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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE IN GREEK AND ROMAN THOUGHT

VOLUME ONE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMITTEE ON THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

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AUGUST 2005

UMI Number: 3181419

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*Still, pedetentim as Lucretius says,
Little by little, you do start to learn;
And learn as well, maybe, what language does
And how it does it, cutting across the world
Not always at the joints, competing with
Experience while cooperating with
Experience, and keeping an obstinate
Intransigence, uncanny, of its own.*
- H. Nemerov, "Learning the Trees"

PREFACE

After a century and more of scholarly disinterest, the origin of language as a topic of research has recently been enjoying a renaissance of sorts. Inquiry into the origin of language fell out of favor with scholars in the late nineteenth century; in 1866 the Société Linguistique de Paris famously banned future contributions on the origin of language and the related topics of universal, perfect, and 'Adamic' languages. The late 20th century saw a renewal of interest in this age-old topic (made possible by converging disciplines and scientific developments) and in previous answers to the question of language origins. Both academic and popular interest has exploded.

This dissertation is the much expanded result of originally more limited research on the ancient idea that Latin is a dialect of Greek ('Aeolism'). The idea is a striking one, and would be more so if it were not so obscure and, as I argue herein, generally misinterpreted. Dedicated scholarship on Aeolism is rare, and incidental references not much more frequent, but both tend to similar conclusions about its role in the ancient world. That role is perceived as minimal, because wholly determined by psychological forces operating at a supra-societal and indeed pan-cultural level (see Chapter Six). Paradoxically, the same scholarship routinely claims that even among the ancients the

idea probably had little currency. Aeolism is thus represented as both commonplace, an unsurprising consequence of more widespread assumptions about language, and inconsequential, its esoteric intellectual existence subordinated to a seemingly more significant and critically appealing cultural psychology.

In the course of attempting to rehabilitate Aeolism, both by making it more known and by giving it an updated understanding in touch with recent developments in critical social theory and our continually evolving understanding of the ancient world, I saw my subject expand from the origin of Latin to ancient thought on the origin of any and all languages. As with Aeolism, research on ancient thought on the origin of language has seemed to me to leave open new avenues of interpretation. This is not to devalue the painstaking work of previous generations of scholars, upon whose Herculean shoulders this dissertation necessarily and gratefully stands. But previous scholarship on the origin of language goes only so far in interpreting the ideas, when at all, primarily from a technical linguistic or philosophical perspective, or as limited offshoots of more important themes (like the origin of all humankind), in either case as if the ideas had relevance only in learned contexts considered esoteric even among ancient intellectuals. There is more to Aeolism and the origin of language than *Quellenforschung* or philosophy, more (and less) than 'ancient language science' so called. My aim herein is to show that these ideas had broader relevance for their thinkers and their worlds. I hope to show that ancient ideas on the origin of language were vital ways of thinking about actual and especially ideal social organization in the multicultural Greco-Roman world

In writing this dissertation I have benefited immeasurably from collaboration with many distinguished people and organizations, and it is my honor and pleasure to

thank them here. I am indebted above all to my committee members: my chairman Dr. Jonathan Hall, Dr. Richard Saller, and Dr. Brian Krostenko -- their learning, patience, and generosity, especially with a topic situated stubbornly at the outskirts of their own areas of profound expertise, were freely given and, I hope, are visible on every page. Early versions of several chapters were commented on by Dr. Campbell Grey. Aeolism was first brought to my attention in the winter of 1999 in a survey of Latin poetry at the University of Chicago led by Dr. David Wray. I also thank for their consideration and helpful comments the organizers and participants of conferences at which I was fortunate to read portions of the work in progress: the Rhetorics and Poetics Workshop at the University of Chicago in 2003 and the Ancient Society Workshop at the same institution in 2001; the American Philological Association Annual Meeting in 2002; the Classical Association of the Middle West and South Annual Meetings in 2002 and 2000; and the University of Pennsylvania Classical Studies Graduate Student Conference in 2000. A great many people have contributed to this dissertation but any errors that remain are, of course, entirely my own.

My research was supported by a Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies (1998-1999) and by a Mellon Dissertation-Year Fellowship (2003-2004), both from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation; and by the University of Chicago, in the form of a Century Fellowship (1999-2003) and the Joseph Regenstein Library. I also benefited from adjunct teaching at the Catholic University of America, the George Washington University (both 2001-2002), and the University of Colorado at Boulder (2004), whose Dr. John Gibert was an uncommonly generous host all of 2003-2004. I was fortunate to complete the dissertation while a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Division of Languages and Literature at Bard College (2004-5).

Finally but in no way lastly, three personal thanks: to my mother, Mary Sue Eldon, whose wit and flair for language sowed the seeds of my own polyglottalism; to my father, Glenn Stevens, whose convictions are as unwavering as they are inspiring (La Rochefoucauld had it right: “The accent of one’s birthplace persists in the mind and heart as much as in speech” ... an obsession with an ancient language or two notwithstanding); and to Abby, *carissimae meae*.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation surveys ancient Greek and Roman thought on the origin of language from the earliest available evidence until the beginnings of the Roman Imperial period. From the perspective of recent work on ancient group interaction, ideas about language origins were responsive to the lived experiences of the people who held them. The ideas were manipulated like myths, ‘good to think with’ about a range of non-linguistic, mytho-social concerns. The ideas were especially useful for articulating the tensions between real and ideal social organizations in a multicultural world inevitably but not always desirably characterized by group overlap and interpenetration.

