



DEFENDING THE CATALAN LANGUAGE: CRISTÒFOL DESPUIG AND THE DESCRIPTION OF THE VALENCIAN OTHER

1 INTRODUCTION

In 1556, Philip II was crowned King of Spain, having inherited “the largest global empire that had ever existed” (Dandelet 2014: 133). The following year, his troops defeated the French in the Battle of San Quentin, and with the subsequent treaty of Cateau-Cambresis (1559) the Spanish Crown gained control over Naples and Milan, one of the wealthiest parts of the Spanish Empire (Dandelet 2014: 149–151). The empire was an example of a so-called composite monarchy in which most of the territories were united by means of a system known as *aeque principaliter*, according to which the different territories maintained “their own laws, *fueros* and privileges” (Elliott 1992: 53).¹ This was the case with the Kingdom of Aragon, the Kingdom of Valencia, the Principality of Catalonia, and the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, all of which constituted the Crown of Aragon. However, the Spanish possessions in America followed a different system: the accessory union, by which these territories were parts of the Kingdom of Castile and supposedly had the same Castilian laws and rights (Elliott 1992: 52). At the center of the monarchy was Castile, and this imbalance of demographic, economic, and military power became a point of contention, especially during the second half of the sixteenth century. The issue of how to organize the Spanish Empire became more relevant with the establishment of Madrid as the capital in 1561,² the tense political atmosphere during the Catalan Courts of 1564 (Rubiés 1995–1996: 248–249), as well as the initial trust that Philip II vested in the Duke of Alba in 1567 to control the anti-Spanish revolt in the Netherlands – also part of the Spanish Empire. During this time, the Prince of Eboli, Ruy Gómez de Silva, the Valencian humanist Fadrique Furió Ceriol, and the Aragonese secretary Antonio Pérez all suggested that a better balance of power could be established through a federalist option, similar to the *aeque principaliter* model, in which there would be no hierarchies (Elliott 1990: 257–261).³ Also at this time, Cristòfol Despuig (1510–1574), a knight from the Catalan city of Tortosa, wrote *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa (Dialogues. A Catalan Renaissance Colloquy Set in the City of Tortosa)*.⁴

1 *Fueros* refer to regional codes of laws, privileges, and exemptions.

2 Before 1561 the emperor had practiced a peripatetic kingship without a permanent capital (Elliott 1992: 254).

3 A Castile-centered Spanish Empire was supported at Court by the Zapata and Alba families.

4 Most scholars agree that Despuig wrote this work in 1557. However, according to Rubiés, Despuig’s *Colloquy* must have been written around 1562 (Rubiés 1999: 222). Rubiés suggests that the work was revised between

Highly illustrative of the genre of Renaissance dialogue in the Catalan-speaking lands (Querol and Solervicens [1557] 2014: 15) – though not published until 1877 –⁵ Despuig’s *Colloquy* differed from other contemporary defenses of Romance languages such as those written by Bembo, Speroni, Du Bellay, Barros, and Valdés, in that it did not focus exclusively on language (Duran 1981: 38, Chabrolle-Cerretini and Narcís Iglésias 2021: 55). However, in the book’s first dialogue, which is the longest of the six that Despuig presents, the topic of language features prominently. The dialogues take place between three characters: Lívio, a knight from Tortosa who is “the most critical voice in the work” (Querol and Solervicens 2014: 15); Fàbio, who is a citizen from Tortosa; and don Pedro, a knight from Valencia. The first dialogue focuses on the past and present of the Catalan language, with particular emphasis on the expansion of Castilian in the Catalan-speaking lands. According to the Catalan knight Lívio: “most Castilians actually dare to say out loud that this province of ours isn’t Spain and that, therefore, we aren’t true Spaniards, and the blessed sinners don’t realise how wrong and how ignorant they are [...] for the province isn’t just Spain: it’s the best Spain, and it’s always been held up as such by every nation that has reached our shores” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 80). The *Colloquy* does not place Catalonia in opposition to the Spanish Empire. Rather, it demands respect towards the Crown of Aragon and the memory of the medieval Catalan-Aragonese Empire, led by the Principality of Catalonia, which is in danger of being erased by a Castilian-centered conception of the Spanish Empire (Rubiés 1995–1996: 247–248). In Despuig’s text, defending the Crown of Aragon by exalting the Catalan language meant defending the Catalan nation, and, ultimately, praising the Principality of Catalonia. It could be argued that Despuig’s work opposed the political historians at the service of the Crown of Castile, who would use any rhetorical device or fictional element to exalt Castile at the expense of the Crown of Aragon. Thus, the lack of fictional elements in the historical narrative would run counter to patriotism (Duran 2004: 110–111).

In this article, I argue that Despuig’s *Colloquy* raises the topic of Catalan language to mount a defense of the memory of the historical importance of the Catalan-Aragonese Empire. This defense emphasizes the leadership of the Principality of Catalonia among the Catalan-speaking lands of the Crown of Aragon. The central role of Catalonia in the work appears based upon a hierarchy of varieties of the Catalan language, in which, for the first time, there is an explicit statement of the superiority of the variety spoken there. Despuig’s linguistic hierarchy reflects an ideology of origin, namely: the variety of the Principality of Catalonia is superior because the language finds its roots there, and thus the language is most appropriately designated *català* or

1558 and 1562 and that Despuig might have used a fictional earlier date for his work (Rubiés 1995-1996: 248). There is only one remaining manuscript of the work: B-20, copied in the eighteenth century and kept at the *Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona* (González 2012: 322; Duran 1981: 43). For a discussion of the date and different editions of the work, see González (2012: 333-335), Querol and Solervicens (2011: 20-26), and Duran (1981: 43-49).

