred transitions and the tendency to think in terms of discrete class-concepts. With the former is associated the principle of pleni-

³ *De Anima*, with translation, introduction and notes by R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, 1907, 414a29-415a13.

⁴ See E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Harmondsworth, 1963, pág. 89.

⁵ *Politics*, with an English translation by H. Rackham, London/Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1932, rev. 1944, 1253a10-11.

⁶ *Historia Animalium*, with an English translation by A. L. Peck, 3 vols., London/Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970, 536a33-536b1.

⁷ *On Interpretation*, with an English translation by Harold P. Cooke, London/Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1938, 16a4-5.

⁸ *De Anima*, 420b3-421a5.

⁹ *Historia Animalium*, 536b11-13.

tude, a doctrine of Platonic origin which argued the existence in the world of every conceivable diversity of living things, and the notion of the continuity of Creation, which was of Aristotelian origin and suggested blurred divisions between the different organisms which constitute the hierarchy, with no clear line of demarcation between each¹⁰. Hence, Aristotle, along with other Classical authorities, sought in reason, and then in language, man's unique, distinguishing attribute, while at the same time paradoxically trying to establish quantitative rather than qualitative differences between created things.

Discussion of the relative importance of man's rational and linguistic faculties was complicated still further by disagreement concerning the relationship between language, thought, and reality. Aristotle attempted to dissociate language from thought. He writes: «As writing, so also is speech not the same for all races of men. But the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for the whole of mankind...»¹¹. In these terms it would seem that it is the very conventionality of languages which separates them from animal communication systems. Hence, the interjection, which was seen as «natural» and shared by men with the animals as an expression of emotion, was frequently treated as a separate part of speech by grammarians¹². This tendency was accentuated in the work of Classical rhetoricians, who predictably associated human dignity with the artistic cultivation of eloquence, rather than with man's natural linguistic endowment¹³. However, rhetoric, with its accompanying scepticism, was opposed, from its Sophistical beginnings, by dogmatic philosophers, who believed in the possibility of discovering truth. Indeed, tradition saw Plato as a naturalist, who believed language to be firmly embedded in reality, in the sense that words described the essence of things¹⁴.

¹⁰ See Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, págs. 52, 55-6.

¹¹ *On Interpretation*, 16a6-8.

¹² See R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, London, 1967, pág. 53.

¹³ See, for example, Cicero, *De Oratore*, with an English translation by E. W. Sutton, introduction by H. Rackham, 2 vols., London/Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1942, rev. 1948, I, viii.

¹⁴ See R. M. W. Dixon, *What IS Language?: A New Approach to Linguistic Description*, London, 1965, págs. 24-7.

It is apparent that the Ancients had been able to isolate for consideration the relationship between language and reality, and had posited two possible, diametrically opposed views of it. However, the nature/convention opposition in Classical scholarship referred initially only to the lexical level of language, and it was therefore left to later grammarians to raise and examine the question of the natural structure and order of language on other levels and thus add fresh dimensions to the debate. Moreover, the relationship between language and thought awaited deeper exploration, thus substantiating Pieter A. Verburg's comment regarding Ancient speculation that «[r]eality, though, and lingual description are looked upon as congruent to such a degree that they seem to be telescoped into one»¹⁵.

Medieval scholarship shows certain significant departures in the evaluation of man's distinctive faculties. Of central importance is the realism/nominalism dichotomy, which correlates after a fashion with the earlier nature/convention dispute¹⁶. Medieval realists followed Plato in affirming that universals enjoyed a separate existence, independent of particular objects. Their philosophy, in a moderate form, underlay the standpoint of the Modistic grammarians, insofar as these scholars believed language to correlate closely with thought and things. Certain aspects of Modistic grammar are relevant to the present context, notably its overriding concern with thought as opposed to language and things. As G. L. Bursill-Hall paraphrases:

...the mind seizes upon the properties of the thing, there being a mode of understanding for each property to be understood. The mind is not satisfied with the mere understanding of the thing but seeks to give it a linguistic formulation by means of the mode of signifying — this meaning is not a possession of the thing itself but is bestowed on it by the mind...¹⁷.

In accordance with Thomistic principles, the human mind is seen as possessing a creative, interpretative function as the link between

¹⁵ «Vicissitudes of Paradigms», in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Studies in the History of Linguistics: Traditions and Paradigms*, Bloomington/London, 1974, 191-230 pág. 195).

¹⁶ Dixon, *What IS Language?*, pág. 47.

