

FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS



ANÍBAL OTERO
(1911-1974)

“The German Romanist, J. M. Piel, told me that we do not know what Galician is like. And even with Galicia being more abundant, from the lexical point of view, than any other region of the Peninsula. F. Krüger, the master of Ebeling,

told me that my works had proven what he already knew: that the province of Lugo was a true El Dorado for the dialectician, and the teacher from Berne, J. Hubschmid, speaking also of my works, stated that in Galicia there were words that did not appear anywhere else in Romania” (from a 1963 letter quoted by Alonso, *Aníbal Otero*, p. 306).

1. Biography

1911 – Born in Barcia (Ribeira de Piquín, Lugo).

1921-1926 – Baccalaureate studies in Valladolid.

1926-1928 – Studies two years of core subjects in Philosophy and Arts in Valladolid.

1928 – Begins degree in Romance Philology at Madrid’s Central University. Begins to collect ballads and tales in response to Ménendez Pidal’s call in the daily newspaper, *El Sol*.

1931 – Research scholar at Historical Study Centre. Collects ballads from different parts of Spain for Menéndez Pidal’s *Romancero hispánico* [*Hispanic Ballads*].

1932-1933 – Attends Tomás Navarro Tomás’ classes on phonetics delivered to the team of researchers working on the *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica* [Linguistic Atlas of the Iberian Peninsula]. Works with Aurelio M. Espinosa on 34 Castilian locations (Zamora, Palencia, Valladolid, Segovia, Burgos and Ávila). Explores one point (in Álava) with L. Rodríguez-Castellano.

1934-1935 – Carries out solo research for *ALPI* on 47 of the 53 Galician locations and another seven (solely in Ourense) with Espinosa.

1936 – Begins exploration of Portuguese domain with A. Nobre de Gusmão. On 5th August (after carrying out only 15 surveys in the north of Portugal), is turned over to the Spanish police by the Portuguese police in Tui.

1937 – On 5th March, is tried by a military tribunal. The prosecutor requests the death penalty. He is sentenced to life imprisonment. Details can be consulted in the

book by Alonso quoted in the references, where various trial documents have been transcribed.

1937-1941 – Continuous imprisonment in Tui, Vigo, San Simón Island (Vigo Ria), Burgos and Figueirido (Pontevedra).

1941 – On 5th March, leaves prison on conditional release. From this date he establishes his residence in Barcía where he works as a farmer and miller until his death.

1942 – On 5th August, is freed definitively. Finishes writing of *Vocabulario de San Jorge de Piquín* [San Jorge de Piquín Vocabulary] which is sent to Menéndez Pidal: “I have received your San Jorge de Piquín Vocabulary. Very abundant. Very useful. Now you must say whether you prefer that I manage the publication from outside, or to wait for better circumstances” (31-12-1942). It is published posthumously in 1974.

1949 – Begins to publish the “Hipótesis...” [“Hypothesis...”] series (See Works, §2).

1950 – Preparation on the works for the continuation of *ALPI* are resumed. Navarro Tomás submits the notebooks that were in his power in New York to Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, but demands that they follow the same interviewers (only Espinosa and Gusmão step down).

1953-1954 – Explores for the *ALPI*, with Luis F. Lindley Cintra, the 77 points that were missing from the Portuguese domain. First “Contribución” [“Contribution”] (1953) in *Archivum* (Cf. Obras [Works], below).

1964 – Is named a full member of the Real Academia Galega [Galician Royal Academy]. He declines.

1973 – Enters a psychiatric hospital in Santiago for depression.

1974 – 11th March, dies in Barcia.

2. Works

a) “Hipótesis etimológicas referentes al gallego-portugués” [“Etymological Hypothesis Regarding Galician-Portuguese”], *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos*, *Boletín*

del Instituto de Estudios Gallegos Padre Sarmiento (CEG), CSIC, Santiago de Compostela.

Contribution	Facs. CEG	Year	Pages	Words
01	XIII	1949	171-200	271
02	XVIII	1951	83-114	273
03	XXIV	1953	88-119	334
04	XXVII	1954	273-292	183
05	XXXII	1955	405-427	152
06	XXXIII	1956	117-139	158
07	XXXIV	1956	245-269	218
08	XXXVI	1957	107-125	239
09	XXXVII	1957	313-227	96
10	XXXIX	1958	77-94	119
11	XLII	1959	87-105	120
12	XLIV	1959	331-348	95
13	XLV	1960	89-104	54
14	IL	1961	160-175	93
15	LIII	1962	329-347	134
16	LIV	1963	16-34	120
17	LVIII	1964	143-160	153
18	XX/60	1965	12-30	149
19	XX/62	1965	330-349	145
20	XXI/64	1966	170-188	175
21	XXII/67	1967	165-182	158
22	XXIII/69	1968	70-88	177
23	XXV/75	1970	70-88	161
24	XXVI/80	1971	287-306	189
25	XXX/90-91-92	1976-7	137-155	203
Total				4169

b) “Contribución al léxico gallego y asturiano” [“Contribution to Galician and Asturian Lexicon”], *Archivum* (AO), Oviedo.

