ieee.es
Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos

Opinion Paper



Visit webpage Receive Newsletter

79/2025 10/10/2025

Ignacio Cartagena Núñez

Sculpted Waters: the Crown and Spanish

Sculpted Waters: the Crown and Spanish

Abstract:

The history of the Spanish language, in particular during the modern and contemporary world, has run in parallel to that of our Kings and Queens. Our language has been an instrument for cohesion, spread of our culture, attachment to our institutions and social prestige. Our monarchs have used it, often inadvertently, as an instrument to shape different aspects of our life and society. They have intervened in its codification, teaching as well as in the promotion of literary production. Successive reigns –with lights and shades, successes and their failures- are inextricably linked to the Spanish Language, having played their part on its current pre-eminence and diffusion in the global context.

Keywords:

Spanish, language, monarchy, Crown, empire, grammar, codification, Royal Academy, Latin America.

How to quote:

CARTAGENA NÚÑEZ, Ignacio. *Sculpted Waters: the Crown and Spanish* Opinion Paper. IEEE 79/2025. web link IEEE and/or link bie[3] (accessed on the web day/month/year)

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense.

Introduction[1]

I am very grateful for the invitation to take part in this course on the "geopolitics of Spanish," not only because of the "what" and the "when" of this course—the topic and the timely occasion to address it—but above all because of the "where." We are at the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, in the auditorium of its Royal College of the Augustinians, and it is impossible to speak from this stand without a certain "sense of metonymy": there is no better place to speak about the history of Spain—indeed about history as a whole—than a site so singular and recognizable as a part of that very history.

When he first saw the façade of this imposing granite work—the grey Castilian stones, the "bones of Castile," as Unamuno called them, cut and turned into stone blocks—the poet Luis Cernuda said that the monastery of El Escorial was "sculpted water." And that witty metaphor can well serve as a starting point for the subject we are going to address this morning: the relationship between the Crown—and those who hold it, the kings and queens of Spain—and Spanish.

Through their action in government, our monarchs also carved and shaped the stone blocks of our language; they did so—perhaps—unconsciously, while pursuing other political aims, but without the Crown's action, Spanish and the Spanish-speaking community would not be what they have become: living sculptures, in constant motion.

The title of this course, "geopolitics of Spanish," lends itself to a couple of initial reflections I cannot resist making as a general contribution to the course, since I have the floor.

My first remark is that, while not being antonymous, the terms "language" and "geopolitics" evoke concepts far apart from each other. The term "geopolitics" suggests "power" or "projection of power," while the term "language" suggests "communication." "Power" and "communication" do not easily fit together: one might say that the only possible point of convergence between them—the keystone joining those two pillars—is what we call *soft power*: a word whose meaning can be concentrated, in Spanish, in a single term, "influence." A form of power no less effective, but perhaps less visible than the traditional kind of power.

Speaking of the Spanish language—and of languages in general—the influence or soft power is always the result of a bidirectional relationship: it is indeed possible for us to

[1] This lecture belongs to the course "Geopolítica del español, repansendo la hispanidad", organized by IEEE and Complutense University in the framework of the "El Escorial Summer Courses" , San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Thursday, July 3, 2025.

influence other countries through language, but it is no less possible for those countries to have an influence on us. The direction of “soft power” is thus determined not so much by the origin of the language, nor by how ancient that origin is, but rather by the vigour, novelty, and creativity of its speakers and also of its writers. Here, our country has not always been in a position to “exercise power” in the first person: look at literature or music, where the output of Spanish-speaking American countries has, in not a few moments, had more “traction” in our country than in the opposite direction.

The second reflection concerns the capacity of our cultural policies to harness the “soft power” tied to the Spanish language. Here there is some reason for scepticism, too, since the saying of the poet Claudio Rodríguez about the sea applies to the language: “it is too much of a creature.” Spanish, with its six hundred million speakers, is, definitely, “too much of a creature.” Such a mighty creature does not let its territory be staked out.

If, as of today, Spanish is the world’s second mother tongue—after Mandarin Chinese—and the fourth in terms of total speakers—behind Chinese, Hindi, and English—this is certainly not the result of a decision or strategy devised in Madrid. It is so by its own inertia, by the conviction and will of all those generations of speakers who have cultivated and spread it. The Spanish language cannot be bridled, much less directed according to objectives and interests: that would be myopic and counterproductive.
What we can do is “navigate it”: take advantage of some favourable currents, assert ourselves as the origin of that immense heritage of which we are co-owners. Because, again, far closer to language than the concept of “power,” not even “soft power,” is the sense of “community”: and within that great community of Spanish speakers—where the language makes us inhabitants of the same territory—we Spaniards still have many things to say.

