

## A RE-APPRAISAL OF JUAN HUARTE'S CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY

Though much more attention has been devoted in recent years to the history of linguistics, the work of many major pre-twentieth-century contributors to the western linguistic tradition still remains relatively ignored and therefore in need of reassessment. In this respect the Spanish physician Juan Huarte has fared better than most, for through the work of Noam Chomsky the Spaniard has become a figure of renewed interest<sup>1</sup>. Huarte is seen by Chomsky and his disciples as a forerunner of later developments in rationalist psychology and linguistics, and the connexions between these and Chomsky's own theories have also been stressed. Chomsky himself writes:

Huarte's framework is useful for discussing «psychological theory» in the ensuing period. Typical of later thought is his reference to use of language as an index of human intelligence, of what distinguishes man from animals and, specifically, his emphasis on the creative capacity of normal intelligence<sup>2</sup>.

Carlos-Peregrín Otero, a disciple of Chomsky, is a little less guarded:

...que el racionalismo filosófico y lingüístico que culmina hoy en la obra de Chomsky tenga algunas de sus más visibles raíces en la España de Cervantes no resultará extraño...<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Language and Mind*, New York, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Introducción a la lingüística transformacional (retrospectiva de una confluencia)*, México, 1970, pág. 40.

It is my belief, however, that Huarte's ideas have been to some extent misrepresented as the result of an attempt to read modern theories into them. I wish to suggest, firstly, that it is misleading to say, as Chomsky does, that Huarte's second kind of wit or «ingenio» relates to «...the normal human use of language as a free instrument of thought»<sup>4</sup>; and further, I would question the view of Otero that Huarte is:

...un ingenio poco común y un español poco en consonancia y no muy bienavenido con la España de su tiempo<sup>5</sup>.

Let us first of all recapitulate briefly Huarte's theory of the three wits. In the first edition of his *Examen de ingenios*<sup>6</sup>, Huarte distinguishes three categories of men. There are some, he explains, who are good only at superficial things, who are incapable of profundity of thought and are given to making silly remarks. A second group are good at learning, but everything they know they must first hear from another since they themselves are entirely lacking in invention. A third group consists of:

...ingenios tan perfectos que no han menester maestros que los enseñen, ni les digan cómo han de filosofar; porque de una consideración que les apunta el doctor, sacan ellos ciento, y sin decirles nada, se les hinche la boca de ciencia y saber<sup>7</sup>.

The major distinction clearly falls between the second and third kinds of wits. Huarte delightfully compares them to the mentalities of sheep and goats respectively, the sheep following the well-trodden path, and the goats leaping alone across the rocky heights. He sees all scholars as falling into one of these two categories.

In the augmented edition of the *Examen* of 1640, Huarte appears to have changed his standpoint slightly. The first kind of wit, that characterizing the passive, animal existence, continues unchanged; but Huarte seems more inclined now to stress the creative potential of the second wit, limited though this may be:

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, pág. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, pág. 30.

<sup>6</sup> The *Examen* was first published in 1575, and was reprinted several times over the following few years, besides being translated into most of the major European languages by 1600.

<sup>7</sup> *Examen*, Baeza, 1575, págs. 76-77.

...muchos hombres han nacido... inventando y diciendo lo que jamás oyeron a sus maestros, ni a otro ninguno...<sup>8</sup>.

This is normal human intelligence, with its ability to discover new thoughts and novel ways of expressing them, transcending any training and experience. The third kind of wit is now limited to the extreme creativity of the poet-genius.

