

International Colloquium on Ancient Greek Linguistics

University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, August 2018.

“Entwining Greek with Asian Speech”: An Example of *Secondary Foreigner Talk* in Timotheus of Miletus’ *Persae*

Milena Anfosso

After the conquest of the Lydian capital Sardis by Cyrus the Great in 546 BC, the complex geopolitical situation of Anatolia was reduced for the first time to political and administrative unity. However, the ethnolinguistic context remained heterogeneous thanks to the tolerant linguistic policy of the Persians (Basello 2013). The linguistic repertoire of Anatolia during the Achaemenid Era included many varieties: the dominators’ languages, old Persian and Aramaic; the epichoric languages, one of which was Phrygian; and Greek, whose penetration into the intermediate zone between the western coast and the Anatolian hinterland was promoted by the Achaemenid administration (Asheri 1983: 15–17). In this multilingual context, the scene represented by Timotheus of Miletus in his nome *Persae* (late 5th century BC) is not implausible. In one of the direct speeches describing the Battle of Salamis (480 BC), the poet decides to give the floor to a Phrygian soldier from Kelainai, engaged in the Persian army. After having been seized by his Greek aggressor and dragged by the hair (140–149), the Phrygian soldier begs him to spare his life, speaking in broken Greek (150–161).

The incomplete linguistic competence of a non-native speaker in a target language is known as a linguistic register called *broken language* (Ferguson – DeBose 1977), which can be easily imitated by a native speaker through a register called *secondary foreigner talk* (Hinnenkamp 1982: 40–41). In a literary context, this *secondary foreigner talk* is a very precise technique that aims to obtain different effects, from mimetic realism to humorous parody, according to the author’s needs (Traugott – Pratt, 1980: 358–397). Through his attempt to reproduce the overall effect of the Phrygian soldier’s imperfect knowledge of Greek, Timotheus connects himself to a tradition already established by Ancient Comedy (cf. Aristophanes: Scythian archer, *Thesmophoriazousae*; Pseudartabas, *Acharnians*; Triballic God, *Birds*). Several studies have been devoted to these passages, including from a sociolinguistic point of view (Brixhe 1988, 2012; Willi 2003: 198–225), but this has never been done before for Timotheus’ Phrygian soldier.

Commentators (among the most recent ones: Janssen 1984; Hordern 2002; Sevieri 2011; Lambin 2013) have often focused on the “grammatical mistakes” present in the Phrygian’s speech, considering their analysis as an end in itself. However, it seems much more interesting to situate these deviations from the norm of Greek language in the framework of *secondary foreigner talk*, in order to understand the strategies used by Timotheus to reproduce in a credible way the type of Greek spoken by the Phrygian. In light of the latest knowledge of Phrygian, it is possible to see the extent to which Timotheus pushed his mimesis, allowing us to identify the elements of the Phrygian’s speech that would actually be compatible with an Ionic Greek dialect learned by a non-native speaker of Phrygian origin, and to distinguish them from those attributable only to the poet’s linguistic creativity in the literary *secondary foreigner talk*.

References:

- Asheri, David. 1983. *Fra ellenismo e iranismo: studi sulla società e cultura di Xanthos nella età achemenide*. Bologna: Pàtron.
- Basello, Gian Pietro. 2013. “Le unità amministrative dell’impero achemenide (satrapie): il potere percepito dai popoli sottomessi e le immagini di ritorno”. *Ricerche storico bibliche* 25. 37–97.
- Brixhe, Claude. 1988. “La langue de l’étranger non grec chez Aristophane”. *L’étranger dans le monde grec: actes du colloque organisé par l’Institut d’Études Anciennes, Nancy, mai 1987* (ed. Loinis, Raoul). Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy. 113–137.
- . 2012. “Le pseudo-pidgin de l’étranger non grec chez Aristophane”. *Folia graeca in honorem Edouard Will: Linguistica* (eds. Brixhe, Claude, Vottéro, Guy). Nancy: Association pour la Diffusion de la Recherche sur l’Antiquité (A.D.R.A.). 65–81.
- Ferguson, Charles A., DeBose, Charles E. 1977. “Simplified Registers, Broken Language, and Pidginization”. *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (ed. Valdman, Albert). Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press. 99–125.
- Hinnenkamp, Volker. 1982. *Foreigner Talk und Tarzanisch: Eine vergleichende Studie über die Sprechweise gegenüber Ausländern am Beispiel des Deutschen und des Türkischen*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag.
- Hordern, James. 2002. *The Fragments of Timotheus of Miletus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Janssen, Tittje H. 1984. *Timotheus, Persae. A Commentary*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.
- Lambin, Gérard. 2013. *Timothee de Milet. Le poète et le musicien*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Sevieri, Roberta. 2011. *Timoteo. I Persiani*. Milano: La vita felice.
- Traugott, Elizabeth C., Pratt, Mary L. 1980. *Linguistics for Students of Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Willi, Andreas. 2003. *The Languages of Aristophanes. Aspects of Linguistic Variation in Classical Attic Greek*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.