

***Laísmo in Miguel Delibes' Cinco horas con Mario (1966):  
Background for foreign students trained in 'correct' Spanish.***

***El laísmo en Cinco horas con Mario de Miguel Delibes (1966): ... para el  
entrenamiento de estudiantes extranjeros en el español correcto***

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**Resumen:** Una viuda habla en primera persona durante el 85 por ciento de *Cinco horas con Mario*: usa 81 veces el *laísmo*, incorrección gramatical muy arraigada en el habla de Castilla. Prohibido desde 1796, el *laísmo* se niega a desaparecer. En otras cuatro novelas de Delibes se apuntan sólo 38 casos de *laísmo*: 28 los dicta el narrador vallisoletano. El conservadurismo vallisoletano de la viuda –vanidosa, aburguesada y anti-intelectual– incluye el *laísmo*. Los expertos sitúan el *laísmo* en las dos Castillas, en Madrid, en ciertas zonas de la España occidental, en La Rioja y en Santander. Para el estudiante extranjero de Hispánicas, ¿qué puede significar esta ‘impropiedad’ al parecer indestructible?

**Palabras clave:** Miguel Delibes. *Cinco horas con Mario*. El *laísmo*.

**Summary:** A widow in first person voice -85% of *Cinco horas con Mario*- 81 times over uses *laísmo*, a grammatical error deeply rooted in Castilian speech. Banned since 1796, *laísmo* refuses to die. Four other Delibes novels deliver only 38 instances of *laísmo*, 28 voiced by the Valladolid-born narrator. The widow is vain, devoutly middle-class and anti-intellectual. Her Valladolid-style conservatism includes the *laísmo*. Linguists locate *laísmo* in both Castiles, Madrid, certain areas of western Spain, La Rioja and Santander. What is the foreign student of Spanish to make of this seemingly indestructible ‘impropriety’?

**Key Words:** Miguel Delibes. *Cinco horas con Mario*. The use of *laísmo*

*Cinco horas con Mario* [1966] is one of Miguel Delibes' most accomplished novels. The story-line is straightforward. The novel is set in a city in Castilla-León in north-western Spain in the mid-nineteen-sixties. A man called Mario Díez Collado has died suddenly, aged 49. His widow is María del Carmen (Menchu) Sotillo.

The prologue shows Menchu with her friend Valen (Valentina) in the family flat after all the visitors have gone. After Valen leaves and the oldest child, also Mario, goes off to his own room, Menchu goes in to spend the last night sitting beside the dead body of her husband. Over 27 chapters and around 240 pages the first-person voice of Menchu reviews her life with Mario:

*El mono-diálogo* (de Menchu) *está escrito desde el “yo” de la viuda a un “tú” de cuerpo presente que es el cadáver* (de Mario) (RINCÓN, no date: 7).

In the epilogue the following morning, the son Mario, the maid Doro (Dorothea) and the returning Valen talk with Menchu. She is taken out to attend a funeral Mass at 8 a.m. and returns to the flat. The undertakers arrive to conduct the body to the cemetery.

The novel is particularly impressive in its presentation of the clash of values over their 23 years of married life between Menchu and the dead Mario. Though he never speaks, Mario becomes a full second major character through his wife's sustained commentary on and criticism of his behaviour.

The two seem polar opposites. Menchu represents a very middle-class, conservative and authoritarian viewpoint, whereas Mario is committed to a more liberal set of values based on social and political reform, workers' rights, the education of women, democracy, justice, etc.: in the context of the mid-sixties as the Franco dictatorship dragged on and on, Mario's views are radical. If for the past 200 years of Spanish history traditionalism has fought with liberalism, “the two Spains”, diametrically opposed, are not reconciled in this marital union:

*Entre ambos Mario y Carmen hay un abismo que separa a España desde hace siglos* (RINCÓN, no date: 10).

This novel is set specifically in the city of Valladolid. An Internet travel site issues a severe warning about the Spanish spoken in Valladolid:

Vallisoletanos (or pucelanos) [residents of Valladolid] are reputed to speak the purest Spanish of all of Spain. However this reputation is largely undeserved as a majority of Vallisoletanos break the standards of Spanish on a continuous basis. For example, the speech of Valladolid is characterized by *leísmo* not tolerated by the Royal Spanish Academy (the use of pronoun *le* instead of *lo* for inanimate direct objects; e.g., *Cómetele todo*, “Eat it all”), *laísmo* (the use of pronoun *la* instead of *le* for feminine indirect object; e.g., *La dije que viniera*, “I told her to come”), and the use of certain intransitive verbs as transitive (like using *quedar*, “to stay”, to mean *dejar*, “to leave”; e.g., *Tu chaqueta, ¿la quedas aquí?*, “Are you leaving your jacket here?”). Also, *yeísmo* (the merging of the palatal lateral phoneme spelled *ll* into the palatal fricative phoneme spelled *y*) is nowadays widespread in Valladolid city especially among the younger generations. While some of these developments can be encountered elsewhere throughout Spain, others are endemic to the Valladolid area (e.g. *leísmo*, use of intransitive verbs as transitive) (TRAVELAMAP, no date: 2).