5 By Fidel Fita (Despuig (1877/1975)). Despuig’s enmity with the bishop Ferran de Loaces, evident in the first dialogue of the *Col·loquis*, might explain why Despuig’s work was not published until the nineteenth century. Loaces had a great influence on the Spanish Crown and the Inquisition (Querol y Solervicens 2014: 10).

llengua catalana.⁶ The degree of resemblance with the variety used in the Principality of Catalonia will determine the value of other varieties spoken beyond Catalonia. This ideology reflects a Platonic point of view, which opposes the classical evolution of language and empire found in the works of Nebrija or Aldrete. Importantly, I suggest that, in mounting his defense, Despuig intentionally portrays the Valencian other as a palimpsest in which the Kingdom of Valencia was colonized first by Catalans and later by Castilians. The Valencian language variety and its concomitant linguistic ideology evidence a process of Castilian substitution and colonization, which can be contested.⁷ This process is revealed in four principal aspects of the *Colloquy*, each having important political implications:⁸ the Castilian name of the Valencian character don Pedro; this character's ostensible lack of awareness that Catalan had been a courtly language during the House of Barcelona Dynasty; his acknowledgement that the Catalan variety spoken in Valencia was contaminated by its contact with Castilian; and finally, the erasure of the literary achievements in Catalan of the Kingdom of Valencia during the Trastámara Dynasty. In this final aspect, Despuig's *Colloquy* suggests that the value of a language does not reside in literary cultivation, but merely in the political power associated with a language. In what follows, I explain the significance of each one of these four aspects of the *Colloquy* in terms of the linguistic ideology that was prevalent at the time. First, however, I consider the question of linguistic origins.

2 THE CONCEPT OF THE CATALAN NATION BASED ON LANGUAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF ORIGINS

In the first dialogue, the Valencian knight, don Pedro, and the Catalan knight, Lívio, compare the different varieties of the Catalan language:

DON PEDRO: What I mean is that we Valencians came from Catalonia, and we regard those families that didn't come from Catalonia as inferior. And we use the language of Catalonia, even though it's been badly affected by the fact that we are so close to Castile [...]

LIVIO: There's no two ways about it. And the same goes for Majorca, which was also conquered by King James, as well as Menorca and Ibiza when they were conquered. That's why Catalan came to be spoken on all those islands, and still is, just as it was at the beginning. They had no need to change it, as they did in Valencia or in Sardinia. (Despuig [1557] 2014: 46–47)

6 We must bear in mind that in this context the term “varieties” does not correspond to the current dialectal differentiation of the Catalan language based mainly on eastern and western Catalan, but rather to hypothetical linguistic blocks that Despuig established. These linguistic blocks were based on geographical and political criteria: variety of the Principality of Catalonia, variety of the Kingdom of Valencia, and variety of the Balearic Islands.

7 I use the terms “Castilian” and “Spanish” synonymously.

8 I apply John Joseph's definition of the political “to any situation in which there is an unequal distribution of power, and where individuals' behaviour reflects the play of power, or is guided (or maybe even determined) by it (2006: 2).

Here the two characters refer to the conquests of Majorca (1229), Eivissa (1235), and the Kingdom of Valencia (1238–1245) by King James I the Conqueror (r. 1213–1276); the conquest of Minorca (1287) by Alfonso the Liberal (r. 1285–1291), and the occupation of the Sardinian city of l’Alguer (1354) by King Peter the Ceremonious (r. 1336–1387). All these areas are treated as Catalan-speaking lands. With regards to the Aragonese participation in the conquest of the Valencian lands, don Pedro explains that the main forces were nearly all Catalan and “that’s why the language that’s spoken in there is Catalan, not Aragonese,” although the Valencian knight acknowledges that some noble Aragonese families settled there (Despuig [1557] 2014: 46). The text erases the presence of the Aragonese language in the Kingdom of Valencia, which could be explained by the fact that the most populated and richest areas of the Kingdom of Valencia were Catalan-speaking.⁹

This passage considers the Catalan-speaking lands a unified linguistic community, which reminds us of the concept of *nació catalana* as an ethnocultural concept that comprises all the Catalan-speaking Christians of Hispania, although, in this case, it also includes the Catalan-speaking territory of Sardinia.¹⁰ Although the term *nació catalana* does not appear explicitly in the passage, the idea of a linguistic community is very clear. Despuig uses the term *nació catalana* on several occasions, but in most cases, it refers exclusively to the Principality of Catalonia (Duran 1981: 36–37). The term *pàtria* most clearly describes the Catalan-speaking territories in one specific passage, when Lívio states: “I do condemn and denounce its everyday use [of Castilian] amongst ourselves, because that could lead to our language being gradually uprooted from our land (*pàtria*), and that would make it look as if we’d been conquered by the Castilians” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 48). As Mas i Forners explains, the use of the term and the idea of a Catalan nation based on a common language and religion had been prevalent among the elites of the Kingdoms of Valencia, Majorca, and the Principality of Catalonia until about the middle of the fourteenth century. However, once King Peter the Ceremonious (r. 1336–1387) incorporated the Kingdom of Majorca into the Crown of Aragon in 1343–1344, the idea of a dynastic nation or nation of the king, comprising the whole Crown of Aragon, spread and overshadowed the ethnocultural linguistic notion of a *nació catalana* (2020: 138–139). From the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards, the concept of the nation of the king coexisted with the notion of *nació catalana* in its linguistic and ethnocultural sense, and with more restricted labels such as *nació valenciana* and *nació catalana*, which referred exclusively to the Kingdom of Valencia and the Principality of Catalonia respectively (Mas i Forners 2020: 152–158). When Despuig writes his *Colloquy*, the former ethnocultural and linguistic concept of *nació catalana* was used when it was considered appropriate. It appears in Despuig’s first dialogue, although not explicitly, to describe the historical expansion of the Catalan language and to emphasize the central role of the Principality of Catalonia.

