

The role of language in the process of social integration: from the ancient *Cena Trimalchionis* to the contemporary world.

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Abstract: The Ancient World *melting pot* is not so different from the globalized contemporary society, in which various people and languages are constantly meeting each others. In particular, language still plays a leading part in the process of social redemption, integration and cultural identity formation. This fact provides us a prominent opportunity to compare these two backgrounds, noticing how the *hic et nunc* could help explaining the past, which, in turn, could improve our analysis of the present. The proposed contribution intends to apply some of the most known linguistic models on a Latin literary text, the famous *Cena Trimalchionis* in Petronius' *Satyricon*, in order to investigate its sociolinguistics implications. This system can frame a further understanding of the passage, which gives back the possibility to outline some evergreen rules about the relationship between the governing and the emerging class. As the *Cena* shows, freedmen, who accorded a high prestige to Latin, aimed to imitate it; yet, they were at the same time also bound to their mother tongue. Their linguistic choices reveal both their wishes and their limits. According to this view, a good use of language, with the consequent sense of being member of a group, granted – and still grants nowadays – a privilege path towards emancipation to foreigners and lower classes. This presentation aims to give some examples on the different levels of communication.

Key words: immigration's sociolinguistics aspects, actuality of ancient culture, social redemption and integration, cultural identity formation, linguistic prestige and loyalty.

Introduction

A parallel reading of an ancient text with the contemporary society, although they are very far from each other, however, could offer many consonances on a linguistic level: the background changes, but the dynamics of a linguistic phenomenon remain unchanged. This type of reading helps to understand the present as well as the Ancient World, offering new guidelines to interpret the text.

This working hypothesis is the starting point of the following contribution, which aims to study the role of language in the process of social integration, applying some of the most known linguistic models on a Latin literary text, the famous *Cena Trimalchionis* in Petronius' *Satyricon*.

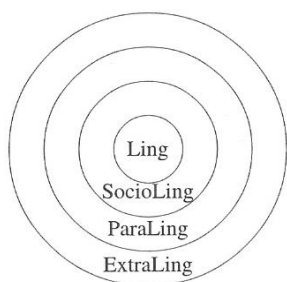
This is a sort of experimental first realistic representation – as Auerbach (1956) 33 notes – because the characters, who do not coincide neither with the author nor with the mock narrator, are talking about what they see and think and they do that using their slang. The *Cena* expresses a new subjectivity because Petronius describes a sort of objective popular everyday environment through the subjective process. Therefore, it presents sociolinguistic cues to investigate.

Language patterns applied

Communicative Competence

Every freedmen's word and action will be considered as a communicative act. The assessment of each one will be coherently based on the model of Communicative Competence theorized by Freddi²⁵⁹ and provided below.

²⁵⁹ The reproduced graph is sourced from Freddi (1999), but this model of communication had already been studied by the same author (Freddi 1979; 1994).



Ling = linguistic competence
SocioLing = sociolinguistic competence
ParaLing = paralinguistic competence
ExtraLing = extralinguistic competence

Communicative competence includes four integrated skills: linguistic, sociolinguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic. First of all, speakers must recognize and produce grammatically correct sentences and therefore master all the three levels of language (phonology, morphology and syntax, lexicon). Secondly, sociolinguistic competence concerns diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic and diachronic language varieties, because speakers must also use appropriate codes for the socio-cultural context. Finally, they must control the prosodic elements (fluency, speech rate, pitch, stress, use of pauses), which are not strictly relevant to the linguistic level but essential to the communication, and non-verbal codes, which are used along with language or as a replacement for it. The latter ones include kinesics (body motion, gesture and facial expressions), proxemics (distance or space), artifacts (clothing, jewels, cosmetic aids) and sensory skills.

A good communication needs also two higher-level competences: the semiotic-cultural one, whereby the communicative act is effective and consistent with the cultural scene in which it takes place, and the textual one, because we communicate through texts, which are extended linguistic sequences with a specific purpose and a coherent internal structure. At last, there is an important subordinate competence, the metalinguistic one, whose object is the thinking on the language.