That this is a forceful and impressive exposition by Huarte of the principle of creativity in man cannot be denied. What I wish to draw attention to, however, is that Huarte appears to see this creativity as restricted to the realm of thought, for there is no mention of language in this context. The claim that a belief in linguistic creativity is implicit would have been reasonable had not Huarte elsewhere in his work associated language not with the faculty of Imagination but with that of Memory:

En el catálogo de las ciencias que dijimos pertenecer a la memoria pusimos la lengua latina y las demás que hablan todas las naciones del mundo, lo cual ningún hombre sabio puede negar; porque las lenguas fueron una invención que los hombres buscaron para poder entre sí comunicarse y explicar los unos a los otros sus conceptos, sin haber en ello más misterio ni principios naturales, de haberse juntado los primeros inventores y a buen pláceme (como dice Aristóteles) fingir vocablos y dar a cada uno su significación. Resultó de allí tanto número de ellos y tantas maneras de hablar, tan sin cuenta ni razón que si no es teniendo el hombre buena memoria, con ninguna otra potencia es imposible poderse entender<sup>9</sup>.

There seem to be some very definite reasons why the concept of linguistic creativity should have been largely unknown and inconceivable to the Renaissance scholar. Firstly as Huarte himself suggests in the remark quoted above and on other occasions in the *Examen*, he was often unable to distinguish between dead and living languages in a radical and consistent manner. It was often stated by the Renaissance scholar that languages like Latin and Hebrew were acquired by «art», whereas the vernacular was acquired by «nature». But since even the vernacular was seen to be learned

---

<sup>8</sup> Alcalá, 1640, pág. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Baeza, 1575, pág. 113.

(«...con el trato ordinario se aprende...»<sup>10</sup>), the above distinction could not help but seem a nice one. Puristic, normative concerns strengthened the belief that the vernacular was by no means imbibed entirely from the mother's breast. To quote Bernardo Aldrete:

...conviene que haya maestros que lo [el vulgar] enseñen, porque si faltan, como es sola la naturaleza la que obra con el uso y trato de otros que hablan y pronuncian bien, son muy pocos los que por este camino llegan a hablar con propiedad y elegancia...<sup>11</sup>.

Secondly, humanistic concern with pedagogical theory led the Renaissance scholar to associate closely linguistic skills with language-learning in childhood, an age when man enjoys in some respects a passive, animal existence. Huarte himself once again provides evidence of this:

Cuan impertinente sea la imaginativa y el entendimiento para aprender lenguas y maneras de hablar pruébalo claramente la niñez, que con ser la edad en la cual el hombre está más falto de estas dos potencias, con todo eso (dice Aristóteles) que los niños aprenden mejor cualquier lengua que los hombres mayores, que son más racionales<sup>12</sup>.

Finally, the Renaissance humanist, unlike the medieval scholastic, believed the realms of thought and language to be largely separate and distinct<sup>13</sup>. This view stemmed in part from the insistence on a rigid division between philosophy and rhetoric. Dialectics, as Huarte himself explains, teaches men how to reason, but this alone does not suffice:

Y para poder ser sociable y político [un buen artífice] tenía necesidad de hablar, y dar a entender a los demás hombres, las cosas que concebía en el ánimo<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Bernardo Aldrete, *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana o romance que hoy se usa en España*, Rome, 1606, pág. 130.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 48.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, pág. 113.

<sup>13</sup> «In contrast to medieval views, scholars in the Renaissance believed 'meaning' was prior to its 'expression' in language: that what was said was completely independent of the way it was said», R. M. W. Dixon, *What is Language? A New Approach to Linguistic Description*, London, 1965, pág. 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, pág. 139.

For Huarte creativity is clearly limited to the realm of thought, and he conceives its linguistic formulation as a mechanical process controlled by the memory. Moreover, he believes that reason and imagination are antagonistic to memory. This explains in his view why the great scholastic intellects should have spoken such barbarous Latin. This line of argument is taken up by A. Tassoni, who had read the *Examen*, and obviously with great interest. The Italian scholar not only points out that many intelligent men are not skilled at language, either as speakers or as writers, but idiots are often highly skilled at both arts:

La cagione è perché lo scrivere e il parlare elegantemente è effetto della memoria, alla quale s'appartiene l'apprendere le lingue con tutte le circostanze, conservando i loro particolari, per somministrarli con squisitezza alla lingua e alla penna quando bisogna...<sup>15</sup>.