9 Lívio also explains that not all Sardinians speak Catalan (Despuig 1557/2014: 47).

10 This idea of nation responds to the Thomist concept: “linguae seu nationes” by which languages determined the existence of nations (Sanchis Guarner 1980: vii).

In the passage mentioned above, there is a clear hierarchy of the different varieties of the Catalan language, which constitutes an ideological interpretation of linguistic difference.¹¹ Lívio explains that the Catalan language has remained unchanged in the islands of Majorca, Menorca, and Ibiza, contrary to the alterations undergone in Valencia and Sardinia. Don Pedro indicates that the changes occurred in Valencia are due to Castilian influence. From these statements, it can be inferred that the variety of the Principality of Catalonia represents an original and perfect state of the language. Don Pedro's comment about the superiority of the Valencian families who are of Catalan origin could be read as supporting this idea. The variety used in the Balearic Islands constitutes the second-best state of the language inasmuch as it is the closest to the original variety of the Principality of Catalonia. Finally, the Valencian and Sardinian varieties would be at the bottom of the pyramid because the original language would have been modified by contact with other languages. This hierarchy is underlined by the exclusive use of the term *llengua catalana* fifteen times throughout the book to refer to the language of the Catalan-speaking lands. Other common terms used during the period, such as *llengua valenciana* or Valencian language, *mallorquí* or Majorcan language, and *llengua llemosina* or Limousin language,¹² are never mentioned (Querol and Solervicens 2014: 21, Lledó-Guillem 2008: 149, Duran 1981: 37). When Despuig wrote his *Colloquy*, the name *llengua valenciana* or *valencià* commonly referred to the Catalan variety of the Kingdom of Valencia. It was first documented in 1395 in Antoni Canal's translation of Valerius Maximus' *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium*. After 1458 the term was dominant in Valencian society in administrative contexts, in public and private correspondence, and in literature (Ferrando Francés 1980: 86). Moreover, in 1409 a document describes the payment made to Ramon Soler for a translation from Castilian into *mallorquí* (Mas i Forners 2020: 76). While these various names for linguistic varieties did not deny the unity of the Catalan language, they underlined the juridical identity of the Kingdoms of Valencia and Majorca and questioned the central role of the Principality of Catalonia. In fact, the expression *llengua catalana* started to be used to refer to the variety of the Principality of Catalonia.

Furthermore, in 1521 we find *llengua llemosina* in Joan Bonllavi's translation of Ramon Llull's *Blanquerna* (BITECA manid 2167), to refer to the language of this thirteenth-century medieval Catalan work (Ferrando Francés 2018: 184). Before 1521 the term *llemosí* or *llengua llemosina* denoted the Occitan language used by the troubadours, whereas *català*, *llengua catalana*, or *catalanesch* made reference to the Catalan language that was used mainly in prose. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the meaning of *llemosí* had changed and it designated all the medieval literature written in Catalan and Occitan. Germà Colon believed that the origin of this confusion originated in the Kingdom of Valencia (1978: 51), whereas Ferrando Francés

11 As Gal and Irvine explain, any discourse about linguistic differences, even if it is a mere contrast, represents an example of linguistic ideology because it carries with it the political naturalization of a hierarchy of domination. Language ideologies are not completely true or false but "they are positioned and partial visions of the world." Therefore, they can be contested because although they pretend "to account for everything and everyone in the word," they defend the interests of certain parts of society (2019: 12-13).

12 With its different variants: *llemosí*, *lemosí*, *lemozí*.

thinks that it may have originated in Castile in the second half of the fifteenth century (1980: 74). According to this new meaning, *llemosí* was the old language of the medieval Catalan lands that no longer existed and that had been divided into Catalan, Valencian, and Majorcan.¹³ Despuig avoids the use of this term because it denies the continuity of a unified language that corresponds to a unified political entity, the Catalan nation, represented by the Principality of Catalonia.