The **Introduction** sets the proposed topic and methods in the context of traditional research into ancient linguistics. Such research, while valuable, by implicitly adopting a teleological or presentist perspective leaves relatively underexplored the non-linguistic functions fulfilled by thought on language in antiquity. There is room for a reexamination of ancient linguistic thought with regard to its thinkers’ perceptions and experiences of social conditions – a *sociology of ancient linguistic thought*.

The Chapters are organized thematically, moving generally from large groups and their perceived linguistic differences, e.g. humankind as opposed to other animals, to the differences between smaller groups, e.g. between speakers of different languages.

Chapter One – Beyond ‘Nature’ and ‘Convention’ complicates the division of ancient ideas on language origins into two allegedly opposed philosophical camps of

‘naturalism’ (words are by φύσις, ‘nature’) and ‘conventionalism’ (words are by θέσις, ‘convention’). A close reading of the authors most often taken as exemplars of the camps (‘naturalists’: Pythagoras and Epicurus, along with Cratylus in Plato’s *Cratylus*; ‘conventionalists’: Democritus and Aristotle, along with Plato’s Hermogenes) reveals both changing definitions of crucial terms within the camps and overlap of ideas between them. The complexity of positions on language origins emphasizes the potential value of a more sociological approach to the ancient evidence.

Chapter Two – The Physiology of Language: Humans, Animals, and Others in Hesiod, Aristotle, and Lucretius surveys ancient ideas on the biology, physiology, and psychology of language. Beginning with implicit differences between such terms as αὐδή and φωνή, ancient thought developed a complex set of distinctions among types of sounds: ‘noise’, ‘voice’, ‘speech’, and ‘language’. These distinctions, by defining human language as against especially animal vocalization, underlined the limits between humans, animals, and other beings. Ultimately biology, including the ‘articulate tongue’, is not sufficient for human language, and ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ becomes crucial. This is especially true in light of cases that resist easy classification, including birds with articulate tongues and linguistic diversity, human groups with animal behaviors or biologies, and barbarians and others whose languages were characterized by Greeks and Romans as animalistic in sound.

Chapter Three – Glottogony and Anthropogony: Language and Civilization builds on the central notion of Chapter Two, that language separates humankind from animals, by exploring the preeminence of language in Greco-Roman anthropology, anthropogony, and *Kulturgeschichte*. Summaries of the history of civilization (in e.g. Sophocles, Euripides, Epicurus, Lucretius, Horace, and Diogenes of Oenoanda) often

include the emergence of language, thus linking that trait with others, including clothing and diet, that strongly define normative humankind as against both animals and marginal or exotic human cultures.

Chapter Four – An Ancient Experiment: Herodotus on Psammetichus examines the linguistic assumptions and implications of the famous experiment performed by Psammetichus, in which the spontaneous speech of children raised without linguistic input was taken for the original language. Reports of the experiment show that interest in language origins is widespread, in antiquity and later, precisely because of the light it purports to shed on language innateness and human nature. Psammetichus' experiment is particularly suited to articulating mytho-social concerns, showing strong structural and thematic similarities to the ubiquitous 'foundling myth'.

Chapter Five – Linguistic Diversity explores ancient thought on that topic, showing that there is little explicit connection between ideas on language origins generally and the fact of linguistic diversity in particular. At the same time, the linguistic diversity of the Greek and especially the Roman worlds provided the most immediate context for many authors' personal experiences of language and its defining and demarcating powers. A close reading of several authors (including Homer, Herodotus, and Ovid), and of experiences with and reactions to linguistic diversity, shows that language like people is assumed to diversify according to place. This connection makes linguistic diversity an intensely personal and ambiguous fact of ancient life.

Chapter Six – Aeolism: The Origin of Latin builds on the persistent tension between ideally distinct groups and actually overlapping groups by examining the evidence for ancient ideas on the origins of Latin. Latin could be viewed in general as

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'mixed' and, perhaps surprisingly from a modern standpoint, in particular as a dialect formed of Greek and barbarian parts. This topic is discussed at length, with important implications for the application of modern psychological and sociological theory to antiquity. This specific instance of language origin offers strong evidence that such ideas served to articulate grudging but widespread acknowledgment of the fact of group overlap and interpenetration in a highly multicultural Greco-Roman world.

Not all men have the same languages.
- Aristotle *De Interpretatione* 16a

INTRODUCTION

THEORY AND METHOD

Why study ancient Greek and Roman ideas on the origin of language? They have in fact been studied for hundreds of years.¹ But this may reveal less about the ancient ideas, much less about their continued importance or relevance, than about the interests of previous and current generations of scholars. Even for those generations, Greco-Roman ideas have tended to take second place to Biblical accounts of language origins and linguistic diversity, and to the traditions of exegesis and research spawned by them. Historians of linguistics may cite Greek ideas as precursors to the linguistics of the Enlightenment and later, but for many the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1ff), and to a lesser extent the naming of the animals by Adam (Genesis 10:5), have provided the more indelible images for almost the whole history of Western inquiry into language origins.² Moreover, it may be argued that Greco-Roman ideas, like other pre-scientific

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹ Most modern comments on the ancient ideas appear incidentally in studies of individual authors (e.g. Rijlaarsdam 1978 on Plato, McKeon 1946-7 on Aristotle, Bailey 1947 on Lucretius) and in surveys of ancient linguistics as a whole (recently e.g. Matthews 1994, 21-25, and Robins 1997; Steintal 1890-1 is still fundamental). Monographs on the topic are rare (e.g. Allen 1948; see esp. Gera 2003). For the more general question, "why study the origin of language?", see von Raffler-Engel 1989; general surveys of the history of answers to the linguistic question include Hewes 1992 and 1975, Hildebrand-Nilshon 1980, Fano 1962, and especially Borst 1957.

