

Looking for Sociolects in Classical Greek Tragedy: A Digital Tool for Measuring Linguistic/Discursive Complexity

Elodie Paillard, The University of Sydney

Audric Wannaz, Universität Basel

Abstract

This paper re-examines the question of the presence of distinct sociolects in Classical Athenian tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides). While the general idea is that all characters in tragedy spoke a similar language, without much distinction between sociolects that could have marked their socio-political status, some recent research has nonetheless highlighted a number of ways in which characters from different backgrounds do indeed speak differently.

Thanks to a digital tool built by Audric Wannaz (available in OA upon completion), we have been able to measure significant differences in the 'degree of complexity' (rarity of words and POS, length of sentences) of the discourses uttered by various characters in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

While our data only point at slight differences in sociolects, we could nonetheless highlight relevant patterns that seem to encourage the idea that some groups of characters (defined by status, or opposition between mortal/divine) spoke markedly differently from others.

Essential Bibliography and e-tools used

C. Amati, 'Contributo alle ricerche sull'uso della lingua familiare in Euripide', *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 9, 1901, 125–148.

E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theatre*, 2010 (esp. chapter 4).

GLEM, Ancient Greek Lemmatizer (<https://github.com/GreekPerspective/glem>)

Corien Bary, Petert Berck and Iris Hendrickx, "A Memory-Based Lemmatizer for Ancient Greek", *DATeCH2017: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Digital Access to Textual Cultural Heritage* June 2017, 91–95. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3078081.3078100>

E. Paillard, *The Stage and the City. Non-élite Characters in the Tragedies of Sophocles*, De Boccard, Paris, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbqs7zt>

E. Paillard, 'Secondary Characters' Rhetorical Skills in Fifth-Century Athenian Tragedy'. In M. Carmen Encinas Reguero / Milagros Quijada Sagredo (edd.), *Tragic Rhetoric. The Rhetorical Dimensions of Greek Tragedy*, Bari, 2021, 143-184.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17613/2jff-zj83>

A. Petrovic, 'Die Sprache des Wächters in der Antigone des Sophokles am Beispiel seines erstens Auftritts (223ff.)', *MH* 60, 2003, 193-209.

P. T. Stevens, 'Colloquial Expressions in Euripides', *Classical Quarterly* 31, 1937, 182–191.

P. T. Stevens, 'Colloquial Expressions in Aeschylus and Sophocles', *CQ* 39, 1945, 95-105.