

Cuervo, Rufino José, b. Sep. 19, 1844, Bogotá, d. July 17, 1911, Paris; Colombian philologist.

C. was the son of the Vice-President of the newly independent Republic of Colombia and from childhood also a friend of M. A. Caro. He was educated by private tutors and at various schools (among them the Jesuits' San Bartolomé). Between 1867 and 1870, he taught Latin and Greek at Bogotá schools to earn his living. During that time he kept up with the latest trends in European linguistics: there is evidence that around 1870 he was very familiar with the theories of M. → Müller, F. → Bopp, A. F. → Pott, F. → Diez, H. → Schuchardt, R. Dozy, A. Morel-Fatio, and others. His interest in the new European linguistic theories took him to Paris (1878), from where he travelled all round Europe with his brother Ángel and met some eminent linguists. In 1879 he went back to Bogotá but returned to Paris with his brother Ángel three years later and stayed there, working tirelessly until his death. C. was self-taught, and had neither masters nor pupils. He was able to learn and speak many different languages fluently, including the main European languages, Latin and Greek, and he was also well acquainted with Sanskrit, Arabic and Hebrew. He published scientific papers in the most important journals of that time: *Romania*, *Revue Hispanique*, *Bulletin Hispanique*, *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, and others.

C. bridges the gap between Spanish linguistic studies of the 19th and 20th centuries. The calamitous state of linguistics in Spain drove him (and A. → Bello) to head a renewal and to link Spanish philology and linguistics. He started by studying the local vernacular and reading and annotating classical writers of the *Siglo de Oro*, from where he proceeded to textual criticism, dialect studies, and the techniques of linguistic data classification. For years he worked in isolation, collecting a large quantity of first-hand material and laying the basis for a future history of the Spanish language, and for the description of American Spanish in particular.

The first topic C. worked on was the Spanish language in America. He devoted his *Apuntaciones [...] sobre el lenguaje bogotano* to this subject, in which—especially from the fifth edition onwards—he goes beyond the localism indicated in the title. Later studies, such as *El castellano en América* or *El español en Costa Rica* confirm this interest. The first gave rise to an interesting controversy, initiated by the Spanish writer Juan Valera, concerning the future of the Spanish language and its unity. C.'s point of view was rather pessimistic, as he held that regional differences in Spanish could

threaten its unity, as had previously happened with Latin. “Estamos, pues, en vísperas (que en la vida de los pueblos pueden ser bien largas) de quedar separados, como lo quedaron las hijas del Imperio Romano” (*Disquisiciones*) [‘We are, then, on the eve (which can be long in the history of peoples) of being split up, as happened with the daughters of the Roman Empire’]. The great Spanish philologist R. → Menéndez Pidal also took part in this controversy and accused C. of following the already antiquated paradigm of → Schleicher and → Pott, who conceived language as a natural organism (Del Valle 1999). In order to counteract his fears, C. wanted to ensure that at least educated speech should have a solid linguistic base. From this starting point, he began a thorough codification of grammatical and lexico-syntactic phenomena.

On the other hand, C. was attracted to the historicism then dominant in European philology. According to → Schuchardt, C. was the pioneer of Romance philology in South America and, actually, together with Morel-Fatio, in all of the Spanish-speaking world. The *Diccionario* and the *Notas* are the best examples of his strong attraction to the historical approach to linguistic questions, especially in the area of grammar. The unfinished *Diccionario* is a fundamental work that has not been surpassed to this day and in which one can also find information on Spanish syntax and semantics that is still valuable. C. bequeathed the compiled material, albeit incomplete, to the National Library in Bogotá. The Lexicography Department of the *Instituto Caro y Cuervo* undertook the task of completing the work and published, between 1959 and 1987, 21 instalments for the third volume (E—H). F. A. Martínez oversaw completion of the first three; after his death, J. A. Porto succeeded him in this task (Porto 1986). The *Diccionario* was finished in 1998.

The *Notas* are the result of C.'s wish to keep Bello's grammar from succumbing to change, since it was seen as the “expresión de las doctrinas más comprobadas y más recibidas entre los filólogos” [‘the expression of the doctrines that are the most solidly established and widely acknowledged among philologists’]. Throughout their successive editions, the *Notas* show clearly how C.'s thinking evolved; in this regard, marked differences can be appreciated between the first two editions (published in Bogotá in 1874 and 1881) and the subsequent ones already published in Paris. The sections of the *Notas* devoted to syntactic questions are of particular interest and touch on both historical and psychological aspects, e. g. in their analysis of pronominal constructions, such as *leísmo*,

loísmo, *laísmo*, and in their examination of impersonal verbal forms, or the use of *que*.

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