In tackling *Cinco horas con Mario*, the foreign student of Spanish accustomed to ‘correct’ forms of the language may find her/his understanding and appreciation challenged particularly by the prevalence -some 81 instances- of *laísmo* to be found in *Cinco horas con Mario*.

Inés FERNÁNDEZ-ORDÓÑEZ in one of her lengthy and wide-ranging commentaries on “*leísmo, laísmo y loísmo*” confirms:

*El laísmo es el empleo de la en vez de le para el dativo con referente femenino, y parece tener una incidencia un poco mayor en el singular que en el plural. No obstante, el laísmo es uso menos extendido que el leísmo personal, y el loísmo, el menos común de todos* (FERNÁNDEZ-ORDÓÑEZ ESTADO, no date: 1).

Juan ALCINA FRANCH and José Manuel BLECUA supply some of the historical background:

*La invasión del la acusativo al dativo es posterior al leísmo. A lo largo del siglo XV se advierte mayor frecuencia y en el siguiente, sin sobrepasar proporciones minoritarias, progresa entre escritores del Norte y Centro de Castilla. En escritores madrileños posteriores a Lope y Cervantes, hay una fuerte intensificación. Quevedo es casi exclusivamente laísta y Calderón lo es predominantemente. La censura académica (1796) ha contribuido a restringir notablemente su uso literario* (ALCINA FRANCH y BLECUA, 1975: 606).

Butt and BENJAMIN write:

*Dialect differences in the use of le/les: Students of Peninsular, particularly Madrid Spanish will often encounter the use of la for le in many of the above contexts to indicate the feminine gender:*

? *La dije la verdad*

*I told her the truth*

? *La quitaron mil pesetas*

*they took 1000 pesetas off her*

<p>? <i>A una de estas bujías se la exige un rendimiento cinco veces superior</i> (Cambio 16)</p> <p>? <i>Yo la alabo el gusto</i> (Delibes, dialogue)</p>	<p><i>one of these spark plugs is expected to yield five times higher output</i></p> <p><i>I praise her taste</i></p>
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*Laísmo is nowadays condemned by most educated Spaniards (who may still use it themselves), and students are advised always to use le/les for the feminine in the above contexts. Laísmo is very rare (but not unknown) in Spanish America, but very common in pre-twentieth century Peninsular literature (BUTT and BENJAMIN, 1989: 113).*

The following instances of *laísmo* -*la* being used instead of *le* to render feminine singular dative- were found in a reading of an early edition of *Cinco horas con Mario*:

[...] *de manera que la cubra medio cuerpo* (Prólogo: 10); *Valentina... la besaba la mejilla izquierda* (Prólogo: 17); *los bultos... la oprimían la misma mano hinchada* (Prólogo: 17); *Yo pienso que la hice daño* (Prólogo: 23); *Esther le ayudó a ponerla una inyección* (Prólogo: 29); *Carmen la tendió el papel azul* (Prólogo: 31); *al hacerlo se la recogen las faldas* (Prólogo: 33); *se la ablandan los ojos* (Prólogo: 35); *pero no la importa* (Prólogo: 37); *cuando Elviro murió, bien que la pesaría* (I: 43); *a ver qué otra cosa podía decirla* (II: 54); *por ejemplo, yo la decía* (III: 62); *quién la iba a decirle a ella* (IV: 66); *y la quitas unos filetes de las pantorrillas* (IV: 68); *a la niña no la tiran los libros y yo la alabo el gusto* (V: 75); *recuerdo que papá la decía con mucha sorna* (VII: 92); [...] *Son los suyos que la traen recuerdos* (VII: 92); *a Valen la limpian el cutis en Madrid* (VIII: 102); *el reflejo la cae muy bien* (VIII: 102); *o que la apetece* (VIII: 102); *a Esther la pareces inteligente* (IX: 113); *lo que la pasa a Esther* (IX: 114); *y todo eso la parecen chocheces* (IX: 114); *que yo no digo que la sobre* (IX: 117); *sé que la dabas dinero* (IX: 117); *yo no sé qué la daría Paco* (X: 118); *Paco Álvarez la tenía sorbido el seso* (X: 119); *Yo la decía bajito a Transi* (X: 123); *Pues yo tengo que decirle* (X: 124); *¿con qué cara la digo que...* (X: 124); *sólo por echarla el humo al pasar* (X: 125); *hay que darle tiempo de ser mujer* (XI: 134-135); *que la pones a una la cabeza loca* (XII: 143); *que a Valen la dices que [...]* (XIII: 155); *que no la va* (XIII: 155); *a que la limpien el cutis* (XIII: 155); *¡claro que se la nota!* (XIII: 155); *dándole dinero en Madrid* (XIV: 156); *y no la ha pasado nada por eso* (XIV: 156); *y la disguste que otra intervenga* (XIV: 157); *lo que la pasa a tu cuñada* (XIV: 157); *no sé en qué hora se la ocurrió a tu madre* (XIV: 158); *yo la digo que sí* (XIV: 163); *no la voy a decir que [...]* (XIV: 163); *la guerra la costó más que a otros* (XV: 173); *si los domingos la sigo mandando los niños* (XV: 173); *y yo la doy la razón* (XVI: 175); *no voy a decirle* (XVI: 175); *llevaba siete años lo menos sin hablarla* (XVI: 183); *a mamá la hubiese gustado que [...]* (XVII: 187); *ya se la pasará* (XVII: 189); *que lo que yo la dije* (XVII: 189); *a Valen la sobra razón* (XVII: 190); *a Esther la hubiera parecido muy bien* (XVIII: 194); *contar con la gente para hacerla un favor?* (XVIII: 199); *y ni la hablas casi ni nada* (XVIII: 201); *y si no la gustan* (XVIII: 201); *la faltó tiempo* (XVIII: 201); *que la gusta meter la nariz en todo* (XVIII: 201); *a Bene, que te vió [sic], la faltó tiempo* (XIX: 209); *tú dirás qué podía contestarla* (XIX: 209); *que no se la escapaba una* (XIX: 211); *sabía*

