

Review

LUIS UNCETA GOMEZ and LUKASC BERGER (Eds), *POLITENESS IN ANCIENT GREEK AND LATIN*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 424. ISBN 9781009123037 (hbk) £90.00; 9781009124164 (pbk); 9781009127271 (eBook).

This volume is very much in line with the trend in recent decades to move away from traditional classical philology, which focused on editions, commentary and interpretation of classical texts, and instead to apply contemporary linguistic, philosophical and anthropological theories to the study of ancient Greek and Latin. Linguistic im/politeness research is the focus here, and it must be said that a classicist will learn a great deal from reading this volume. A thorough introduction (1–42) is devoted to an overview of im/politeness research from its beginnings in early pragmatics and speech act theory by John Langshaw Austin and John Searle (1962 and 1969) with scholars such as Robin Lakoff and Geoffrey Leech (1973 and 1983), through the seminal study by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978 and 1987), to the latest ‘second-’ and ‘third-wave’ theories with their focus on discourse analysis and context dependence. In addition, a useful glossary is provided at the end (366–7), explaining key terms from im/politeness theories used frequently throughout the volume and not necessarily familiar to a traditionally trained classicist, such as ‘face’ and ‘facework’, ‘political behaviour’ and ‘mitigator’.

The editors, both primarily Latinists, bring together Greek and Latin texts to produce a convincing study which, apart from the introduction mentioned above, consists of thirteen chapters, also with a clear bias towards Latin but with important contributions focusing purely on Greek (Denizot on the particle $\delta\eta$, Lloyd on the terms of friendship in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Sorrentino on politeness markers in Menander and van Emde Boas on conversation analysis in Euripides). This is a very useful attempt at studying Greco-Roman antiquity, especially in the climate of the usual separation between Greek and Latin. In particular, two chapters provide a real comparison of data from the two languages, namely Barrios-Lech on injunctions in Greek and Roman comedy corpora and Zago on reflection on im/politeness in late Greek and Roman grammarians and commentators, in particular on *charientismos*, which is a kind of euphemism denoting the pragmatic relationship of the speaker to the addressee, *astismos* meaning grace and intelligence, and *reticentia* as a way of using vague expressions to deal with things that are difficult to say.

Apart from the final chapter by Zago, all the other contributions deal with dialogic texts in one form or another. Im/politeness strategies in linguistics presuppose records of spontaneous speech, and since the emic perspective on ancient languages is, for obvious reasons, limited, the contributors discuss speech-oriented texts within the framework of Jonathan Culpeper and Merja Kytö’s 2010 study of early modern English dialogues (see the Introduction: 27). In particular, the distinction between ‘speech-like texts’, such as letters and dialogues from novels, ‘speech-based texts’, such as speeches and trial proceedings, and ‘speech-purpose texts’, such as plays (Culpeper and Kytö 2010, 17), is applied to Greco-Roman literary and non-literary texts. Given all the caveats of recovering ‘real’ oral productions, this is a compelling and perhaps the only possible approach.

An obvious question that always arises when modern theories are applied to ancient material is how this really changes our understanding of the sources. I have to say that some important conclusions are reached, and reading these chapters has made me rethink some concepts. Thus, the first two contributions (Barrios-Lech and Denizot), which independently applied the findings of modern linguistics, demonstrate the fruitful integration of linguistics, anthropology and classics. Greek and Latin native speakers did indeed use words like ‘please’ (e.g. $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota\beta\omicron\lambda\omicron\omega$, $\iota\kappa\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\omega$, *amabo*, *quaeso*, *obsecro*) differently. Such terms made themselves at home in the Latin language. In Greek, however, the words did not become formulaic and remained channels of supplication. Instead, there is a plethora of particles and vocatives used by Greek speakers to soften interaction. This example leads to a more general conclusion, repeated in several other chapters in the volume, which is the juxtaposition of the more egalitarian Greek societal codes with the much more hierarchical, status-sensitive and complex Roman system of communication.

This is indeed a valuable observation, which may require more work on the part of Hellenists to analyse different genres in different periods, given that the ‘egalitarian’ ideology of the Athenian polis was not necessarily maintained in the same form in, say, Hellenistic Egypt. For Roman urban linguistic behaviour, however, this volume argues from different perspectives: Barrios-Lech on the

comparison of Greek and Roman comic playwrights (esp. 62–3 and 73–5), Mencacci on hedging devices in Cicero’s letters, speeches and fictional dialogues (esp. 124–6), Berger on the analysis of interruptions in Plautus and Terence (225–6), van Gils and Risselada on third-party politeness in Cicero’s letters (271–2), Hall on Varro’s teasing techniques and the aristocratic concept of urbanity (287–91), Unceta Gómez on the ‘moral order’ in Plautus (esp. 297–8). In this vein, the discussions of some key concepts of Roman behaviour — again without a counterpart in Greek! — such as *auctoritas* (‘influence, prestige’), *existimatio* (‘reputation’), *dignitas* (‘esteem’) and *verecundia* (‘awareness of one’s rank in social transactions’), as well as *amicitia* (‘friendship’) are very stimulating (on discussion, cf. Barrios-Lech 62 and 75, Unceta-Gómez 297–301, Mencacci 124–5, van Gils and Risselada 256 and 272, Iurescia 336–7). With *amicitia*, it might be worth comparing its Greek counterpart *φιλία*; building on David Konstan’s seminal 1997 study of the concept of friendship in the Greco-Roman world, studies of im/politeness along the lines of the present volume would certainly open up new insights. In this volume, the discussion of Socrates’ use of vocatives such as *phile*, *hetaire*, *ariste*, *beltiste*, *agathe*, *makarie*, *thaumasie*, *daimonie*, *gennaie* in Plato (Lloyd *passim*) is very thought-provoking.

Finally, I should mention a very suggestive but rather isolated contribution by van Emde Boas on conversation analysis and in particular on the interaction between Theseus defending democracy and the herald celebrating despotic power in Euripides’ *Supplikes* (vv. 399–597). Drawing on ‘second-wave’ theories of politeness, which argue that linguistic behaviour is not inherently im/polite but can only be judged in a given context, van Emde Boas argues that the tension between the political language of diplomacy and the behaviour depicted in this scene creates a significant plot-driving tension.

All in all, the book is a qualitatively thoughtful and well-crafted product that can be equally of use to students and scholars of theoretical and historical pragmatics as well as classics. If modern theories can be applied to ancient sources, this is an exemplary account of how it can be done.

Aristotle University Thessaloniki
anovokhatko@lit.auth.gr

ANNA NOVOKHATKO

doi:10.1017/S0075435824000625

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.