

Use Smaller Words, Socrates: Using Words and Particles to Classify Conversation Types in the Socratic Dialogues

The study of particles in Ancient Greek spans from Denniston (1954) to recent works like Bonifazi et al. (2022). Recently, researchers have looked at particles through the lens of linguistics, hoping to find new avenues of understanding ancient Greek. Bonifazi et al. (2022), for example, classified particles as what linguists call “discourse markers,” words that serve functional roles rather than convey specific meanings. This paper attempts to help understand what the particle’s role as a discourse marker means for ancient Greek prose.

While the use of discourse markers in English, as demonstrated by Stenström (2014), is fairly straightforward, their role in Ancient Greek, especially as particles, remains an emerging field of study. Tronci (2017) analyzed particles as discourse markers specifically in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. This paper, sharing fascination with Platonic prose, will focus on the *Dialogues of Socrates*. Adopting the concept of conversational “turns” from research such as Beňuš et al (2011), this paper introduces the “lecture quotient” to categorize Socratic exchanges in the *Dialogues of Socrates* as either “dialectic” or “lecture” based on word count disparities. This will enable the categorization of Socratic exchanges into two types: dialectic and lecture. The Greek particles $\gamma\epsilon$, $\sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\nu$, and $\alpha\tilde{\rho}\alpha$ will be analyzed to determine their functions; namely, whether they tend to increase the lecture quotient, thus denoting a lecture, or whether they decrease the lecture quotient, indicating a dialectic. Analysis reveals that, within the Platonic dialogues, particles like $\gamma\epsilon$, $\sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\nu$, and $\alpha\tilde{\rho}\alpha$ generally reduce the lecture quotient, signifying a dialectic conversation, whereas $\delta\eta$ typically has the opposite effect.

Bibliography

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