*dónde la apretaba el zapato* (XIX: 211); *papá y mamá no la hablaban* (XX: 215); *a ella, hijo, la dio sentimental* (XX: 216); *por no hacerla un feo* (XX: 217); *que yo la doy la razón* (XX: 218); *no es cosa de decirla* (XX: 218); *ni sabe por dónde la da el aire* (XXII: 234) *y la recete unos choques de vitaminas* (XXII: 235); *si a la niña no la da por ahí* (XXV: 256); *no la ha de faltar dónde elegir* (XXV: 257); *que la iría a ella* (XXVI: 268); *basta donde no la importaba* (XXVI: 270); *que lo que yo la dije* (XXVI: 270); *pues la mandé una cuartilla tuya* (XXVI: 270); *la arropa los hombros* (Epílogo: 284); *como si los pechos [...] la pesasen ahora* (Epílogo: 287); *Estber la lee la necrología de “El Correo”* (Epílogo: 293); *¿La importa que pase un momento?* (Epílogo: 293); *deja que Valentina la pase un brazo por los hombros* (Epílogo: 296) (DELIBES HICKEY, 1977).

The Leo HICKEY edition of *Cinco horas con Mario* in 1977 made absolutely no changes to the 81 instances of *laísmo* in the early printing dated 1967.

The 81 instances are all in the feminine singular: this search through *Cinco horas con Mario* uncovers no examples in the novel of *las* replacing *les* in the plural. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language’s *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* (2006) states:

*LAIÍSMO*. 1. *Es el uso impropio de la(s) en función de complemento indirecto femenino, en lugar de le(s), que es la forma a la que corresponde etimológicamente ejercer esa función* (REAL, 2006: 389). The *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* here recognises that *laísmo* can also occur in the plural.

The Royal Academy is trying to eradicate a usage that -according to Manuel SECO- was first recorded in the *Poema de Mio Cid* in the early thirteenth century:

*El uso de la como complemento indirecto femenino (laísmo) en lugar de le, que es la forma académica, es general en la lengua hablada familiar, y sobre todo popular, de Castilla; es muy antigua (hay ejemplos en el Poema del Cid) y aparece en muchos escritores distinguidos de siglos pasados (Moratín es sistemáticamente laísta); pero no ha alcanzado la extensión y el prestigio del leísmo (SECO, 1998: apartado 4 (c)).*

An Internet check failed to locate exact line references of possible examples of *laísmo* in the *Poema de Mio Cid*. This non-specialist’s re-reading of the *Poema* produced an extremely tentative little list of possible instances of *laísmo*, based on certain uses of the verbs *servir*, *enseñar* and *rogar*. Reference, however, to Rafael LAPESA’s much-cited article of 1968 -“Sobre los orígenes y evolución del leísmo, laísmo y loísmo”, with 24 very dense pages on *leísmo*, 2 pages each on *laísmo* and *loísmo* and a three-page conclusion- gave a valuable warning. LAPESA states:

*El laísmo está documentado también desde la Edad Media, pero sin ejemplos seguros hasta época posterior a los del leísmo.*

Lapesa’s footnote number forty-nine reads:

*No es seguro el del Roncesvalles, v. 16, <<mandó la cabeça alçare / que la lñnpjasen la cara>>, pues podría entenderse error del copista antiguo por <<quel alñnpjasen>>. Tampoco son válidos, en su mayoría, los citados por Gessner, pág. 6: el de Mio Cid, 2545, <<enseñar las bemos dó las heredades son>> no es dativo, pues el verbo enseñar regía doble acusativo, tanto en latín como frecuentemente en español antiguo [...] (LAPESA, 1968, 523-551 and LAPESA, 2000: volume I, 279-310).*

To interpret 'doble acusativo' as 'two objects, one direct, one indirect' is clearly wrong: the Latin and the early Spanish verb took two objects, both expressed in the accusative (direct object) case. This LAPESA footnote suggests the great difficulty for the non-specialist of pinning down precisely the very earliest examples of *laísmo*.