Contribution	Vol. AO	Year	Pages	Words
01	III	1953	113-134	251
02	III	1953	339-417	201
03	VI	1956	382-399	208
04	VII	1958	170-188	268
05	VIII	1958	173-191	215
06	IX	1959	72-90	161
07	X	1960	341-357	194
08	XII	1963	409-426	210
09	XIII	1963	49-66	222
10	XIV	1964	233-249	209
Total				2319

c) “Voces onomatopéyicas del gallego-portugués” [“Onatamopeic voices in Galician-Portuguese”], *Homenaje al Exmo. Sr. Dr. D. Emilio Alarcos*, Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, II, 1967, pp. 63-72.

d) *Contribución al diccionario gallego* [Contribution to Galician dictionary], Vigo, Galaxia, 1967.

e) “Algunas adiciones al léxico hispánico” [“Some additions to Hispanic lexicon”], *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos*, XXIV/72-73-74, 1969, pp. 154-171.

f) *Vocabulario de San Jorge de Piquín* [San Jorge de Piquín Vocabulary], Santiago de Compostela, Universidade de Santiago, 1977 (*Verba*, anexo 7).

g) “Contribución de Aníbal Otero a un vocabulario do «verbo» dos canteiros de Pontevedra” [“Contribution of Aníbal Otero to a vocabularly of Pontevedra quarrymen’s discourse”] (edited by A. Santamarina), *As tebras alumeadas. Estudos filolóxicos ofrecidos en homenaxe a Ramón Lorenzo*, Santiago de Compostela, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2005, pp. 457-477.

NOTE. All of Aníbal Otero's lexical contributions (except the last one) are included in *Dicionario de dicionarios da lingua galega* [Galician Language Master Dictionary], available online at <<http://sli.uvigo.es/ddd/>>.

3. Commentary on his works

Anibal Otero's life was marked by the events of 1936, which took place when he was only 25 years old. This episode and a very painful family misfortune prevented him from making a career as a philologist for which he was especially gifted and motivated. From 1941, he was isolated from the academic circles with the exception of some meetings in Madrid with ALPI colleagues from 1950 and the Portugal campaign of 1953-1954.

In spite of this, he was always faithful to the advice of his teacher, Menéndez Pidal, to "collect much and well". He did it on a constant basis, querying linguistic matters with any informant who could provide him with data, even in the worst moments of his captivity. There are testimonies from fellow prisoners who remember him interviewing sailors from A Guarda or stonecutters from Forcarei. That made him the finest expert on the linguistic reality of Galicia until well into the 1960s.

Urged by people linked to respective journal, he began to publish the "Hipótesis etimológicas" ["Etymological Hypotheses"] in *CEG* and the "Contribuciones" ["Contributions"] in *AO* in 1948 and 1953 respectively. A product of this commission is also his book *Contribución* [Contribution] (1967). All these works are of a lexical nature and their structure is similar. Under an etymon, which seeks to be the headword of an ideological family, a cluster of words that have some relation to each other, whether formal or semantic, is grouped. This arrangement seemed more useful to him than the alphabetic approach, because in this way it is easy to "appreciate at first glance the phonetic and semantic fluctuations of contemporary Galician". In the posthumously published manuscript, *Vocabulario* [Vocabulary], he employs the alphabetical order but frequently inserts all the geographical synonyms collected personally, and sometimes by others, under a headword (that corresponds to the locality of San Jorge

de Piquín). No lexical areas are traced (or described) because only words referring to specific points are removed, which distances it from the idea of “atlas”; he does instead, however, convert the headwords into entry headings in an onomasiological dictionary (assuming such a type of dictionary existed). The reader can get an idea of this by consulting <<http://sli.uvigo.es/ddd/>> (in the contributions by Aníbal Otero), and specifically entries such as the following, randomly selected words beginning with the letter *a*-): *abanicadoiro abedul abalocado anozcar auriolo*.

For reasons that have been mentioned, it is easy to understand why his work has not had considerable impact, not only for its lack of disciples but also because of the dispersed nature of his contributions. The great Galician dictionaries after 1961 (from the publishers Xerais, Ir Indo, Cumio, Sotelo) recorded most of the words collected by Aníbal Otero; of course, this was done without indicating the source and eliminating the information relative to the geographic location of the word. Some of these dictionaries can now be consulted on the web (Ir Indo Publishing: <<https://digalego.xunta.gal/digalego/Html/index.php>>; the Sotelo Editorial: <<http://www.estraviz.org/>>). Only the Appendix of Eladio Rodríguez González’s *Diccionario [Dictionary]* (vol. III, 1961) faithfully provides the source. Joan Corominas takes occasional information from this appendix (which contains the work of Aníbal Otero only very partially) on Galician testimonies regarding a word. Incidentally, Corominas believes that Otero is only an contributor to the Appendix and is not always convinced of Otero’s credibility; Corominas often expresses distrust of the Galician lexicographers and this also reaches A. Otero: “the two *leirán* words that were registered by A. Otero for the Appendix to Eladio Rdz, and whose meaning is not very clear, may be the same word [as the Gal. *leilán*]” (s.v. FILELÍ). The “normal” approach to the work of A. Otero is not that it is mentioned with disdain (as in the case of Corominas), but used as if it were anonymous.

For our part, we believe that the work of A. Otero, both in terms of his work on *ALPI* (and on the *Romancero hispánico [Hispanic Ballads]*) and for his solitary lexicographical work, deserves a prominent place in the historiography of Galician linguistics. His work certainly cannot be equated with that of an F. Krüger, but in

relation to the words and things of the northwest of Spain, it does not detract anything from that of the German Romanist.

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<<http://alpi.csic.es/en/publicaciones>> (See especially the “pdfs” referring to works by David Heap, Tomás Navarro Tomás, Lorenzo Rodríguez Castellano, Manuel Sanchis Guarner and Xulio Sousa).