Though on the evidence outlined above the concept of linguistic creativity was clearly alien to Huarte, there can be no objection to Chomsky's or Otero's insistence on his role as a *precursor* of this Cartesian doctrine. The French scholar P. de Deimier, working probably from the 1580 French translation of the *Examen*, drew extensively upon Huarte's ideas. He not only developed these ideas along the same lines as Huarte, but also hints on one occasion at a belief in the concept of linguistic creativity:

Car l'invention est d'une telle dignité..., elle est incorporée en la disposition, puisqu'il y a toujours de l'invention à bien disposer les sujets, comme aussi il y en a en l'élocution, vu qu'en l'arrangement des mots et des termes, et au choix de ceux, l'esprit y parait non moins inventif qu'industrieux<sup>16</sup>.

There thus exists the clear possibility of a continuity of tradition between Huarte and Cartesian linguistics, though the present state of our knowledge of the history of linguistics would seem to warn us against any categorical assertion.

That Deimier should be able to bridge the gap between the realms of thought and language is not altogether surprising. Though we have characterized humanistic scholarship by its belief in the

---

<sup>15</sup> *Dieci libri di pensieri diversi*, Venice, 1627, pág. 248.

<sup>16</sup> *Art poétique*, Paris, 1610, pág. 224.

independence of these two realms, the view that they were intimately connected also had, as in most ages, considerable appeal, intuitively and rationally, and it is not unusual to see one scholar alternating between the two standpoints. Hence Luis Vives can remark at one point:

A veces también ingenios excelentes y clarísimos, con aptitud para penetrar perspicazmente en lo íntimo de las cosas y con una amplia complejión de pensamiento que abarca muchos y graves asuntos, resultan como infantiles por no hallar palabras adecuadas para expresar tantos objetos<sup>17</sup>.

while, prior to this, he has observed:

Acertadamente llamó Demócrito al lenguaje «el arroyo de la razón»; para los griegos «logos» significaba a la vez lenguaje y razón<sup>18</sup>.

Huarte himself would certainly seem to encourage the view that he was attacking a dominant tradition in his insistence on human creativity<sup>19</sup>. And it is certainly true that there has been a long tradition of rhetoricians and pedagogues from the Ancients onwards that stressed the role of the memory. Hence Pedro Mexía comments typically:

Entre los sentidos interiores del hombre la memoria es el más excelente, y él es tesorero y guardador de todos<sup>20</sup>.

In many respects the Renaissance was certainly a backward-looking, conservative age, concerned above all with recapturing the glories of the past. Its social philosophy was essentially repressive and elitist, and there prevailed a general, if at times subconscious, fear of the creative impulse. Juan de Valdés epitomizes this fear perfectly when he comments:

Porque hombres de grandes ingenios son los que se pierden en herejías y falsas opiniones por falta de juicio<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Tratado del alma*, 3rd. ed., Colección Austral, Madrid, 1957, págs. 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 83.

<sup>19</sup> Huarte attacks both Cicero and Aristotle for attributing to the faculty of Memory what should, in his view, be attributed to man's generative faculties. See, Alcalá, 1640, pág. 83.

<sup>20</sup> *Silva de varia lección*, Aug. ed., Venice, 1553, pág. 258.

<sup>21</sup> *Diálogo de la lengua*, ed. and notes J. P. Montesinos, Madrid, 1964, pág. 170.

Public education in the period was largely dull and uninspiring, being based largely on the «bucket» theory. The importance of language-learning, especially of dead languages, undoubtedly encouraged the emphasis on memory and learning by rote. One might also point to a general inability to see intellectual activity as anything other than an uncovering of the hidden Truth and the belief that changes consist merely of a revelation of the innately present, which militated strongly against the creative principle. The conservative trends in the Renaissance tradition undoubtedly weighed heavily upon Huarte, to the extent that elements of them force their way into his own work.