² Trabant 2001, 15: "Just as philosophy is ... footnotes to Plato, the origins [of language] debate is, of course, footnotes to the Bible: to Adam's naming of the living creatures, to Eve's seductive first

ideas on the origin of language, have no *scientific* linguistic value: they cannot add to a modern understanding of the actual origin or prehistory of language, or even in most cases to the subsequent history of individual languages, Greek and Latin included. Nonetheless the ideas are often considered precisely from a modern linguistic perspective, with only explicitly technical or philosophical formulations counted as linguistics proper, and these investigated or even just cited primarily for their similarity to or difference from modern theories.³ This common presentist perspective depends on a modern distinction between scientific knowledge about language and non-scientific knowledge or belief. Its application to the ancient evidence is anachronistic and limits both the evidence considered and how it may be interpreted.

In contrast to this perspective, my aim in this dissertation and especially this Introduction is to show that ancient Greek and Roman ideas on the origin of language, whether scientific, philosophical, and esoteric, or non-scientific, non-technical, and popular, should still be of interest, and not necessarily or even primarily because of continued relevance to the modern world or to modern linguistics. The history of linguistics, like the history of other areas of knowledge considered today to be disciplines or sciences, is more discontinuous than not, with knowledge in different eras

speech act, and to the diversification of language at Babel.” Trabant sees “clear intertextuality” with the Biblical stories in “all enlightened origins stories”, scientific literature included. Trabant like others mentions in passing Greek ideas as a first step away from theological myths, but reserves real linguistic knowledge for the Enlightenment (6). This sort of reference to the ancient evidence is “presentist” (Koerner 1999, 1-2 and 24; see below). On Genesis 11:1ff v. 10:5 in Western research, Eco 1994, *passim*; cf. Harrelson 1989. These and similar impressions ignore non-Western ideas almost completely; for a refreshing and magisterial corrective, see Borst 1957.

³ Thus e.g. the first two sentences in Dahlmann’s seminal and invaluable dissertation (1928:5) allow that ancient philosophers “tried to explain ... how human language was born” (*Quomodo lingua humana orta esset ... explicare conabantur*) but “they of course fell into errors” (*necessario in errores incidebant*).

and places characterized by distinct social, cultural, and intellectual conditions that have nothing necessarily to do with those of adjacent eras or places, much less those peculiar to the modern world.

One seminal formulation of this perspective on the history of knowledge, linguistic or otherwise, is Foucault's. Like him:

I am not concerned ... to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility.⁴

This approach to the ancient ideas results in "not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology'"⁵, or an informed historiography (see below) not only of the ideas, and not with reference to later ideas or those currently considered correct or scientific, but also of their preconditions and socio-cultural concerns.

From this perspective, modern charges of inaccuracy and claims to precursors, while arguably correct in cases, are revealed as limiting understanding of the ancient ideas. Greek and Roman ideas about language should be interesting precisely to the extent that they are not separate from other historically-specific areas, including for example politics, society, and culture. If they offer little insight into how language functions in general, into its actual history, or even into how Greek and Latin worked as living languages, they have much to say about many things aside from language. The

⁴ Foucault 1970, xxii.

⁵ Ibid. See recently and more theoretically Longino 2002; and below, "Toward a Sociology of Ancient Linguistic Thought".

same connections between linguistics and the specific contexts of Greece and Rome that disappoint the modern linguist should delight the classicist, for in those connections are implicated other ancient subjects of broader import.⁶ Ancient linguistic thought is interesting because of its cultural specificity.⁷

From this perspective, the ancient ideas assume a local or historicized importance, both in themselves and as representatives of ancient organizations of knowledge, demonstrably “good to think with” about a range of mytho-social concerns. Thus Jonathan Hall concludes about a related body of myths, myths of origins:

The multiple, contradictory versions in which such myths are transmitted to us should not be viewed as the shattered fragments of a genuine historical memory which can be carefully reassembled to write prehistory, and the attempt to rationalize and harmonize them should be resisted.⁸ Instead, their sheer diversity should be retained as a valuable indication of how the scattered population groups of Greece attempted to understand their position in the world and their relationships with one another.⁹

Ancient ideas on language origins offer an underused chance to explore the complex multiculturalisms of ancient Greece and Rome. The ideas should be interesting in the first place because they were interesting to the ancients. As an intellectual

⁶ Cf. Bloomer 1991, 6: “The subject of how and why Roman literature employed linguistic protocols has dimensions different from the strictly linguistic because Roman culture, like so many others, found stylistic strictures to be a vehicle for anxieties about ethnicity, social order, social status, and gender.”

⁷ Cf., more generally, Ortega y Gasset 1937, 447: “Necesitamos de [los hombres de otros tiempos] precisamente en cuanto son disímiles de nosotros”.

⁸ On the trend against “rationalizing” myths more generally, see the papers collected in Buxton 2002.

