

FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS



Antoni M. ALCOVER
(1862-1932)

«Yes, collecting all the words used by people with all forms and varieties of pronunciation and modulation; collecting everything without despising anything at all, making making a slow, tenacious comparative study of all those elements, just in this way you can get the depth, the core of the language, and reach its soul, and find out the reason and basis of all its laws and everything that is its character, its

constitution.» (Antoni M. Alcover, 1901: *Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, I, 142.)¹



- 1862, February 2nd: Born in Manacor (Majorca), Spain.²
- 1881: He wrote his *Mostra de diccionari mallorquí*³ (‘a sample dictionary of Majorcan’), a lexical inventory containing a study of the gender of the words *amor* (‘love’) *color* (‘colour’) and *olor* (‘odour’) and a compilation of sentences formed by the verbs *anar* (‘to go’), *dur* (‘to bring’) and *fer* (‘to do’) when they are combined with other grammatical elements. This work won a prize and it represents a sample of his future interest in linguistic variation, lexicology and lexicography.
- 1898: He was appointed general vicar of Majorca, and this circumstance favoured human relations for data collection and for compiling a large-scale work: the *Diccionari de la llengua catalana* (‘the Dictionary of the Catalan language’). His aim was to record not only the Majorcan variety but Catalan as a whole, understood as the sum total of all its dialects, to create a dictionary of all the Catalan varieties. The dictionary would recover, order, classify, and preserve the heritage of the language.
- 1900: He conducted the first of his surveys through the linguistically relevant localities in the Catalan-speaking territory from Perpignan (in France) to Elx (in Alicante) and from the Catalan area of Aragon to Alghero in Sardinia, and held the first meeting to promote the Dictionary. On these travels, which combined study with a certain amount of propaganda and spanned the period from 1900 to 1928, he amassed an immensely thorough linguistic corpus derived from questionnaires,

¹ “Sí, recullint totes les paraules que usa el poble, amb totes les formes y varietats de pronunciació y modulació; replegantho tot, no despreciant cap mica ni cap engruna; fent un estudi comparatiu, detingut, obstinat, de tots aquells elements; sols axí se pot arribar fins a n-el fons, fins a les entranyes de la llengua, y assolir la seva ànima, y afinar la raó y el fonament de totes les seues lleis y de tot lo que constituex el seu caràcter, la seua encarnadura”.

² For more biographical information, see Rotger (1928), Massot (1933, 1983, 1985), Moll (1962a, 1983) and Perea (2005).

³ Alcover (2001).

oral information regarding phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexicon, folk-lore and sociolinguistics.

- 1901: He published a «Lletra de Convit» (Letter of Invitation), setting out the aims and description of the project, and encouraged people to collaborate on the dictionary: He also published the first philological journal of the Iberian Peninsula: the *Bolletí del Diccionari de la llengua Catalana* (1901-1926) in fourteen volumes.
- 1911: He became president of the Philological Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (an academic, scientific and cultural institution that promoted and carried out research in various branches of science and Catalan culture) and the Dictionary became an official project of the Institut.
- 1919: Because some personal disagreements and methodological divergences with other members of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, in 1918 he was removed as president of this institution, and then he decided to change the title of the dictionary to *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*.
- 1920: Out of favour in Catalan cultural and political circles, he obtained financial aid from the Spanish Government to complete the dictionary. This support lasted until 1926 and did little for his standing in Catalonia, but it helped him to complete and organize the lexicographic materials for the definitive version of the *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*.
- 1921: Francesc de B. Moll joined Alcover and became secretary of the project, revising the cards sent by collaborators and meanwhile received the philological training required for the task.
- 1925: Alcover set up a printshop with the equipment needed to publish the Dictionary. At the end of the year, a booklet and eight pages of a sample of the first volume of the dictionary was published, containing the entries comprised between the words *alenar* ('to breathe') and *aletejar* ('to flutter').
- 1926: The first part of the dictionary appeared, but the financial support from Madrid came to an end.
- 1930: The first volume of the *Diccionari català-valencià-balear* was published, written entirely by Alcover and Moll; the work retained the archaic Catalan orthography.

- 1932: Alcover died, penniless. Only the first and the second volumes of the Dictionary were finished before his death.