That being said, what I have been asked for is a reflection on the Spanish language and the Crown: a topic standing at the intersection of history, politics, and language. But a topic, too, of sociolinguistics—in other words, the sociology of language—since the choices of our kings, in different periods, have had effects on the community of Spanish speakers; not only in our country, but also in all the countries belonging to—and I quote our Constitution—our “historic community.” In other words: our monarchs’ decisions regarding language not only shape our past; they also give form to our present. They have made us who we are. Therefore—and at the risk of getting ahead of my conclusions—there are three basic features, three constants that define the relationship among the Crown, the language, and society:

1. Spanish acts as a factor of cohesion for the Crown’s territories.
2. Spanish acts as a factor linking the monarchs’ identity with Spain.

3. Spanish acts as a factor of social prestige both abroad and at home.

On a subject that allows for multiple approaches, I have chosen the path of history. I will briefly go through the various stages of modern history, from the Catholic Monarchs to the present day, where we will reveal the presence of those three traits: cohesion, identity, and prestige. We will see that times of political ascendancy (the 16th century and the first half of the 17th) are moments of impetus for Spanish; periods of decline (18th–19th centuries) tend to coincide with a certain retreat or loss of our language's influence.

One last caveat before we begin: I am not a historian, and since I understand that some of the students in this course are, I ask that you not expect great historical profundity from this talk, because you will be disappointed. My approach will be closer to cinema than to history: we will compress six centuries into a half-hour tracking shot, choosing the frames and scenes that best suit what we want to show. Compressing five hundred years into thirty minutes is an exercise almost as ambitious as the one Kubrick attempted in *2001*, with the tibia of a hominid and the model of a spaceship; so although the letter might leave many perplexed and unsatisfied, I hope that—as in that scene—the music leaves everyone more or less content.

1. THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS AND THE NEED FOR A "LINGUA FRANCA" IN SPAIN

1.1. Origins

Castilian is the Romance language that formed through the evolution of Vulgar Latin around the Cantabrian range, in areas close to the domain of Basque language, which acted as a substratum. A few weeks ago, His Majesty the King attended, in the town of Brañosera, in the mountains of Palencia, the commemoration of what is held to be the first *fuero*, or charter of settlement, in the history of Spain, granted to five frontier settler families exactly 1,200 years ago.

It is evident that the language spoken by those first inhabitants of Brañosera was not yet Castilian (the *glosas silenses*, the first Castilian fragments in the margins of codices, were likely written around the 11th century at the monastery of San Pedro de Cardeña), but it was a Latin evolved enough to sound vaguely familiar to modern Spanish speakers. To anyone curious to know what that embryonic Romance sounded like I would recommend the book *Una ciudad de la España cristiana hace mil años*, a lovely collection of early-medieval vignettes by Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, set in the city of León, which, before the year 1000, experienced a period of great flourishing.

For our purposes, what matters is the relationship between Castilian and power: in the Crown of Castile, the Castilian language almost totally replaced Latin in written expressions of the Crown of Castile starting in the 13th century—one of the first territories in Europe where the change occurred. In the Crown of Aragon, Castilian appears from the 13th century onward, but it would not achieve the same status as in Castile until the arrival of the Castilian Trastámara dynasty with the Compromise of Caspe in 1412,

the reign of Ferdinand I (1412–1416) and, especially, of his son Alfonso V (1416–1458). Between 1450 and 1550 Castilian progressively replaced Aragonese and Catalan in all written expressions of the kingdom.

1.2. Language as a Unifying Factor: The First Castilian Grammar

But the moment when the value of Castilian as an element of territorial cohesion begins to be clearly perceived is the reign of the Catholic Monarchs. There are two complementary reasons for this. This first one is of a political nature: the court of a vigorous modern state like Castile needed an imperial *lingua franca* as the vehicle of administration. The language chosen in that courtly environment would be the king's language. The second one is a humanist idea: the need to "fix the language," to study it, to know it. That task had already been carried out with learned languages, but not with the vernaculars, the descendants of Latin, which posed a challenge to any philologist.

The first grammar of the Castilian language, published in August 1492—a year fertile in events in our country—was written by Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), a humanist, philosopher, philologist, and poet from the Sevillian city of Lebrija. (Only a capricious translation of the Latin patronymic has brought his surname down to us with an "n" instead of an "l").

Being one of the most eminent professors of the Renaissance, he divided his teaching career between the two great Spanish universities of the time: Salamanca (1475–1487) and Alcalá (1514–1522). He even had time to write a prolific body of work touching upon practically every genre. Nebrija's academic life unfolded in the time of the Catholic Monarchs, and he enjoyed the friendship, protection, and admiration of two of the chief political figures at the time, Fray Hernando de Talavera, bishop of Ávila, and none other than Cardinal Cisneros. To the latter we owe what is probably the greatest praise that can be paid to a professor when, wanting to "sign" Nebrija for the Alcalá campus, he gave him the closest thing to a blank check a professor can receive:

"he told him to lecture on whatever he wished, and if he did not wish to lecture, not to lecture, and that this was not given in order that he should work, but to repay him for how much Spain owed him."

