

Otto Zwartjes, **Portuguese missionary grammars in Asia, Africa and Brazil, 1550-1800** (Amsterdam studies in the theory and history of linguistic science. Series III, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences, 117). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011. Pp. 373.

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Missionary grammars written in Portuguese were shaped as practical tools for language teaching and after the end of mission period were swiftly forgotten. Most of this vast production is lost. Some grammars remained in libraries as a precious heritage, others were brought to Europe and a few were printed. Once rediscovered, they were considered partial descriptions or excessively contaminated by Latin grammar.

Otto Zwartjes (University of Amsterdam) has contributed decisively to a better understanding and appreciation of these metalinguistic testimonies. In 2000, he coordinated a major volume on Spanish missionary linguistics (*Las gramáticas misioneras de tradición hispánica*). Since then, he has applied the conclusions and analysis methods to Portuguese documentation. The present volume collects some partial studies on each of the grammars, revised and unified.

Compared with the Spanish grammars, the Portuguese tradition must be treated with caution. There are fewer extant works written in Portuguese, and from many regions only one or two works are available. In the Spanish colonies, we can follow the pedagogic activities of various religious orders, allowing a distinction between schools. In the Portuguese case, most of the authors are Jesuits and it would be misleading to consider a specific method of a religious order, without distinguishing elements. Therefore, the author prefers to look for «specific features of the work of a certain individual»,

since «it does not make much sense to trace ‘nationalities’ among Jesuits» (p. 269).

Although unquestionably valuable, the list of sources consists of only 19 texts, representing different languages. This diversity explains the geographical organization of the chapters and the need to gather languages with common features, which may not be linguistic, rather historical.

From India, there are five grammars (Tamil, Konkani, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi), just one from Japan, four from Brazil (two of Tupinambá, one of the ‘*língua geral Amazônica*’, one of Kipeá-Kiriri), three from Sub-Saharan Africa, all belonging to the Bantu group (Kongo, Kimbundu, Sena), two of Arabic and one of Hebrew. Through this restricted corpus it is extremely difficult to compare and evaluate the quality of linguistic description. Being aware of the limitations of extant texts, Otto Zwartjes focuses on the historiography of language sciences, rather than study indigenous languages represented in them.

The analysis framework seems fairly consistent. In addition to aspects of grammatical theory, the author establishes a relation with missionary biography and historical context of teaching / evangelization. This background is crucial to confirm whether priests wrote these grammars to teach other missionaries the new language. Under these circumstances, the description is not bidirectional.

Latin grammatical categories operate as an aid to explain familiar linguistic categories and are adapted – or expanded – to admit unknown characteristics. The author believes that «the attitude of missionary linguists can be considered as more open-minded than that of contemporary grammarians in Europe» (p. 10). This statement should perhaps be reconsidered for Portuguese, where there was not, until the mid-18th century, a tradition of Portuguese L2 teaching to foreigners, nor even as L1.

In line with previous studies, the main purpose is to know how Portuguese missionaries used the Greco-Latin framework, as well as to identify the integration of non-Western linguistic terminology in grammars. In phonology and orthography, the focus is the adjustment of existing Latin graphemes and eventual efforts to transcribe local languages. In morphosyntax, the purpose is to detail the parts of speech that missionaries define and classify, and to assess if the Latin paradigm is modified to include new parts of speech (p. 18).

One appealing aspect may be the inquiry of word formation terminology, when authors try to divide words into smaller units – such as ‘syllable’, ‘particle’, ‘diction’, ‘root’ – given that this feature is marginally discussed in vulgar language grammars and that the use of the ‘root’ concept in Portuguese tradition is not clearly surveyed.

The author tries to overcome the most common reading of this type of grammars, which attempts to identify the aspects that do not fit the traditional Latin-based model and «the inappropriateness of imposing Eurocentric

concepts onto other languages». Rather than assume that authors saw a fault in inadequacy, Otto Zwartjes asserts that most authors «were aware of these shortcomings and attempted to invent new approaches» (p. 261). Metalanguage knows few innovations before the 18th century, so any attempts to adapt sense and applications are instances of originality.

The findings in the areas of phonology and spelling were partially foreseeable, because the treatment of different languages can hardly be compared. In the Indian subcontinent, Latin alphabet is barely reformed, with careless transcriptions, and frequently causing misunderstanding. In Japan, the Portuguese grammarians employed the existing metalanguage and achieved a very elaborate description of Japanese pronunciation. In Africa, Bantu languages have no detailed tonality descriptions. In Brazil, Tupi and Kiriri languages were perceived as phonologically compatible with Portuguese and therefore the transcription was made with Latin graphemes.

The way the lexicon is studied in grammars is not considered, although they often contain lists of specialized vocabulary. Lexicography is abridged in an appendix (pp. 271-302) that provides bibliographic lists, based on Fonseca (2006: 335-340). This guide to the production of missionary dictionaries is also geographically divided, but now with the introduction of dictionaries of Chinese. The above information about the contexts of production helps to understand the action of lexicographers of those languages. This appendix is an outline for the history of missionary lexicography, a chapter of Portuguese linguistic historiography that is still waiting to be written.

We commonly assume that the missionary lexicography had no influence or impact on the development of modern Portuguese lexicography, even in bilingual dictionaries (Verdelho, 2008). Just like missionary grammars, dictionaries are examples of linguistic empirical knowledge, build upon Latin tradition, but amplified by the multilingual competence and humanistic culture of the Portuguese missionaries. Otto Zwartjes' future work may clarify this vast domain of linguistic historiography, disclosing sources hardly accessible and insufficiently studied.

References

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