We must bear in mind that the expression *llengua valenciana* could have a double meaning. While in its origins it may have referred to the Catalan variety used in the Kingdom of Valencia, potentially it could evolve and refer to the common language of the Catalan-speaking lands. By the end of the Catalan Civil War (1462–1472), the Kingdom of Valencia became the strongest area politically, culturally, and economically in the Crown of Aragon (Ferrando Francés and Nicolás Amorós 2011: 189). Since the reign of King Alfonso the Magnanimous (r. 1416–1458), Valencians began to play an important role in the Royal Chancellery, or *Cancelleria reial*, which had been dominated until then by the urban elites of Barcelona. The *Cancelleria reial* was created by King James I (1213–1276) and since 1291 it played a dominant role in the “standard” use of the Catalan language in official documents. After the dynastic union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon in 1479, the Royal Chancellery was substituted by the Council of Aragon in 1494 (Ferrando Francés 2018: 224), which meant the end of an institution that had created one of the most unified written languages in the Romance area.¹⁴ Yet once the use of the printing press started in the city of Valencia in 1473, a highly uniform written language was developed in the Catalan-speaking lands until the beginning of the eighteenth century based on Valencian criteria for linguistic modernization (Ferrando Francés 2018: 224–225). While we witness certain divergences starting in the middle of the seventeenth century, the prestige of the Valencian variety would remain until the first half of the nineteenth century. This prestige led to the possible use of the term *valencià* or *llengua valenciana* to refer to the common language of the *nació catalana* (see Ferrando Francés 2018: 228–230). In Castile we find examples of the use of *llengua valenciana* or *valenciano* as the common language of the Catalan-speaking lands: Ferrando Francés mentions, for example, Cervantes’s *The Travails of Persiles and Segismunda* (*Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda*) (1617).¹⁵ Bartolomé Jiménez Patón indicates in *Spanish Eloquence in Art* (*Elocuencia española en arte*) (1604) that “in Spain there are five other [dialects], which are Valencian, Asturian, Galician, and Portuguese, which derive from our first language and main language: the fifth and original Spanish language, which is different from Basque” ([1604] 2006: 283; my translation). Naming the common language “Valencian” questioned the legitimacy of the Principality of Catalonia as the origin and location of the prestige variety of the language of the Catalan nation, which Despuig meant to defend.

13 For the political implications of this change of meaning, see Lledó-Guillem (2018: 112–167).

14 According to Joan Coromines, Catalan was the most unified Romance Language in the Middle Ages in the written mode (1971: 276–277).

15 “According to Cervantes, the Valencian language is “such a gracious language, and so sweet and pleasant that only Portuguese can compete with it” (Quoted in Ferrando Francés 2018: 228–229). My translation.

Despuig's judgement of the Valencian, Balearic, and Sardinian varieties according to their degree of resemblance to the language of the Principality of Catalonia, implied an ideological criterion of origin for the appraisal of language varieties, i.e., the original is the purest or best. This stance opposed the imperial topos "linked to the idea that everything on earth goes through a sequence of stages, from beginning to end, or from childhood to an old age" (Burke 2004: 22). This topos appears in Antonio de Nebrija's *Grammar of the Spanish Language* (*Gramática de la lengua castellana*) (1492): "language was always a companion to empire. Thus, the former followed the latter in such a way that they started, grew, and thrived together, but they also declined together" (Nebrija [1492]1980: 97; my translation). We find another example in Bernardo de Aldrete's *On the origin and beginning of the Castilian or Romance language* (*Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana ó romance*) (1606): "languages are like empires. Once they reach the peak, they end up falling and they never recover" ([1606]1975: 185; my translation). Despuig is not referring to the value of the language as a whole as in Nebrija and Aldrete. His judgement depends on the variety. Lívio complains about Castilian taking over Catalan in certain areas of the Principality of Catalonia: "I do condemn and denounce its everyday use amongst ourselves, because that could lead to our language being gradually uprooted from our land, and that would make it look as if we'd been conquered by the Castilians" (Despuig [1557] 2014: 48). However, there is never a direct cause-effect relationship between the loss of territory and the value of the language. There is simply a language substitution. In the Balearic Islands there is no problem whatsoever but in Sardinia, and, especially in the Kingdom of Valencia, the original essence of the language has been 'corrupted' by contact with other languages. Consequently, the value of the different varieties will depend upon the degree of proximity to the language of the original territory: the Principality of Catalonia. There is no process of birth, growth, prosperity, and decay because the highest degree of perfection is already in the origin, which is Catalonia. This idea is closer to Neoplatonism and the different degrees of proximity to the perfect One, which would be the origin. A Neoplatonic interpretation would match the concept of a *nació catalana* and a Catalan Empire led by the territory where the language originated and where its real essence is maintained: the Principality of Catalonia. To support this stance, Despuig describes the Kingdom of Valencia as the colonial other.

3 THE CATALAN VARIETY OF THE VALENCIAN COLONIAL OTHER: THE TRUE CATALAN KINGS

Don Pedro's comments can be interpreted as a colonial construction of the Valencian other by the Catalans from the Principality of Catalonia. Valencians are represented as colonial subjects who were first "conquered" by the Catalans and now are in the process of being "conquered" again by Castile in a vertical way, i.e., by erasing the previous linguistic identities. Valencians are "others," with a lower-case letter, because they are dependent, colonized, and they construct their own identity and their vision of the world by gazing at the imperial "Other," with a capital letter (Ashcroft *et al.* 2007b: 155–156). In the Valencian case, there have been two imperial Others: first Catalonia and later Castile

(see Fuss 1994 and Boons-Grafé 1992). The process of being colonized by the Castilians can be compared to a manuscript in which the original text, the Catalan dominion, has been erased and a new text, the Castilian one, has been written. Yet the erased text can be recovered in the form of a palimpsest by highlighting the memory of the medieval Catalan Empire. The memory remains among the Catalans of the Principality of Catalonia, who present the Valencian other as a historical superposition of two colonial influences—the Catalan and the Castilian—which Johannessen (2012: 873) metaphorically refers to as an excavation site.¹⁶ We observe this phenomenon in four linguistic aspects of the text:

