

Peter Barrios-Lech, *Linguistic Interaction in Roman Comedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 410 pp., ISBN 978-1-107-12982-5, £74.99.

The pragmatic dimension of a language is always more elusive for a linguistic examination, especially in case of such corpus languages like Latin. Still, it does not mean it cannot be systematically studied, given that a great deal of data may be retrieved from dialogical genres like Roman Republican drama. In the case of Terence, this was proven by the early monograph by MÜLLER, who successfully dealt with the conversational structure (opening, closing and other interaction-oriented phenomena) along with more traditional matters of Syntax and Lexicon¹. Until now the Pragmatics of Plautine idiom has remained largely untouched. Compared to the six Terentian comedies, the corpus of twenty complete plays by Plautus is in fact much more difficult to handle, which must be one of the reasons why we had to wait almost three decades for this detailed survey of verbal interaction in Roman comedy. Indeed, after many recent advances on Latin Pragmatics – on speech acts by RISSELADA and on politeness by HALL, FERRI and DICKEY to name but a few² – the time seemed perfectly ripe for this ambitious endeavour to be undertaken by BARRIOS-LECH (= B.-L.).

The author seeks to “enrich our descriptions of ‘interactional’ features of the Latin language” as depicted in Republican drama (p. 5). Thus, his data comes not only from the complete *fabulae palliatae* by Plautus and Terence (27,300 lines in total), but the scholar also includes fragments of archaic comedy (1,971 verses) and tragedy (1,970 verses). Despite their incompleteness, the latter sources turned out to be very useful for a comparison, especially in establishing the register of a given (form of) expression (e.g. p. 190). This also works the other way round. Thanks to the established rules of verbal interaction, B.-L. is able to suggest a possible *persona* speaking in a given fragment or to convincingly confirm already existing hypotheses (e.g. p. 84 on Livius Andronicus’ and p. 131 on Turpilius’ fragments). Finally, the rules formulated in the book may give further support for some controversial manuscript readings (e.g. p. 128). That being said, the author’s choice of basing his study on the older editions by LINDSAY for Plautus³ and by KAUER & LINDSAY for Terence⁴ seems to be rather arbitrary, given the quality of more recent editions (e.g. DE MELO⁵, BARSBY⁶), which, as the author admits himself, were only consulted for the English translation (p. XXI).

The main line of investigation offered by B.-L. follows the methods of sociolinguistics, speech act theory and politeness research. Hence the scholar is mostly interested in, as he calls it himself,

¹ R. MÜLLER, *Sprechen und Sprache. Dialoglinguistische Studien zu Terenz*, Heidelberg 1997.

² R. RISSELADA, *Imperatives and Other Directive Expressions in Latin. A Study in the Pragmatics of a Dead Language*, Amsterdam 1993; J. HALL, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero’s Letters*, Oxford 2009; R. FERRI, *Politeness in Latin Comedy. Some Preliminary Thoughts*, MD LXI 2009, pp. 15–28; E. DICKEY, *How to Say ‘Please’ in Classical Latin*, CQ LXII 2012, pp. 731–748.

³ W.M. LINDSAY (ed.), *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae*, Oxford 1910.

⁴ R. KAUER, W.M. LINDSAY (edd.), *P. Terenti Afri Comoediae*, Oxford 1958.

⁵ W.D.C. DE MELO (ed.), *Plautus*, vols. I–V, Cambridge, MA 2011–2013. See, however, the editor’s interest in providing the most readable text: “The Latin text of my Plautus edition is based on the latest critical work, but I have not considered it necessary to follow them slavishly” (p. IX).

⁶ J. BARSBY (ed.), *Terence*, vols. I–II, Cambridge, MA 2001.

“patterns of speech” ascribed to sociolects, which, moreover, are treated as a means of characterisation of a stock comedy type. The most important findings in this matter definitely refer to moments of transgressions of those patterns of speech, either due to the idiolectal features of a particular character or motivated by shifts of roles (e.g. a free-born youth disguised as a slave).

