

## Sophists versus Fascists: Pluralism and Purism in the language of Rome

To even a casual observer, the role of language in creating and expressing identity is clear. Code switching, jargon as a token of in-group status, and adoption or rejection of loanwords will be familiar to most if not all audiences (Irvine & Gal 2000, Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Evidence of these phenomena abounds in Greek and Roman sources, as does awareness of and interest in them (Biville 2002, Adams 2003). Just as the modern era sees a range of attitudes towards linguistic purism, ancient sources also take a variety of positions on the subject. In recent history a preference for purism, especially the avoidance of words considered foreign, often results from deliberate differentiation along ethnic or national lines, such as the excision of Persian vocabulary from standard Hindi compared its spoken versions (Hock 1991). This tendency often accompanies nationalist movements that aim to revive ancient models for the identities they seek to promote.

This paper discusses how the Italian Fascist regime exemplifies self-consciously antiquarian political rhetoric and how Italian language policies of the 1920s and 1930s, aimed at flattening the country's linguistic variety into a standard version of Italian, were intended to reinforce such rhetoric with the support of public intellectuals (Cicognani 1938, Monelli 1943, Lepschy & Lepschy 1978). In the Roman world, a comparable program of antiquarian revival arose in the Augustan era, but among literate intellectuals, the so-called Second Sophistic of the second century CE was clearly characterized by this backwards-looking tendency. (Swain 1996) Some writers advanced strict antiquarian purism, such as Fronto in Latin and Phrynichus in Greek (Fischer 1974, Champlin 1980), but as this paper demonstrates, they represented a minority view. Even in the wide-ranging antiquarian miscellanies of Gellius and Athenaeus, the

linguistic exchange between Greek and Latin is often not only accepted but welcomed. (Braund 2000, Garcea & Lomanito 2004) Puritanical linguists are mocked by both authors for possessing lack of expertise or imagination, and revival of the past need not supplant the present.

This paper argues that, while in the modern era the Fascist ideology of ancient Roman identity regarded linguistic purity as a central pillar, the prevailing sentiment among the elite ancient Romans, whose culture this ideology sought to emulate, was instead a pluralistic one. It concludes that effectively countering nationalist rhetoric predicated upon the authority granted uncritically to ancient cultural traditions requires a rigorous and intellectually honest engagement with the ancient sources. An accurate assessment and transmission of Roman intellectual attitudes towards language, this paper proposes, can play an integral role in exposing the inherent falsehood of a Fascist agenda that lays superficial claim to Roman cultural heritage.

### Bibliography

- Adams, J.N. *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Anderson, G. "Athenaeus: the Sophistic environment." *ANRW* 34.3 (1997): 2173-2185.
- Baldwin, B. "Athenaeus and his Work." *Acta Classica* 19 (1976): 21-42.
- Biville, F. "The Graeco-Romans and Graeco-Latin," in J.N. Adams, M. Janse, and S. Swain (eds.) *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text*, 78-102. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Champlin, E. *Fronto and Antonine Rome*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Cicognani, B. "Abolizione del 'Lei'". *Corriere della Sera* [Rome], 15 Jan. 1938, p. 3. *Archivio Corriere della Sera*.
- Braund, D. "Learning, Luxury and Empire: Athenaeus' Roman Patron." In D. Braund and J. Wilkins (Eds.) *Athenaeus and his World: Reading Greek Culture in the Roman Empire*, 3-22. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.
- Demartini, S. "Dal dialetto alla lingua" negli anni Venti del Novocento. *Una collana scolastica da riscoprire. Letteratura e Dialetti* 3 (2010): 63-80.

- Fischer, E. *Die Ekloge des Phrynichos*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974.
- Garcea, A. and V. Lomanito. "Gellius and Fronto on Loanwords and Literary Models." In Holford-Strevens, L. and A. Vardi (Eds.) *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius*, 41-63. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Goldoni, L. "Gli irredenti dell'Italiano. Paolo Monelli e il dominio delle lingue straniere." *Corriere della Sera* [Rome], 13 Jan. 2011. *Corriere.it*
- Hock, H.H. *Principles of Historical Linguistics*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991.
- Holford-Strevens, L. *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement*. London: Duckworth, 2003.
- Howley, J.A. *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Irvine, J.T. and S. Gal. "Language ideology and linguistic differentiation," in P.V. Kroskrity (ed.) *Regimes of language: ideologies politics, and identities*, 35-84. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2000.
- Lepschy, A.L. and Lepschy, G. *The Italian Language Today*. London: Hutchinson, 1977 (repr. 1998).
- Leso, E. "Osservazioni sulla lingua di Mussolini." In E. Leso et al. (eds) *La Lingua Italiana e il Fascismo*, 15-62. Bologna: Consorzio Provinciale Pubblica Lettura, 1977.
- Monelli, P. *Barbaro dominio: 650 esotismi esaminati, combattuti e banditi dalla lingua con antichi e nuovi argomenti*. Milan: Hoepli, 1943.
- Tosi, A. *Language and Society in a Changing Italy*. Multilingual Matters: Buffalo, 2001.