

## Book Review

### **Archival Documentation in the Philological Analysis of Philippine Spanish: A Review of *El español de Filipinas. Documentos coloniales* by Mariano Franco Figueroa**

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Issues of access often limit research in Fil-Hispanic studies. Firstly, scholars in the field have to contend with constraints to physical accessibility. While many materials from the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) and the Archivo General de Indias (AGI), two oft-cited sources in the study of Philippine Hispanism, have since been digitalized and made publicly available, a host of other archival documents and manuscripts both in the Philippines and abroad have yet to make their way into the databases that Filipino researchers can readily consult.

Secondly, scholars who do manage to secure copies of manuscripts would then have to consider the language in which the texts were written. Since the Philippines, Spain, and Latin America share a social and cultural history that spans centuries, a working knowledge of how the Spanish language evolved throughout those years would be very advantageous. At the visual level, for example, the handwriting style of Pablo Ruiz de Talavera, the parish priest of Quiapo who penned a letter denouncing the illegal expropriation of lands in 1601, was different from that of Joaquín de Coria, who delivered the inaugural lecture of the *cátedra* (professorial chair) of the Tagalog language at the Universidad Central de Madrid, to which he was appointed in 1871.

In addition, orthographical and grammatical conventions of Spanish have changed dramatically over the years. The graphemes *ç* and *ss*, which were quite common in early Spanish missionary texts, are no longer used in Antonio Abad's *El campeón*, written during the so-called Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic literature. The postposition of object pronouns to verbs that are not infinitives, gerunds or imperatives, while still in vogue even during José Rizal's time, is already deemed as an archaism and is thus used for literary effect in the writings of contemporary writers such as Edmundo Farolan and Macario Ofilada.

For all these reasons, one would find it difficult to ignore the brilliant work that Mariano Franco Figueroa has put into writing *El español de Filipinas. Documentos coloniales*, a very welcome addition to Fil-Hispanic scholarship, particularly in the field of historical and colonial linguistics. The book gives us a glimpse of how Spanish was conceived as an integral part of colonial rule in the Philippines through a compilation and analysis of selected AGI documents. Through these documents, Franco Figueroa not only explains the intent of the Crown to bring the Spanish language into the islands; he likewise provides a vivid description of the variety of Spanish that actually reached the Philippines, and does so with the rigor of a philologist whose body of work focuses on the history of the language.

In terms of format, scientific rigor is most evident in Franco Figueroa's transcriptions, which appear both as in-text citations and as appendices. The author explains his approach in this manner:

*En cuanto a los criterios paleográficos, se ha procurado mantener la fidelidad en la transcripción de los originales y los escasos cambios paleográficos se justifican en razón de la mayor facilidad para la lectura de los documentos. El respeto a la ortografía del original solo se ve modificado por la introducción de la puntuación moderna y la resolución en cursiva de las abreviaturas. (60)*

(With regard to the palaeographic criteria, we have attempted to maintain fidelity in transcribing the original; the sparse changes in palaeography can be justified in that they provided greater ease in reading the documents. Respect towards the orthography of the original is modified only by inserting modern punctuation and by rendering abbreviations in the cursive form.) (my translation)

Cognizant of the information his research will afford to the study of the Spanish language, the author opts to respect the format of the manuscripts by sectioning the texts according to how they were divided as folios in the original documents (marked as f.1, f.2, and so on). Line breaks are indicated through slashes and counted through numeral superscripts (e.g., /<sup>3</sup> would refer to the third line break in a document). Orthographic elisions and abbreviations, a common feature of texts during the colonial period, are similarly respected but without sacrificing the clarity of presentation. By supplying the elided elements in italics, Franco Figueroa facilitates the understanding of the text while still distinguishing the explicitations<sup>1</sup> that he himself added. Furthermore, archaic spellings (such as *yglesia* for *iglesia* and *neçessidad* for *necesidad*) are retained to give an overall archaizing feel to the transcriptions, and are thus valuable examples in comparing the varieties of written Spanish from different time periods.

Beyond these formalisms, however, *El español de Filipinas* contains an interesting exegetical text that links the language politics of Hispanic Philippines to other social and cultural forces within the Spanish empire. Philippine historians are likely familiar with the first chapter of the book, *La aventura transpacífica: Las Indias Orientales*, wherein the Spanish colonization of the Philippines is presented as a missionary enterprise. This argument calls to mind the researches by Hispanists John Leddy Phelan and Henry Arthur Kamen and by academics in the field of Philippine missionary linguistics, particularly Emilio Ridruejo and Joaquín Sueiro Justel.

In his second and third chapters (*La base americana del español en Filipinas* and *Trasvase americano y peculiaridad filipina*), Franco Figueroa locates the use of Spanish in the Philippines within the ambit of a colonial society governed from Europe through America. This is a very important point to make as it illustrates the connection of the Philippines not only to Spain but also to Latin America. From a philological perspective, this also serves to explain why some features in Philippine Spanish are similar to those of the Spanish of the Americas. As Franco Figueroa himself avers,

*“La lengua que llega a las islas Filipinas lleva la consustancial variedad de normas y de registros propios, aunque ahora, dentro de esa variación, se observe la impronta americana de su indiscutible trasplante histórico” (47)*

(The language that reached the Philippine Islands carried a consubstantial variety of norms and particular registers, even though within such variation at that time, the American influence could be observed from its indisputable historical transplantation.) (my translation)

Anyone who wishes to read more linguistic descriptors will find the fifth chapter of the book, *Análisis lingüístico de los documentos seleccionados*, very enlightening. In this chapter, the orthographic, phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and discursive features of Spanish are discussed at length and meticulously exemplified using the transcriptions of AGI documents.

If there is any criticism to be given, it would probably be the fact that Franco Figueroa's exegesis dwells heavily on how the language was used by Spaniards who either lived in the Philippines or were writing about the country. Scant references are made to the variety of Spanish that the Filipinos themselves were actually able to learn and use. This seems to suggest that the *español de Filipinas* being referred to in this book largely concerns the Spanish spoken by the Spaniards in the islands, and not the Spanish of the Filipinos. Such silence in relation to the

local speakers of the language is understandable on the one hand, given the scope of this book and the corpus used in its analysis. But, on the other, it likewise becomes a call for Filipino Hispanists everywhere to expand our knowledge of the use of the Spanish language in the Philippines, particularly during the colonial period. Franco Figueroa's masterpiece should not be the last research to be written in this regard.

## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Explications is a term used and accepted in Translation Studies. They are elements that are purposively written to explicitate what would otherwise be a covert meaning of the word. "Explication" totally departs from the spirit of the word.

## WORKS CITED

Franco Figueroa, Mariano. *El español de Filipinas. Documentos coloniales*. Cádiz: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cádiz, 2013. Print.

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