The path to the first grammar was not free of obstacles. The first contact between Nebrija and Queen Isabella of Castile took place in Salamanca in 1486, upon the return of the Catholic Monarchs from a journey to Santiago, for which (surely eager to prepare the ground in his favor) the learned Sevillian grammarian had written a commemorative poem. The illustrious humanist spoke to the Catholic Monarchs about the project that would later become his *Grammatica Castellana*, but at that time it does not seem to have enthused the queen, as she asked what advantages a work of that kind would have, and it was Fray Hernando de Talavera who replied in Nebrija's defense. He did so in the terms that Nebrija himself records in the prologue to this *Grammatica Castellana*, which saw

the light in Salamanca on August 18, 1492:

"When in Salamanca I gave your royal majesty a sample of this work, and you asked me what use it might be, the most reverend bishop of Ávila took the answer from me, and, answering on my behalf, said that after your Highness should bring many barbarous peoples and nations of foreign tongues under your yoke, with the conquest they would need to receive the laws that the victor imposes on the vanquished, and along with them our language."

Nebrija's grammar is largely a foundational work of that science as it relates to our language, but in his own time it did not carry such weight, because it was considered excessively academic. It reproduced the scheme of Greco-Latin grammars—and was of little use for the essential purpose required at the time: learning Spanish by those who did not have it as their mother tongue. Juan de Valdés, another Spanish grammarian, author of the *Diálogo de la Lengua*, criticized the profusion of localisms from Andalucía in a work of such academic stature. This, among other reasons, is why Nebrija's grammar would not be reprinted until well into the 18th century.

2. SPANISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: SPAIN UNDER THE HABSBURGS

2.1. Charles V: The King who became "Hispanic"

If in the time of the Catholic Monarchs, Spanish was a language of cohesion, under the Habsburgs it became a language of diplomacy and international prestige too. And if any of our kings can rightly be credited with this shift, that was surely the Emperor Charles—the king-emperor—who, without having it as his mother tongue, ended up embracing Spanish as his own. Manuel Alvar reminds us of this in an article titled "Carlos V y el español," published in 1977:

"Charles of Ghent was not born as King of Spain or Emperor of Germany. Not a few twists of fate placed those reins in his hand, and he found that some things were foreign to him and others poorly known. He spoke French, but not Castilian or German. The first of these he mastered, and well; the second, poorly. And, in spite of having been born in Ghent, he was never able to converse in Flemish."

The king's ignorance of Spanish benefited the king's non-Castilian counsellors and distanced him from Spaniards. Not that this ignorance was decisive in the so-called "War of the Communities," between 1518 and 1522—some historians see in it a medieval tax revolt, others an early seed of the bourgeois revolutions—but it certainly harmed the new monarch's popularity. The king's ignorance of the Spanish language was pointed out to him in the Cortes held in Valladolid in 1518, in these terms:

7. *Likewise they beg Your Highness to grant us the favour that in your royal household there be room for Castilians and Spaniards so that they may understand us and we them.*
8. *Likewise they beg Your Highness to grant us the favour of speaking Castilian, because by doing so you will learn it much more quickly, and Your Highness will be better able to understand his subjects and servants, and they him.*

And the king replied, humbly, with these words:
"To this it is answered you, that it pleases us, and we shall strive to do so, especially because you ask it of us in the name of the Kingdom; and thus we have already begun to speak it with you and with others of our realms."
Five years later, Charles had kept his promise and accomplished his "hispanization". He spoke in Castilian at the "Cortes" of Valladolid in 1523, and pronounced a phrase which explains, by itself, his identification with the spirit and peoples of Castile, but also his personal view on the exercise of government:

"I love and cherish these my kingdoms and their subjects and vassals as my very self [...] Yesterday I spoke to you asking you for the service, and now I wish to ask you for counsel."

Charles V also made Spanish become a language of international prestige. As Menéndez Pidal put it: "Thus the emperor, who at eighteen did not speak a word of Spanish, now at thirty-six proclaims the Spanish language the common tongue of Christendom, the official language of diplomacy." We find two examples in two historical events with Italy as their stage: in 1529, Charles entered Bologna to be crowned, the last Holy Roman Emperor to be crowned by a pope; Clement VII, Giulio de' Medici, awaited Charles V surrounded by the College of Cardinals, and the monarch greeted him in Spanish.