¹⁷ *Speculative Grammars of the Middle Ages: The Doctrine of 'Partes Oratorionis' of the Modistae*, The Hague/Paris, 1971, pág. 41.

reality and language. However, definite limitations are imposed on this function, for Modistic theory continues to abide by the assumption of a radical congruence between the realms of reality, thought, and language. This kind of grammar attempted to lay bare man's universal ways of reasoning, and rests, quite naturally, upon the belief that grammatical rules were universal. As Bursill-Hall explains:

[It] had the effect of creating the belief that the universality of things as conceived and understood by the universality of human reason could be expressed in the universal language, Latin...¹⁸.

Medieval realists were opposed by the nominalists, who held that concepts such as *genera* and *species* constituted nothing more than «subjective correlations out of similarly featured patterns»¹⁹. Though these nominalists agreed with the Modistic view of language as an expression of thoughts, they insisted that the intellect «is spontaneously initiating and freely deciding whether to express its thoughts lingually or not»²⁰, and hence seriously called into question the prevailing equation of language with thought. Applying Occam's razor to the modes of signifying, they made it possible to explain linguistic variety in terms of merely contrasting sound systems of a conventional kind. Cognition thus became an intuitive function which preceded and was independent of language²¹.

The nominalist orientation was continued in Renaissance Humanism, a movement which undertook the rediscovery of Ancient rhetoric. In Humanism, language and thought are separate spheres, and «thinking neither enhances nor overgrows language any more»²². The functions of reason and language are clearly differentiated, and the vision of man as *homo loquens* assumes greater prominence alongside the traditional view of him as an essentially rational creature. As Verburg writes:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pág. 38.

¹⁹ Dixon, *What IS Language?*, pág. 47.

²⁰ Verburg, «Vicissitudes of Paradigms», pág. 199.

²¹ See Karl-Otto Apel, «The Transcendental Conception of Language-Communication and the Idea of a First Philosophy», and John A. Trentman, «Speculative Grammar and Transformational Grammar: A Comparison of Philosophical Presuppositions», in Herman Parret (ed.), *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics*, Berlin / New York, 1976, 32-61, pág. 41; 279-301, págs. 294-5.

²² Verburg, «Vicissitudes of Paradigms», pág. 200.

The genuine novelty of Humanism is that it sees language, whether spoken or written, as a normative or teleotic function. This is accompanied by the characterization of the human being as animal *loquens* — especially by Erasmus — in the ethical sense of a person who assumes responsibility for his lingual acts²³.

The Humanists' emphasis on spontaneous, human, mental activity reflects their cosmic view of man as a creature distinguished by free will, that is to say, with a power of choice analogous to that of the angels. They increasingly argued that man is not tied to any medial position in the Chain of Being, but is free to ascend to eternal happiness by the exercise of his virtue, or to descend to eternal misery in sin²⁴.

Something of this background complexity of inherited ideas, which formed the basis on which Renaissance linguists pursued their studies, is discernible in the work of the Spanish exile Luis Vives (1492-1540)²⁵. As a scholar, he looked in many directions. He was stimulated by the work of the Italian Humanists, such as Lorenzo Valla, and spent a lifetime attempting to reform the disciplines. However, though usually considered to be one of the finest Humanists of the early Northern Renaissance — he spent most of his life in the Low Countries —, it is important to recall that he was trained in the ways of Scholasticism. For indeed a Scholastic background is often in evidence in his work, and this is particularly true of his views on language and its relationship to reason. Vives does admit that the lack of reason in animals is manifested in their lack of speech, but leaves us in no doubt as to what he believed to be the fundamental deficiency:

Haud quidem, quod sermo sit discrimen inter hominem et belluam
essentiale, quod quibusdam placuit non satis in quo sita esset essentia
considerantibus, sed nascitur ex illo discrimine, ratione scilicet, tam-
quam rivus e fonte²⁶.

²³ *Ibid.*, págs. 200-201.

²⁴ See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classical, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains*, New York, 1961, pág. 129.

²⁵ For a good general study of Vives and his work, see Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives*, The Hague, 1970.

²⁶ *De Anima et Vita*, see *Opera Omnia*, 8 vols., Valencia, 1782-90, III, 300-520, pág. 360.

Naturally, Vives was faced with the problem of explaining away seemingly rational behaviour in animals. He admits that animals reveal evidence of ability, prudence, and wit, but insists that such qualities are different in kind, not merely degree, from those found in humans. He believes in fact that the terms are misused if applied to animal behaviour, which bears only a spurious similarity to that of man. In other words, we witness in animals merely a 'fiction of life', based on instinct.

