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Transformations of the Roman West: Social Factors in Latinization

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The power of the language

The attitude of the first Julio-Claudian emperors (and beyond) toward language

1. Augustus

Attitude toward Latin

(1) Suetonius, *Augustus*, 86.1-3: Genus eloquendi secutus est **elegans et temperatum** uitatis sententiarum ineptiis atque concinnitate et 'reconditorum uerborum,' ut ipse dicit, 'fetoribus'; praecipuamque curam duxit sensum animi quam apertissime exprimere. quod quo facilius efficeret aut nec ubi lectorem uel auditorem obturbaret ac moraretur, neque praepositiones urbibus addere neque coniunctiones saepius iterare dubitauit, quae detractae afferunt aliquid obscuritatis, etsi gratiam augent. **cacozelos et antiquarios**, ut diuerso genere uitiosos, pari fastidio spreuit exagitabatque nonnumquam; in primis Maecenatem suum, cuius 'myrobrechis,' ut ait, 'cincinnos' usque quaque persequitur et imitando per iocum irridet. sed nec Tiberio parcat et exoletas interdum et reconditas uoces aucupanti. **M. quidem Antonium ut insanum increpat**, quasi ea scribentem, quae mirentur potius homines quam intellegant; deinde ludens malum et incon stans in eligendo genere dicendi ingenium eius, addit haec: 'tuque dubitas, Cimberne Annius an Veranius Flaccus imitandi sint tibi, ita ut uerbis, quae Crispus Sallustius excerpserit ex Originibus Catonis, utaris? an potius Asiaticorum oratorum inani[bu]s sententiis uerborum uolubilitas in nostrum sermonem transferenda?' et quadam epistula Agrippinae neptis ingenium conlaudans: 'sed opus est,' inquit, 'dare te operam, ne moleste scribas et loquaris.'

(2) *Rhetorica ad Herreninum*, 4.12.17: **Elegantia est, quae facit, ut <locus> unus quisque pure et aperte dici videatur**. Haec tribuitur in Latinitatem et explanationem. Latinitas est, quae sermonem purum conservat, ab omni vitio remotum. Vitia in sermone, quo minus is Latinus sit, duo possunt esse: soloecismus et barbarismus. Soloecismus est, cum in uerbis pluribus consequens uerbum superius non a<d>commodatur. Barbarismus est, cum uerbis aliquid uitiose effertur. Haec qua ratione vitare possumus, in arte grammatica dilucide dicemus.

Explanatio est, quae reddit apertam et dilucidam orationem. Ea comparatur duabus rebus, usitatis verbis et propriis. Usitata sunt ea, quae versantur in [sermone] consuetudine cotidiana; propria, quae eius rei verba sunt aut esse possunt, quae de loquimur.

(3) Gellius, 10.24.2: Diuus etiam Augustus, **linguae Latinae non nescius munditiarumque patris sui in sermonibus sectator**, in epistulis plurifariam significatione ista dierum non aliter usus est.

(4) Quintilian, 1.6.9: Sed Augustus quoque in epistulis ad C. Caesarem scriptis emendat quod is 'calidum' dicere quam 'calidum' malit, non quia id non sit Latinum, sed quia sit odiosum et, ut ipse Graeco uerbo significauit, περίεργον.

(5) Charisius, 271, 10-20 Barwick: obiter diuus Hadrianus sermonum libro I quaerit an Latinum sit: 'quamquam' inquit 'apud Laberium haec vox esse dicatur', et cum Scaurus Latinum esse neget, addit quia veteres eadem soliti sint dicere, non addentes uia... inquit 'eadem biberis, eadem dedero tibi ubi biberis saviu'. Quamquam diuus Augustus reprehendens Ti. Claudium ita loquitur, 'scribis enim per uiam ἀντὶ τοῦ obiter', sed diuus Hadrianus 'tametsi' inquit 'Augustus non pereruditus homo fuerit, ut id aduerbium **ex usu potius quam lectione** protulerit'.