In 1536 Charles V went to Italy again, this time to Rome, to present before the Pope, the pontifical court, and the ambassadors a long bill of complaints against the King of France, Francis I, for his machinations in the Mediterranean. The Supreme Pontiff, on this occasion Paul III, Alessandro Farnese, received him in the Apostolic Palace, in the "Sala dei Paramenti", and to everyone's surprise the emperor-king spoke for more than an hour in perfect Castilian, with only a few notes to aid him. At the end, the bishop of Mâcon, France's ambassador to the Holy See, said he had not understood that address in Spanish, and Charles replied:

"My lord Bishop, let him understand me if he wishes; and let him not expect other words from me than those of my Spanish tongue, which is so noble that it deserves to be known and understood by all Christian people."

This second anecdote has gone down in history as “Charles V’s *rodomontade*.” The word *rodomontade*, a Gallicism akin to Spanish *baladronada* or “boast,” was associated at the time with the deeds of Spanish soldiers—starting with their own king. The French essayist Pierre Bourdeille de Brantôme (1540–1614) even devoted an essay to it: “*Les rodomontades et les jurements des espagnols*,” the product, probably, of a poorly concealed envy toward our diplomatic and military successes.

2.2. Spread of Spanish in Europe

The Habsburgs’ reign saw Spain become the hegemonic power and, consequently, Spanish became the language of administration and trade. There was great interest in learning our language. In 1570, the creation of a foundation for Spanish studies in Louvain was proposed under the patronage of the Duke of Alba. Similar initiatives took place in English and French cities. Grammars and dictionaries of Spanish began to appear, remedying the shortcomings of Nebrija’s grammar—a trend that continued into the 17th century.

As a result of this prestige, there was a significant contribution of Spanish terms to other languages, especially French and Italian. In this era, Spanish gained importance as a language of communication in European courts. The aforementioned Juan de Valdés (1494–1541) went so far as to state that in Italy “both among ladies and among gentlemen it is considered refinement and elegance to know how to speak Castilian.”

2.3. Spread of Spanish in the Iberian Peninsula

In Europe Spain’s vigour favoured the spread of Castilian and the same applies to the peninsula. Juan de Valdés, in 1535, writes: “The Castilian language is spoken not only throughout Castile, but in the Kingdom of Aragon, in that of Murcia with all Andalusia and in Galicia, Asturias, and Navarre; and this even among common people, because among the nobility it is spoken as well in the rest of Spain.” At that time, the designation “Spanish” arises as an alternative to “Castilian.”

While “Spanish” as a demonym can already be traced in documents from the 12th century (José Antonio Maravall found many of them in the cathedral of Huesca), in will not be till the 16th century when it will be used as an alternative denomination to Castilian. Its use is not universal, but it does begin to be used in a majority way; from the mid-16th century, it is already common. This neologism, *español*, coincides with a new political reality: in fact, it is the term used in all foreign languages to refer to the language spoken by all Spaniards.

The same can be said of Spanish as a marker of social distinction. Eugenio Salazar (1530–1602), chronicler of Charles V, shows us how cosmopolitan the Spanish court was at the end of the 16th century, where its members—"foreign peoples of diverse nations"—despite communicating in Castilian, kept their original languages when greeting one another. Speakers of courtly Castilian would distance themselves from the rest of the population, and this distance would be twofold: both social and territorial. In this regard Juan de Valdés recorded some differences between the court register and that of the common people when he stated that "Among common folk they say *yantar* (to dine), at court one says *comer* (to eat)." Miguel de Cervantes, in chapter XIX of the second part of *Don Quixote*, echoes this distinction:

"Pure, proper, elegant and clear language is found among discreet courtiers, though they may have been born in Majalahonda: I said discreet, because there are many who are not, and discretion is the grammar of good language, which goes together with practice."

2.4. Spread of Spanish in the Americas

The spread of Spanish was closely linked, as it could not be otherwise, to evangelization and the work of missionaries, many of whom were moved by that proselytizing zeal in a land that—as Antonio Muñoz Machado reminds us—was a mosaic of 1,500 languages belonging to 170 major language families. Numerous documents support the evidence of the care that the kings placed on spreading the faith before the Spanish language itself; and they disprove, thereby, that Spanish was a language of imposition, at least—in the 15th to 17th centuries. This would change radically, as we shall see, starting in the 18th century.

As early as 1512, under Ferdinand the Catholic, the Laws of Burgos prescribed this method of evangelization:

"We order that each preacher be obliged to have a boy, whichever of them seems most apt, taught to read and write and the things of our faith, so that he may then teach them to the other Indians."
A little later, Charles I expressed himself in these terms about the teaching of Spanish to the indigenous peoples of the Americas:

"Wherever possible, schools of the Castilian language should be established so that the Indians may learn. [...] Let them teach those who voluntarily wish to learn it, in the least bothersome way and at no cost."