3.1 The Castilian name of the Valencian knight: don Pedro

At the beginning of Despuig's *Colloquy*, Fàbio recognizes the Valencian don Pedro in two stages. Before identifying him, Fàbio realizes that the man in the distance is Valencian: "I could tell by the way he holds himself and by his lively demeanour that he was a Valencian, but I didn't realise it was Don Pedro" (Despuig [1557] 2014: 45). Thus, don Pedro is described as the Valencian other, even though Fàbio and Lívio, who are both Catalans from Tortosa, treat him as a close friend. One of the most striking features of the Valencian other is his name: don Pedro. This is a Castilianized name that corresponds to the Catalan *En Pere*, which would have been the expected proper name in a dialogue between Catalan speakers. The Castilian name connotes the Valencian identity as the colonized other in the metaphorical sense of a manuscript that offers the possibility to read the previous texts that were written on it. Although don Pedro speaks in Catalan with Fàbio and Lívio, his name suggests the process of Castilianization of the Kingdom of Valencia. On the one hand, the use of "don", equivalent to "Mr." or even "lord," highlights this Castilianization since, although it could be interpreted as a sign of nobility, the lack of a similar form of address for Lívio, who is a Catalan noble, emphasizes the otherness of don Pedro as a character who gazes at the imperial Castilian Other to construct his identity. This signifier of nobility in don Pedro's name may be interpreted as a sign of arrogance and corresponds to the negative characterization of Castilians provided by Lívio in the second dialogue: "they believe that everything they have is the best, and that what other people have is the worst. It's as if they'd dropped from heaven, and the rest of mankind had crawled out of the mud" (Despuig [1557] 2014: 70). On the other hand, the negative connotations of using *Pedro* instead of *Pere* are strikingly highlighted by the name that don Pedro himself uses to refer to Tomás de Villanueva: *Tomàs de Vilanova* (Duran 1981: 78),¹⁷ a Castilian prelate who was archbishop of Valencia from 1545 to 1555. It could be argued that using a Castilian name for a Valencian knight who speaks Catalan and a Catalan name for a Castilian archbishop creates a significant contrast that underlines the Castilian colonization of the Valencian other. Nonetheless, this contrast also proves that don Pedro's Valencian

16 "Imperial discourse brings the colonized space 'into being', the subsequent rewritings and overwritings, the imaging of the place in the consciousness of its occupants, all of which constitute the contemporary place observed by the subject and contested among them" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 159).

17 "DON PEDRO: Maybe he's following the example of our archbishop, Tomàs de Vilanova, who died not very long ago" (Despuig 1557/2014: 60).

identity is not simply a substitution of a Catalan colonization with a Castilian one. The Catalan colonial influence on don Pedro is still there and can be retrieved as though it were a palimpsest, i.e., a text or identity that has been erased but can be recovered. The use of a Catalanized name, *Tomàs de Vilanova*, to refer to the Castilian Tomás de Villanueva, shows that don Pedro, despite the obvious Castilian influence that we observe in his name, can still rewrite his own Valencian identity by gazing at and behaving as the Catalan Other. Had Lívio or Fàbio, the characters from the Principality of Catalonia, used a Catalan version of the Castilian archbishop's name, the result would have been completely different because they would not have underlined the possibility of don Pedro's remembering or recovering his colonial Catalan past. It is obvious that the Catalan influence on don Pedro's identity as a Valencian other is still there.

3.2 The anonymity of the Catalan language spoken by the kings of the House of Barcelona

Don Pedro expresses his belief that Catalan is not a prestigious language. When Lívio indicates that in Sardinia "Catalan is the language of prestige," don Pedro responds: "Actually, I don't see why. After all, Catalan isn't held in such great esteem. In fact, Aragonese is thought to be superior, because it's closer to Castilian." The Valencian knight's surprise when he is told that Catalan is the language of prestige in Sardinia suggests that he believes that Catalan is mainly a marker of identity. In other words, for him Catalan is an authentic language because it shows a more intimate relationship between the language and the community that it represents (Woolard 2007: 136). Therefore, Catalan would not be a good candidate to become an anonymous language, i.e., the language of no one in particular and the language of everyone at the same time (Woolard 2007: 136). Castilian is valued as an effective and practical language of communication rather than a special marker of identity, bestowing it more potential as a language of anonymity. However, Lívio tells don Pedro that not only is Catalan prestigious in Sardinia now, but in the "olden days" it was considered far superior and more prestigious than Aragonese, as it was the language used by the kings of "the male line of the counts of Barcelona." (Despuig [1557] 2014: 47). Lívio mentions that even the last king of the House of Barcelona, King Martin the Humane (r. 1396–1410), spoke Catalan. The text implies that there is a linguistic division between the two main royal dynasties of the Crown of Aragon: the House of Barcelona-Aragon and the Trastámara Dynasty. The first dynasty reigned from Alfonso I the Chaste (r. 1164–1196) to Martin the Humane (r. 1396–1410). After a two-year interregnum (1410–1412), with the Compromise of Caspe (1412), the Castilian Trastámara Dynasty was established in the Crown of Aragon from Ferdinand I (r. 1412–1416) to Ferdinand II (r. 1479–1516). From Despuig's reference to Martin the Humane it can be inferred that the House of Barcelona-Aragon considered Catalan to be the royal and familiar language. The text does not indicate that he was the last king to speak Catalan, but it does state that he was the last monarch of the House of Barcelona, which has important connotations. In fact, while Catalan was a royal language and it was cultivated during the reign of the Trastámara Dynasty, the familiar language of the monarchs was Castilian.