(6) Fronton, 123, 2-10 VdH: Postquam res p. a magistratibus annuis ad G. Caesarem et mox ad Augustum translata est, Caesari quidem facultatem dicendi uideo imperator<iam> fuisse, **Augustum uero saeculi resid<ui> elegantia et Latinae linguae etiam tum integro lepore potius quam dicendi ubertate praeditum puto.** Post Augustum non nihil reliquiarum iam et uictarum et tabescentium Tiberio illi superfuisse. Imperatores autem deinceps ad uespasianum usque eius modi omnes ut non minus uerborum puderet quam pigeret morum et misereret facinorum.

Attitude toward Greek

(7) Suétone, *Augustus*, 89.1: Ne **Graecarum quidem disciplinarum** leuiore studio tenebatur. in quibus et ipsis praestabat largiter magistro dicendi usus Apollodoro Pergameno, quem iam grandem natu Apolloniam quoque secum ab urbe iuuenis adhuc eduxerat, deinde eruditione etiam uaria repletus [s]per Arei philosophi filiorumque eius Dionysi et Nicanoris contubernium; **non tamen ut aut loqueretur expedite aut componere aliquid auderet; nam et si quid res exigeret, Latine formabat uertendumque alii dabat.** sed plane poematum quoque non imperitus, delectabatur etiam comoedia ueteri et saepe eam exhibuit spectaculis publicis.

(a) Augustus had the same interest for the Greek studies as for the Latin ones: “he was possessed no less an interest even in Greek studies and in these too he excelled to a great degree”.

(b) Despite this interest he was not fluent in Greek and he was not able to write in Greek: “not with the result that he could either speak fluently or be bold enough to compose anything”. The Latin expression *expedite loqueretur* deserves a commentary. What does exactly mean the adverb *expedite*? The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* translates “fluently and gives a parallel to Suetonius’ text in Seneca, *Ep.*, 40.11: disputabat **expedite** magis quam concitate, ut posses dicere facultatem esse illam, non celeritatem.

(c) When it was necessary he wrote his text in Latin and then gave it to someone else to translate: “he would write in Latin and give it to someone else to translate”. This assertion can be explained by the fact that Augustus was very careful in all what is was doing. He had a very great scruple in every matter even in family disagreements.

(8) Dion Cassius, 51.16.3: καὶ τὸν γε λόγον δι’ οὗ συνέγνω σφίσι, ἑλληνιστί, ὅπως συνῶσιν αὐτοῦ, εἶπε. Cassius Dion says that Augustus held a speech in Greek in front of the Alexandrians in 30 BC when Egypt was not yet integrated into the administrative structures of the Roman administration.

(9) Plutarch, *Cato Maior*, 12.5-6: πλεῖστον δὲ χρόνον ἐν Ἀθήναις διέτριψε, καὶ λέγεται μὲν τις αὐτοῦ φέρεσθαι λόγος ὃν Ἑλληνιστὶ πρὸς τὸν δῆμον εἶπεν, ὡς ζηλῶν τε τὴν ἀρετὴν τῶν παλαιῶν Ἀθηναίων, τῆς τε πόλεως διὰ τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος ἠδέως γεγονῶς θεατῆς· τοῦτο δ’ οὐκ ἀληθές ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἐρμηνέως ἐνέτυχε τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, δυνηθεὶς ἂν αὐτὸς εἰπεῖν, ἐμμένων δὲ τοῖς πατρίοις καὶ καταγελῶν τῶν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ τεθαυμακότων.

(9) Gelsomino (1959) – Dubuisson (2002).

For example, in a letter to Livia quoted by Suetonius in the *Life of Claudius* (3, 2), Augustus uses Greek to cancel not very pleasant concepts.

Suetonius, *Augustus*, 25.4: crebro itaque illa iactabat: σπεῦδε βραδέως.