We see the same tenor in these instructions issued by Charles I to the viceroy of

Mexico in 1536:

"It is very important that [...] the religious and ecclesiastical persons apply themselves to knowing their language [that of the Indians], and to that end reduce it to some grammars and an easy method by which it can be learned."

Given the scant progress achieved, in 1573 the Council of the Indies asked King Philip II to take measures to promote Castilian in the viceroyalties, to which he responded by going further than his very father:
"It does not seem fitting to force [the indigenous peoples] to abandon their natural language: only arrange for some teachers for those who wish voluntarily to learn our language."

In fact, three years earlier, in 1570, a royal decree had named Nahuatl the official language of the natives of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The Spanish missionaries did the most to preserve and promote indigenous languages, and can claim authorship of as many as six hundred American grammars. Not in vain, the second modern language in the world to have its own grammar, after Spanish and even before Portuguese, French, German, English, or Italian, was Nahuatl, written in 1531 by the Franciscans. In many of the nearly thirty universities that Spain would found in the Americas, faculties of indigenous languages were created. An ordinance of September 23, 1580 ordered that "among the chairs that are established there should be one of the general language of said Indians," and, not content with that, required that clerics hold the corresponding certification to take up their parishes.

2.5. Culture in Spanish in the 16th and 17th Centuries

The rise of our culture goes hand in hand with that of the Spanish language itself. Too well-known to dwell on, we will just mention in passing a few references. The 17th century is our Golden Age of literature: Cervantes, Lope, Góngora, Calderón, Tirso de Molina. Not only does the formula for reflecting reality bear fruit—the great ambition of the great narrative and literary artifact whose genesis we witness in this period, the novel—where *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the *Guzmán de Alfarache* prepare the ground for the universal Don Quixote.

Music also played an important role in the cultural life of Habsburg Spain. Composers such as Tomás Luis de Victoria and Francisco Guerrero created masterpieces of sacred music, using Spanish in their devotional texts. Special mention is due to the *villancico*, a popular musical form that often included Spanish lyrics. These pieces were performed in churches and court celebrations, contributing to the diffusion of Spanish language and culture.

During the 16th and 17th centuries numerous scientific treatises were published in Spanish, spanning disciplines such as astronomy, medicine, engineering, botany, and geography. These works not only reflect scientific advances, but also the lexical richness and expressive power of Spanish; a notable example is Jerónimo Muñoz's *Tratado de Astronomía*, which contributed important observations about comets and eclipses.

The same can be said of culture in the Americas, where Renaissance and Baroque aesthetics arrived through Spain's artistic and literary output. According to Octavio Paz, more than 40% of the Spanish emigrant population consisted of literate people; theatre, music, and poetry proliferated, giving rise to a Creole culture with its own particularities, with authors such as Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Amarilis, Juan Espinosa Medrano, or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, not forgetting Inca Garcilaso and Guamán Poma de Ayala.

3. SPANISH FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT ONWARD: THE BOURBON DYNASTY

3.1. The End of Spanish Pre-eminence in Europe, in favour of French

With the political and cultural hegemony France achieved at the end of the 17th century, French stands out among its competitors, Spanish and Italian. It is considered the "language of reason": it prevails in diplomacy, philosophy, and science, and even in the family dealings of European elites. In literature and oratory, French also surpasses Spanish, which has lost the hegemonic role it had in the previous two centuries. So pronounced is French's rise that Fray Benito Jerónimo Feijoo informs us of the fashion for using Gallicisms in Spanish conversation, including at the Spanish court:

"... there stand out some passionate lovers of the French language who, preferring it by far to Castilian, extol its charms, exalt its excellences, and, unable to endure even a brief absence from their beloved tongue, sprinkle conversation with some words stolen from it, even when they speak in Castilian. This, in part, has already become a fashion, so that those who speak pure Castilian are almost looked upon as men from the time of the Goths."

Nevertheless—and unlike what happened in Italy—in our country Spanish maintained its institutional and academic use. In our educational system, as with other modern languages, the most important school subject remained Latin. It is no surprise, then, that in Spain no works were written in French, nor were French books published in the original language. But, as "there is no ill that doesn't come for some good," that fact surely has much to do with the traditional deficit in foreign-language knowledge in our education system. The data bear it out: in Madrid, only the Jesuit college taught French in the 18th

century, and in Barcelona the technical schools of the Junta de Comercio did not create chairs for modern languages until 1824.

