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*O libro da vaca. Monografía etnolingüística do gando vacún.* By Pedro Benavente Jareño and Xesús Ferro Ruibal. Santiago de Compostela: Centro Ramón Piñeiro para a Investigación en Humanidades, Xunta de Galicia, 2010. Pp. 1637. A free electronic edition is available under:  
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*O libro da vaca. Monografía etnolingüística do gando vacún* [“The book of the cow. An ethnolinguistic monograph of cattle”] is a monumental, exhaustive study of cattle in Galicia, which combines the linguistic and ethnographic perspectives (taken in their broadest sense), paying special attention to the paremiological and phraseological fields.

Cattle is a key point in the definition of Galicia as a nation, as it meant a critical support for family sustenance throughout history and, in spite of the deep socioeconomic restructuring of the last decades, it still is, even today, a fundamental basis for the Galician economy. It’s no wonder, therefore, that the cow historically has become a collective reference that achieved, without a doubt, the category of totemic animal of Galicia. In this way, the work we are reviewing puts forward with pleasantness and erudition the complex web that has been woven around the cow, in which innumerable fields interact: economics, ethnography, phraseology, history, linguistics, literature, paremiology, sociology, veterinary science, etc.

*O libro da vaca* is the result of two decades of joint work by Pedro Benavente Jareño, veterinary surgeon, and Xesús Ferro Ruibal, philologist. One of the major assets of this work is, precisely, the collaboration between two specialists from two very different scientific fields: the cooperation between the specialist in animal medicine and the linguist creates a synergy that brings into dialogue the popular culture and the veterinary science, both to analyse critically some customs and traditions, and to corrob-

rate the wisdom and wit of those popular beliefs that are supported by a scientific basis.

The authors' stated aim is to provide a multidisciplinary approach to the cow, which examines the world related to this animal from different views and it is not addressed only to specialists, but to be accessible to the general public, especially to Galician cattle breeders. This intention is thoroughly fulfilled, since the authors know how to adequately combine technical rigour and exhaustiveness in the presentation of linguistic, literary, and veterinarian data with an educational, extraordinarily enjoyable style. Besides, all this material is complemented with a large number of historical and cultural references that encourages reading and highlights the importance gained by the cow in different periods of time, inside and outside Galicia.

The book is organised in 16 chapters followed by a complete bibliography. A good example of the degree of exhaustiveness is that the index alone takes up twenty pages. Its organisational layout stands as follows (page 35):

1. Introduction. | 2. Outside (determination of age, ethnology, morphology, proper names) | 3. Characteristics (positive, negative and neutral) | 4. Physiology (eating, drinking, excrements, growth, moo, movements) | 5. Anatomy (the skin; digestive, respiratory, genito-urinary, and circulatory systems; nervous system and locomotive systems) | 6. Beef in the food (the slaughterhouse, the butcher's, beef pieces, giblets and sub products, milk and dairy products, the kitchen and cattle products business) | 7. Reproduction (cattle selection and improvement, oestrus, fertilisation or mounting, pregnancy, birth, puerperium, lactation) | 8. Pathology (general terms, unidentified pathology, infectious pathology, parasitic pathology, medical pathology, surgical pathology, reproduction pathology, syndromes and other unidentified pathologies; veterinary or healer actions and gear) | 9. The cattle and the cattle breeder (a brief historical approach to Galician cattle industry, cattle, cattle breeder, actions and gear of the cattle breeder, the yoke, the cart, ploughing and other actions, and gear of the cattle

breeder; the stable, cattle feeding; the pasture; the wolf) | 10. Cattle business (the deal, the fair, the dealer, cattle in the fair) | 11. Shows and rites with oxen. Bullfighting | 12. Beliefs and cattle calendar (beliefs and superstitions, predictions and calendar) | 13. Everything is like a cow (the cow as a reference) | 14. Cattle humour | 15. The cow in the Galician toponymy (needed cautions when dealing with toponymy, place names that make reference to cattle; other place names discussed) | 16. The cow in literature (an anthology of literary texts with references to cattle) | 17. Sources of this monograph (initials system, sources, municipalities and informants indices).