If, however, language is not for Vives an essential difference between man and animal, it is nevertheless a relevant factor. «Voice», he believes, is an instinctive, superficial sound; whereas articulate speech, man's unique gift, is the expression of the soul's concepts:

Vox est quidem sonus quicunque, sed aptius, et peculiarius, quem animans edit ore ad aliquid significandum; articulatus autem sonus, et distinctus, solius est hominis, ad cuius imitationem aviculas quoque et instrumenta musica, quae sonos edunt sine iudicio atque intelligentia, voces emittere dicimus: voces in homine signa sunt animi universi, et phantasiae, et affectum, et intelligentiae, et voluntatis, in belluis autem tantummodo affectionum, quemadmodum in nobis voces inconditae, quaeque a Grammaticis interjectiones nominantur ²⁷.

At the same time as defining language in these terms, as a vehicle for transmitting the psychic contents of the soul, Vives also stressed the role of language as an instrument of social cohesion. In both these respects, he was indebted to the teaching of the Scholastics, which was ultimately a reformulation of Aristotelian doctrine ²⁸.

Vives, whose influence was enormous, helped establish the direction of language study in the ensuing period of European scholarship. As the sixteenth century progressed, we find scholars inclined to exalt language as a distinguishing facet of man's make-up. Sometimes it merely takes its place alongside reason, assuming perhaps a slightly subservient role, as when Bernardo José de Aldrete writes:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, págs. 371-2.

²⁸ Cp. G. A. Padley, *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe: 1500-1700: The Latin Tradition*, Cambridge, 1976, págs. 104-05; and Eugenio Coseriu, *Tradición y novedad en la ciencia del lenguaje: estudios de historia de la lingüística*, 1977, pág. 64.

Recibio el hombre de la Divina mano dos beneficios en antigüedad natural los primeros, en utilidad ricos, en nobleza ilustres, la razón. i la lengua su interprete...²⁹.

At other times, however, it is given a special prominence by linguists undoubtedly influenced by their professional bias. Hence, Ambrosio de Salazar, although he concedes the central role of the understanding, stresses the importance of language as a vehicle for man's ideas:

Mas la razón le ayudaria [al hombre] muy poco, y no pareceria tanto en el, si no pudiesse hablando declarar lo que antes ha pensado en su entendimiento³⁰.

These words are, in fact, not Salazar's own — he is quoting, without acknowledgement, from the French scholar Louis Leroy³¹ — but he obviously shared the view which they express, being a scholar passionately interested in language.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars continued to draw the distinction suggested by Vives between language (i. e., the expression of the concepts of the soul) and «voice» (i. e., the instinctive sounds of animals). Some writers, such as the famous poet and literary critic Fernando de Herrera, are content merely to express the commonplace view that «[l]a palabra es sermon razonable que descubre el misterio del corazon, i la vox es comun al ombre y a los brutos, mas la palabra es sola del ombre»³². Other writers, however, are more penetrating in their discussion, such as Pedro Mexía (1497-1551), the author of *Silva de Varia Lecion*³³. Mexía reports the view of various authorities (principally Aristotle, though there is no explicit reference) to the effect that language is not confined to man, and that birds, for example, have varied voices by means of

²⁹ *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana o romance que oi se usa en España*, 1606, facsimile edition by Lidio Nieto Jiménez, Madrid, 1972, prologue (no pagination).

³⁰ *Espexo de la gramática*, Rouen, 1614, pág. 2.

³¹ See M. K. Read and J. Trethewey, «Ambrosio de Salazar, Plagiarist and Honnête Homme», *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 39, 1977, págs. 569-571.

³² Quoted from El Conde de Viñaza, *Biblioteca histórica de la filología castellana*, Madrid, 1893, col. 894.

³³ For a recent survey of Mexía's work, see A. J. Krailsheimer (ed.), *The Continental Renaissance: 1500-1600*, Harmondsworth, 1971, págs. 475-7.

which we can distinguish them and with which they appear to communicate amongst themselves. Parrots and magpies, these same authorities point out, actually reproduce human speech. Mexía himself, however, is fully persuaded of the view that, strictly speaking, speech can be said to be natural only to man. Referring to a story about Cardinal Ascanio of Tarragona (d. 465?), in whose presence a parrot is claimed to have recited the creed perfectly in Latin, he remarks:

...aquellos propriamente no es habla: ni ellos no entienden ni saben lo que dicen, sino es una cierta costumbre mostrada por muchos dias, de formar aquellas bozes. Porque la palabra primero se concibe en el animo, y esto en ellos falta ³⁴.

That is to say, he sees the utterance of the parrot as a conditioned reflex, completely devoid of psychic content.