Interlanguage

According to the literary and epigraphic sources, the Roman Empire involved various people and languages and its social fabric was very complex. Despite the hierarchical structure, there was a real upward social mobility both in Rome and the provinces, as Alföldy (1987) 206-207 shows. This opportunity of emancipation led foreigners and lower classes to imitate upper classes education and modes of speech: Latin was the language of the State and of the governing class and it became the most prestigious one²⁶⁰. However, the natural loyalty of the emerging class to their native language – most of all Greek – and their lack of liberal education produced an imperfect linguistic and cultural acquisition. The *Cena*, which probably took place in a provincial town in Campania²⁶¹, offers a meaningful picture of this attitude staging some upstarts, whose names reveal a humble foreign origin²⁶², opposed to the educated guests.

The same situation characterizes the globalized contemporary world, in which speakers always need to find appropriate language forms and features to their purposes. Alongside conditions of bilingualism and diglossia, they often settle the mixture of languages taking on a new code: they leave the less influential language varieties in the context in which they live, using the one in which they recognize a cultural superiority²⁶³. They start a second language learning (L2), because of its favourite role in the process of social redemption, integration and cultural identity formation. Yet, they still remain bound to their first language (L1), the mother's one, and this implies many interferences.

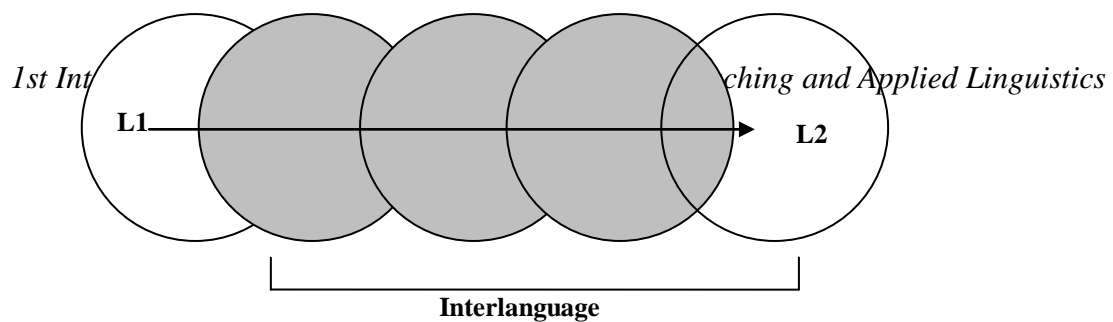
For these reasons, freedmen's language in *Petronius' Satyricon* reveals the same features of an interlanguage, which is a language developed by a speaker, who already has its own natural language, when he starts to learn a second language. The schema reported here is taken from Freddi (1994) 76.

²⁶⁰ About the spread of Latin in the Empire and its consequent learning as L2 see Banfi (1991) 84.

²⁶¹ The exact place is controversial, but it is certainly a *Graeca urbs* – as it is defined in the text (81,3) – in southern Italy, probably in Campania. See Petersmann (2000) 84-86.

²⁶² As Priuli (1975) 25 explains, all other freedmen have a non-Latin and typical of lower condition name, excepted *Fortunata*, *Scintilla*, *Primigenius* and *Proculus*, which are anyway Latin names of humble origin.

²⁶³ The relationship between language and power is well-defined by Heller (1995) 159.



It is a personal grammar, because it depends on the assumptions that the speaker has made about the operation of the L2; it is temporary, because he aims to achieve a full acquisition of the L2; finally, it is dynamic, because it is constantly modified on the line L1,L2.

Chomsky's generative grammar, which provides, below the superficial differences, a universal grammar as a mental and biological equipment, allows us to identify universal mental processes in language learning. This implies that the elements of a second language learning are almost identical, regardless of the language.

Most errors are due to the interference mechanism: second language learners compare it with their mother tongue and this fact can both help and damage the learning process distorting the marks of the L2. Most of them are morphosyntactic, but they can also concern the phonology and the lexicon. Others can be related to physiological and psycho-emotional factors, which are the subject of psycholinguistics. In general, the awareness of these errors can be an incentive to improve or cause a fall-back of speech on more familiar codes becoming a source of shame.

Analogy, which appeals to well-known forms, is one of the main features of the interlanguage, since speakers are supported from a regular basis (Astori 2007-2008 118). In contrast, hypercorrectness is very common, because they try to use elegant forms, even when not required, to demonstrate their control over the language. Yet, code-switching, borrowing, calque and neologism are frequent. It is a very concrete language and often controls the micro-language, but not the conventional expressions. Simplification is usual, as evidenced by the frequent use of modal verbs and the decomposition of a word into its primitive constituents.