⁹ Hall 2002, 35-36.

endeavor embedded in historical, cultural, and social contexts, as well as non-linguistic discourses, the practice of linguistics in the ancient world depended on and may thus reveal aspects of the lived experience of its practitioners, diverse and particular but also held partially in common. Exploration of these two areas, the ideas themselves and their multiple contexts, by uncovering fundamental differences between ancient and modern organizations of linguistic knowledge, may also unmask the assumptions made by histories of linguistics and ancient studies more generally, and a consequent need of ‘unthinking’ those modern analytical categories.¹⁰

“New Models” and “Traditional Accounts” of Ancient Linguistics

There is room to expand both the evidence considered for ancient ideas on language origins and the ways in which it is interpreted. Any complete history of ancient linguistic thought cannot limit itself to language science so called but must include non-technical ancient ideas about language, and must also borrow interpretive models and methods from other fields in order to move from an essentially positivist and presentist history of ideas to a more informed and informative historiography of ancient linguistics. In this way what counted as language and linguistic thought in antiquity may be revealed in all its peculiarity and difference from the modern disciplines to which it putatively corresponds.

The editor of a recent collection of essays on *The History of Linguistics in the*

¹⁰ I borrow ‘unthinking’ from the title of Wallerstein 2001, a work insightful into the origins of modern social analytical categories, and thus highly suggestive of those categories’ limits. ‘Unthinking’ includes refashioning social science to collect and explain data without necessarily using (monoglot) states and nations as the standard of analysis, that is, free from the metahistory suggested by the ideology of the nineteenth century nation-state; as such it may help to rid ancient studies of the same anachronism.

Classical Period, Daniel Taylor, describes in his introduction how “the traditional account of ancient language science is undergoing intense criticism and review”, and concludes that there is “no reason ... not to accept the new model of the history of Graeco-Roman language science.”¹¹ According to Taylor, the traditional account was expressly teleological, representing all of ancient linguistic thought as tending towards the creation of a general system for grammar in the first century BC. In contrast, the “new historiographical model” is supposed to have escaped from this “positivistic perspective”, a perspective whose limiting focus on the linguistic bottom line “allow[ed] too much originality to go unrecognized by concentrating on what we have come to think of as ‘normal science’.”¹² In its place, practitioners of the new model are supposed to pay more critical attention to the nature of the ancient sources, and to emphasize the diverse contributions to grammar of distinct ancient thinkers and schools of thought, especially those predating the first century BC.

Taylor’s tone is congratulatory, and for good reasons. Scholars working within the new model have advanced our understanding of several areas of classical linguistics, for example the complementary roles played by Alexandrian philologists and Stoic grammarians in the gradual creation of an overall theory of grammar;¹³ and have revamped some areas entirely, for example “eliminat[ing] the analogy/anomaly quarrel”

¹¹ Taylor 1987, 1 and 13.

¹² Idem 4; “positivistic perspective”, 1; cf. Taylor 1996, 10-11 (quoting the passage from idem 4). Examples of the traditional account cited by Taylor include Steinthal 1890-1 and Robins 1997.

¹³ On these contributions to grammar, Callanan 1987, Ax 1986, Frede 1974; on the Stoics see further Long 1987, 183-236; and idem 1978, 131-139, esp. 131 (“their work in this field was of great interest and importance”) and 139 (“Like their predecessors the Stoics failed to distinguish clearly between grammar and semantic or logical theory”).

as an artifact of mostly Varronian design.¹⁴ The new model thus purports to reconstruct the history of ancient language science with more care as regards the nature of the ancient sources, and with less dependence on a teleology conditioning the whole course of the history.

Despite these and other advances, however, the new model retains certain assumptions from the traditional account that limit both its consideration of otherwise interesting ancient evidence and its interpretive scope, and that ultimately render it, like its predecessor, teleological. In terms of subject-matter, the new model still allows under the rubric of “ancient language science” only a relatively narrow subset of the wide range of ideas about language that were current in antiquity. Non-philosophical or non-technical ideas about language, so-called ‘folk linguistics’, made up a large and popular part of ancient linguistic thought but are effectively excluded from consideration. As a consequence of these limits, in terms of theory and method the new model remains more or less focused on a history of ideas, without much obvious interest in broader modes of interpretation. And in the end the new model still identifies a goal or pinnacle of ancient linguistic thought: the “autonomous science” and “independent discipline” of grammar achieved in the first century BC: this is the standard to which ancient linguistics in general is held.¹⁵ Thus the new model and the

¹⁴ These examples and others Taylor 1987, 13 and *passim*. On analogy and anomaly, Fehling 1956-1957 “was the first to argue that Varro ... had essentially invented a non-existent controversy between two schools” (Taylor 1987, 7); for a traditional account of the problem, Dihle 1957.

¹⁵ *Idem* 14. For Taylor the exemplar of this “revolution in linguistics” is Varro (1996, 10-18). While the first century BC did witness an explosion of principled inquiry into language, and while the *Ars Grammatica* was a real achievement in formal linguistics, to focus so narrowly is to ignore the richness and complexity of contemporary informal inquiry into and thought about language.

traditional account are similar, both arising from the same modern metahistory or historical myth about (ancient) linguistic thought.¹⁶

The fundamental limiting assumption made by both the traditional account and the new model is a distinction between philosophical, technical, or scientific knowledge of language on the one hand (*Sprachwissenschaft*), and non-scientific or popular ideas about language on the other ('folk linguistics').¹⁷ The distinction is a modern one. It depends on the relatively recent professionalization of linguistics as an academic discipline, with more or less clearly defined boundaries vis-à-vis other academic disciplines as well as extra-institutional, popular, and non-Western thought about language.¹⁸ Thought about language that does not analyze but evaluate, including popular ideas about language, is devalorized, especially by professional or 'scientific' linguists.¹⁹

¹⁶ On metahistories and historical myths in social science, Wallerstein 2001, 51-63: "modern historiography has not yet discarded theology, it has merely substituted new organizing myths for the previous ones" (52). In Foucauldian terms, both the new model and the traditional account depend on the same conditions of possibility, and presume the same underlying organization of knowledge, or archaeology.