Mexía, however, was not entirely satisfied with the above argument, to judge by the fact that he sought further proof of the unique quality of human speech. The proof he adduces is convincing, and it recalls similar statements by modern scholars, who have stressed displacement and productivity as the major characteristics of human language:

...pero el hablar y sermon por do se muestra en particular lo util y necessario, lo dañoso y malo, y lo justo y lo injusto, y lo honesto y bueno, se cuenta lo passado, y se avisa lo porvenir, por razones y palabras..., a solo el hombre es dado, y el tiene en su propia naturaleza ³⁵.

Mexía is aware that in Pliny's view tribes exist which do not have a language, but he himself argues that these Troglodytes are believed to lack speech merely because their own speech is imperfect and barbarous.

The Renaissance scholar exalted language not merely as a vehicle of man's creative spirit but a bond between men. The civilizing effect of language had been emphasized before in the European tradition, being given particularly powerful symbolic expression in the mythical figure of Orpheus, the divine singer who was able both to

³⁴ *Silva de varia lecion* (1540), rev. ed., Venice, 1553, fol. 104r.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 104v.

tame ferocious animals with his words and music and lead the human race from its barbaric animal existence to civilization. This myth, rediscovered and revitalized, achieved a notable popularity in the Renaissance, which as we have seen in the case of Vives, was also by no means deaf to the Scholastic appraisal of language as an off-shoot of man's social nature. Nevertheless, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Renaissance marks a new departure in the awareness of the social dimension of language. As R. A. Hall, Jr, writes:

...in regard to language in its relation to the individual and society, the Renaissance scholars' outlook differed radically from anything that had gone before. The general tendency to regard the Cinquecento as an age of pure individualism has led to the idea that language, also, was regarded in the Renaissance (as it had been in Scholastic philosophy) solely from the point of view of the individual. As a matter of fact..., the Cinquecento must be regarded as the time in which language first came to be regarded as a primarily social phenomenon ³⁶.

Though Hall, along with other scholars, is certainly guilty of oversimplifying the medieval standpoint, his claim concerning the new emphasis in the Renaissance is in essence justified. In Spain, at least, scholars continually stressed that man is a social animal, and it was but a short step from seeing man as naturally gregarious to seeing him as equipped with a natural faculty of language for communicative purposes. Hence, as Miguel Sánchez de Lima insisted: «Como quiera que todos... estamos obligados a comunicar a nuestros próximos, el talento... de la divina mano [lo] hemos recibido...» ³⁷; and Bernardo de Aldrete, to quote but one more example, proclaimed that man had been provided with language so that «tuviese compañía con los otros hombres mediante la comunicacion, i trato» ³⁸. Not surprisingly, the myth of Babel profoundly troubled the Renaissance mind.

Throughout the history of European culture the dominant anthropocentric philosophy never passed completely unchallenged,

³⁶ «Linguistic Theory in the Italian Renaissance», *Language* 12, 1936, págs. 96-107, pág. 99.

³⁷ *El arte poético en romance castellano*, Alcalá, 1580, fol. 5r.

³⁸ *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana*, prologue (no pagination).

though in the Renaissance, within the context of Christian doctrine, the attack upon man's traditionally exalted state was bound to appear decidedly heretical. It is largely associated with the philosophical school of scepticism, the revival of which was stimulated by certain trends in European culture in the sixteenth century. In particular, reports of travellers in the New World encouraged Renaissance scholars to think in terms of cultural relativity; and the growth of interest in Antiquity led to a proliferation of conflicting views conducive to the suspension of belief³⁹. Curiously, those who supported this attack on the anthropocentric tradition were able to draw upon some elements of the tradition which was the object of their criticism and which they wished to ridicule. When they considered the lower levels of the Chain of Being, most Renaissance scholars did so in the light of their own needs, and, not doubting that the world was made for man, saw the function of these levels as one of providing symbols and pointing morals for man's benefit⁴⁰. The model behaviour of animals was exalted by those who, like Francisco Sánchez the Sceptic, sought to undermine man's privileged position in the scheme of things.

Sánchez the Sceptic (1552-1623)⁴¹ probably left the Peninsula to live in France on account of his Jewish blood and the consequent danger of persecution in Spain. He was the only sceptic of the age other than Montaigne to achieve any recognition as a major thinker. Suspicious of all abstraction and categorization, Sánchez believed that language imposed on nature an order which did not in reality exist. He was totally opposed to the notion of naturally discrete units: «Pero las especies nada son, o al menos son una fantasía; sólo son los individuos, sólo se perciben éstos, sólo de éstos hase de tener ciencia; de ellos se ha de captar»⁴². Wherever he looked, the sceptical philosopher saw blurred transitions in the Chain of Being: «...hay algunos hombres ante los que dudas muy seriamente

³⁹ See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Erasmus to Descartes*, rev. edition, New York: Harper & Row, 1968, págs. 44, 54.