All those chapters are divided in a large number of thematic sections, which many times have up to four levels of depth. Most of them have the same distribution. First of all, there is an introduction to each subject of study in order to be contextualised from the point of view of economy, ethnography, philology, history, sociology, or veterinary science, accordingly. Then are put forward the vocabulary (with definition and, often, with use examples in literature), the phraseology, and oral tradition related to the issue in question. In total, *O libro da vaca* gathers 12020 lexical units, presents 5343 phraseological units, and brings back 1383 elements belonging to other fields of the oral tradition (songs, tales, legends, riddles, and prayers). Unfortunately, due to its great length, the volume does not include indices to directly access all those elements, so every section must be scanned in order to find anything. However, the authors are working on the creation of indices of words, proverbs and songs, which will be available in the website of *Centro Ramón Piñeiro para a Investigación en Humanidades* ([www.cirp.es](http://www.cirp.es)) as of March 2013. Although the printed work includes a CD-ROM with a database, it has a quite poor design and it is not very useful; so as long as the above mentioned index is not released, it is recommended to resort to the electronic edition to find the elements.

According to the subject matter of the specialised magazine to which this review is addressed, I will focus on the treatment of the phraseological and paremiological aspects referring to cattle, which occupy a privileged position in this monograph, including 2757 proverbs, 1982 collocations and locutions, and 604 formu-

lae. To that regard, we should keep in mind that one of the authors of *O libro da vaca*, Xesús Ferro Ruibal, is a prominent researcher in Galician phraseological and paremiological studies, one of the scientific fields in which he carries out a rigorous, tireless work, especially on the cataloguing and edition of proverbs, and on the creation of specialised forums such as *Cadernos de Fraseoloxía Galega* (<http://www.cirp.es/prx2/frase.html>). Therefore, we can deduce that the authors depart from an exhaustive knowledge of the Galician phraseology, and demonstrate a proven competence in the practical and theoretical work in regards to those linguistic structures.

We have to say also that this is not the first Benavente and Ferro's approach to the paremiology related to cattle. In 1995, they published their notable *Refraneiro galego da vaca*, which compiled 1471 proverbs, a number that virtually doubles in *O libro da vaca*. This spectacular increase in the inventory reveals both the great presence of the cow in the Galician collective unconscious, and the persistence of the authors, always attentive to add new material.

A high percentage of the proverbs are spread across the book, depending on the cow's aspect they refer to (anatomy, food, business, etc.). However, pp. 1369 to 1393 include some hundreds proverbs that do not refer directly to the cow, but rather to some aspect of the cattle as a metaphor for external realities. Thus, Benavente and Ferro classify, in more than one hundred themes, a large amount of proverbs that show the all-embracing presence of the cow in the Galician paremiology to describe a wide variety of situations. Let's see some examples:

Justice/law: *Quero máis que me morra a vaca que ver a xusticia na casa* ["I'd rather my cow die than see the law at home"]

Value of life: *Máis val de vivo cheirar a touro que de morto a ouro* ["I'd rather be alive smelling like a bull than dead smelling like gold"]

Theft: *Quen vende xatiños e vacas non ten, de algures lle ven* ["He who sells little calves and does not have cows, he got them somewhere"]; *Quen come a vaca do*

*Rei, a cen anos paga os ósos* ["He who eats the king's beef, he takes one hundred years to pay the bones"].

Dangers: *O millor carro pódese emborcar* ["Even the best cart may overturn"].

Relationship between men and women: *A vaca que non come cos bois, ou come antes, ou come despois* ["The cow not eating with the oxen, eats later or eats before"].

It must be noted that *O libro da vaca* is not a "simple" proverb compilation grouped in themes, but there is an important work of critical reflection around the paremias included. A prominent example can be found from page 1277 to 1285, devoted to proverbs that present the cattle as a barometer able to forecast weather into the future, as in *Cando espirran os bois, troca o tempo a pior* ["When oxen sneeze, the weather changes to worse"] (page 1280), as well as in those proverbs in the weather field that make reference to cattle, such as in *Cando a garcia vai pró mar, colle os bois e ponte a arar* ["When the heron goes to the sea, take the oxen and set about ploughing"] (p. 1281). The authors classify the proverbs according to the different atmospheric phenomena involved, they suggest scientific basis to support the different information transmitted, and they even try to reconcile some divergences among the sources. All along the work, there appear similar paremiological comments: when showing the blurred line that sometimes occurs between stanzas and proverbs (pp. 426), when examining, in light of the existing proverbs, whether popular culture appreciates more lamb or beef (pp. 475-476), when analysing the recommendations of proverbs on the suitable moment to plough and to sow wheat and rye (pp. 950-952), or on the right amount of fertilizer (pp. 980-981), just to mention some examples.