¹⁷ For the term 'folk linguistics', Robins 1997, 2; Niedzielski and Preston 2000 (see below). The distinction parallels another limiting one in ancient studies, opposing boring pragmatic Romans to exciting philosophical Greeks. The OCD thus considers linguistics a Greek activity, even when done by Romans and Greeks "in direct contact with each other" for more than six hundred years; the exaggerated dichotomy is read into the ancient evidence, showing "two main schools of thought" on language origins (Allen 1948, 36). A similar divide is currently being bridged in studies of visual and material culture, where it has long been thought that "art history is Greek, archaeology is Roman" (Smith 2002, 64 and 88-90).

¹⁸ For a forceful discussion of Western disciplinary knowledge as reifying colonialist views of non-Western, non-scientific "myth", see Smith 1999, esp. 58-77 with references; in general Young 1990.

¹⁹ "[L]inguists have generally taken an "us" versus "them" position" (Niedzielski and Preston 2000, vii). The linguist Leonard Bloomfield is supposed to have called such ideas "stankos", evidently because they stunk (ibid.); Bloomfield's obituary reports without evident irony that he collected these "ignorant or stupid remarks about language" (Hall 1970, 552).

An introduction to the study of folk linguistics puts it thus:

From a scientific perspective, folk beliefs about language are, at best, innocent misunderstandings of language ... or, at worst, the bases of prejudice, leading to the continuation, reformulation, rationalization, justification, and even development of a variety of social injustices.²⁰

The terms in which these demarcations are often cast are telling. Linguistics as an academic discipline seeks and finds “knowledge” about language, while non-academic (read: pre-modern Western or non-Western) ideas about language are “myths”, in this context a derogatory term.²¹ Moreover the latter are thought to be responsible for the worst abuses of humans by other humans, for example the use of Indo-European linguistics to support Aryan mythology and, in one ramification, to help justify German National Socialism and its practices.²²

The distinction between *Sprachwissenschaft* and ‘folk linguistics’, along with its limiting effects, may be seen in both “new” and “traditional” approaches to ancient linguistic thought. For if the new model no longer treats ancient linguistics as “normal science”, it still presumes a firm distinction between scientific and non-scientific ideas

²⁰ Niedzielski and Preston 2000, 1.

²¹ See e.g. the section divisions in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Part I is about “Popular ideas about language”, and includes topics like prescriptivism, the notion that languages can be better or worse than others, and magic words, all of which are written off as “widely held misconceptions” or “linguistic superstition” (6). The remainder of the *Encyclopedia*, Parts II-XI (!), is concerned by implicit contrast with true knowledge about language. Part IX Section 49, on “The origins of language”, makes the contrast explicit: “Early ‘experiments’” are contrasted with “Scientific approaches”. On language myths, Bauer and Trudgill 1998.

²² Post-colonial theory argues that Western, “scientific” knowledge is no less complicit than “myth” in the history of Western disempowerment, dehumanization, and abuse of non-Westerns; for a powerful review of these arguments, Young 1990; on Aryanism and anti-Semitism in linguistics, see e.g. Olender 1992.

about language; ancient linguistics is thus in fact subject to additional exclusion and categorization as myth. This is clear first in the title of Taylor's article, which replaces the collection's "Linguistics", at least possibly ambiguous as regards scientific knowledge and/or belief, with the explicit "Language Science"; and in the appearance of the word "science" in the passages quoted above. In the article Taylor makes clear the disciplinary presuppositions underlying the new model:

the theory [was] first proposed by Di Benedetto [1958-9] and later amplified by Pinborg [1974], Siebenborn [1976], and Fehling [1979] that a new language science emerges in the first century B.C. ... [T]he one crucial characteristic of grammatical science as it exists after the first century B.C.: it is an autonomous endeavor, independent of philosophical inquiry on the one hand and of literary study on the other. Linguistic questions are being asked because those doing the asking want linguistic answers for their own sake. There is no hidden agenda, as it were.²³

Near the end of the article Taylor uses the same distinction to give ancient linguistics explicit chronological limits and an implicit thematic and methodological definition:

A general overall system of grammar, we might say linguistic theory ... occurred in the first century B.C. The crucial difference between this new system or theory and its predecessors is that it considers grammar an *autonomous science*, an *independent discipline*. This then is *the* significant event in the early history of linguistics, for it is when linguistic questions are asked for their own sake.²⁴

The modern standard is clear: ancient linguistics is linguistics to the extent that it anticipates the supposedly scientific isolation enjoyed by linguistics as a modern academic discipline. As a result non-philosophical or non-technical ideas about

²³ Taylor 1987, 11.

²⁴ Idem 13-14; emphases added.

language, by definition not part of modern linguistics, are not considered for the ancient “science” either.