⁴⁰ For example, one of the chapters of Mexía's *Silva de varia lecion* is entitled: «Como de las aves y animales pueden tomar exemplo y reglas para bien y virtuosamente bivar los hombres» (fol. 313^r).

⁴¹ For a good summary of Sánchez's achievement, see Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, págs. 38-43.

⁴² *Que nada se sabe*, Madrid, 1972, pág. 79.

si los debes llamar racionales o irracionales. Y, al contrario, hay brutos a los que puedes apellidar con mayor justicia racionales que a algunos de entre los hombres»⁴³. Given such human variety, not even language could be seen as characteristically human: «...los hay faltos totalmente de palabra, que viven en las selvas como las fieras, se refugian en cavernas o se establecen en los árboles a modo de aves, y si logran alguna vez arrebatarse a nuestros hombres, los devoran con gran placer...»⁴⁴.

Juan Huarte de San Juan (c. 1529 - c. 1591)⁴⁵, author of a highly influential book on human psychology, embodies even more vividly than Sánchez the strains, inconsistencies, and contradictions of the age. He was certainly very much alive to the uniqueness of man, of which in his view language is a facet⁴⁶, and one may legitimately view his work as forceful assertion of the Renaissance philosophy of the dignity of man. He was, moreover, profoundly sensitive to the dangers of rationalistic determinism. As he remarks at one point: «El error de los filósofos naturales está en no considerar —como lo hizo Platón— que el hombre fue hecho a la semejanza de Dios, y que participa en su divina providencia...»⁴⁷. However, as a physician who combined a sceptical outlook with a rigorous pursuit of rational inquiry into Nature, Huarte joined Sánchez and others in an attack upon the vain arrogance of man in seeing the whole functioning of the universe as geared to human needs. It is human pride, he maintains, which leads men to see themselves as at the centre of miraculous happenings which he, as a natural philosopher, believes to be explicable in terms of cold reason⁴⁸. After emphasizing that the dissection of the head of an animal reveals that it is basically constituted in the same way as that of a man, sharing the same component parts, he concludes that man is separated from the beasts by differences of degree, not of kind: «...que la diferencia que hay del hombre al

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pág. 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pág. 86.

⁴⁵ The standard work on Huarte is M. de Iriarte, *El doctor Huarte de San Juan y su «Examen de Ingenios»: Contribución a la historia de la psicología diferencial*, 3rd ed., Madrid, 1948.

⁴⁶ *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*, edited by Esteban Torre, Madrid, 1976, pág. 95.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pág. 113.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, págs. 82-3.

bruto animal, es la misma que se halla entre el hombre necio y el sabio, no más de por intensión»⁴⁹. The extent to which this philosophy contradicted the dominant anthropocentric philosophy of Huarte's times may be gauged by the fact that the Inquisition demanded the deletion of this and similar passages in subsequent editions.

Two final aspects of the impact of the Chain of Being on Renaissance linguistics need to be mentioned. Firstly, we must consider the principle of simplicity upon which the hierarchical system was based. As Joseph Anthony Mazzeo suggests in his illuminating discussion of the subject, this principle is singularly antipathetic to modern man, accustomed as he is, under the influence of Evolutionism, to judge excellence by reference to a principle of complexity. He writes:

Each higher being on the ladder possesses a greater degree of all of the potentialities of living beings, a greater capacity to perform more of the functions and activities that life is capable of, from eating to thinking. However, the higher beings are really characterized not by complexity but by a much greater unity and simplicity, according to this way of thought⁵⁰.

On a cosmic level the celestial, consisting of one unique substance, was deemed to be simpler than the terrestrial, which consisted of four elements. Even within the terrestrial spheres, however, the touch-stone was the degree of simplicity which each created thing was believed to possess. This whole mode of thought involved, in short, a subtle juxtaposition of the notions of economy and complexity. As Mazzeo explains:

In a sense, of course, Aristotle would have agreed that a man is much more complex than a sponge, but his definition of simplicity or complexity is really different from our own. For Aristotle, it is a mark of a being's imperfection if, in the performance of any function, it must use cumbersome means⁵¹.

It is true that such reasoning is invariably implicit in Renaissance linguistic scholarship. Explicit references to simplicity, though so-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pág. 96.