Even in the Ancient world, however, man was confident and forward-looking enough to stress his inventive capacity, and indeed Huarte's concern with creativity is a lesson he might well have learned from Antiquity itself. Consider Quintilian's remark, for example:

Ante omnia igitur imitatio per se ipsa non sufficit, vel quis pigri est ingenii contentum esse iis, quae sint ab aliis inuenta. Quid enim futurum erat temporibus illis, quae sine exemplo fuerunt, si homines nihil, nisi quod iam cognouissent, faciendum sibi aut cogitandum putassent? Nempe nihil fuissent inuentum<sup>22</sup>.

The Renaissance took over a tradition in which the two faces of man, the forward- and backward-looking, are clearly discernible, a fact which explains why scholars were wont to see two possible sources of knowledge: the «ingenio» and «conocimiento de antigüedad». The question inevitably poses itself: which of these two faces dominates in the Renaissance? Certainly the complexity of the age causes one to despair of answering such a question. Even an individual can be difficult to categorise. Fray Jacinto de Ledesma y Mansilla, for instance, observes at one point:

He procurado probar lo más eficazmente que me ha sido posible, con autoridad de graves autores, todo lo que digo...<sup>23</sup>.

yet comments on the same page: «...juzgo que he hecho más que otro hasta ahora»<sup>23</sup>. It remains true, however, that any attempt to

<sup>22</sup> *Institutio oratoria*, London, Heinemann, 1920-1922, IV, 1922, pág. 76.

<sup>23</sup> *Dos libros que tratan de la lengua primera de España*, MS Bibl. Nac., Madrid, Toledo, 1626, pág. 7.

describe the Renaissance movement in general must acknowledge the general ebullience and creative impulse of the age. Even on a cosmic level the Chain of Being becomes more flexible in this period, under the influence of the Neo-platonists. Man was conceived of by Pico della Mirandola and others as no longer tied to the centre of the universe but detached from the entire series of existing things and free to choose his own destiny, for better or for worse. Such ideas were popularized in vernacular literature in the Renaissance, as can be judged from the work of Francisco Cervantes de Salazar:

Porque como el hombre tiene en sí natural de todas las cosas, así tiene libertad de ser lo que quiere. Es como planta o piedra puesto en ocio, y si se da al deleite corporal es animal bruto, y si quisiere es ángel, hecho para contemplar la cara del padre; y en su mano tiene hacerse tan excelente que sea contado entre aquellos a quien dijo Dios: dioses sois vosotros<sup>24</sup>.

The curiously conflicting attitudes of the humanists to astrology can provide a further example of this new mobility. Some saw in astrology a threat to human free-will and liberty, while others glimpsed in the possibility of mastering the occult forces which ruled the universe a means to sublimate man's creative urge. To quote Ambrosio de Morales:

La mayor excelencia del ánimo del hombre es haber sido criado a la imagen y semejanza de Dios... De aquí proceden todas las otras excelencias y grandezas, con que se ve cómo tiene mucho de lo divino. Y entre las demás es gran excelencia suya el tener tan gran señorío sobre sí mismo con el absoluto poder de su libre albedrío, que ni aun al cielo ni a las estrellas no tiene sujeción, que ni pueden nada en ella para quitarle su libertad todas sus influencias, que tan poderosas son sobre esto inferior. Todos los otros animales que son las más perfectas criaturas después del hombre están sujetos al cielo...<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* (n. p., n. d.), fol. xii. The work was begun by H. Pérez Oliva and finished by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. There is a prologue by Ambrosio de Morales.

