

BOOK REVIEW

Linguistic Interaction in Roman Comedy. By PETER BARRIOS-LECH. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xxiii + 381. Hardcover, \$120.00. ISBN 978-1-107-12982-5.

This is a study in Latin pragmatics and sociolinguistics. The book's five sections cover directives, command softeners and strengtheners, greetings, closings and interruptions, and talk within and across status boundaries, concluding with case studies of *Captivi*, *Eumuchus* and *Adelphoe* that illustrate how role shifting (i.e., pretending to be a different stock type) can affect speech patterns. The project is grounded in both Latin- and modern linguistics, particularly work on gender and politeness. It is accessible to a broad audience, in the sense that Latin quotations are translated and concepts are carefully explained, as, for example, the sociolinguistic premise that the more integrated a speaker is within a group, the more its linguistic norms exert pressure, or the distinction between positive politeness, which shows affection and approval, and negative politeness, which emphasizes an addressee's autonomy. There are English examples for concepts unfamiliar to classicists and the terminology is fairly transparent, e.g., "convergence behavior" (intended to narrow the social distance to an addressee) or "back channeling" (supportive interruptions).

It is not possible to do justice to the detailed arguments of this book, but the example of *heus* may serve to illustrate its methodology and findings. *Heus* appears 133 times in Plautus and Terence, under three functions: initiating conversation (45.1%), re-establishing contact during a conversation (38.3%) and focusing attention on an upcoming utterance (16.5%). The first function is so generic (Barrios-Lech compares it to a phone ringing) that a vocative is often added to capture attention, a point that Donatus notes but this book quantifies: 51% of occurrences.

One reason why *heus* alone may get ignored is that it often precedes questions or commands to low status addressees, 49% of whom are slaves, and yet *heus* is not typical of slave-owners' speech, as one might expect. Only 29.7% of the Plautine examples are spoken by high status figures—much lower than their overall share of speech (41.2%)—and this is not simply due to chance. One of the most useful practices of this book is that it performs basic statistical tests of its

data. In this case, a chi-square test shows a preference for lower status speakers in Plautus with a solid confidence interval of 99.95%. Barrios-Lech is careful throughout to test his findings for significance and he does not make statements that cannot be supported, even when this means finding no pattern: the same test, for example, shows random distribution of *heus* by status in Terence.

Even more interesting are the gender statistics: 130 out of 133 examples are spoken by men. This distribution is not random and it is nearly the same for Plautus and Terence. Can we conclude that real Roman women avoided *heus*? Barrios-Lech argues that we can, and that other gender exclusive or preferential usages in comedy reflect real speech habits too, notably “citizen women’s avoidance of *amabo*, the female disinclination to strengthen imperatives with particles like *quin*, and, in general, the inclination of women to use positive politeness” (194). This is a big leap to make, however, and it seems unlikely in a number of cases. Lost citizens raised by prostitutes exhibit the speech habits of *matronae*, who themselves conform to an ideal (noted, 46) that is not upheld by the *uxores dotatae*. Elsewhere, the author concedes that slave speech may reflect genre conventions, which are what this book really demonstrates.

One other caveat: it is not possible to reproduce the book’s results from the information it provides. For example, instances of four common morphological forms for directives (the types *fac*, *facito*, and *facias* in both dependent and independent clauses) are collected and classified under eleven categories (advice, challenges, instructions, etc.), with frequency counts and percentages presented in a table (2.3; 31). The sample size for each form is large enough to compare observed distributions to the null hypothesis, e.g., to show that the proportion of *fac* forms that are commands (42.5% or 344 tokens) is unlikely to be due to chance. There is not, however, enough detail to confirm claims such as “*fac* prefers commands to *facias* according to the z-test” (65) through calculation. In general, it would be convenient to have a sample of the actual calculations and one hopes that classics editors will allow similar projects in the future to include a bit of math.

Overall, this book is very useful for its painstaking collection of information and employment of sound statistical methods to elucidate non-lexical aspects of usage. The first sections helpfully supplement, and often confirm, qualitative research going back to Donatus. The ideas from modern linguistics are illuminating throughout and the four-page appendix of politeness phenomena is a real resource. I expected the final chapters to draw more on the statistically-tested find-

ings of the first section, rather than introducing new criteria, but they shed interesting light on the plays, e.g., comparing Demea's new-found affability in *Adelphoe* with advice in the *Commentariolum Petitionis*. The book is well produced, with few typos.

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