⁵⁰ *Renaissance and Revolution: The Remaking of European Thought*, London, 1967, pág. 173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

metimes numerous, are invariably fleeting. The cumulative effect, however, is striking, and we need to remind ourselves of Lovejoy's warning to the effect that the beliefs which an age takes for granted are often those most characteristic of its philosophy⁵². On the most general level, human language figured as relatively crude and clumsy in comparison with the language of the angels, believed to be of a completely psychic, intuitive nature. Juan Huarte, amongst others, speaks of the angelic «lenguaje espiritual», which he contrasts with the «palabras materiales» of men⁵³. On the other hand, when compared with the difficult, laboured processes of communication in the animal kingdom, human speech emerged as an economical system of a highly efficient kind. Hence the frequent expression of wonder by Renaissance writers regarding the marvellous combination of efficiency and simplicity embodied in the orthographical system. As Juan López de Velasco writes:

[S]i se considera [es] increíble que si por ver, como vemos, escrevir de ordinario, no se creyesse que es possible hazerse: o con saberlo no se entendiesse como se haze; no pudiera creer que veinte figuras, o pocas mas de letras tan faciles y senzillas pudieran dar noticia (como la dan) de quanto Dios tiene criado y el entendimiento comprehende⁵⁴.

The concept of simplicity is important on other linguistic levels in Renaissance scholarship. It was by virtue of its quality of simplicity that the language of Adam was often thought to surpass all others, as the natural language of mankind. Miguel Salinas, for example, writes: «Dios hizo y crio la lengua hebrea, y la enseñó a nuestro padre Adan, y fue la primera y mas perfecta, senzilla y sin mezcla...»⁵⁵. Likewise, for Fray Jacinto de Ledesma y Mansilla it seems natural to suppose that Adam's language would have been easily learned, read, and written⁵⁶. Such scholars believed that since in the natural language the word described the essence of the object

⁵² *The Great Chain of Being*, pág. 7.

⁵³ *Examen de ingenios*, pág. 262.

⁵⁴ *Orthografía y pronunciacion castellana*, Burgos, 1582, no pagination.

⁵⁵ *Libro Apologetico que defiende la buena y docta pronunciacion*, Alcalá, 1563, fol. 158v.

⁵⁶ *Los libros que tratan de la lengua primera de España*, MS Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, dated Toledo, 1625, fol. 81.

it named, a speaker of this language, could, by studying the words of the language itself, without difficulty and tedious investigation, learn much about the objects signified by the words.

Needless to say, those scholars who seek to establish the excellence of their language on the basis of its antiquity apply the same criterion of simplicity. The Babel tongues might have been a consequence of God's anger and intended as a punishment for man's pride, but they were still of divine origin, and must therefore have possessed the finest qualities, of which simplicity is one. Andrés de Poza, who was the chief theorist of a group of scholars who claimed for Basque the status of a Babel language, writes of Basque: «Enseña al simple y al sabio la naturaleza de las cosas sin otro maestro ni estudio»⁵⁷. Esteban de Garibay also points to the simplicity of Basque as a sign of its divine origin, and notes in this respect the ease with which it has been learned by wild savages with whom Basque whalers came into contact⁵⁸. Scholars tracing Castilian back to Babel reveal the same or similar preoccupations. Gonzalo Correas, of notable Babelist affiliation, writes: «...una Lengua, para ser buena, ha de ser fázil en la pronunziacion de las silabas i voces»⁵⁹. Significantly, he argues that circumlocution in translation should be avoided, for it is not simple or economical, and that the best language is one which is sufficiently rich to allow the translator to be concise in expression. The concept of simplicity, however, is not limited to the Babelists. Bernardo de Aldrete, who believed Spanish to be of recent Latin origins, records 'facility' as one of the praiseworthy attributes of his language⁶⁰.

It is interesting to consider the extent to which this attitude to linguistic simplicity differs from that current in modern folklinguistics. One is often assured today by the jingoistic native that his language is the most difficult of all to learn, for the simple reason that it possesses a super-abundance of synonyms which defies all but the native's memory. This admiration of complexity, it might

⁵⁷ *De la antigua lengua, poblaciones y comarcas de las Españas*, Bilbao, 1587, fol. 32v.

⁵⁸ *Del compendio historial de las chronicas y universal historia de todos los reynos de España*, Antwerp, 1571, pág. 92.

⁵⁹ *Arte grande de la lengua castellana* (1625), first published by Viñaza, Madrid, 1903, pág. 298.

⁶⁰ *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana*, prologue (no pagination).

be assumed, derives ultimately from the evolutionary world view. There may be some truth in this explanation, but alone it does not suffice, since praise of complexity is a phenomenon which can also be discerned in Renaissance scholarship, often in curious juxtaposition with praise of simplicity. The following comment by Ambrosio de Salazar illustrates this perfectly: «Yo querría que la lengua Española se pudiesse saber con facilidad porque aunque sea tan fácil, con todo esso es menester muy largo uso y estudio»⁶¹. The reason for the conflict of criteria seems clear. Whereas the world view favoured the notion of simplicity, difficulty in the pedagogical context seemed to confer prestige on a language⁶².