The application of this standard thus artificially limits the evidence for ancient thought on language. The situation is more pressing in that the same presuppositions inform the modern *communis opinio*. In his summary and praise of the new model Taylor implies that he is preaching to the converted: “for all [the] familiarity [of the traditional account] I daresay that few contemporary scholars would agree with it.”²⁵ This suggests widespread acceptance of the distinction between *Sprachwissenschaft* and ‘folk linguistics’, with the latter excluded *a priori*.²⁶

This modern distinction, with its consequence of focusing attention on seeming *Sprachwissenschaft* alone, has limited relevance to interpreting the practice of linguistics in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The range of ideas about language considered by ancient Greeks and Romans, by ‘philosophers’ of language or professionals with serious linguistic interests (philosophers, grammarians, translators, teachers of language and rhetoric) as well as laypeople, included both technical or philosophical and less technical notions.²⁷ In ancient thought about language the two types of ideas, *Sprachwissenschaft* and folk linguistics, are inseparably intertwined or rather of a piece because not clearly distinguished. Any history of ancient linguistic thought must make that overlap its starting point and perhaps its main concern.

²⁵ *Idem* l.

²⁶ Other surveys have aimed for a more ecumenical approach, but with some traditional assumptions still in operation. See e.g. Matthews 1994.

²⁷ The best example is probably the practice of etymology, involving by definition ideas about language, enormously popular in antiquity, and dismissed by modern histories of ancient linguistics as methodologically flawed and scientifically bankrupt. Yes, but *cui bono*?

There is room for this sort of overlap in the “new model” of ancient linguistics described by Taylor, but the idea may be pushed further. In the new model, as noted above, ancient linguistic thought is said to become scientific, that is an autonomous, independent discipline, only in the first century BC. The implication is that prior to that time, ideas about language were at best pre-scientific, including a nascent technical vocabulary and philosophical notions only gradually specialized to the study of language, as well as non-philosophical ideas, attitudes, and beliefs. That is, before the creation of grammar in the first century BC, linguistic thought was mixed as described above, containing both *Sprachwissenschaft* and folk linguistic notions. Even within the new model a study of ancient folk linguistics is thus suggested for ideas about language prior to the synthesis of the first century BC.

What the new model thus leaves relatively unexplored is that, despite the systematization of “theoretical linguistics”, emerging scientific ideas remained mixed with non-scientific ones. For Taylor the creation of grammar is “*the significant event in the early history of linguistics.*” But in the larger context of continually mixed scientific and non-scientific ideas, the creation of grammar is a major event in linguistic *science* but a less dramatic moment in the history of linguistic *thought* more generally. In addition to the ideas being mixed, the people who held them were also more diverse than the new model or traditional accounts would seem to allow: ancient linguistics as an intellectual practice was sociologically complex.

Toward a Sociology of Ancient Linguistic Thought

There is implicit awareness of the overlap of scientific and non-scientific ideas, and of the existence of non-scientific ideas about language at all, in some studies of

Greek and Roman attitudes to their own and other languages, and of Greek and Latin usage with regard to the same. Topics considered in this light have included “the poverty topos”, the idea that Latin is worse than Greek;²⁸ Cicero’s opinions on non-Roman speech;²⁹ the Greek and Latin terms for bilingualism along with their social and cultural connotations;³⁰ and the striking belief that Latin was a dialect of Greek.³¹ Studies of these topics are not normally framed as histories of ancient linguistic thought (or language science), but it is unclear whether their authors would accept a reading of their works as implicitly challenging the closed ancient canon of that subject or the fundamental modern distinction between *Sprachwissenschaft* and folk linguistics. They may be grouped together generally under the rubric of folk linguistics, but none goes by that name and they do not necessarily share theoretical or methodological underpinnings. Moreover some of these sorts of studies, in adhering to other theoretical bases than a history of linguistics, whether consciously or not, have produced questionable interpretations of the evidence.³²

In light of the fundamental presuppositions about the nature of ancient linguistic thought shared by both new and traditional accounts, and given the scattershot nature of studies of Greek and Roman non-scientific ideas about language, there is room for a

²⁸ Farrell 2001, 28-51 (chapter title: “The poverty of our ancestral speech”); Toohey 1981.

²⁹ Ramage 1961.

³⁰ Dubuisson 1992, 1985, 1983.

³¹ Idem 1984; see Chapter Six.

³² Chapter Six deals with these problems in common interpretations of Aeolism.

more ecumenical study of ancient linguistic thought generally. The implication of the new model, that prior to the first century BC ancient ideas on language mixed proto-scientific with folk notions, and my own suggestion that, despite the arguable emergence of linguistic science in the first century BC, that mix continued, combine to allow for a more comprehensive approach to the evidence, both of the ideas themselves and of the people who held them. An extension of sociological methods of research and analysis to the ancient evidence results in a sort of *sociology of ancient linguistic thought*: how do ancient ideas about language origins relate to their thinkers' lived experience?

This sort of study of ancient ideas about language may yet become an informed historiography of both the ideas and the society in which they are embedded: an archaeology of ancient ideas on language. In his programmatic work on the history of linguistics, E. Koerner distinguishes between the *history* of linguistics, a more or less straightforward recording of the events constituting the discipline over time, and what he calls the *historiography* of linguistics, a "principled manner" of writing the history of linguistic thought with awareness of the theoretical and methodological problems inherent in any kind of history-writing.³³ Even here the distinction between scientific and non-scientific ideas about language is evident. As part of a survey of the contributions to be made to this discipline by various other fields, Koerner concludes for example that "there is no particular methodological framework to be gained for linguistic historiography from the sociological approaches to science."³⁴ Like the

³³ Koerner 1999, 8-15 and 26-34; idem 1993.

³⁴ Idem 1993, 12-13.

