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.

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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).
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 one. 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 Campania, offers a meaningful picture of this attitude staging some upstarts, whose names reveal a humble foreign origin, 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 superiority. 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.

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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 scholasticci 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


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 of the imperative.

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, ἔτι ἡμῖν ἐπετρέπετο (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 geometrias 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 scholarici” (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.


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 intimate terms with those who are currently in power, such as Titus and Mammea”. 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 chariots, 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».)
pronunciation with o of the diphthong au (plodo); the morphological change of gender of stigma, treated as a first
declension feminine noun, and of amphiteater, whose transformation from a neuter noun to the masculine does not
surprise, if we advert to the universal language principles; vinciturum (from vincio) for victurum, which could be
confused with the past participle of vivo, according to the tendency to simplify irregularities using analogical
forms; quos si sufflasses, where the intransitive verb is used with the accusative; many syntactic errors, similar
to those seen before in Hermeros language (occidit de lucerna equites; subolofoelio, quia nobis epulum daturus est;
eripiant; vixerit); neologisms, like the compounds burdubasta and loripes, and a borrowing, zelotypos <
Cavalca 2001 181-182). Finally, he frequently uses proverbial expressions (qui asinum non potest, stratam caedit; ille milvo volanti poterat angues rescare; colubra restem non parit) and some insults, like
Glyco’s wife as a filix and a matella, which represents an emotional outburst which is typical of the Lateinische
Umgangssprache (Hofmann 1985 220).

Paralinguistic level

Few information come from the work about paralinguistic elements, because this is a written text and
therefore fluency, speech rate, pitch, stress and use of pauses cannot be directly investigated, as in reverse it can be
done with the spoken language. However, there are some narrator’s remarks and some speeches which would seem
to provide such an opportunity. For example, the following joke is very useful:

[41,7] Ad quem sonum conversus Trimalchio «Dionyse» inquit «liber esto». Puer detraxit pilleum apro

capitique suo imposuit. [8] Tum Trimalchio rursus adiecit: «non negabitis me inquit «habere Liberum

patrem. Laudavimus dictum [Trimalchionis] et circumueuntem puerum sane perbasiamus ».

In this passage, the ambiguity of non negabitis me habere Liberum patrem can be understood only by
assuming an intonation, which would highlight the word Liberum with appropriate pauses. In fact, it is both the
adjective of patrem, with reference to Trimalchio as ingenuus, and the appellative of the Italic Dionysus Pater,
whose figure is drawn from the action: the freedman has just freed his slave, Dionysus, who was miming the
different epithets of the god (Bromius, Lyaeus, Euhias) (Gaide 1993 251-253).

Extralinguistic level

Also the non-verbal communication is governed by a sort of “grammar of acts”, which should be observed.
The following example concerns the use of clothes:

[32,2] Pallio enim coccineo adrasum excluderat caput circaque oneratas veste cervices laticlaviam

immiserat mappam fimbriis hinc atque illinc pendentibus. [3] Habebat etiam in minimo digito sinistrae

manus anulum subauratum, extremo vero articulo digitii sequentis minorem, ut mihi videbatur, totum aureum, sed plane ferreis velati stellis ferrimaminat. [4] Et ne has tantum ostenderet divitas,
dextrum nudavit laeertum armilla aurea cultum et eboere circulo lamina splendente conexo.

Thus Trimalchio introduces himself to his guests, when he is entering for the first time in his triclinium: he
wears gaudy clothes and some jewels, exhibited to show his wealth. Indeed, all the freedmen believe that richness is
the main way to be admitted to the upper classes. Trimalchio reveals he knows the rules to use those objects: instead
of the golden ring on the ring finger of his left hand, which he could not use, because it was distinctive of the
kings, he wears surrogates with the same value. He finds gimmicks to mask his diversity, like the enormous gilt
ring on the little finger, the precious bracelet and the little ring against the evil eye on the ring finger.

Semiotic-cultural level

[71,12] «[…]“C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit” […]».

267 [Trimalchio turned round at the noise and said, «Dionysus, rise and be free». The boy took the cap of freedom off the boar,
and put it on his head. Then Trimalchio went on: «I am sure you will agree that the god of liberation is my father». We applauded
Trimalchis’s phrase, and kissed the boy heartily as he went round].

268 [His head was shaven and peered out of a scarlet cloak, and over the heavy clothes on his neck he had put on a napkin with a
broad strip and fringes hanging from it all round. On the little finger of his left hand he had an enormous gilt ring, and on the top
joint of the next finger a smaller ring which appeared to me to be entirely gold, but was really set all round with iron cut out in
little stars. Not content with this display of wealth, he bared his right arm, where a golden bracelet shone, and an ivory bangle
clasped with a plate of bright metal].

269 [“Here lieth Caius Pompeius Trimalchio, freedman of Maecenas”].
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 (1997) 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.


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 fail 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:


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 *praed* with accusative show), but this perception lead him to attempt a classical Latin learning. Later, indeed, his aggression is attenuated and his tongue tries again to imitate them, *qui possunt loqueri*, 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:


**Conclusions**

270 [Soon there was silence, and then he said, «you know the story they are doing? Diomede and Ganymede 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 studies\textsuperscript{273} 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.

\textsuperscript{273} See Giacalone Ramat (2000) 60 in her consideration about William Labov’s statement “use the present to explain the past”.
References


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