Main works

- 1903: “Questions de llengua y literatura catalana”, *Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, I, 209-556.
- 1908-1909: «Una mica de dialectologia catalana», *Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, IV, 194-303.
- 1915: *Pertret per una Bibliografia Filològica de la Llengua Catalana del temps més antic fins a 31 de desembre de 1914. Apèndic an el tom VIII del BDLC*, Ciutat de Mallorca: Estampa Amengual i Muntaner.
- 1918: «Dialectes catalans i llur extensió i característiques principals», *Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, X, 519-522.
- 1929-1932: (1929-1933) *La flexió verbal en els dialectes catalans*, Barcelona: Anuari de l’Oficina Romànica (v. II (1929) [73] 1- [184] 112, v. III (1930) [73] 1- [168] 96, v. IV (1931) [9] 1- [104] 96, v. V (1932) [9] 2 - [72] 64).
- 1930: *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*, vol I, Palma de Mallorca: Impremta de Mn. Alcover.
- 1961-1969: *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*, 12 vol., Palma: Moll.

The *Diccionari*, along with many of Alcover’s works on dialectology and other topics, is available online at <http://alcover.iec.cat>



Antoni M. Alcover’s main work was the *Diccionari català-valencià-balear*. However, besides being a lexicographer, he was also interested in dialectology, popular literature, philology, language, history, architecture and archaeology, and promoted many of the most important linguistic and cultural projects of his time.

Alcover was self-taught, but in his youth he was profoundly influenced by two leading scholars: Marian Aguiló (Palma 1825 - Barcelona 1897), who compiled a large body of material for his dictionary, the «Diccionari Aguiló», which was eventually published thirty years after his death; and Tomàs Forteza (Palma 1838 - 1898), who wrote an important grammar of the Catalan language. Following their lead, the young Alcover transcribed many Majorcan songs and specially folk-tales (*Aplec de rondaies mallorquines*), which were published in 24 volumes. In these sources, he found dialect words and sentences that were not recorded in the dictionaries of his time. This lack was the reason that prompted him to start his lexicographic project, still current, and available on line, along with other writings and dialect works, at <http://alcover.iec.cat/>

The year 1900 was a key date for the visibility of Alcover's tasks: his «Lletra de Convit» (Letter of Invitation), sent to scholars and intellectuals, was supported by more than 1600 collaborators; and in his numerous surveys, he collected the linguistic richness of all the varieties of the Catalan speaking area. From these fieldwork surveys (1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1918, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1928), numerous notebooks and a set of diaries have been preserved. They reflect his personal experiences and the results of surveys to collect Catalan verb conjugations from different varieties.

Alcover followed the pattern of Romance studies of his time and made contact with foreign scholars for advice in their work. He learned languages — he spoke and wrote Italian, French, English and German fluently — and traveled three times through European countries — France, Germany, England, Switzerland, Austria and Italy — in 1907, 1913 and 1914, to expand his philological knowledge, to create contacts with the Romanists at universities and to establish with them, as reflected in his extensive correspondence, fruitful and lasting relationships.

After Alcover's death, Moll took responsibility for finishing the Dictionary. He published the second volume, and started the third, changing the orthography and adapting it to the guidelines proposed by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. In 1962, the tenth and last volume was finished. In 1968, the first and the second volumes were also revised to standardise the orthography and other scientific criteria: the information in the entries was increased, quotations were added, definitions improved and some etymologies corrected.

Alcover had a major role in dialect studies of early twentieth century and was the first to carry out a complete and systematic fieldwork surveys in a number of places in the Catalan linguistic domain. His work was recognized by Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke, who, referring to his study “Una mica de dialectologia catalana”⁴ (‘A little Catalan dialectology’), defined him as the founder of the Catalan dialectology:

... Es war noch zu früh, und Morel-Fatio, der Bearbeiter, war zu sehr Erforscher des Mittelalters, zu sehr Schüler von P. Meyer, als dass er dafür Interesse gehabt hätte. Saroïhandy bietet schon etwas mehr, aber erst durch die Zusätze von Alcover bekommt man nun einen klaren Einblick. Man darf ohne Übertreibung sagen, dass damit die [‘Una mica de dialectologia catalana’] katalanische Dialektologie begründet ist und dass, wer irgendwie sich mit den katalanischen Mundarten beschäftigt, zunächst darauf zurückgreifen muss⁵ (*Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, XIV, 119).

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⁴ This paper is a complete study on the phonetics of Catalan dialects based on the work of Alfred Morel-Fatio and Joseph Saroïhandy included in the *Grundriss der Romanischen Philologie* by Gustav Gröber.

⁵ “...It was still too early, and Morel-Fatio, the author, was too much of a medievalist, too much a disciple of P. Meyer, to be interested in this. Saroïhandy already offers something more, but only through the additional work by Alcover can we get a deeper insight. One can say without exaggeration that with this work [‘Una mica de dialectologia catalana’], Catalan dialectology was founded, and that anyone who is interested Catalan dialects in any way, has to refer to it first.”

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