Analysis of freedmen's acts

In the *Cena Trimalchionis*, the master of the house, Trimalchio, and the other freedmen clash with the narrator Encolpius and the other educated characters. It becomes a show – with discussions, performances, dances, music, enormous dishes and unexpected twists – in which freedmen flaunt their wealth, their social redemption and their integration into the upper-classes of society. Their purpose involves every aspect of communication, but it always reveals its limits: they are *parvenu* and the *scholastici* laugh at them because of their imperfect use of the rules. Examples of their attempts will be shown according to the different levels of Communicative Competence.²⁶⁴

Linguistic level

[58,7] «*Athana tibi irata sit, curabo, et <ei> qui te primus "deuro de"fecit. Non didici geometrias, critica et alogas menias, sed lapidarias litteras scio, partes centum dico ad aes, ad pondus, ad nummum. [8] Ad summam, si quid vis, ego et tu sponsiunculam: exi, defero lamnam. Iam scies patrem tuum mercedes perdidisse, quamvis et rhetoricam scis. Ecce "qui de nobis longe venio, late venio? Solve me". [9] Dicam tibi, qui de nobis currit et de loco non movetur; qui de nobis crescit et minor fit. Curris, stupes, satagis, tamquam mus in matella [...]*».²⁶⁵

The *libertus* Hermeros is talking, in an outburst of rage against Ascylos and Giton, who are laughing at him and his colleagues. This is an advantaged communication context in order to analyze freedmen's language, because in those moments they lose the control and make many errors, which follow the interlanguage pattern outlined.

In this case, according to the classification of Boyce (1991) 46-54, we can see phonological peculiarities, like the doric form *Athana*, typical of the south Italian speech, and one syncopated form, *lamnam*, which is widely used in colloquial popular language. From a morphosyntactic point of view, there are several irregularities. Indeed, instead of *quis nostrum*, he uses *qui de nobis* thrice: here the partitive genitive is replaced by a prepositional construction, according to the simplification of syntax of the cases, and the interrogative pronoun *quis* is confused with *qui*. Yet, according to the same tendency, there is the simpler use of indicative (*currit, movetur, crescit, fit*) in indirect questions, where the literary language employs the subjunctive, and the present *defero* is employed in place

²⁶⁴ The critical edition used is edited by Müller (1995⁴), the translation by Michael Heseltine (1913).

²⁶⁵ «[I will bring down the wrath of Athena on you and the man who first made a minion of you. No, I never learned geometry, and criticism, and suchlike nonsense. But I know my tall letters, and I can do any sum into pounds, shillings and pence. In fact, if you like, you and I will have a little bet. Come on, I put down the metal. Now I will show you that your father wasted the fees, even though you are a scholar in rhetoric. Look here: "what part of us am I? I come far, I come wide. Now find me". I can tell you what part of us runs and does not move from its place; what grows out of us and grows smaller. Ah! You run about and look scared and hustled, like a mouse in a pot»].

of the future. About the lexicon, there are a diminutive, *sponsiacula*, which is common in vulgar speech, and a code-switching into Greek, □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ (Adams 2003 21). It is not isolated inside Hermeros language, since he arrived in that Greek city when he was a young slave and he served there forty years, as he tells us; Greek has obviously an heavy influence on his speech. Finally, the form *geometriarum* used in the plural form could represent an incorrect use of a word he has learned, whose specific meaning remains unknown to him. In fact, “*he contrasts his business education and practical literacy with the liberal education of the scholastici*” (Boyce 1991 91), in order to affirm again he is proud of his gained status.

Sociolinguistic level

It is very difficult to choose a passage in order to demonstrate the sociolinguistic valence of freedmen’s words, because every character has different origins, status and ambitions, which are unavoidably revealed by his language, which changes according to the context. The following example, a part of the consideration about the present time of the poor old clothes dealer, Echion, is indicative of the will to speak classical Latin, but also of the unsatisfactory result.