3.2. The Impact of Centralism on Language Policy: The Nueva Planta Decrees

We cannot deny the very negative impact that the change of ruling dynasty had on the different languages spoken in our country, through a strict centralist policy felt in education and administration starting with the Nueva Planta Decrees. After the fall of Barcelona in 1714, the Council of Castile requested the following of King Philip V:

"Assuming and establishing that the fueros, constitutions, usages, customs, and privileges enjoyed by the Principality are to be abolished, erased, and entirely removed, it would be well that those [laws] by which in their place it is to be governed and maintained in justice be ordered by Your Majesty to be exercised for the present; and that the laws of Castile be put into practice forthwith, both civil and criminal, acting in the Castilian language".

The decrees had a profound impact on regional identities. By imposing Castilian as the administrative language and limiting the use of vernaculars in public administration and education, there was an erosion of local culture and identity.
Linguistic centralism would also have its counterpart in the Americas. There was a sense at the Spanish court that the degree of Spanish illiteracy—an estimated three million Spanish speakers out of a total population of fifteen million—contributed to misrule in the American territories. The scant spread of Spanish was attributed to the intermediation of religious orders, which, as we have seen, acted with great autonomy, particularly in education and very often adopted local languages in their preaching. Starting with two royal decrees, of 1770 and 1778, Charles III would establish that Castilian "become unique and universal, to facilitate administration and the spiritual nourishment of the natives." This policy of cultural imposition would end up having a specific weight in the American independence processes in the first decades of the 19th century.

3.3. The Path towards Codification: The Royal Academy of the Language

Following the linguistic ideals of the time and the encyclopedic zeal of the Enlightenment, different academies were created in Europe with the aim of fixing the vocabulary and grammar of modern languages. The oldest precedent is the "Crusa" of Florence (1582), then Paris (1635); and in the 18th century, Madrid (1713), Copenhagen (1742), Lisbon (1779), Moscow (1783), Stockholm (1786).
The Royal Academy is the embodiment of Enlightenment ideas in our country: its founding can be understood as part of the Bourbon reformist reach, tending toward centralization and concentration of power around the king, including in the cultural sphere. That this creation had political import is clear from the frontal opposition of the once-all-

powerful Council of Castile to the creation of the Royal Academy.

On October 3, 1714, King Philip V issued the royal charter that officially created the Academy. The first meetings of the corporation's members had been held in 1713 at the home of its first president, Juan Manuel Fernández de Pacheco y Zúñiga, Marquess of Villena (1650–1725). The royal charter "had been delayed, apparently because of the Council of Castile's interference, which postponed its issuance on the grounds that the task the academics proposed exceeded their capacities, and out of suspicion toward the privileges attached to the status of academician." Víctor García de la Concha recounts that:

"a commission headed by Villena personally thanked the king for his support, in a gesture of familiarity and closeness—as servants of the Royal Household—that became customary. It does not seem far-fetched to think that the clear opposition of the all-powerful Council of Castile sought to prevent the Academy from being conceived as a national enterprise, personally protected by the king to the point that its members enjoyed the status of members of the Royal Household, with direct access to it."

Since its founding, the Royal Academy has only gained prominence in shaping a pan-Hispanic space for the language: already in 1851, under the directorship of Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, the RAE named the Venezuelan grammarian Andrés Bello an honorary member. A few years later, in 1871, the Colombian Academy of Language was founded, the first of the twenty corporations existing in the American continent and which, together with the Philippine, Equatoguinean, and Spanish academies, form the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language (ASALE), established in 1951 in Mexico.

3.4. The 19th Century: Romanticism and the Cultural Flowering of Other Spanish Languages

During the 19th century, the policy of linguistic centralization and unification started by the Bourbons in the previous century continued. The prevailing current of thought held that linguistic diversity hindered the spread of knowledge and progress, both in the peninsula and in the Americas, where secessionist movements began to proliferate: in 1808 in Caracas—Bolívar; in 1810 in Buenos Aires; in 1813 in Paraguay; later in Quito, etc. Indigenous rebellion would also play its part: in Mexico it was the priest Hidalgo (1810), then the priest Morelos (1813). Between 1811 and 1822 the Venezuelan, Colombian, and Chilean constitutions would be promulgated.

In the middle of the century officialization of Spanish orthography took place: it came on April 25, 1844, when, by royal order, Queen Isabella II sanctioned that of the Royal Spanish Academy as the only official one for primary education. In this tumultuous century we also have two foreign monarchs who, over the course of their brief reigns, reacted differently to the Spanish language. José Napoleon Bonaparte, King of Spain from 1808

to 1813—the unjustly nicknamed “Pepe Botella”—made an effort to learn it, whereas Amadeo of Savoy (king from 1870 to 1873) never spoke it, reinforcing the popular perception of a “foreign king,” although his wife, Maria Vittoria dal Pozzo, spoke it fluently.