LAPESA, though, does recognise the use of *laísmo* in the fourteenth century, its steady and at certain moments rapid increase in usage thereafter and its durability even after being banned in 1796. LAPESA's main text continues:

*Los más antiguos [ejemplos] fidedignos [del laísmo] pertenecen al siglo XIV. A mediados de él se escribió el códice de las Partidas alfonsíes donde se lee que los confesores <<debense guardar de las non parar mientes>> a las mujeres que acudan a ellos en penitencia [...] A lo largo del siglo XV se advierte mayor frecuencia en autores de las dos Castillas [...] Durante el siglo XVI continúa el moderado progreso de la para el dativo en escritores del Norte y Centro (Santa Teresa, verbigracia), sin rebasar la proporción minoritaria [...] No parece haber alteración sensible en Cervantes y Lope de Vega, pero sí en los madrileños de las generaciones siguientes: en Quevedo el laísmo es casi exclusivo; en Calderón, predominante. La <<Historia de la Academia>> que antecede al Diccionario de autoridades manifiesta igual preferencia laísta, y las tres primeras ediciones de la Gramática académica (1711, 1772 y 1781) dan por bueno el ejemplo <<diganla lo que quieran>>. El gusto de la corte prendía en escritores de otras regiones, como el canario Iriarte. Sin embargo, la reacción llegó pronto, y en 1796 la Academia, rectificando su postura, volvió por los fueros de la etimología y declaró incorrecto el laísmo. La condena no ha logrado desterrarlo del habla llana de las Castillas y León, donde sigue teniendo plena vitalidad; pero ha contribuido a restringir notablemente su uso literario (LAPESA, 2000: volume I, 303-304).*

In our time, the Academy's *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* (2006) continues to condemn *laísmo*:

*No son correctos los usos ejemplificados a continuación, en los que la forma la funciona como complemento indirecto: \*"Cuando abrió la Marcelina, LA dijeron: ¿Vive aquí Marcelina Domínguez?" (JmnzLozano Grano [Esp., 1988]; \*Yo LA di un beso a Josefa (Pombo Héroe [Esp., 1983])" (REAL, 2006: 389).*

The usage, however, refuses to die. While not universal, *laísmo* seems to be deeply rooted both in everyday speech over a widespread area of the Castilian heartland and in

some of that heartland's best writers. This might cause a measure of alarm for the foreign student of Spanish -especially as it is presented in Delibes' *Cinco horas con Mario*-. The 81 uses in *Cinco horas con Mario* of the 'impropriety' known as *laismo* demand comment.

These 81 instances of *laismo* within the 290 pages of *Cinco horas con Mario* show that Delibes uses the *laismo* approximately once every three and a half pages of text. Reference to four other Delibes novels throws up some interesting data.

*El camino* [1950], set in a village probably in northern Castile, shows only eleven possible instances of *laismo* within 181 pages of text in the Harrap edition of 1967 -one instance every sixteen and a half pages:

*Y a las cotillas no las viene mal todo lo que les caiga encima* (V: 56); *Lo cierto es que a la Guindilla mayor, que basta entonces se la antojara aquel valle una cárcel vacía y sin luz* [...] (V: 60); *La prostituta es la que hace de su cuerpo y de las gracias que Dios la ha dado un comercio ilícito* (V: 62); [...] *y el gobernador la había socorrido con un donativo* (VI: 65); *A su hermana la sulfuraba esta precocidad* (VII: 73) [???]; [...] *él sabía perdonarla y consolarla. Esto era lo que la urgía: un poco de consuelo* (VIII: 84) [???]; *La Mica cogió mucho cariño al pueblo de su padre. Reconocía que Méjico no la iba* [...] (IX: 91); *A la Mariuca la gustaba Quino, el Manco, porque era su antítesis* (XI: 108); - *¿Tan pronto?* - *la preguntó la Chata* [...] (XI: 111); [...] *y a la Sara no la disgustaría que un hombre le dijese cuatro cosas* [...] (XV: 148); *El Peón se inclinó ahora hacia la Sara y la cogió osadamente una mano* (XV: 152) (DELIBES POLACK, 1967).