Moreover, Lívio highlights the fact that King Peter the Ceremonious (r. 1336–1387) wrote a chronicle in Catalan describing the feats of his predecessors: “he penned [the chronicle] with his own hand” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 47). Thus, the Catalan language, both spoken and written, is associated with the royal dynasty of the House of Barcelona-Aragon, with Peter the Ceremonious’ chronicle as the peak of this cultivation of the Catalan language. The implications of the centrality of Peter the Ceremonious from a linguistic point of view lie in the political power of this monarch. First, Catalan becomes the prestigious language of several kings. This was not the case when Despuig writes his *Colloquy*, since after the dynastic union of the Crown of Castile and the Crown of Aragon in 1479, the Court had moved to Castile and the Castilian language had become dominant in the royal environment. However, during Peter the Ceremonious’ reign, Catalan was indeed a royal language that was also anonymous because it had spread to different territories and had embraced different identities. It can be argued that Peter the Ceremonious had been the epitome of imperial power as far as the House of Barcelona-Aragon is concerned. Having conquered the Kingdoms of Valencia and Majorca, King James I (r. 1213–1276) had divided his dominions between his two sons: James II of Majorca (r. 1276–1286) received the Kingdom of Majorca. James I’s elder son, Peter the Great (r. 1276–1285), received the Hispanic territories of the Crown of Aragon. During his reign, Peter the Great occupied Sicily in 1282 and defeated the French in 1285. Peter the Ceremonious (r. 1336–1387), whom Lívio mentions, was able to add the Kingdom of Majorca to the Crown of Aragon (1343–1344). Moreover, as Nadal and Prats indicate, Peter the Ceremonious reigned during a period of political balance in Europe and the Mediterranean due to the One Hundred year’s War between England and France, and the crisis of the Papacy. The monarch created a powerful Mediterranean confederation (1982: 425), in which he was even able to control the Duchies of Athens and Neopatra in the eastern Mediterranean.

Highlighting the importance of Peter the Ceremonious with regards to royal writing in Catalan, was also related to his reform of the Royal Chancellery, the *Cancelleria reial*. His Palatine Ordinances (1344) institutionalized the figure of the protonotary, who would be in charge of the formal correctness of the three languages used in the Chancellery: Catalan, Aragonese, and Latin. As a result, a Catalan *koiné* was created, highly influenced by Latin and the *sermo urbanus* of Barcelona, although it did not coincide with any spoken variety (Ferrando Francés 2018: 220–221).¹⁸ During the House of Barcelona Dynasty and, particularly, during the reign of Peter the Ceremonious, the Principality of Catalonia was the political, economic, and cultural center of the Crown of Aragon (Ferrando Francés and Nicolás Amorós 2011: 95). It was thus quite easy to associate the exaltation of the House of Barcelona-Aragon with the praise of the Principality of Catalonia, the center of an imperial project of the Crown of Aragon in the fourteenth century. Certainly, the kings of the Trastámara Dynasty such as Alfonso the Magnanimous (r. 1416–1458), John II (r. 1458–1479), and Ferdinand II (r. 1479–1516) were also exalted, but never from a linguistic point of view and always emphasizing the positive qualities of the Principality of Catalonia. For example, the conquest of Naples

18 See note 14.

carried out by Alfonso the Magnanimous is described in the second dialogue as being possible due to the courage of the Catalans (Despuig [1557] 2014: 77–78). We must bear in mind that during the Trastámara Dynasty, the economic, political, cultural, and linguistic power of the Kingdom of Valencia increased dramatically and, especially after the Catalan Civil War, it became the center of the Crown of Aragon and the Catalan-speaking lands. Consequently, defending the linguistic anonymity and prestige of the Catalan language during the Dynasty of the House of Barcelona-Aragon implied placing the Principality of Catalonia as the true center of the Catalan nation versus the Castilianized Valencian other.

3.3 The Castilian influence on the Catalan variety of the Kingdom of Valencia

Don Pedro himself acknowledges that the Catalan spoken in Valencia has been “badly affected by the fact that we are so close to Castile” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 46). He refers to a process of linguistic change rather than the linguistic substitution mentioned by Lívio, who appears concerned that the everyday use of Castilian could lead to the language “being gradually uprooted from our land, and that would make it look as if we’d been conquered by the Castilians” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 48). Lívio denounces the use of Spanish among the Catalan nobles: “I do condemn and denounce its everyday use [of Castilian] *amongst ourselves*, because that could lead to our language being gradually uprooted from our land (*pàtria*)” (Despuig [1557] 2014: 48, emphasis mine). While this process had been more extreme among the Valencian nobility in the sixteenth century (see Cahner 1980), don Pedro’s comment refers to the transformation of the Catalan language due to Castilian influence. Before Despuig’s testimony, we find two texts that mention a differentiated Valencian variety: in chapter XVIII of his *Chronicle* (ca. 1328), Ramon Muntaner explains how En Conrado Lansa and Roger de Luria “came very young to Catalonia and, in every place in Catalonia and in the Kingdom of Valencia they acquired what was best and most beautiful in the language” (ca. [1328] 2000: 39–40). This is perhaps a description of what nowadays is known as dialectal leveling, which implies that the Catalan of the region of Valencia was already differentiated (see Lledó-Guillem 2018: 62–63). Another explicit reference to the Valencian variety, in which it is placed in a superior position, appears in Francesc Eiximenis’ *Regiment of the Republic* (*Regiment de la Cosa Pública*) (1383) when he describes the Valencian region: “the thirty-second beauty of this land is that its language is made out of the different languages around. It has taken the best of each one and it has discarded the roughest and most vulgar words and has taken the best ones” (1383/1972: 19, my translation). As this text is known in an incunabulum printed in Valencia in 1499 (Ferrando Francés 1988: 411), this exaltation of the Valencian variety is a legitimation at the end of the fifteenth century, and not a fourteenth-century stance (Rafanell 2000: 41–42). Yet this testimony contrasts with don Pedro’s negative view of language contact. Don Pedro’s comment is brief and it may respond to two different phenomena: first, the existence of a variety in the Kingdom of Valencia that differed from the popular and formal oral register of Barcelona, but not very different from the Catalan spoken in Tortosa, as is still the case