“History of Ideas”, sociological models are thought to provide “little insight”; nonetheless “a smattering of the sociology of science and, perhaps more importantly, an understanding of the dynamics of social networks within any scientific organization would do the historian of linguistics some good”.³⁵ By contrast, Koerner considers the input to be had from history and philosophy of science “more promising”. The unstated reason for these evaluations must be that, since linguistics is considered a science, its history is best written with lessons learned from the historiography of other sciences. Although “the historian of linguistics [may need] to enter into the debate about the scientific status of linguistics ... it need not consume most of her/his energies.” The old distinction between scientific knowledge or disciplines and unscientific knowledge appears again, in this case to the potential detriment of historiographical method.

To the discipline’s potential theoretical gain, however, Koerner concedes that his appraisal of different subfields in historiography is probably conditioned by his specialty, linguistics in the modern period. He continues:

[f]or earlier periods of language, preceding the scientific age ... other criteria may have to be developed; no doubt, the application of modern principles in the philosophy of science to these earlier periods is hazardous. Indeed, the understanding of what is ‘scientific’ and what constitutes ‘science’ may have to be redefined for different periods of the discipline under investigation.³⁶

Koerner is right to suggest a need for historiographical rigor, and his final sentence moves his proposed historiography of linguistics closer to an archaeological inquiry along Foucauldian lines. As has been shown, however, for the study of linguistic

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Idem 13-14.

thought in the ancient world more is needed than a redefinition of “what constitutes ‘science’”, for both scientific and non-scientific ideas made up linguistic thought (then as they do now), and both must be considered.

The possibility of treating non-scientific ancient (or other) ideas about language as raised by Koerner gets stronger theoretical backing from Nancy Niedzielski and Dennis Preston in their work on contemporary American ideas about language. They and others have established non-specialist ideas about language as a legitimate field of study.³⁷ They trace widespread interest in the topic to a presentation on it by Hoenigswald, who suggests that “we should be interested not only in (a) what goes on (language), but also in (b) how people react to what goes on ... and in (c) what people say goes on. It will not do to dismiss these secondary and tertiary modes of conduct merely as sources of error.”³⁸ This clear, early formulation has had unfortunately little impact on linguistics.

Among other uses for the field of folk linguistics, Niedzielski and Preston note that “[t]he study of folk beliefs about language is one of the ethnographies of a culture.”³⁹ In this way the study of non-scientific ideas about language produces both intellectual (or philosophical) and socio-cultural results. The evidence studied to that end must be inclusive. After discussing and answering various objections to the field raised by subsequent authors, Niedzielski and Preston conclude that in the study of

³⁷ Niedzielski and Preston 2000; see also Preston 1996, 1993a: 333-377, 1993b.

³⁸ Hoenigswald 1966 (quoted material, 20). The topic “is ... as old as F. Polle [1889]” (Niedzielski and Preston 2000, 337 n.2).

³⁹ *Idem* vii.

ideas about language “we must not limit what we call language awareness (or “attention to language”) to one class or type of behavior.”⁴⁰ This conclusion expands on Koerner’s admission that in linguistic historiography what counts as linguistics may require redefinition for different societies. Taken together, these suggestions make theoretically feasible an informed historiography of ancient folk linguistics that may begin to address the imbalances caused by the presuppositions of both traditional and new accounts of ancient Greek and Roman linguistic thought.

The methods used by Niedzielski and Preston or by others studying contemporary folk linguistics are not directly applicable to the ancient evidence.⁴¹ Whereas modern evidence for such study has tended to be oral (transcribed), the evidence for ancient ideas about language is limited to what has been preserved in writing.⁴² Since ancient genres carried with them constraints on subject-matter and rhetoric, much of the spontaneity of contemporary evidence is absent, replaced by concerns particular to the genres in question. The scattershot nature of the ancient evidence has conditioned classics generally, encouraging a methodological eclecticism. Koerner’s historiography of linguistics allows for the same sort of catch-all methodology: “it is quite legitimate for linguistic historiographers to look outside their

⁴⁰ Idem 24.

⁴¹ Cf. Dubuisson 1985b, 110: Sociolinguistics “est ... liée, comme la sociologie en général, à des méthodes (enquêtes orales, enregistrement des témoignages, quantification des données) évidemment impraticables en histoire ancienne.” Dubuisson nonetheless endorses a sociolinguistic perspective for understanding Greco-Latin bilingualism, which he considers “la clé à bien des égards” in Greco-Roman history (109).

⁴² On this problem generally Crawford 1983; cf. Labov 1972, 100: “the fundamental methodological fact that historical linguists have to face is that they have no control over their data.”

own field for guidelines and models to imitate.”⁴³ As noted, and as Koerner stresses, turns to other disciplines, often not explicitly justified, must be tailored to the demonstrable shape of the evidence and the realities it reflects.⁴⁴ Such methodological turns may even make up deficits in the evidence; it has been observed that “[t]he regularities discovered by sociolinguistics ... may help us to fill some of those gaps which are inherent to the data on which the research of classical philology is based.”⁴⁵

In line with the promise of this contingent eclecticism I combine theoretical underpinnings dependent on the demonstrable contexts of the ancient world with historiographical methodologies developed by other disciplines. I approach ancient ideas on the origin of language by following the lead of several classicists who on various topics have abandoned the strong oppositions traditional in many areas of modern classical research in favor of fuzzier logics of complementarity and overlap more suited to the ancient evidence. This approach acknowledges the contingent nature of group interaction in the ancient world, and the complexity of their representations in ancient texts. Recent work on ancient group interaction seeks to move away from “a dichotomy of acceptance and resistance” between *distinct* groups, and stresses instead “the complexity and evolution of identity” within *overlapping* groups continually

⁴³ Koerner 1993, 4.