<sup>25</sup> *Las obras de F. Pérez Oliva*, Córdoba, 1586, págs. 186-187. Language was seen to have a special role in controlling the occult forces. As E. Garin writes: «E l'accordo è proprio nell'idea di un universo tutto vivo, tutto fatto di nascoste corrispondenze, di occulte simpatie, tutto pervaso di spiriti... ..e in mezzo v'è l'uomo, mirabile essere cangiante, che può dire ogni parola, risplasmare ogni cosa, disegnare ogni carattere, rispondere ad ogni invocazione, invocare ogni dio», *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi e ricerche*, Bari, 1961, pág. 154.



The humanistic interest in law and politics, fields in which man's social destiny is shaped, is also explained by an interest in the creative possibilities of man. Many humanists, like L. Bruni, Palmieri, Acciaiuoli, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, etc., were men of state, ambassadors, governors and counsellors, and boasted considerable experience of civic life, a fact keenly felt in their cultural interests. They delighted in feeling themselves to be the arbiters of the moment, the origin of factors deciding situations<sup>26</sup>. History for the Renaissance scholar was not ruled by the divine hand, as it was for his medieval predecessor, but by the hand of man. Machiavelli's cyclic principle of change may strike us as somewhat pessimistic, but when compared to the medieval theories of providentially ordered decay, it can be seen to encourage considerable optimism concerning the possibilities for creative action in politics.

The humanistic philosophy of education is based largely upon a belief in the essential goodness of man and in his inventive capacity. Emphasis in memory is criticised. It is suggested that this faculty is not perhaps the finest that man possesses, and that to know is not to remember. Matteo Palmieri, the great Renaissance educational theorist, writes:

...deve conoscere ciascuno che, come la natura ha fatto gli uccelli atti a volare, i cavrioli a correre, e le fiere a essere crudeli, così ha fatto gli uomini desiderosi ed atti a imparare e pronti a esercitare l'ingegno in cose sottili e degne... Quando alle volte si vede uomini tardi d'ingegno, grossi, e non atti a alcuna dottrina, sono stimati fuori de natura essere nati monstruosi e simili a bestie, alla miseria dei quali si debba meritamente avere compassione<sup>27</sup>.

The love of spontaneity and invention, and the belief in the need for the individual to be allowed to develop freely is perhaps the

---

<sup>26</sup> U. Fiorentina brilliantly sums up the Renaissance commitment to the principle of creativity thus: «Alla scuola dei primi Umanisti, sotto la insegna delle *humanae litterae* s'era venuta delineando quella immagine dell'uomo *poeta* (nel senso pieno della parola, che significa 'creatore'), che coincide con quella pichiana dell'uomo, libero plasmatore di se stesso è del suo mondo: *poeta nelle espressioni del linguaggio e dell'arte...*; *poeta nelle leggi e costituzioni di libere città e civili congregazioni*; *poeta nell'opera quotidiana con qui l'uomo commisura alle cose della natura le sue umane possibilità*», *Il Quattrocento*, Firenze, 1954, pág. 22.

<sup>27</sup> See E. Garin, *L'Educazione umanistica in Italia*, Bari, 1964, págs. 115-116.

major force which motivated the supporters of the vernacular against Latin, and ensured the eventual success of the movement.

In recent years a major change has taken place in the attitude of linguists to the tradition of their science. Whereas in the Bloomfieldian era it was normal for a scholar to stress the unalloyed novelty and originality of his ideas, scholars are now inclined to seek out respectable family trees for their theories. Though this undoubtedly indicates a salutary re-adjustment, which all thoughtful scholars will welcome, it is not an approach devoid of danger. One of the major traps which awaits the unwary is the temptation to «modernize» traditional scholarship. I have tried to show how Juan Huarte has suffered to some extent in this way. Though clearly a scholar of great ability, he did not hit upon the concept of linguistic creativity which is a feature of modern scholarship, and rather than being an exceptional forerunner of later theories, he expresses in his insistence on the creativity of the human intellect, eloquently and splendidly, the very essence of his age.

M. K. READ