The second aspect of the impact of the Chain of Being on Renaissance linguistics concerns discussion of social and geographical differentiation in language. We have seen how, on the most general level, man's key position in the scheme of things, as the link between the celestial and terrestrial spheres, was based for some scholars on his possession of a natural faculty of language. Let us now consider, by way of conclusion, how, below the level of «language» (in the Saussurean sense of the term), the hierarchical framework is itself reflected in the way in which languages, dialects, registers, and styles themselves jostle for positions of excellence. Once again, reference to the hierarchical structure are either implicit or fleeting, but numerous and cumulative in their effect.

The varying degrees of rationality or naturalness which languages were deemed to possess provided one means by which to evaluate excellence. Of all languages, Hebrew was usually held by Renaissance

⁶¹ *Espexo de la gramatica*, pág. 63. M. Martín de Viciana also illustrates the same conflict between the criteria of simplicity and complexity. He remarks, for example, that the Romans used Greek for recording their laws in writing «por ser facil su interpretacion» (*Libro de alabanças d'las lenguas Hebrea, Griega, Latina, Castellana: y Valencian*, Valencia, 1574, pág. 20). He claims later, however, in an attempt to establish the pre-eminence of Valencian, that whereas a Valencian finds it easy to learn other languages, completing the task within a few days, speakers of these languages face insurmountable obstacles when learning Valencian: «Si acaso algun estraño viene a vivir y morar en Valencia..., en su vida no hablara perfectamente [el valenciano]: porque a cada passo tropieça en su materna lengua» (pág. 45).

⁶² This opposition helps to explain the conflict between the supporters of stylistic brevity and clarity in literature and the defenders of such ornate poetic styles as «gongorismo»; and between the phoneticists and the archaizers in orthographical theory.

scholars to be the natural language and therefore superior to all others. Not surprisingly, therefore, the regionalist Rafael Martín de Viciano appeals to Hebrew as the «princesa de las lenguas» to pass judgement and accord Valencian its rightful place in «la colocacion de los asientos de todas las lenguas del universo»⁶³. But as this statement suggests, scholars, while admitting Hebrew as the primate of the species, were nevertheless prepared to contest the other places of the hierarchy. Some traced their languages back to Babel and attributed to them natural qualities. Hence, it was the natural, rational status of Basque which led Andrés de Poza to elevate it above other idioms:

En las lenguas que se pueden decir elegantes, sustanciales, y filosóficas, hallaremos no sólo la demostracion mas también el sentido y definición de la cosa. Pero en las que no son tales sino mestizas e imperfectas, no hallaremos más de solos los nombres, sin tener más misterio de que la tal cosa fue llamada así⁶⁴.

Otherwise the Classical languages, Greek and Latin, were generally, though not invariably, placed higher up the Chain of Being than the modern tongues, which explains why Juan de Robles concedes that in discussing the vernacular (i. e., Spanish) before Latin in his work, he is «prevertiendo [*sic*] la orden natural mas no la de la doctrina»⁶⁵.

A story related by Viciano illustrates the extent to which the modern vernaculars contested hierarchical positions amongst themselves. He tells of a discussion which took place in 1498 in the presence of the Pope and four ambassadors, representing Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy. The discussion centred on the question as to which of the languages of those present was the finest, the agreed basic criterion for judging excellence being proximity to Latin. It was decided that each ambassador should read aloud a set speech in his mother tongue, so that the degree of proximity might be ascertained. Castilian, it seems, carried the day, unchallenged, though Viciano is of the opinion that had Valencian been represented it would have surpassed all⁶⁶.

⁶³ *Libro de alabanzas*, pág. 59.

⁶⁴ *De la antigua lengua*, fol. 30v.

⁶⁵ Quoted from Viñaza, *Biblioteca histórica de la filología castellana*, col. 871.

⁶⁶ *Libro de alabanzas*, págs. 35-41.