*Las ratas* [1962], also given a rural setting, deploys only eight possible instances of *laismo* over its 107 pages of text in the Harrap/Hickey edition -one instance every thirteen and a half pages:

*Mas el hombre, cada vez, la oprimía distraídamente el hocico* [a la perra] (1: 27); *solía decir* [la Sabina] *que viendo al Nini charlar con los hombres del pueblo la recordaba a Jesús entre los doctores* (1: 30); *el Nini regaló a la señora Clo un nido vacío de pardillos, advirtiéndola que* [...] (5: 49); *Don Ciro, que era el párroco de Torrecillorigo* [...], *era demasiado joven y tímido para contradecirla* (9: 76); *En la cueva bastaba que el niño la señalara la entrada con un gesto para que el animal* [la perra] *saliera y se desabogara.* (10: 80); [...] *y así que el niño marchaba la invadía* [a la Columba] *una sensación de desasosiego* [...] (12: 91); *Claro que esto la ocurría* [a la Columba] *cada vez que* [...] (12: 91); *y la Sime* [la Simeona] *pidió que la echasen una mano* (14: 107) (DELIBES HICKEY, 1969).

In what might be viewed as a robust dramatisation of Fray Antonio de Guevara's *Menosprecio de corte* [= ciudad] *y alabanza de aldea* (Valladolid, 1539), Delibes' 1978 novel *El disputado voto del señor Cayo*, set in its second half in a village close to the mountains in -possibly- northern Burgos province, shows only nine possible instances of *laismo* over its 178 pages of print -one example every 22 pages:

*En dos años la hace dos hijos y, luego, si te he visto no me acuerdo* [a Laly, female character] (I: 25); [...] *miró a Laly, la pasó un brazo por los hombros y la atrajo hacia sí* (II: 42); - *A punto fijo no la puedo decir* [a Laly] (III: 59); *Rafa la cogió una mano* [a Laly] (IV: 72); *la echó una ojeada* [a la nota, a la cuenta] (IV: 72); *Víctor la miró profundamente a los ojos* [a Laly] (IV: 80); *No entran muy voluntarias* [las abejas], *no señor. Yo no sé qué las pasa hoy.* (V: 94); *Hay que entresacarlas* [las remolachas = beetroot plants] *y ponerlas cama aparte* (VI: 106); *Yo la aupé a ella al borrico y la dije: "Sube"* [a la que sería la mujer del señor Cayo] (VIII, 139) (DELIBES, 1987).

*Los santos inocentes* [1981], set in neighbouring estates in the countryside of Extremadura in western Spain, generates ten possible cases of *laísmo* -one every fourteen pages of text:

[...] *y tampoco las otras* [letras del alfabeto] *hablan si nosotros no las prestamos la voz?* (II: 36-37); *y la Régula suspiraba, acunaba a la Niña Chica y la espantaba los mosquitos a manotazos* (II: 43); *y la Señora no la quitaba ojo a la Nieves* (II: 49); *y cada vez que veía a la Régula preocupada por el Azarías, la decía* (III: 70); *la arrullaba* [a la Niña Chica] *y la decía a cada paso...* (III: 72); *ya es una moza* [la grajeta = jackdaw], *mañana la buscaré otra lombriz* [earthworm] (III: 81); *ae, déjala que vuele* [la milana = kite, bird of prey], *Dios la dio alas para volar* (III: 82); *y el Azarías la miraba* [a Miriam], *sonriéndola con sus encías sonrosadas* (IV: 113); *y, entonces, el Azarías la sonrió* [a la grajeta = jackdaw] (VI: 165); *se armó, aculató la escopeta y la tomó los puntos* [a la grajeta = jackdaw], *de arriba abajo como era lo precedente* (VI: 170) (DELIBES, 2007).

These four novels -*El camino*, *Las ratas*, *El disputado voto del señor Cayo* and *Los santos inocentes*- together generate only 38 cases of *laísmo*. Why is there a much higher frequency -81 instances- of *laísmo* in the single novel *Cinco horas con Mario*?

*El camino* is based on traditional third-person narration. Only two of the eleven possible instances of *laísmo* are voiced by characters in direct speech, one by the village parish priest (V: 62) and one by the main character, Daniel el Mochuelo, the boy about to leave his village (XV: 148). The other nine instances are in the voice of the author. *Las ratas* is also based on third-person narration: all eight possible instances of *laísmo* form part of the third-person narration led by the external author. *El disputado voto del señor Cayo* also uses third-person narration set around the extensive dialogues. *Laísmo* there is used once by the city character Rafa on page 25, once by the *tabernero* in the hamlet of Berruoco on page 59 and three times by the countryman el señor Cayo on pages 94, 106 and 139. The other four instances form part of the author's external narration. In *Los santos inocentes* only three instances of *laísmo* are voiced by characters, all of them rural: the instance on pages 36-37 by el Porquero [the swineherd], the instance on page 81 by el Azarías and the unit on page 82 by la Régula. The remaining seven form part of the authorial external narration. Over these four novels only ten uses of



*laismo* out of 38 are voiced directly by the characters. The other 28 instances are in the voice of the Valladolid -born author.

In *Cinco horas con Mario*, however, apart from the external third-person narration in the Prologue and Epilogue (29 pages plus 12 pages = 41 pages), the central 27 chapters (around 240 pages) are a sustained first-person monologue. One single first-person speaking voice dominates over 85% of the text. A single first-person voice sustained over so many pages should reveal the speaker's most intimate feelings and ingrained speech habits -including the flaws often embedded in *el lenguaje familiar*.