[45,5] «*Et Titus noster magnum animum habet et est caldicerebrius: aut hoc aut illud, erit quid utique. Nam illi domesticus sum, non est mixcix. [6] Ferrum optimum daturus est, sine fuga, carnarium in medio, ut amphitheater videat. Et habet unde: relictum est illi sestertium trecenties, decessit illius pater. Male! Ut quadringenta impendat, non sentiet patrimonium illius, et sempiterno nominabitur. [7] Iam Manios aliquot habet et mulierem essedariam et dispensatorem Glyconis, qui deprehensus est, cum dominam suam delectaretur. Videbis populi rixam inter zelotypos et amasiunculos. [8] Glyco autem, sestertiarus homo, dispensatorem ad bestias dedit. Hoc est se ipsum traducere. Quid servus peccavit, qui coactus est facere? Magis illa matella digna fuit quam taurus iactaret. Sed qui asinum non potest, stratum caedit. [9] Quid autem Glyco putabat Hermogenis filicem umquam bonum exitum facturam? Ille milvo volanti poterat ungues resecaere; colubra restem non parit. Glyco, Glyco dedit suas; itaque quamdiu vixerit, habebit stigmam, nec illam nisi Orcus delebit. [10] Sed sibi quisque peccat. Sed subolfacio, quia nobis epulum daturus est Mammea, binos denarios mihi et meis. Quod si hoc fecerit, eripiet Norbano totum favorem. Scias oportet plenis velis hunc vinciturum. [11] Et revera, quid ille nobis boni fecit? Dedit gladiatores sestertiaros iam decrepitos, quos si sufflasses cecidissent; iam meliores bestiarios vidi. Occidit de lucerna equites, putares eos gallos gallinaceos; alter burdubasta, alter loripes, tertiarus mortuus pro mortuo, qui habe<ba>t nervia praecisa [...]*».²⁶⁶

As Boyce (1991) 82 notes, “*he is an opportunist and frustrated social climber: while he does not hesitate to attack the wealthy and famous such as Glyco and Norbanus in the most rabid and venomous fashion once they have been disgraced and their fortunes have declined, he displays a cloying obsequiousness and even affects to be on intimate terms with those who are currently in power, such as Titus and Mammea*”. Therefore, he wants to hide his lower-class origin and, with regard to language, he uses hyperurbanisms, like neuter in place of masculine (*nervia*) and deponent in place of active (*delectaretur*). However, as his political judgment is based only on popular materialistic opinions about gladiatorial combats, banquets and money (Ciaffi 1955 139), from a linguistic point of view, “*in an attempt to compensate for the popular tendencies in his speech, he commits solecisms of the opposite sort*” (Boyce 1991 83).

Moreover, despite the effort, his language is characterized by a high number of vulgarisms (Boyce 1991 46-54), which reveal once again his origin and upbringing, marking his exclusion from the upper circles: the

²⁶⁶ [«And our good Titus has a big imagination and is hot-blooded: it will be one thing or another, something real anyway. I know him very well, and he is all against half-measures. He will give you the finest blades, no running away, butchery done in the middle, where the whole audience can see it. And he has the wherewithal; he came into thirty million when his father came to grief. If he spends four hundred thousand, his estate will never feel it, and his name will live for ever. He has already collected some clowns, and a woman to fight from a chariot, and Glyco’s steward, who was caught amusing Glyco’s wife. You will see the crowd quarrel, jealous husbands against gallants. A twopenny-halfpenny fellow like Glyco goes throwing his steward to the beasts. He only gives himself away. It is not the slave’s fault; he had to do as he was told. That filthy wife of his rather deserved to be tossed by the bull. But a man who cannot beat his donkey, beats the saddle. How did Glyco suppose that a sprig of Hermogene’s sowing would ever come to a good end? He was one for paring the claws of a kite on the wing, and you do not gather figs from thistles. Glyco? Why, Glyco has given away his own flesh and blood. He will be branded as long as he lives, and nothing but death will wipe it out. But a man must have his faults. My nose prophesies a good meal from Mammea, twopence each for me and mine. If he does, he will put Norbanus quite in the shade. You know he will beat him hands down. After all, what has Norbanus ever done for us? He produced some decayed twopenny-halfpenny gladiators, who would have fallen flat if you breathed on them; I have seen better ruffians turned in to fight the wild beasts, He shed the blood of some mounted infantry that might have come off a lamp; dunghill cocks you would have called them: one a spavined mule, the other bandy-legged, and the holder of the bye, just one corpse instead of another, and hamstrung»].

In this part, Trimalchio is giving the instructions for his testament, tomb and epigraph, and he is using a rather high-flown language, because of the importance of these things in Roman society, according to Magnani (1997²) 138.

The sentence provided above is the actual *inscriptio*, which should have been engraved on his tomb and it aims to be perfectly appropriate to the socio-cultural background. He takes on the *tria nomina*, which from Caesar's age identified the Romans free citizens, but he adds a second famous *cognomen* to increase the feeling of nobility and greatness, betraying the expectations. Also the entire inscription meets the same goals: it is traditionally included in an architectural structure with a figurative element, it remembers Trimalchio's office of *sevir in absentia* and his Roman values of *pietas*, *fortitudo* and *fidelitas*. At the end, it presents the address to the *viator*, so that the dead will live in his memory.