As regards class dialects, scholars were in more agreement, for the Renaissance Humanist was generally critical of the speech of socially less privileged people, and preferred an aristocratic, courtly or literary norm. However, champions of the plebian idiom were not entirely wanting, for just as the Renaissance rediscovered the beauty of created nature in all its multifarious forms, so linguists exalted even the lowliest forms of the vernacular. Correas, for example, comments:

Ha-se de advertir qe una Lengua tiene algunas diferencias, fuera de dialectos particulares de provinziás, conforme á las edades, calidades, i estados de sus naturales, de rústicos, de vulgo, de ziuudad, de la jente mas granada, i de la Corte, del Historiador, del anziano, i Predicador, i aun de la menor edad, de mujeres y varones: i que todas estas abraza la Lengua universal debajo de su propiedad, niervo i frase; i á cada uno le está bien su lengua, i al Cortesano no le está mal escojer lo qe le pareze mejor à su propósito, como en el traje. Mas no por eso se ha de entender qe su estilo particular es toda la lengua entera i jeneral, sino una parte; porque muchas cosas qe él desecha, son mui buenas i elegantes para el historiador i anziano i Predicador i los otros⁶⁷.

As the above statement by Correas indicates, there exists in the Renaissance an awareness of division below the general dialectal level, in terms of «styles» and «registers». Karl D. Uitti has correctly recognized the impact of hierarchical thinking on literary theory: «The finite, static world view implied in pagan thought supported rhetorical or stylistic frameworks in literature that resulted in hierarchical deployments of expression devices»⁶⁸. In accordance with this Classical and medieval tradition, Juan de Robles divides words into categories from which he derives certain styles. After the fashion of Correas, however, he warns against the practice of despising the low styles, which, though certainly inferior in his view, have their own place, he assures us, in the scheme of things:

⁶⁷ *Arte grande*, págs. 60-1.

⁶⁸ *Linguistics and Literature*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969, pág. 2. For a detailed study of the impact of the idea of a hierarchical cosmos on poetic theory in the Renaissance, see A. Terry's «Introduction» to his *An Anthology of Spanish Poetry*, 2 vols., Oxford/London, 1965, I, xviii-xxii.

No ha de despreciarse el culto de saber las otras dos especies de grosero y humilde, porque el no ignorar lo más menúdo es parte de sabiduría, y á la perfeccion de las cosas pertenecen tambien las pequeñas como las grandes, y en la casa de un señor tan menester son las menudencias y baratijas de la cocina como las tapicerías y adornos de las galerías y recámaras⁶⁹.

Yet even here the hierarchical principle does not stop. It is extended, for example, into orthographical theory and practice, leading Gonzalo Bravo Graxera to suggest that not all words should be treated alike orthographically, that is, given characters according to the phonemic principle, insofar as

[d]ar regla, que una Monarchia entera de diferentes estados, i personas se vistiese de un color, era lei intolerable..., pues con esta resolucion se corta de un golpe toda quanta erudicion contiene la Ortografia⁷⁰.

In a similar way, nouns and verbs are sometimes considered to be the principle word classes, in opposition to the «syncategoremata», constituted by the remaining elements, thereby illustrating that «[t]he hierarchy of being is reflected in a linguistic hierarchy»⁷¹. In vernacular grammar Juan Pablo Bonet, who composed a highly influential work on the teaching of deaf-mutes, provides a perfect example of such a categorization⁷², whereas Correas not only presents what he sees as the natural order of syntax, namely, noun, verb, and particle, as a descending hierarchy, but suggests that the hierarchical principle is embedded in such phrases as «el zielo i la tierra» and «el dia i la noche». He explains:

Ansi-mesmo debemos notar ó acordar qe hai entre las cosas criadas, i aun en las del artificio, zierta orden natural i muy conforme á la razon, por la cual las qe por naturaleza son primeras i de mayor dinidad, se han de anteponer a las siguientes i menos dinas⁷³.

To conclude, in opposition to the Darwinian tradition, which emphasized human kinship with the beasts, modern linguistic scholar-

⁶⁹ *Primera parte del Culto Sevillano*, Sevilla, 1883, pág. 227.

⁷⁰ Quoted from Viñaza, *Biblioteca histórica*, col. 1261.

⁷¹ Padley, *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe*, pág. 73.

⁷² *Reduction de las letras para enseñar a hablar los mudos*, Madrid, 1620, pág. 156.

⁷³ *Arte grande*, pág. 234.

ship has refined the concept of man as *homo loquens*, that is, of man as unique by virtue of his capacity for speech. Indeed, it has become *de rigueur* in basic linguistic text books to include a comparison between language and the communication systems of animals, in which the special qualities of the former are extensively explored. Noam Chomsky, who has undoubtedly played a leading role in there-affirmation of the fundamental dignity of man, has been foremost amongst those who have criticized the insufficiency of recent attempts to trace the evolution of language and to attribute to animal communication the essential characteristics of human speech. However, Chomsky's own appraisal of the history of the concept of man as *homo loquens* has tended to direct attention towards the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This narrowing of interest does scant justice to the Renaissance, an age which, as the present articule has shown, explored the same theme with an intelligence and thoughtfulness that command attention and respect.

M. K. READ