The first-person speaker in this monologue is María del Carmen (Menchu) Sotillo, widow of Carlos Díez Collado. She is a woman in her early forties, mother of five children between 22 and 3 years of age. Within this extended monologue Menchu very occasionally quotes fragments voiced by other characters: the speaking voice, for example, at VII, 92 is that of Menchu's father. The vast majority of the instances of *laismo* listed above are in Menchu's voice.

To what extent is Menchu's use of *laismo* a speech habit that is specific to her? Menchu does use vocabulary and turns of phrase that seem utterly personal. The first of a small selection of three examples might be her use of 'para inter nos' [= 'between ourselves'], mixing Spanish and Latin, when confiding in the dead Mario (I, 39; III, 57; III, 59; VI, 89; VIII, 100; XI, 130; XII, 144; XIII, 154; XIV, 156; XXVI, 268).

Secondly, in her long 'conversation' with Mario, Menchu regularly deploys negative introductory tags, often just before a wounding comment on or criticism of her husband. A good example comes on the first page of chapter I:

*Y no es que yo vaya a decir ahora que tú hayas sido una cabeza loca, cariño* [I: 39].

These negative introductory tags include:

*Y no es que me queje* (I: 39); *Y no es que yo vaya a decir ahora* (I: 39); *No es que yo diga o deje de decir* (I: 40); *y no es que te reproche nada* (I: 43); *y no es que a mí eso me interese* (I: 45); *¿No es natural que [...] te hicieras cargo del pequeño?* (I: 45-46); *Y no es que me pille de sorpresa* (II: 48); *Y no sería porque papá no te lo advirtiera* (II: 48); [...] *que tu padre, no es que yo lo diga, cariño, que toda la ciudad andaba en lenguas, tenía fama de roñoso* (II: 53); *que no es que yo lo diga* (II: 53); *y un catedrático, no te digo que sea un ingeniero* (II: 54); *y no es que yo diga [...]* (III: 57-58); *y no es que vaya a decir* (III: 59); *no es porque yo lo diga* (III: 60); *no es porque yo lo diga* (III: 62); *y no es que yo pretendiera que me besases* (IV: 65) - sixteen examples in chapters one to four.

There are a great many further examples of these negative introductory tags in every chapter of the novel.

Thirdly, Delibes *qua* omniscient author comments:

*El suéter negro de Carmen clareaba en las puntas de los pechos debido a la turgencia. En puridad, los pechos de Carmen, aun revestidos de negro, eran excesivamente pugnaces para ser luto (Prólogo: 16).*

As the third-person narration begins to give way in the Prologue to italicised monologue, Menchu says:

*La poitrine ha sido mi gran defecto. Siempre tuve un poco de más, para mi gusto (Prólogo: 17).*

The borrowing of the French word 'poitrine' is a polite option for the more direct Castilian 'pechos'. Other uses by Menchu of 'la poitrine' for 'bosom' appear at IV, 66; X, 119; XVIII, 196; XX, 214; XX, 217. Whether using 'la poitrine' or 'los pechos' (XX, 213; XX, 214; XX, 217; XXVII, 279), Menchu is aware that she is still attractive to men:

*¡Anda que si yo hubiera querido! Con cualquiera, Mario, fíjate bien, con cualquiera. Mira Eliseo San Juan, el de la tintorería, sin ir más lejos [...] y, como ése, otros que me callo, tonto del bigo, que estoy para gustar, que no soy ningún vejstorio, qué te has creído. Los hombres todavía me miran por la calle [...] (I: 44).*

Menchu's use of 'la poitrine' may be middle-to-upper class delicacy of speech, but its much-repeated use and that of 'pechos' also show her considerable vanity.

These three linguistic 'tics' could be specific to Menchu as an individual, though in the use of 'poitrine' there may also be a slight overlay of *clasismo*. Menchu mentions in passing, for example, that her mother spoke French:

*[...] estuvo un año en Francia, en Dublín, creo, no me bagas caso, pero sabía el francés a la perfección, lo leía de corrido, pásmate, igualito que el castellano (V: 76).*

Menchu -whose sense of geography seems poor- may possibly have picked up the use of 'la poitrine' -as with so much else- from her ferociously upper-class, much admired, much quoted and much imitated mother.

What is Menchu's own social, economic and political profile?

Menchu is very much of the provincial city of Valladolid in north-western Castile. Menchu sees herself as an upper middle-class woman (II: 53), belonging to the upper strata of polite society in that city, a very model of impeccable moral and social background and behaviour. In matters political she is extremely conservative, a supporter of the principle of absolute authority:

[...] *y es que un país es como una familia, lo mismo, quitas la autoridad y ¡catapum!, la catástrofe* (XXIII: 244).

