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The Latin-Portuguese grammarian Manuel Álvares (1526-1583) and his *De institvtione grammatica libri tres*

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A little more than 440 years ago, in September 1572, the Portuguese typographer João da Barreira printed the first edition of a quite elaborate grammar of the Latin language. Little did the printer as well as the author, the Madeiran Jesuit Manuel Álvares (1526-1583), know that this first print of *Emmanuelis Alvari e Societate Iesv de institvtione grammatica libri tres* would constitute a momentous event in modern grammar history world-wide. With hundreds of editions throughout the following centuries, this grammar would become the Latin grammar with the greatest overall editorial and grammaticographical impact of all time.

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September 1540, young Manuel Álvares was one of the first generation Portuguese Jesuits, acquiring his vast knowledge of Humanist studies in the classes of the Jesuit College of Arts (Colégio das Artes) in Coimbra that had been founded in 1548. As soon as 1552, he began teaching Latin grammar in the Portuguese Jesuit Colleges in Coimbra, Lisbon and Évora, occupying several positions of importance during the following decades. As a result of the fame for his mastery of Classical Latin that he achieved during the course of his teaching activities, the Jesuit Superior Generals Diego Laínez (1512-1565) and St. Francis Borgia (1510-1572) commissioned in 1564 the elaboration of a Latin Grammar by Álvares, to be used by the Society of Jesus:

He was already old, full of infirmities, had for many years been Father Superior, when the obedience commanded him to compose the *Arte de Grammatica*. He confessed that at such a time he could not been given a more painful task. However, because this was the will of the obedience, he took it upon himself to dig into the grammar books and to arrange the work he had been ordered to make, that he made it so perfect and so complete, that in this genre there is neither anybody to exceed nor equal him.^[1]

Although the statement about the grammarian's age appears curious, given his approximate age of 40 years, this sketch by the seventeenth century Jesuit historiographer António Franco (1662-1732) provides us with a unique view of the development of Álvares' grammar. Not surprisingly, the elaboration of the Latin grammar took considerable time, which lead the Jesuit Superior-General St. Francis Borgia to insist upon a more timely completion (Springhetti 1961-1962: 286-287).

The first result of these grammaticographic efforts is the publication of the grammar's second book on Latin syntax. Under the title *De Constructione octo partium*

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orationis Emanuelis Aluaris Lusitani e Societate Iesu libellus this first edition “*Nunc primum in lucem editus*” was published in Venice in 1570 (Álvares 1570). In the following year, the same Venetian printer Michele Tramezzino printed a second edition entitled *De constructione octo partium orationis liber*, enriched “Cum explicationibus auctoris eiusdem” (Álvares 1571).

With censorship licenses dated September 9, 1572, the already mentioned *editio princeps* of the complete grammar entitled *Emmanuelis Alvari e Societate Iesu de institutione grammatica libri tres* was first published in Lisbon, from where it would obtain an awe-inspiring diffusion during the centuries to follow, not only all over Europe, but also in the Americas (Brazil, Mexico, USA) and in Asia (Japan, China). This edition clearly constitutes the beginning of the tradition of the author’s *ars maior*, in the sense that this edition contains the grammar’s complete text in its primitive version.

Shortly thereafter, in early 1573, Álvares published an abbreviated version of his grammar, omitting most of his erudite *scholia*. The latter edition constitutes the beginning of the author’s *ars minor* (Álvares 1573). Beginning with this version’s *editio princeps*, one finds the following paratext, directed by the author to his readers:

Auctor Lectori.

Libros de Grammatica Institutione, quos nuper explanationibus illustratos edideram, compulsus sum Lector humanissime nudos ferè, ac luce priuatos, diligentius tamen correctos denuo foras dare: tum ne scholiorum multitudine impedirentur tyrones, tum vt eis non solùm ad diuites, sed etiam ad tenuiores, (quorum multo maior semper fuit copia) aditus pateret. Quare te etiã, atque etiam rogo, vt eorum tenuitatem, vel nuditatem potiùs boni consulas.

