

Quod-Switching: Bilingualism and Social Context in the Letters of Pliny the Younger

This paper draws on recent work in ancient multilingualism to examine instances of Greek code-switching in Pliny the Younger's Latin epistolary corpus. Specifically, it applies a number of categories employed by J.N. Adams in analyzing how and why Cicero, in his letters, switches between Greek and Latin during the same discourse. While building on these categories, the paper makes some modifications to them in order to address differences between the two authors. This paper's application of recent sociolinguistics to Pliny's corpus will allow for a more nuanced approach to his code-switching than has previously been undertaken—although previous work has commented on the presence of Greek in Pliny, a sociolinguistic framework allows for a more thorough analysis of the impact and conditioning factors of Pliny's code-switching.

In my presentation I will focus specifically on what Adams calls “critical terms”: short characterizing statements, many as brief as single-word units, that an author employs to indicate judgments about the author's own writing or the writing of others (Adams 2003: 323). Some relevant examples of this kind of switching in Pliny, along with some brief analysis, will show that Pliny's use of this type of code-switching diverges somewhat from Adams' model. In his analysis of Cicero, Adams most often considers the author's description of separate written works outside of the epistolary corpus, both his own writing and that of others. In Pliny's letters, on the other hand, critical code-switching most often serves to establish context for the letters themselves in the wider social and literary world.

Similarly self-referential and performative is Pliny's use of Greek in intimate social situations. While, in Cicero, Greek works “as a form of coding or exclusion,” in Pliny it functions rather to suggest Pliny's own close affiliations with such desirable friends as emperors

and Tacitus to an external reader (Adams 2003: 329). He even goes so far as to say that the emperor once commanded him, partly in Greek, to “*consider* what we ought to do” (ἐπιστήσατε *quid facere debeamus*, 6.31.12). Although both of the use of code-switching for “critical terms” and to create a sense of intimacy overlap with categories that Adams uses in his work on Cicero, this paper’s focus on the subtly and not-so-subtly different uses of two of these categories in Pliny shows how the nature and purpose of elite Roman code-switching had changed by the early empire along with changing social circumstances.

Bibliography

Adams, J.N. 2003. *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*. Cambridge.

Mynors, R. A. B. (ed.). 1963. *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Libri Decem Epistularum*. Oxford.