The authors do not disregard either the theoretical aspects of paremiology, as we can see in pp. 213-214, in which Valerii Mokienko's teachings on the stability of proverbs regarding dairy production are applied. If there is something the authors are not missing, it is the reflections about the quality of the sources included in *O libro da vaca*, such as on pp. 48 and 454, in which the proverbs seem to be an invention of the collector, probably a veterinary surgeon or an agronomist who wanted to give advice to farmers using this popular format.

As deduced from the above, the contribution of the authors to the field of paremiology is essential, not only because of their collection and classification of Galician material, but also because of their detailed analysis and comments, which compose an exemplary piece of work that should be taken as a starting point for undertaking similar tasks in other languages and/or semantic fields.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from proverbs, there are other phraseological aspects that deserve a prominent position in the work we are dealing with, always combining the elements' cataloguing and classification work with the critical analysis of the materials. As we have mentioned before, *O libro da vaca* collects around 2000 locutions and 600 formulae. Although most of this information is spread across the book, according to the thematic fields to which it belongs in the livestock world (cow illnesses, farming tasks, etc.), there are also other sections devoted to explore in detail different phraseological aspects; in this sense, a particularly important chapter is 13.1.5, appropriately entitled *A vaca, espello no que os galegos miran a súa vida* ["The cow, mirror in which Galician people look at their life"], as these pages by Benavente and Ferro clearly confirm that cattle is a major cognitive referent when creating metaphorical constructions, formulae, and any kind of phraseologism.

From page 1317 to page 1357, in section 13.1, we can find hundreds of designations in which the cow world serves to name animals and things, and even abstract concepts such as education, emigration, freedom, opportunity, homeland, effort, resignation, old age, etc. Thus, just to give a couple of examples of the first case, the *Lucanus cervus* is popularly known as *escornabois* [ox \*gorer] or *vacaloura* [chestnut-brown cow] and different modifiers following the name of the ox refer to a large variety of crustaceans: *boi bravo* [wild ox], *boi de area* [sand ox], *boi de Francia* [ox from France]... We can also find uncountable formulae and phraseological units that borrow the reference to the cow in order to name qualities, defects, feelings, etc. I cannot find a better way to describe it than paraphrasing part of the authors' inspiring words in section 13.3.6 ("The cow symbology in Galician phraseology and oral tradition"). In the phraseology linked to the cow, it appears as a beneficial animal.

It is a symbol for large dimensions (*comer coma un boi* [“eating like an ox”]) or for intensity (*bruar coma un boi sen capar* [“mooing like an uncastrated ox”]). It is also a referent for fatness (*gorda coma unha vaca* [“fat as a cow”]). If somebody speaks a lot, it is said that *ten lingua coma a vaca rabo* [“to have a tongue like a cow’s tail”]. It can be symbol of nudity (*ir en coi-ro coma unha vaca* [“To be naked like a cow”]) and of freedom (*andar solto como vaca sen choca* [“To be loose like a cow without a cowbell”]), of helpfulness (*dar a todo coma a vaca do pobre* [“To do everything, like the poor’s cow”]), but also of slave labour (*andar ás dúas mans coma a vaca do pobre* [“Walking on one’s two hands, like the poor’s cow”]). The cow and the ox are referents for calm, slowness, and sloth as well (*os bois de Búa, que, cando ollan para o carro cargado, xa súan* [“as soon as Búa’s oxen see the loaded cart, they sweat”]), but also for opposite values, such as restlessness (*andar coma o rabo da vaca no mes de agosto* [“to be like the cow’s tail in August”]). The cow’s sight inspires a feeling of confusion and surprise (*quedar como unha vaca mirando para o tren* [“to look like a cow watching the train”]). The examples are innumerable and, in any case, going over the pages of this book will provide informative material as well as an extraordinary pleasant time. We challenge other scholars to undertake similar works in other countries in order to observe similarities and differences on the phraseology related to the cow.