(10) Macrobius, *Sat.*, 2.4.31: ... breue sua manu in charta exaravit **Graecum epigramma**...

(11) Plinius the Elder, 35.91: Venerem exeuntem e mari divus Augustus dicavit in delubro patris Caesaris, quae anadyo- mene vocatur, **versibus Graecis** ta<nt>opere dum laudatur, <aevīs> vict<a>, sed inlustrat<a>.

2. Tiberius

Attitude toward Latin

(10) Suetonius, *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*, 22.2: hic idem cum ex oratione Tiberii verbum reprehendisset, adfirmante Ateio Capitone et esse illud Latinum et si non esset futurum certe iam inde, 'Mentitur,' inquit, Capito. tu enim, Caesar, **civitatem dare potes hominibus, verbo non potes.**'

(11) Cassius Dio, 57.15.1-3 : τότε μὲν ταῦτ' ἐγένετο, Στατιλίου δὲ Ταύρου μετὰ Λουκίου Λίβωνος ὑπατεύσαντος ὁ Τιβέριος ἀπεῖπε μὲν ἐσθῆτι σηρικῇ μηδένα ἄνδρα χρῆσθαι, ἀπεῖπε δὲ καὶ χρυσῶ σκεύει μηδένα πλὴν 57.15.2 πρὸς τὰ ἱερὰ νομίζειν. ἐπεὶ τε διηπόρησάν τινες εἰ καὶ τὰ ἀργυρᾶ τὰ χρυσοῦν τι **ἔμβλημα** ἔχοντα ἀπηγορευμένον σφίσιν εἴη κεκτῆσθαι, βουλευθεὶς καὶ περὶ τούτου τι δόγμα ποιῆσαι, **ἐκόλυσεν ἐς αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ τοῦ ἐμβλήματος ὡς καὶ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐμβληθῆναι, καίτοι μὴ ἔχων ὅπως ἐπιχωρίως αὐτὸ ὀνομάσῃ.**

(12) Tacitus, *Ann.*, 3.51.3: id Tiberius solitis sibi ambagibus apud senatum incusavit, cum extolleret pietatem quamvis modicas principis iniurias acriter ulciscerentium, deprecaretur tam praecipitis verborum poenas, laudaret Lepidum neque Agrippam argueret.

(13) *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* and its analogies with the inscription of Antiochus of Commagene (*OGIS* 383). Calboli (1997) (1998).

Attitude toward Greek

(14) Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 71 : **sermone Graeco** quamquam alioqui promptus et facilis, non tamen usque quaque usus est abstinuitque maxime in senatu; adeo quidem, ut

[a] monopolium nominaturus ueniam prius postularet, quod sibi uerbo peregrino utendum esset.

[b] atque etiam cum in quodam decreto patrum ἔμβλημα recitaretur, commutandam censuit uocem et pro peregrina nostratam requirendam aut, si non reperiretur, uel pluribus et per ambitum uerborum rem enuntiandam.

[c] militem quoque **Graece** testimonium interrogatum nisi **Latine** respondere uetuit.

(15) Cicero, *De fin.*, 3.52: in uerborum usu **faciles** esse debemus – Seneca, *Dial.*, 9.14 : **faciles** ... nos facere debemus, ne nimus destinatis rebus indulgeamus – Suetonius, *Titus*, 3 : Latine Graeceque uel in orando uel in fingendis poematibus **promptus et facilis** ad extemporalitatem usque.