She supported Franco during the Civil War of 1936-39 and has maintained her support for him into the nineteen-sixties. She is a very traditional Catholic, hostile to the new liberal ideas emerging from the Vatican Council of 1962. She believes that a young woman from a good family should at most complete secondary education and then seek out a good husband. She does not believe in college or university education for women or for the poor. She worries that university education may be radicalising her eldest son Mario. In Menchu's world-view, respectable married women of her class do not go out to work:

[...] *porque, ¿desde cuándo trabajan las señoritas?* (V: 77).

She does not approve of women working in general, of bikinis, of foreign influences coming in through the opening of the country to tourism. She is very suspicious of foreigners, as in

*esos extranjeros* (XIII: 152) and in:

*si los extranjeros esos piensan en cristiano* (XXV: 257).

She detests Protestants and Jews:

*pero antes la muerte, fíjate bien, la muerte, que rozarme con un judío o un protestante* (VI: 90).

She looks down on the lower orders within her own society -the working class whether rural or urban, the servant class, beggars and prostitutes. She seems to lack true (Christian) charity.

She is very disappointed that her husband Mario, a *Catedrático de Instituto* (head of department in a state secondary school appointed after passing rigorous competitive exams) and writer of articles for the local newspaper, does not earn enough to pay for several more servants to help her look after the five children. She also resents not having a car, not having a better flat, not having a new dinner service so that she can return full dinner invitations to her circle of middle-class friends.

Menchu is by no means a monster, and may be justified in complaining about her husband's neglect of her physical, psychological and social needs. Yet whereas in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) Molly Bloom's lengthy monologue is continuously life-affirming, Menchu's monologue affirms a much less edifying set of values based on self-centredness, shallow materialism and hypocrisy. Menchu is, finally, class-ridden,

utterly convinced of -and confident of- the superiority of her personal and class-defined tastes and values:

*Delibes quiso reproducir en el carácter de Menchu todos esos rasgos del verdadero arquetipo de mujer provinciana española de clase media, de espíritu reaccionario y mentalidad pequeñoburguesa, a la que presenta como ejemplo de la más ciega sumisión a los prejuicios y convencionalismos, dogmatismos e hipocresía de la sociedad en que vive* (RINCÓN, no date: 8).

So Menchu's use of 'para inter nos', 'la poitrine' and the negative introductory tags may be personal habits of speech, overlaid perhaps to some extent by speech patterns derived from her middle-class background or pretensions. Yet the extensive use of *laísmo* by Menchu in *Cinco horas con Mario* seems to go beyond her individual speech patterns and beyond her middle-class values, ambitions and prejudices. To what extent, then, might Menchu be part of a speech community, the city and region of Valladolid, thoroughly imbued -over centuries- with the speech habit of *laísmo*?

The practice of *laísmo* is condemned by the Royal Academy. A casual assumption might be that such impropriety or incorrectness would be found in rural, backward and remote areas, in social groups with fairly low levels of formal education. By the same assumption, 'correct' or standard syntax would be more likely in the better educated populations of larger towns and cities. Yet in the rural environments of *El camino*, *Las ratas*, *El disputado voto del señor Cayo* (the second half) and *Los santos inocentes*, the village characters make relatively little use of *laísmo*. The very high level of use of *laísmo* in *Cinco horas con Mario* may suggest that the city of Valladolid is a particular *cita del -bastion?- of laísmo*.

In her monologue, Menchu is alone, throughout the night, sitting beside the dead body of her husband, in the quiet of a darkened room. The setting is contemplative, almost confessional. She must know rationally that Mario cannot hear her, that no-one else can hear her 'thoughts'. In her 'conversation' with Mario, she has no reason to feel obliged to 'speak proper'. She need make no attempt to correct the language of the thoughts that flow across her mind as she slowly turns the pages of Mario's Bible on her lap and reflects on her years of courtship and marriage. The flow of thoughts and words seems utterly natural and authentic, unmediated by any concerns for correctness or propriety. Her speech is instinctual.

Might Menchu's level of formal education and intelligence counter-balance her instinctual use of *laísmo*?

Menchu's formal education is limited to secondary school certificate level. Her sense of geography is poor: she associates Dublin with France. Her great admiration for her mother's skills in French suggests that she herself has no foreign languages. She is in awe of her father's occasional contributions of cartoons to the right-wing monarchist

newspaper in Madrid, the *ABC*. Her tastes in reading are for the mildly spicy -but not revolutionary- titillations of cheap fiction: the obligatory womanizing Tenorio figure must be seen to repent before the last page. She is hostile to the entry of women into higher education:

[...] *porque, en definitiva, ¿para qué va a estudiar una mujer, Mario, si puede saberse? ¿Qué saca en limpio con ello, dime? Hacerse un marimacho, ni más ni menos, que una chica universitaria es una chica sin femineidad, no le des más vueltas, que para mí una chica que estudia es una chica sin sexy, no es lo suyo, vaya, convéncete* (V: 75).