The comprehensive bibliography presented in *O libro da vaca* deserves a specific analysis. As it is expected from such a precise and exhaustive work, its level of detail is extraordinary, since it consists of almost sixty pages of references, with a total of 2411 sources of primary and secondary material. An outstanding amount of the entries are made up of phraseological collections and works of critical analysis, so this bibliography becomes an indispensable reference to those who want to be informed about the existing material on this field in Galicia.

The main problem this bibliography has – and of which the authors are aware (notes 1 and 3, page 1572) – derives from the fact that *O libro da vaca* is a work that started to be developed two decades ago. The underestimation of the amount of data that was to be compiled after all these years and the computer limitations of that time, lead to adopt some solutions that, years later

with much better technical means at our disposal, did not show themselves to be the most productive. This is the case of the order of the bibliography using initials created from the authors' names, a quite heterogeneous, unpredictable process that complicates the lineal search of the works included. In that sense, it is more advisable to use the bibliographical list available in the CD-ROM or to consult the PDF edition using the search-engine. The bibliography does not show either the existence of an electronic edition of the consulted works. The reason is clear enough. Who could imagine, at the beginning of the 1990s when the number of computers with Internet connection in Spain was less than one thousand, that most of our linguistic research and paremiological collections were going to be openly accessible in the Net? I think it is worth mentioning, especially for non-Galician readers, that in order to look up any of the primary or secondary sources included in the bibliography, we have the essential *Bibliografía Informatizada da Lingua Galega* (BILEGA, <http://www.cirp.es/bdo/bil/bilega.html>) to know whether there exists an electronic edition and to consult a content synopsis of most of them.

As a conclusion, I would like to reiterate that we have a fundamental work for the ethnolinguistic study of cattle that has no parallel in other countries. It also provides an exemplary reference point for other interdisciplinary teams to undertake similar tasks, referring to this or other semantic fields, in other linguistic domains, especially in those who show how the lexical and phraseological richness declines due to interferences with other languages or to socioeconomic changes. In addition, each of its 1637 pages demonstrates that technical rigour and erudition are not incompatible with pleasantness and being accessible to all audiences. Academic literature has, in the work of Benavente and Ferro, a perfect illustration of Horatio's maxim *to delight and enlighten*.

***Bibliographic reference***

Benavente Jareño, Pedro / Xesús Ferro Ruibal (1995): *Refraneiro galego da vaca*. Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, Centro de Investigacións Lingüísticas e Literarias Ramón Piñeiro. Electronic edition at: [http://www.cirp.es/pub/docs/ref\\_vaca.pdf](http://www.cirp.es/pub/docs/ref_vaca.pdf)

*Note*

<sup>1</sup>It would even be possible to undertake work that would complete the information of Benavente and Ferro referred to Galicia, as the cow's semantic field is so rich that, in spite of the authors' efforts, it is impossible to collect all the proverbs. As an example, in a recent edition of unpublished material of the Diccionario Geográfico Popular de España ["Popular Geographic Dictionary of Spain"] started by Nobel Laureate Camilo José Cela (<http://ilg.usc.es/ditados>), we find some proverbs that complement those shown from page 1480 to page 1482 in *O libro da vaca*, which have toponymic references that illustrate jokes and rivalries amongst neighbouring towns: Home de Melide, muller de Sobrado e vaca de Furelos, que os leven os demos ["Man from Melide, woman from Sobrado and cow from Furelos, let the devils take them"] // Vacas de Mandaio e nenas de Cesuras, aparta delas coma de Xudas ["Get away from the cows from Mandaio and the girls from Cesuras, just like from Judas"] // Os de Escomabois xunguen as vacas e ordeñan os bois ["People from Escomabois yoke the cows and milk the oxen"] // A quen mal lle queirás deseaye ser baca ou boi da Ameá ["If you wish him any harm, wish him to be cow or ox from Ameá"]; the latter proverb can be explained due to the large slopes existent in the place, a noticeable problem for loaded carts].

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