(16) Cassius Dio, 57.13.1-3: τότε μὲν ταῦτ' ἐγένετο, Στατιλίου δὲ Ταύρου μετὰ Λουκίου Λίβωνος ὑπατεύσαντος ὁ Τιβέριος ἀπεῖπε μὲν ἐσθῆτι σηρικῆ μηδένα ἄνδρα χρῆσθαι, ἀπεῖπε δὲ καὶ χρυσῶ σκευεῖ μηδένα πλὴν πρὸς τὰ ἱερὰ νομίζειν. ἐπεὶ τε διηπόρησάν τινες εἰ καὶ τὰ ἀργυρᾶ τὰ χρυσοῦν τι ἔμβλημα ἔχοντα ἀπηγορευμένον σφίσιν εἶη κεκτῆσθαι, βουλευθεὶς καὶ περὶ τούτου τι δόγμα ποιῆσαι, ἐκώλυσεν ἐς αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ τοῦ ἐμβλήματος ὡς καὶ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐμβληθῆναι, καίτοι μὴ ἔχων ὅπως ἐπιχωρίως αὐτὸ ὀνομάσῃ. ἐκεῖνό τε οὖν οὕτως ἐποίησε, καὶ ἑκατοντάρχου ἑλλητιστὶ ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ μαρτυρῆσαί τι ἐθελήσαντος οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, καίπερ πολλὰς μὲν δίκας ἐν τῇ διαλέκτῳ ταύτῃ καὶ ἐκεῖ λεγομένας ἀκούων, πολλὰς δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπερωτῶν. Suetonius reports two cases: *monopolium* and ἔμβλημα/*emblema*. Cassius Dion speaks only about ἔμβλημα, but he adds another case: Tiberius forbade a soldier to give evidence in Greek, locating the incident in the senate (also AD 16).

(17) Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 30.1: **de uectigalibus ac monopolis**, de extruendis reficiendisue operibus, etiam de legendo uel exauctorando milite ac legionum et auxiliorum descriptione, denique quibus imperium prorogari aut extraordinaria bella mandari, quid et qua[m] forma[m] regum litteris rescribi placeret. Suetonius used this word when listing the subjects frequently discussed by Tiberius with the senators. The first attestation of *monopolium* in a legal text appears in an edict of the emperor Zeno (AD 483 : *Cod. Iust.* 40.50).

(18) Pliny, *NH*, 26.9: Id ipsum mirabile, alios [sc. morbos] desinere in nobis, alios durare, sicuti colum. Ti. Caesaris principatu inrepsit id malum, nec quisquam id prior imperatore ipso sensit, magna civitatis ambage, **cum in edicto eius excusantis valetudinem legeret nomen incognitum**. “This itself is a wonderful fact, that some diseases should disappear from among us while others remain endemic, as for example colum. It was in the principate of Tiberius Caesar that this malady made its way into Italy. Nobody suffered from it before the emperor himself, and the citizens were greatly puzzled when they read in his edict, in which he begged to be excused because of illness, a name they had never heard before.” (Loeb trans., W.H.S. Jones).

(19) Greek was so deeply well-established in the administrative customs that some emperors have had to take measures to reduce its use in the public sphere. According to Valerius Maximus the rule of using Latin in the public sphere seems not to be respected in the beginning of the Empire, especially during the reign of Tiberius.

Valerius Maximus 2.2.2: Magistratus uero prisci quantopere suam populi que Romani maiestatem retinentes se gesserint hinc cognosci potest, quod inter cetera obtinendae grauitatis indicia illud quoque magna cum perseuerantia custodiebant, ne Graecis umquam nisi **Latine**

responsa darent. Quin etiam ipsos linguae uolubilitate, qua plurimum ualent, excussa per interpretem loqui cogebant non in urbe tantum nostra, sed etiam in Graecia et Asia, quo scilicet Latinae uocis honos per omnes gentes uenerabilior diffunderetur.

(20) (a) In 167, Aemilius Paulus announces to the Greeks that the new order will be established *in Greek*. However, he makes this proclamation *in Latin*. An interpreter, who was the praetor Cn. Octavius, translated Aemilius Paulus' speech into Greek: Paulus **Latine**, quae senatui, quae sibi ex consilii sententia uisa essent, pronuntiauit. Ea Cn. Octavius praetor – nam et ipse aderat – interpretata **sermone Graeco** referebat.¹ “After the herald had commanded silence Paulus announced in Latin the decisions of the senate, as well as his own, made by the advice of his council. This announcement was translated into Greek and repeated by Gnaeus Octavius the praetor – for he too was present” (Transl. A.C. Schlesinger, LCL).