In the second half of the 19th century we witness a “resurgence” for Galician, Catalan, and Basque. The three became languages of culture and science with writers and philologists such as Rosalía de Castro, Curros Enríquez, and Eduardo Pondal (for Galician); José Manterola, José María de Iparraguirre, Luciano Bonaparte (for Basque); and Jacint Verdaguer, Joan Maragall, and Eugeni d’Ors (for Catalan). This process of revitalization and normalization of the other peninsular languages would culminate at the beginning of the 20th century with the creation of the corresponding language academies: Real Academia Galega, 1906; Euskaltzaindia, 1918; Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1907.

This resurgence is possible thanks to the lesser sway of Jacobin positions in Spain and the emergence of a moderate bourgeoisie which, within a framework of loyalty, defended the use of local languages in their most cultivated register—not as an opposition to Castilian, but as a strengthening of their own identity. Such was the case of the moderate bourgeoisie in Valencia and the archaizing movement known as the *renaixença de guant* (“gloved renaissance”).

4. THE PRESENT: FELIPE VI AND HIS COMMITMENT TO THE LANGUAGE

4.1. The Undeniable Vigour of Spanish Today

We arrive—skimming over two kings and a regency—at the present rime, marked by the 1978 Constitution (we warned this would be a *tracking shot*, and the time we have for this talk allows for no more). Ours is a time of undeniable vigor for our language, to such an extent that we cannot call it “ours” without falling into a certain reductionism. For, according to the Instituto Cervantes’ 2023 Yearbook, almost 500 million people have Spanish as their mother tongue (6.2% of the world’s population). The group of potential users of Spanish in the world exceeds 600 million (7.5% of the world’s population), with more than 23 million students enrolled in some course of Spanish as a foreign language.

Spanish is the world’s second mother tongue by number of speakers, after Mandarin Chinese, and the fourth language in an overall count of speakers (combining native command, limited competence, and learners of Spanish), after English, Mandarin Chinese, and Hindi. In 2060 (if the current demographic trend continues, which remains to be seen) the United States will be the world’s second Spanish-speaking country, after Mexico. 27.5% of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic origin.

4.2. The Constitutional Framework

Against this powerful and diverse backdrop our head of state acts as what He is: a symbol of unity, cohesion, and dialogue. To understand the king's role in relation to language, it is worth beginning by recalling two articles of the Constitution:

- Article 3: "Spanish is the official language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it," and "the other Spanish languages shall also be official in the respective Autonomous Communities in accordance with their Statutes."
- Article 56.1: "The King is the Head of State, the symbol of its unity and permanence, and assumes the highest representation of the Spanish State in international relations, especially with the nations of its historical community."

From both articles derives the king's function in relation to all the co-official languages in Spain, but also the defense and use of Spanish in various international fora. King Felipe VI referred to the languages in his Proclamation Address before the Cortes on June 19, 2014. He starts from the recognition of our cultural diversity as an element "born of our history, which ennobles us and should strengthen us," and which is embodied in our official languages, because "unity is not uniformity." He also recognizes it as "an asset of immense value" in our relations with the Ibero-American countries.

4.3. The King's Commitment to the Countries of the Historical Community

The term "historical community," present, as we have seen, in Article 56.1 of our Magna Carta, suffered from a certain ambiguity: its boundaries were not very clear in a kingdom where there was a time "the sun never set." It helped not a little to define it that, in 1991, the Ibero-American Conference—the Ibero-American Summits of Heads of State and Government—was instituted "as the highest institutional expression of the Ibero-American Community of Nations." King Juan Carlos participated assiduously during his reign and was rightly called by Uruguayan President Julio María Sanguinetti the "flagship of the Ibero-American Community," in recognition of his work in articulating this multinational space of sister countries.

In his speech to the Board of Trustees of the Instituto Cervantes in 2015, King Felipe VI explained the value of the Spanish language as a backbone of the Ibero-American space. He stated: "we Spaniards have always been very clear that we are only co-owners of the cultural and linguistic treasure that we share with so many Spanish speakers around the world." Hence the close collaboration of the Instituto Cervantes with other institutions, its "clear Ibero-American vision," and its promotion "of all culture in Spanish."

The Ibero-American community invites us to go one step further, and that is *iberofonía*; a concept which, having been treated already in a previous session in this same course, I will not dwell on, except to mention it. The "pan-Iberian space" or *Iberofonía* includes all the world's countries of Iberian languages, which today reaches the extraordinary figure of almost 900 million people—the first geolinguistic bloc on the planet.