She opposes serious education for the poor because she sees it as a threat to the class system that she so much wants to preserve:

[...] *y andáis revolviendo cielo y tierra para que los pobres estudien, otra equivocación, que a los pobres les sacas de su centro y no te sirven ni para finos ni para bastos, les echáis a perder, convéncete, en seguida quieren ser señores y eso no puede ser, cada uno debe arreglárselas dentro de su clase como se hizo siempre* (V: 79).

She worries that the university education permitted for her son Mario may be turning him towards radical social and political thinking:

*Mira Mario, veintidós años y todo el día de Dios leyendo o pensando, y leer y pensar es malo, cariño, ... pero la mayor parte de los chicos son boy medio rojos, que yo no sé lo que les pasa, tienen la cabeza loca, llena de ideas estrambóticas sobre la libertad y el diálogo y esas cosas de que hablan ellos* (III: 60).

Her attitudes are thoroughly anti-intellectual. She fails to see or chooses not to see the real moral or social import of the Bible fragments underlined by her husband which are used to launch each chapter. She rejects out of hand anything foreign or different or alien, disliking intensely both Protestants and Jews. She has no understanding of her husband's need for intellectual stimulation, which he finds in his circle of male friends. She is hostile to her husband's newspaper articles seeking various measures of social reform. She seems to have few cultural interests or ambitions of her own. She has overall a fairly low educational and cultural profile.

Being of such average intelligence and formal education, Menchu is incapable of analysing or questioning her own convictions and prejudices, her materialism or her presumption of superiority over lesser beings and classes. Even if she were fully aware of her regular use of the incorrect *laismo*, she would find it very difficult to eliminate it from her speech, especially in the very private setting of her night-time vigil. Given all of this, the foreign student of Spanish trained in correctness might conclude that Delibes' insistence on Menchu's habit of *laismo* is meant to reflect the everyday speech -including deeply-ingrained grammatical flaws- of perfectly typical and ordinary -in the English sense of 'ordinary'- members of the middle classes in Valladolid.

How far beyond the city or province of Valladolid might this phenomenon of *laísmo* extend? BUTT and BENJAMIN suggest that the phenomenon is common in the spoken Spanish of Madrid. (BUTT and BENJAMIN, [1988], 1989: 113).

An Internet source states:

*Entre las incorrecciones que cometemos con más frecuencia al hablar y al escribir, sobre todo en las zonas central y noroccidental de Castilla, se encuentran muy posiblemente el leísmo, el laísmo y el loísmo* (DEFENSOR, no date).

From this, it would seem that Galicia and Asturias in the north-west and Extremadura in western Spain are zones relatively free of *laísmo* -though there are three instances of *laísmo* voiced by three different rural Extremaduran characters in *Los santos inocentes*.

Another site comments:

*Hemos de tener en cuenta que en Madrid y en otras zonas del centro peninsular los errores en el uso de los pronombres átonos son muy frecuentes, y que de ahí han pasado también a ser frecuentes en muchos de nuestros medios de comunicación* (ARCO, no date).

Manuel ALVAR in “Lengua y habla en las novelas de Miguel Delibes” also projects a broad basis for the use of *laísmo*:

*Para cualquier no castellano es una agresión el uso del leísmo y del laísmo, tan del habla de Valladolid y del occidente peninsular* (ALVAR, Internet).

Coral García Rodríguez in “El leísmo y el laísmo en la enseñanza-aprendizaje del E/LE” [E/LE = español como lengua extranjera] explains:

*Como es bien sabido, leísmo y laísmo son fenómenos presentes fundamentalmente en Castilla-León, Santander, parte de La Rioja, Madrid y Castilla-La Mancha* (GARCIA RODRIGUEZ, Internet).

A careful reading of *Cinco horas con Mario*, then, gives the foreign student of Spanish a good opportunity to familiarise her/himself with the challenging phenomenon of *laísmo*. If such a student accepts the language in Delibes’ *Cinco horas con Mario* as authentic and accepts also the guidance of BUTT and BENJAMIN, Manuel ALVAR, Rafael LAPESA, Inés FERNÁNDEZ-ORDÓÑEZ, Coral GARCÍA RODRÍGUEZ and the anonymous Internet contributors cited here, then s/he can more easily come to terms with the following:

- the use of *laísmo* has a long, long history in Castilian Spanish;
- *laísmo* is an impropriety condemned consistently by the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language since 1796;
- in spite of such formal condemnation, *laísmo* remains powerfully rooted in the speech of the Valladolid area, perhaps especially amongst the middle classes;
- the prestige of Valladolid Spanish means that *laísmo* is likely to continue to be used and heard regularly in the speech of Castile (Castilla-León and Castilla-La Mancha), Madrid, many areas of western mainland Spain and as far north as Santander (Cantabria);
- the established presence of *laísmo* in Madrid speech and Madrid's important role in the media may allow *laísmo* to continue to expand its area of influence and use.

Given the indestructibility of the incorrect *laísmo*, for the foreign student trained in “correct” Spanish, where now lies the concept or ideal of “correctness”?

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