The sociolinguistic examination is completed with the insights brought in by politeness theory, which lately may seem to be the most dynamically developing branch of Latin Pragmatics. B.-L. deals very aptly with the immense literature in that field, selecting the theoretical tools most plausibly adaptable for a dead language. Drawing on previous studies by KASTER⁷ and, more importantly, HALL⁸, the author seeks to identify the BROWN & LEVINSON⁹ sociopsychological concept of positive and negative “face” with the Roman notion of, respectively, *diligentia* and *verecundia* (pp. 35–39). To this aim, B.-L., following his predecessors, uses mostly Ciceronian passages, adding some references of his own. Moreover, he is convinced of a binary division of politeness into approach-oriented and restrain-oriented motivation. Thus, he chooses to include HALL’s “politeness of respect”, developed specifically for the Roman reality in Cicero’s letters¹⁰, into the negative type (p. 291, n. 50). In my opinion, he quite rightly does so. Respect for the addressee’s hierarchical position, after all, should be part of the constant redressive action, treated by B.-L. as *verecundia*, namely “due attention to the other’s *diginitas*” (p. 37) or, as KASTER puts it, “the art of knowing your proper place in every social transaction”¹¹.

More problematic, however, is the relation between unmarked face-work (TERKOURAFI)¹² and politeness seen as salient verbal behaviour (WATTS)¹³. B.-L. argues that those two perspectives on politeness are “compatible” (p. 37) but, dare I say, ultimately he fails to explain how; nor does he indicate *expressis verbis* what linguistic behaviour he will interpret as “polite”: the excess of what is situationally appropriate or every face-constituting action? Instead, B.-L. concludes by stating that the context-sensitive care for the hearer’s face was always “operative in any conversation but became especially relevant when and if the speaker was on the brink of saying something offensive” (p. 39). As a result, in the statistical survey that dominates the first part of the book, the lack of an explicit distinction between polite and politic behaviour makes one cautious about B.-L.’s generalisations, such as “[the young man] is the most polite of any male character type” (p. 132), which, I feel, would be more precise if rephrased in terms of “using politeness markers” or “being ostensibly polite”¹⁴. Of course, in the close-reading analysis of specific passages, the author seems perfectly aware of the whole spectrum of politeness phenomena when in the second part of the book (Chapters 13–17) he delves into more ritualised aspects of verbal interaction: “Sostrata’s

⁷ R. KASTER, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome*, Oxford 2005.

⁸ HALL, *op. cit.* (n. 2).

⁹ P. BROWN, S.C. LEVINSON, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, Cambridge 1987.

¹⁰ HALL, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 8–13.

¹¹ KASTER, *op. cit.* (n. 7), p. 40.

¹² M. TERKOURAFI, *Generalised and Particularised Implicatures of Linguistic Politeness*, in: P. KÜHNLEIN, H. RIESER, H. ZEEVAT (edd.), *Perspectives on Dialogue in the New Millennium*, Amsterdam 2003, pp. 149–164.

¹³ R.J. WATTS, *Politeness*, Cambridge 2003.

¹⁴ This imprecise wording seems also to be acknowledged in the review by E. DICKEY (BMCR 2016.10.52, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2016/2016-10-52.html>); when commenting on B.-L.’s findings that “‘clever slave’ characters are politer” (p. 49), DICKEY reformulates his conclusion: “specifically, they soften a higher percentage of their imperatives”. Thus, the reviewer duly implies that the use of politeness markers does not necessarily makes an utterance markedly polite, nor does it say much about the speaker’s real intention.

expression of joy at her son's safe return ("gaudeo venisse salvom"), although formulaic and expected in precisely this situation, is genuine" (p. 178).

Further on, one may be not entirely convinced about the "heuristic device" which the author borrows from DE MELO¹⁵ in order to demonstrate if a given expression is "neutral with respect to politeness" (p. 65)¹⁶. This, according to the scholar, may be confirmed if the same expression-type can be used in speech acts with a different level of imposition. Although the premise seems to be correct, several problems arise. First, the examples chosen for comparison are rather controversial. While the 2nd person 'jussive' subjunctive in Plaut. *Pseud.* 1226 ("saltem [...] mihi dedas") does seem to be a "humble request", it is contrasted with *Mil.* 1030 ("aliquam mihi partem [...] operae des denique") where the same grammatical form can hardly be interpreted as a command. Given the minimisation (*aliquam partem operae*, see p. 276) of the imposition, we can also read it as a "humble request", in this case, pronounced ironically (by *miles* to his slave) in order to express impatience. One can also question the contrasting context used for *ne* + imperative (p. 76). The courtesan Philaenium (Plaut. *Asin.* 664 f.) indeed "expresses herself as politely as possible", but the dowered wife in the counter-example is not yet "in the middle of insulting" when she utters *ne nega* (922: DE. "Nullus sum." ART. "Immo es, ne nega, omnium <hominum> pol nequissimus"). I would rather say, the *matrona* is feigning empathy by reformulating her husband's self-deprecatory turn ("It's not true that you're 'nobody', don't deny it") and only then does she proceed to insult him ("You *are* the most base of people")¹⁷. Thus the irony employed in both comparisons, as I would argue, significantly weakens the conclusion about the politeness-neutral character of the expressions under discussion. This, obviously, can be still defended by the statistical data provided, but one would expect more pronounced differences in the examples selected for illustration. Since I have already mentioned the statistics, it is worth stressing that the calculation tools (the z-test and the chi-square calculation), explained in an accessible way (pp. 16–18) and aptly handled by B.-L., are one of the valuable arguments to support the findings. Moreover, the author is very agile in using numbers, percentages and proportions throughout the text, maintaining the balance between statistics and close-reading analysis. The reader will appreciate the recurrent reinterpretation of the calculations in terms of "preferences", "tendencies", "patterns" and "rules".