Textual level

A text must respect the seven standards of textuality to be correct. According to De Beaugrande – Dessler (1984), those are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. If one or more of them fail, the communication can be compromised. This happens several times during the *Cena*, as the following example shows.

[59,3] [...] *Mox silentio facto «scitis» inquit «quam fabulam agant? Diomedes et Ganymedes duo fratres fuerunt. [4] Horum soror erat Helena. Agamemnon illam rapuit et Dianae cervam subiecit. Ita nunc Homeros dicit quemadmodum inter se pugnent Troiani et Tarentini. [5] Vicit scilicet et Iphigeniam, filiam suam, Achilli dedit uxorem. Ob eam rem Ajax insanit et statim argumentum explicabit».*²⁷⁰

Trimalchio's speech is clearly cohesive, coherent, informative and it has a situational relevance, because he is translating the lines of *Homeristae Graecis*. His intent is also proper, because he wants to compare the mythic Ajax with the chef Ajax, who soon after will slice a boiled calf. But it fails in acceptability and intertextuality, because the recipients have a more correct cultural heritage and they will find incomprehensible deformations of the mythical tradition.

Metalinguistic level

There are two moments in which the freedmen make some remarks about their language, opposed to the Latin of the educated characters, and in both of them they feel the same sense of inferiority. However, the reactions are different:

[46,1] «*Videris mihi, Agamemnon, dicere: "quid iste argutat molestus?"*. *Quia tu, qui potes loquere, non loquis. Non es nostrae fasciae, et ideo pauperorum verba derides. Scimus te prae litteras fatuum esse [...]*».²⁷¹

Against the rhetorician Agamemnon, Echion admits to speak incorrectly (as the active form of *loquor* and *argutor*, the change of *pauperorum* from the third to the second declension and *prae* with accusative show), but this perception leads him to attempt a classical Latin learning. Later, indeed, his aggression is attenuated and his tongue tries again to imitate them, *qui possunt loqui*, to be part of their group.

Niceros, on the contrary, refuses to stand against the educated characters and tells them a popular folktale, with a lower-class Latin:

[61,4] «[...] *Itaque hilaria mera sint, etsi timeo istos scholasticos, ne me [de]rideant. Viderint: narrabo tamen; quid enim mihi aufert qui ridet? Satius est rideri quam derideri*».²⁷²

Conclusions

²⁷⁰ [Soon there was silence, and then he said, «you know the story they are doing? Diomedes and Ganymedes were two brothers. Helen was their sister. Agamemnon carried her off and took in Diana by sacrificing a deer to her instead. So Homer is now telling the tale of the war between Troy and Parentium. Of course he won and married his daughter Iphigenia to Achilles. That drove Ajax mad, and he will show you the story in a minute»].

²⁷¹ [«Now, Agamemnon, you look as if you were saying, "what is this bore chattering for?". Only because you have the gift of tongues and do not speak. You do not come off our shelf, and so you make fun of the way we poor men talk. We know you are mad with much learning»].

²⁷² [«Well, it shall be pure fun then, though I am afraid your clever friends will laugh at me. Still, let them; I will tell my story; what harm does a man's laugh do me? Being laughed at is more satisfactory than being sneered at»].

This work is intended as a further example of the fruitful dialogue between classicism and the present. In fact, according to the modern sociolinguistic and cognitive studies, we can analyze the language shift of the Ancient together with the contemporary World in the process of social integration. The former studies²⁷³ prove that the mechanisms are the same over time, the latter that they are universal, regardless of the language.

As the analysis of the text shows, on one hand the language of the freedmen can be interpreted as an interlanguage which tends to the upper-class Latin but contains a lot of errors due to the interference mechanism and to the creativity of the speakers. On the other hand, their attempt to integrate themselves shows evergreen rules: outcast people try to imitate every kind of feature of the governing class in order to emancipate themselves, but they end up exaggerating or damaging them. Their communicative acts often mark the difference and reveal what they want to hide. However, their perceptions, their aims and their motivations can improve the outcome. According to this view, a good use of language still plays a decisive role.

²⁷³ See Giacalone Ramat (2000) 60 in her consideration about William Labov's statement "use the present to explain the past".

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