

LANGUAGE AS A WEAPON IN FRANCO'S NATION-BUILDING PROJECT

Introduction

This research proposes to study what specific discursive practices were used in Spain, during the 1940s, in Franco's nation-building project. It explores how the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) discursively constructed Catalans', Basques' and Gallegos' linguistic practices as a threat to the unity of Franco's totalitarian state. While the physical violence of Franco's dictatorship has been extensively documented—as it should be—, the symbolic violence of his reign, particularly within the realm of the politics of culture and language, needs more attention. This research will contribute to the literature by exploring how Franco's RAE wielded language as a weapon to eradicate the polysemic-linguistic threat to national unity and activated the Pan-Hispanic ideology.

Who is Pemán?

José María Pemán y Pemartín was a writer born in Cádiz who played a prominent role in the management of the Spanish language during the Franco dictatorship. He was a member and president of the RAE throughout two terms, that were interrupted by the Spanish Civil War. The 1st from 1937 to 1940, although it was officially 1939, and the 2nd from 1944 to 1947.



His Role at the Royal Spanish Academy

He reorganized the academy along nationalist lines through the cultural activities. His time at the institution marked the beginning of a stage of renewal in which the main mission was to train intellectuals and scientists to be loyal to the national line. His efforts to centralize the unity of Spain through an ethnocentric assertion of Spanish, where other languages such as Catalan, Basque and Galician were just considered dialects.

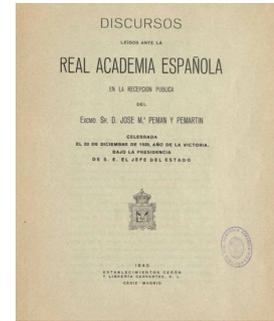


Conceptualizing on the national language

Language was used as a weapon in the dictatorship for the Nation-building project. Pemán's mission was to act as a regulating agent of language ideologies in order to preserve the national unity and build a hegemonic community in a cultural, political and economic sense. The fear of political and cultural fragmentation set the ideological state apparatus to eradicate linguistic plurality and maintain cultural, national and linguistic homogeneity. This fear of national disintegration led to the emergence of control mechanisms directed by the cultural elite that would ensure the purity of the language, such as the Royal Spanish Academy (created in 1713).

The discourses

The corpus of texts analyzed is made up of the speeches on the language that José María Pemán read as director of the RAE during the dictatorship. The main work is a compendium of the texts that the poet dictated in 1939. It reflects the close relationship that existed between the Academy and the dictatorial regime.



Analysis

His discourses on the language are impregnated with the ideas of Romanticism. Spain is the center of a past Pan-Hispanic empire from which power relations are articulated through language. Most of these speeches are based on resistance to the disintegration of Spain, as the center of cohesion of the nation and the empire. The articulation of these themes has as its central axis the Spanish national language. This instrumental vision is necessary to establish the consciousness of identity in the community to which the speeches are directed. This instrumental vision is necessary to establish the consciousness of identity in the community.

Findings

The speeches reflect a linguistic ideology that naturalizes the expansion and defense of the national language and the adoption of policies aimed at its preservation. It has been seen that Spain needed to define itself not only as a political nation, but also as a cultural and social unit. This process of national construction was carried out, among other things, through the RAE as a cultural institution capable of legitimizing the forms of speech and developing mechanisms that would influence the attitudes of the speakers. In this context, Pemán's discourses were crucial to develop the monoglossic linguistic ideology, that is, the tendency to naturalize homogeneous practices and convergent verbal behaviors among members of the same community.

Dr. Lorena García Barroso

lg2689@columbia.edu

Department of LAIC, Columbia University

Ongoing thanks

Northeast Modern Language Association
National Library of Spain
Seville Public Library