(b) In 168, Aemilius Paulus speaks to Perseus in Greek² (Perseus did not of course know Latin), and then addresses his soldiers in Latin, after the definite defeat of Macedonia

(c) In 191, while *tribunus militum*, Cato the Elder speaks at Athens *in Latin* and assigns a subaltern the task of translating his words into Greek – a translation which was much longer than the original, as Plutarch notes³.

(d) In 196, after the victory over Philip V in Cynocephaloi, T. Quintius Flamininus announces to the Greeks the independence of Macedonia *in Latin*.⁴

3. Claudius

(21) Suetonius, *Claudius*, 16.4: splendidum uirum Graeciaeque prouinciae principem, uerum **Latini sermonis ignarum**, non modo albo iudicum erasit, sed in peregrinitatem redegit.

(22) Cassius Dio, 60.17.4: ἐν δὲ δὴ τῇ διαγνώσει αὐτῆ (ἐποιεῖτο δὲ αὐτὴν ἐν τῷ βουλευτηρίῳ) ἐπύθετο **τῇ Λατίνων γλώσση** τῶν πρεσβευτῶν τινος, Λυκίου μὲν τὸ ἀρχαῖον ὄντος Ῥωμαίου δὲ γεγονότος· καὶ αὐτόν, ἐπειδὴ μὴ συνῆκε τὸ λεχθέν, τὴν πολιτείαν ἀφείλετο, εἰπὼν μὴ δεῖν Ῥωμαῖον εἶναι τὸν μὴ καὶ τὴν διάλεξιν σφῶν ἐπιστάμενον.

(23) Suetonius, *Claudius*, 42.1-2: Nec minore cura **Graeca studia** secutus est, amorem praestantiamque linguae occasione omni professus.

¹ Livy, XLV, 29, 3.

² Livy, XLV, 8, 6.

³ Plutarch, *Life of Cato*, 12, 5.

⁴ Livy, XXXIII, 32, 5.

[a] cuidam barbaro Graece ac Latine disserenti: 'cum utroque,' inquit, 'sermone nostro sis paratus';

[b] et in commendanda patribus conscriptis Achaia, gratam sibi prouinciam ait communium studiorum commercio;

[c] ac saepe in senatu legatis perpetua oratione respondit. multum uero pro tribunali etiam Homericis locutus est uersibus.

4. After Claudius: an overview

The system called by Kaimio (1979, 319) “bilateral unilingualism” has been invented under Claudius or Nero because in the department of the imperial correspondence the office *ab epistulis* has been divided in two parts: *ab epistulis Graecis* and *ab epistulis Latinis*. This distinction seems to be already operational under Nero who was perfect fluent in Greek and in Latin. In 53, when he was 16 years old, Nero delivered a speech in the Senate in Latin for the inhabitants of Bononia, and another in Greek for those of Rhodes and Ilion.⁵ Nero uses Greek in his speech delivered in Corinth during the Isthmic games of 67 for the proclamation of the liberty of the Greeks⁶.

(24) Suetonius, *Nero*, 20.2-3 : ... subinde inter familiares **Graecum prouerbum** iactans « occulta musicae nullum esse respectum. ... si paulum subbibisset, aliquid se sufferi tinniturum **Graeco sermone** promisit.

After Nero we have less information about the linguistic knowledge of the emperors and about the use they made of the language in the public field.

Septimus Severus gives his sentences in Latin during a visit in Egypt in 200 (*P. Col.* 131). His words were translated into Greek in order to be understood by the population. In 216, the Goharieni appealed to Caracalla in Syria to resolve a conflict. An inscription found in Dmeir in 1935 reproduces the protocol of the trial which took place in Antioch in 27 May 216. The text is written in Latin, but the words of Caracalla and of the lawyers are in Greek (*AE*, 1947, 182 = *SEG*, 17.759).