As for the structure and distribution of the content inside the volume, at first it seems slightly chaotic. The "Introduction" is followed by major parts titled "How to command and request / say 'please' / greet, (etc.) in early Latin", which get divided further into chapters. This gives an impression that what was supposed to be a monographic study on verbal interaction is rather a random selection of pragmatic functions ("How to..."). Fortunately, an attentive reader will see a perfectly designed distribution of content with no place for randomness: from discussing the speech acts (Parts I and II), mainly directives (Chapters 2–10) and assertives (Chapter 11), to the dialogue-management signals (Part III): opening, closing and interruptions. Thus the book goes through verbal interaction roughly from the unit level to the global structure. Only then, drawing on the previous findings, can the author proceed to present the most compelling "speech patterns" (Part IV): the language of friendship, i.e. among equals (Chapter 14), and the language of domination, i.e. master–slave interactions (Chapter 15). The final part uses three particular plays (Plaut. *Capt.* and Ter. *Eun., Ad.*) to illustrate the transgressions of those conversational styles: a case of swapping roles between master and slave, the free-born Chaerea disguised as a eunuch and old Demea's transformation into *adfabilis senex*. This last analysis of trading speech patterns in *Ad.*

¹⁵ W.D.C. DE MELO, *The Early Latin Verb System: Archaic Forms in Plautus, Terence, and Beyond*, Oxford 2007, pp. 109–111.

¹⁶ By "neutral with respect to politeness", which appears throughout the book, B.-L. seems to refer to unmarked expressions that in the case of politeness-motivated formulae such as greetings should be tokens of WATTS' politic behaviour.

¹⁷ This false-consolation mechanism is also explored by Plautus in *Merc.* 164 (see pp. 158 f.).

(pp. 254–266) is especially succulent and convincing, while making excellent use of the previous arguments.

In short, after reading through the volume the reader, guided competently by the author, gets to know the main mechanisms of verbal interaction in Roman comedy and, moreover, the repercussions of their creative modifications for on-stage performance. Despite this accumulative progression of content, there are no final conclusions. Unfortunately, this can only to some extent be compensated for with the partial and, indeed, very comprehensive summaries after every cluster of chapters and major parts.

Even if the number of issues addressed in the book is impressive, I can see a lack of balance in dedicating attention and space to some topics: e.g. almost 14 insightful pages on conversational openings (pp. 177–191) and merely one page on the closings (pp. 191 f.). Also, as one can infer from the presentation of the contents above, the directives, strongly connected to the politeness phenomena, constitute the core of the book. For an even fuller description of verbal interaction, the future research, following the methods of B.-L., should include also other speech-act types like commissives, expressives (etc.) along with other conversational functions such as change of topic or small talk elements (mentioned briefly on p. 193).

To sum up, this book is an excellent contribution to the study of Latin Pragmatics in Roman comedy. Among its major merits, besides a number of new insights, I should mention its comprehensive use of different linguistic frameworks and tools without resorting unnecessarily to hermetic jargon. This feature makes it easily accessible to a novice reader, even if B.-L.'s main objective is far from giving a full summary of previous studies on the particular topic. Therefore, *Linguistic Interaction in Roman Comedy*, with its minor flaws that I have tried to indicate above, sets a new milestone in the study of verbal characterisation in Plautus and Terence and offers a well-argued revision on such broadly discussed topics as politeness phenomena.

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