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Vale (Álvares 1573a: [VIII]).[\[2\]](#)

This text is most significant, as it permits the identification of all of the grammar's specimens that belong to the editorial tradition of the *ars minor*. We observe that the author complains about having been forced to publish his grammar anew, but this time without the explanatory comments of the *scholia*. In other words, the *ars minor* lacks most of the grammatical, critical or explanatory comments that are so typical of the *editio princeps* of the *ars maior* and its reprints. In the grammarian's mind, the elimination of most of the *scholia* renders the three books of his grammars 'almost nude and deprived of brightness'. However, Álvares explains that the reduction of the grammatical corpus serves ultimately to prevent the large amount of comments and the consequent high price for a book printed as an in-quarto format which might result in an intellectual or financial obstacle for beginners or poor students.

In the Latin-Portuguese grammar tradition, the importance of Álvares' grammar lies not only in its national and international projection as a Latin grammar that had been written in Latin. Since the respective Lisbon *editiones principes*, even many non-Portuguese editions (almost) entirely written in Latin share as a common denominator the occurrence of the vernacular glosses in the chapter «DE VERBORVM CONIVGATIONE», as can be seen in the Portuguese equivalences for the Latin conjugation that can be found in Álvares (1974: fols. 45 r – 45 v) and Álvares (1573: fols. 35 v – 36 r).

Given the grammar's worldwide importance from the late 16th to the mid 20th century, it seems obvious that what seems to be a "simple" matter of bibliographical interest gets to be crucial for modern studies in Manuel Álvares' grammar and its impact on Latin and vernacular grammar traditions.

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As I already had the chance to point out on another occasion (Kemmler 2012: 516) the Italian Jesuit Emilio Springhetti (1913-1976) offers an overview of publishing countries and centuries in his famous paper “Storia e fortuna della Gramatica di Emmanuele Alvares, S. J.”, while self-consciously conceding the following concerning the origins of his statistics (Springhetti 1961-1962: 304): «Questa statistica, compilata sul Sommervogel, op. cit. e su ricerche personali, è imperfetta e certamente suscettibile di notevole augment».[3] The Italian researcher admits to mostly having used the special bibliography of Backer / Backer / Sommervogel (1890-1916).

Given that there exist more recent attempts of a bibliographic representation of Álvares’ grammars (such as ACL 1983, LUSODAT s.d.), Springhetti’s indication of 530 editions in 22 countries seems to fall considerably short from an adequate description of the numbers of editions that must be considered in the universe of the Alvaresian Latin grammar worldwide.[4] If I were to hazard a guess based on my own studies, I would venture a preliminary estimate of something between no less than a 700 and possibly as much as a 1000 editions that may have to be considered as being part of the editorial universe of Álvares’ Latin grammar.

While there has been an increase of research on Álvares’ grammar in the last two decades, I cannot help but state that, unfortunately, many key questions related to this crucial work of worldwide grammaticography still remain unanswered. It seems paramount that current research in HoL should undertake a special effort to find and identify as great a number of editions possible, while establishing a classification and systematization of works, all the while working towards what should, one day, become a “definitive bibliography” of the Alvaresian Latin grammar and its impact on Latin and vernacular grammaticography.

Notes

[1] [Translation RK] Cf. Franco (1719: 103): «Ja era velho, cheyo de achaques, tinha por muitos annos sido superior, quando a obediencia lhe ordenou, q[ue] compuzesse a Arte de Grãmatica. Confessou, que em tal tempo se lhe não pudera dar occupaçam mais penosa. Com tudo por ser assim vôtade da obediencia, se deu tam de veras a revolver livros gramãticos, & a dispor a obra, que se lhe mandara, q[ue] a fez tam perfeita, & cabal, que neste genero não sô não ha, quem o exceda, mas nem ainda quem o iguale.»

[2] Cf. my English translation of the paratext «The author to the reader»: «The books about the grammatical instruction that I recently have delivered, illustrated with comments, I see myself obliged, oh most humane reader, to publish them again almost nude and deprived of brightness – although rigorously reviewed –, with the purpose of, firstly, not embarrassing the beginners by the multitude of *scholia*, and secondly, that with them the access might not only be possible to the rich, but also to the humblest (of which there was always much greater number). Therefore, I beg you earnestly to esteem as good their humility and nakedness. Farewell».

[3] [Translation RK:] «This statistic, compiled on the basis of Sommervogel, op. cit. and on personal research, is imperfect and certainly susceptible of a noteworthy increase».

[4] Indeed, one should correct this number to 532, as there seems to be a mistake in the addition of the editions by Springhetti (1961-1962: 304).

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