

Cassandra as Bilingual in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

This paper argues that the Cassandra scenes in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* constitute a rare moment in Greek tragedy where language difference is realistically represented. I show that the tragic convention of permitting non-Greek personae to speak Greek (Hall 1989; Colvin 1999) is not upheld in this play: Cassandra, a Trojan, speaks Greek only because she truly *knows* Greek (καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἑλλήν' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν, 1254). The quality of Cassandra's speech has always attracted attention (e.g. Heath 2005; Brault 2009), but her linguistic capacities have gone largely unnoticed. I argue that Cassandra's bilingualism mirrors the irony of her role as prophet: she is a foreigner who will not be understood, even though she speaks Greek.

What secures this interpretation is the Cassandra scenes' unique focus on language difference and its impact on communication. I begin by reframing the initial exchange between Clytemnestra and Cassandra as a scene where the conditions of communication are examined: language difference is considered a barrier to communication (1060-1061), but one that can be overcome, either with non-verbal cues or the help of an interpreter (1061, 1062-1063). This commentary on language augments the irony of the subsequent scenes, where communication continues to fail despite the coryphaeus and Cassandra sharing a language (1112-1113, 1253).

Cassandra's command of Greek is confirmed in the coryphaeus' response to her speech post-mania: he expresses surprise at the fact that Cassandra speaks well (κυρεῖν λέγουσαν, 1201) despite "having grown up heterophone" (τραφεῖσαν ἀλλόθρου, 1200). At the very moment where Cassandra speaks Greek of her own accord, such an intradiegetic acknowledgement is necessary to preserve the realism of the scene. This paper therefore proposes a new interpretation

of the much-discussed lines, 1199-1201 (cf. Fraenkel 1950; Raeburn & Thomas 2011), to count Cassandra in the ranks of liminal bilinguals (Mairs 2011; James 2024).

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