nowadays.¹⁹ The Catalan variety spoken in Valencia had been the result of the dominant migration of Catalan-speakers from the Western part of Catalonia, with important influences, especially in vocabulary, from the Aragonese language (Ferrando Francés/Nicolás Amorós 2011: 130–132, 219; Ferrando Francés 1989). The *sermo urbanus* of Valencia became the prestige variety during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Catalan-speaking lands (Ferrando Francés 2018: 224–234). However, *Apitxat*, another subvariety of Catalan, had been developing in the central area of the Kingdom of Valencia, which was the result of mass migratory flows from Castile and Aragon in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The devoicing of the sibilants [z] and [dʒ] became a feature of the variety of Catalan “along the Palància, Túria, and Xúquer Basins” (Rasico 1989: 470) in a narrow strip with the city of Valencia as the center (1989: 461),²⁰ the outcome of dialectal leveling. However, this subvariety was not prestigious either in the city or in the Kingdom when Despuig writes his *Colloquy*. As Rafanell explains, its prestige nonetheless increased in Valencia in the seventeenth century and became fashionable in the writing of the eighteenth century (2000: 37).

3.4 Literature plays no significant role in the value of a language: erasing fifteenth-century Valencian literature

Focusing on the House of Barcelona-Aragon Dynasty, with the corresponding political and linguistic centrality of the Principality of Catalonia, implied erasing the literary achievements in Catalan of the Kingdom of Valencia during the Trastámara Dynasty. Literature as a criterion to improve and value a language is not important in the *Colloquy*. The only exception appears when Lívio mentions King Peter the Ceremonious and his chronicle (Despuig [1557] 2014: 47–48). This reference mainly supports the idea of Catalan being a courtly and prestigious language as we saw above. Several writers are in fact mentioned: the Valencian authors Ausiàs March (1400–1459) and Saint Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419) appear in the first dialogue (Despuig [1557] 2014: 51 and 55). Curiously, Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana, (1398–1458), a Castilian poet, is the author who is mentioned the most: three times ([1557] 2014: 62, 69, and 148). However, the word “poet” is only applied to Ausiàs March, and Lívio calls him “the excellent Catalan philosopher and poet.” It could be argued that the word “Catalan” may refer to the language used in his poetry, as he is considered to be the first poet from the Catalan-speaking lands to use Catalan instead of Occitan to write lyric poetry (see Lledó-Guillem 2018: 109–167). Yet avoiding the demonym “Valencian” to refer to one of the most famous European poets of the fifteenth century and erasing the names of other Valencian literary authors of the fifteenth century such as Joanot Martorell, Sor Isabel de Villena, Joan Roig de Corella, among others, was consistent with the description of the Valencian other. Highlighting the quality of the fifteenth-century Valencian authors who wrote in Catalan could question the central role of the

19 For a very good study of current Catalan dialectology, with very useful historical additions, see Mar Massanell (2020) and Joan Veny and Mar Massanell (2015).

20 See Lledó-Guillem 2018: 171–176. In *Apitxat* Valencian *casa* (house) would be pronounced [ˈkasa] instead of [ˈkaza]; *junts* (together) would be pronounced as [tʃuɲts] instead of [dʒuɲts] or [zuɲts].

Principality of Catalonia with regards to the Catalan language and the Catalan nation. Moreover, the quotation attributed to the Valencian Saint Vincent Ferrer is written in Latin (see Despuig ([1557] 2011: 51).

The three authors, including the Marquis of Santillana, are mentioned because of their didactic messages, not because they are models for improving or elevating the language. In this regard, literature does not play the same role as in, for example, Valdés, Speroni, or Du Bellay's works written in the first half of the sixteenth centuries. For these latter three authors, literature plays a fundamental role in the value of a language. Indeed, the cultural context was different and the Catalan language did not have the royal or ecclesiastical support that the French language had, for example (Chabrolle-Cerretini and Iglésias 2021: 57). Defending Catalan by encouraging its literary cultivation was not the main objective of the *Colloquy*. The work intended to emphasize the role of the Catalan nation in the Spanish Empire and demand respect for the memory of a former powerful Catalan-Aragonese Empire. Yet that empire could only be remembered with respect and, consequently, the Catalan language had a grim future, according to Fábio: "I reckon there isn't much that can be done about it" (Despuig [1557] 2014: 48), simply because language was mainly associated with political power. Fortunately, time would demonstrate that Catalan would remain strong in the future.