On July 7, 2014, in his first speech abroad, King Felipe emphasized that, thanks to the affinity between Spanish and Portuguese:

"we can today recognize the existence of a great linguistic space composed of about thirty countries on all continents and of more than seven hundred million people. A formidable cultural and linguistic space of universal reach and projection."

4.4. The King's Participation in Major Gatherings of the Spanish Language

Within the framework of his constitutional powers—the ones derived from the articles cited above—the king regularly takes part in the major gatherings of the Spanish language.

Such is the case of the International Congresses of the Spanish Language, held every three years since 1997 in countries of the Spanish-speaking community. These are global forums for reflection on the situation, problems, and challenges of Spanish. They are organized by the Instituto Cervantes –serving as permanent general secretariat- the Royal Spanish Academy, and the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language, as well as the host country of each edition.

Such is also the case of the Cervantes Prize, the highest recognition of the creative work of Spanish and Hispano-American writers whose work has significantly enriched the literary heritage in the Spanish language. Any writer whose literary work is written wholly or essentially in this language may be proposed for this award. The ceremony takes place in Alcalá de Henares around April 23, the date on which, as is famously said, both Miguel de Cervantes and William Shakespeare died in 1616.

Conclusion

The Spanish language, as we have seen, has been one of the great supports of the Crown in its primary function, which is recorded in the Spanish Constitution itself when it says (Art. 56.1) that "The King is the Head of State, the symbol of its unity and permanence." Spanish is also an instrument that structures our national reality and gives it continuity through the different periods of our modern history.

Awareness of this reality led even monarchs born outside Spain and educated in languages other than Spanish—from Charles I to the more recent (and brief) Joseph Bonaparte—to make a point of knowing it and cultivating it.

Concern for language is enshrined in our current Constitution, and certainly by our current King, who since childhood studied and speaks all Spain's co-official languages, using them daily in his institutional engagements.

A King who, throughout his career (as Prince of Asturias and now as the holder of the Crown), has made more than a hundred trips across Ibero-America—journeys in which he has reinforced that extraordinary bond which is our language, in a shared cultural space that the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes baptized as the "territory of La Mancha."

And a King, too, who uses language daily—the Spanish language, yes, but also the other co-official languages—as an instrument to underscore the ethical content of so many ceremonies, events, and initiatives in which he takes part. The word is not, of course, the only instrument at his disposal to carry out his work; image, gesture, presence, persuasion are too... even silence can also be an instrument for the exercise of his functions. For, as the playwright and academic Juan Mayorga tells us, "silence is part of language and is, decisively, part of theatrical language."

I would therefore like to conclude these reflections on the Spanish language and the Crown with some words of His Majesty the King, which, I believe, reflect his commitment to our language,—an inheritance, as we see, of more than five hundred years of Spain's history; but also a profoundly ethical vision of what Spanish language must be. It is a fragment of the speech delivered on April 22 of this year, at the traditional meeting with representatives of the literary world held on the eve of the Cervantes Prize award ceremony. On that occasion His Majesty the King said:

"Spanish already has 600 million speakers; it is the world's second language of communication. It is a most powerful instrument to achieve what the world needs now more than ever, when there is so much talk of barriers and disconnects: to reflect, to dialogue.

Language must also serve us to say loudly and clearly: it isn't true. It isn't true that anything goes; it isn't true that everything is relative. It isn't true that merit and dedication are equivalent to luck and opportunism, nor that rigor and knowledge are out of fashion. It isn't true; and not because it is obvious should we cease to proclaim it."

Main Sources

- ALVAR, Manuel, “Carlos V y la lengua española,” in *Nebrija y estudios sobre la Edad de Oro*, Madrid, CSIC, 1977, pp. 169–187.
- CANO AGUILAR, Rafael, *El español a través de los tiempos*, Editorial Arco/Libros, Madrid, 2002 (5th ed.).
- GARCÍA DE LA CONCHA, Víctor, “Las academias y la lengua,” in REYES CANO, Rogelio, *El Mundo de las academias*, Seville, University of Seville, 2003.
- LAPESA, Rafael, *Historia de la lengua española*, Madrid, Editorial Gredos, 1988 (9th ed., 6th reprint).
- LAPESA, Rafael, *Crisis históricas y crisis de la lengua española*, RAE inaugural address, April 1996.
- MARTÍNEZ RUIZ, Enrique, et al., *Ilustración, ciencia y técnica en el siglo XVIII español*, Valencia, University of Valencia, 2008.
- MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, Ramón, “La lengua en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos: del retoricismo al humanismo,” in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, no. 13 (Jan–Feb 1950), pp. 9–24.
- RAMÍREZ LUENGO, José Luis, “Breve historia del español en América,” in *Cuadernos de Lengua Española*, 93, Madrid, Arco Libros, 2007.

Ignacio Cartagena Núñez