The papyrological documents of Egypt are also very useful in studying the language use. The Roman testaments exemplify how the languages (Greek and Latin) were used, at least in Egypt (but probably also in the Eastern provinces). After the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (212), according

⁵ Bardon 1940, 212-3.

⁶ *IG* VII 2713. See Bardon 1940, 212-3.

to a rule expressed by the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* (BGU, V, 1210, ll. 35-37), a Roman will was valid only if it was performed in Latin, with the exception of the *testamentum militis* and the *fideicommissum*.

(25) Gaius 2.281: *Item legata Graece scripta non valent; fideicommissa vero valent.*

In Egypt, the use of written Latin was limited to some specific fields: the Roman army, official correspondence, and certain Roman legal documents. Therefore much of the Empire, especially the Eastern provinces, wrote their wills in Greek. This created problems because it was difficult to preserve the requirements of Roman law. The difficulty was resolved by **Severus Alexander**, who authorized wills to be composed in Greek as well as Latin. The constitution of this emperor has not survived, but we can reconstruct it, thanks to a passage of the *Novellae Theodosianae* (439). This evolution shows how powerful the Greek language was, even after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, which consolidated the prestige of Greek.

With the creation of the **Tetrarchy**, the imperial and provincial administration in the Eastern part begins to use more Latin. However this change in the tradition of the official use of the languages is not the result of a conscious politics, but rather the consequence of a spontaneous evolution to which the transfer of the imperial residence toward East and the increased prestige of Latin among the Greeks seem to have given a decisive impulse.⁷

With the foundation of Constantinople Rome became the only capital of the Western part of the Roman Empire, it means the Latin-speaking part. In the Eastern part, Greek-speaking, the influence of Latin has been important above all during the fourth century. This importance of Latin clearly appears in the papyrological documents of Egypt, where the Latin loanwords are many especially during the fourth century. How is the linguistic knowledge of the emperors of this century? Aside from Valens who has had a very poor education, and maybe also from his brother Valentinianus, whose education was more polished, all the emperors of this century are bilingual.

The *Vita Constantini*, attributed to Eusebius, clearly shows **Constantine's** use of both languages. He required of his soldiers the knowledge of Latin, and imposed to address every Sunday a prayer to the God of the Christians. During the Nicaean council of 325, the emperor used Latin to communicate with the oriental bishops. His words were translated into Greek by an interpreter because the oriental bishops were not able to understand Latin with some

⁷ Adamik 2010.

exceptions as Paulus of Constantinople,⁸ Epiphanius of Salamine and Photinus of Sirmium. During the same council, the emperor wrote his speeches in Latin and gave them for translating to professional interpreters. That would mean that Constantine didn't know Greek. But, after having delivered his speech in Latin, he was able, according to the same *Vita Constantini* (3.13), to discuss in Greek μηδὲ ... ἀμαθῶς with the Greek-speaking members of the assembly to find a solution for theological questions. However, Constantine was not able to read the theological treatises written in Greek sent to him by Eusebius. Therefore, we have two different situations: Latin as official language perfectly known by Constantine, and Greek used in a context of spontaneous dialogue, but not as a written language. This linguistic habit is confirmed by a protocol of trial which contains some sentences expressed by one of the two litigants and by the emperor himself.⁹ Constantine speaks always in Latin with a woman called Agrippina who answers always in Greek without interpreter. That means that one could understand the other. We can conclude that Constantine had a perfect knowledge of Latin, but only an oral knowledge of Greek which he probably learnt during his stay in Bithynia before 305.

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⁸ *PLRE* II, Paulus 8, 850.

⁹ *C. Theod.* 8, 15, 1 [without date] (see Corcoran 1996, n° 5, 259-60), studied by Bianchini 1984.

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