4 CONCLUSION

While Cristòfol Despuig did not see his *Colloquy* published in his lifetime and while his book did not focus exclusively on the Catalan language, there is no doubt that his work was very significant from the point of view of linguistic ideology. His interpretation of linguistic difference naturalized the superiority of the Catalan linguistic variety used in Catalonia, and in turn stressed the leading role of the Principality of Catalonia in the former Catalan-Aragonese Empire at the expense of the Kingdom of Valencia. The defense and construction of the memory of this empire implied an underlying desire to recover it (see Rubiés 1995–1996), with language playing an important role in this desire. However, Despuig's book posed questions that went beyond the Catalan-speaking context. For example, the lack of importance of literature in Despuig's work invites us to adopt a comparative approach. The role that literature could play in the recovery, maintenance, or construction of an empire by means of language, was a common topic in Early Modern Europe. What was more important in determining the value of a language: the political power that this language represented or its literary achievements? Was there a real dichotomy between the two criteria (see Lledó-Guillem 2008)? Moreover, with the expansion of the printing press, was there any hope for those languages, such as Catalan, that could not compete on equal terms according to the laws of the market (see Anderson 1983)? In the process of imagining communities in Renaissance Europe, Despuig constitutes an example of resistance, but were there similar examples in Europe at that time, and if so how did the Catalan situation compare to other 'minoritized' languages? This is why Despuig's *Colloquy* should be studied alongside other works that explicitly focused on the defense of different languages in the sixteenth century.

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Abstract

DEFENDING THE CATALAN LANGUAGE: CRISTÒFOL DESPUIG AND THE DESCRIPTION OF THE VALENCIAN OTHER

This study focuses on the work *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa* [*Dialogues. A Catalan Renaissance Colloquy Set in the City of Tortosa*] by the Catalan knight Cristòfol Despuig. While it was written around 1557, it was not published until 1877. My analysis demonstrates that the issue of language is raised in the *Dialogues* to defend the memory of the Catalan-Aragonese Empire in which the Principality of Catalonia has always been the dominant part, especially in the Catalan-speaking lands. The prestigious position of the Principality of Catalonia is supported by an explicit hierarchy of the varieties of the Catalan language in which the Catalan used in the Principality of Catalonia is considered superior. This explicit hierarchy implies two important ideological aspects: first, the idea of origin as the main criterion to value the different varieties of the language. Second, the description of the Valencian other as a palimpsest, since while Valencians were colonized first by Catalans and then by Castilians, the Catalan colonial presence can still be recovered. The otherness of the Valencian identity is represented by four linguistic aspects of the text: first, the Castilian name of the Valencian character: don Pedro. Second, don Pedro's lack of awareness that Catalan was a courtly language. Third, don Pedro's acknowledgement that the Catalan spoken in the Kingdom of Valencia has been contaminated by its contact with Castilian. Finally, the erasure of the literary achievements in Catalan in the Kingdom of Valencia during the reign of the Castilian Trastámara Dynasty in the Crown of Aragon (1412–1516). This erasure supports the superiority of the House of Barcelona-Aragon over the Trastámara Dynasty. Moreover, it supports a clear association between language and political power in which literature does not play an important role in the value of a language.

Keywords: Cristòfol Despuig, *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa*, Catalan, Principality of Catalonia, Kingdom of Valencia, language ideology, Castilian, Spanish Empire, Catalan dialectology, colonialism, nationalism

Povzetek

OBRAMBA KATALONSKEGA JEZIKA: CRISTÒFOL DESPUIG IN OPIS VALENCIJSKE DRUGOSTI

Razprava se osredotoča na delo *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa* katalonskega viteza Cristòfola Despuiga. Čeprav je bilo napisano okoli leta 1557, je izšlo šele leta 1877. Pričujoča analiza kaže, da se jezikovno vprašanje v tem delu pojavi v obrambo spomina Katalonsko-aragonskega cesarstva, v katerem je bila Katalonija zmeraj občutena kot glavni del, predvsem na katalonsko govorečih območjih. Prestižni položaj Katalonske kneževine potrjuje tudi izrecna hierarhija različic katalonskega jezika,

med katerimi katalonščina, ki se uporablja v Katalonski kneževini, velja za višjo. Ta izrecna hierarhija je odraz dveh pomembnih ideoloških vidikov – najprej predstave o izvoru kot najvažnejšem kriteriju za vrednotenje različnih jezikovnih variant. Drugič, hierarhija je povezana tudi s prikazom valencijsčine, ki je drugačna od katalonščine, kot palimpsesta, kajti čeprav so Valencijance kolonizirali najprej Katalonci in nato Kastiljci, se je do katalonske kolonialne prisotnosti še mogoče dokopati. Drugačnost valencijske identitete predstavljajo štiri jezikovne značilnosti omenjenega besedila, in sicer: kastiljsko ime “don Pedro” valencijskega junaka; don Pedrovo nezavedanje o tem, da je bila katalonščina dvorni jezik; don Pedrovo priznanje, da je katalonščina, ki se je govori v valencijski kraljevini, kontaminirana zaradi stika s kastiljščino; izbris literarnih dosežkov v katalonščini v Valencijski kraljevini med vladavino kastiljske dinastije Trastámara znotraj Aragonske krone (1412–1516). Ta izbris kaže na superiornost barcelonsko-aragonske vladarske hiše v odnosu do dinastije Trastámara, pa tudi na jasno povezanost med jezikom in politično močjo, kjer književnost nima velike vloge pri pripisovanju vrednosti danemu jeziku.

Ključne besede: Cristòfol Despuig, *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa*, katalonščina, Kneževina Katalonija, Kraljevina Valencija, jezikovna ideologija, kastiljščina, špansko cesarstvo, katalonska dialektologija, kolonializem, nacionalizem