⁴⁴ Koerner’s acknowledgment of the contingent nature of method is found in his use of the term “climate of opinion”: he first says that it “map[s] out the intellectual atmosphere of a given period in which certain ideas flourished, were received or rejected”, and notes that in addition to the intellectual climate “also a number of other factors that may have played a role in fostering certain views” will have to be reconstructed (1993, 8). He owes the term to Becker 1932, 5.

⁴⁵ Frosen 1974, 3 (*non uidi*; cited by Colvin 1999, 4 n.7).

redefined by their partial mutual participation in shared social practice.⁴⁶ Much of this work has aimed at complicating the traditional picture of Romanization, a picture that simply opposed Romans to others; as such the focus has been largely on Romans and non-Greeks.⁴⁷ When Roman and Greek interpenetration is treated the period in question is usually the empire and often the Second Sophistic.⁴⁸ But there is ample evidence of Greco-Roman overlap and interpenetration in the late Republic and early Empire. Ideas about language origins reflect, among other things, the real fact of group overlap.

Similar considerations apply to ancient conditions not only as ‘real’ but also as experienced, perceived, and discussed by the people who lived through them. D. Cohen argues that classicists, in continuing to apply anachronistic binary schemes of analysis to ancient evidence and thus ignoring the complex categories in that evidence, have “sacrificed complementarity to opposition and so lost [the] significance [of what were in antiquity] essentially manipulable and rhetorically subtle symbols.”⁴⁹ As a corrective strategy Cohen suggests “choosing not to choose” between apparent opposites, avoiding “univocal solutions” that favor one or more modern categories at the expense of ancient ones, and thus restoring, crucially, their vitality as responses to real conditions experienced by ancient thinkers.⁵⁰ Cohen’s research focuses on the complementary

⁴⁶ E.g. Farrell 2001; Feeney 1998; Woolf 1998; Jones 1997; Cornell 1995, 78-9; and Gruen 1992, esp. 223-271; quoted material from Laurence 1998, 105 and 109; cf. generally Shennan 1989.

⁴⁷ E.g. MacMullen 2000, who surveys all Mediterranean regions aside from Greece.

⁴⁸ E.g. Ostenfeld 2002 treats “intercultural aspects of [the Second Sophistic]” (9); Goldhill 2001; Swain 1996, 1990.

⁴⁹ Cohen 1991, 39 n.15, quoting Herzfeld 1985, 215.

⁵⁰ *Idem* 174.

roles played by legality and morality in the regulation of sexual behavior at Athens, but the lesson is more broadly applicable. “Choosing not to choose” between *Sprachwissenschaft* and folk linguistics allows ancient ideas on the origin of language their full, potentially self-contradictory diversity of articulation and attestation over time and place – in short, their historicity, and their complex relationships to perceptions of lived experience.

Greek and Roman ideas on the origin of language by their very ubiquity and perennial mutability prove their vitality as expressions of lived experience. Although perhaps only ever partial or imperfect expressions, from the fifth century BC at the latest they were demonstrably “good to think with” not only about language but about a range of more or less pressing mytho-social concerns.⁵¹ The larger project is one of representing the present in terms of the past.⁵² In this sense ideas on language origins are similar to the intellectual practices of eponymy and etymology, both of which purport to reveal past or original states in the proper reading of present forms.⁵³ The

⁵¹ Levi-Strauss 1964.

⁵² For the present to be representable as past, history must be understood as less about change than about continuity of essence. This idea coexisted with ideas of history as change for the better, progress (e.g. Edelstein 1973, Dodds 1967), and of history as descent, contrasting the present with a past Golden Age (prototypically Hesiod *WD* 106-201 and see West 1978 ad loc.; Wallace-Hadrill 1982). Cf. Smith (2002: 78) on ancient visual culture: “where the modern world places high value on change, innovation and individuality, the ancient world often preferred similarity, continuity and collective ideas.” The ancients have been taken to task for their perceived historical naïveté. Robins 1997, 8: “[T]he failure of western Antiquity to evolve an adequate theory of historical linguistics, despite the fascination shown for etymology, may be linked with the failure of ancient historians to envisage the fact of change as more than the revelation of what was innately present all the time in a political system or in a person’s character”. Cf. Collingwood 1994, 42-45 on ancient “substantialism”: “the attempt to think historically and the attempt to think in terms of substance were incompatible.”

⁵³ On etymology see generally Bloomer 1991, 38-72, esp. e.g. 49: “Etymology practices a comparative culture making, working backwards from the present word to explain the reasons for its

nature of group interaction, both actual and ideal, the possibility of truth in language or originality in literature, the conditions and consequences of empire, acculturation, acceptance, resistance – all of these and other concerns may be read in ancient ideas about language origins. The modern distinction between *Sprachwissenschaft* or science generally and ‘folk linguistics’ or mythic thought thus founders again, since the two types are not clearly distinguished in ancient descriptions and more normative representations of the contemporary world.

In this capacity the ancient ideas are similar to other intellectual and quasi-intellectual fields in antiquity, each of which doubled as a means of thinking about the present in other terms, typically in terms of the past.⁵⁴ The ancient ideas are, again, interesting not insofar as they are divorced from non-linguistic concerns, but precisely to the extent that they are informed by them and respond to them. Technical and folksy, popular and philosophical, the ancient ideas comprise a topic similar in function to what N. Loraux has called the ‘civic imaginary’, the contentious discourse surrounding ideals of social organization. In interpreting them as such one “chooses not to choose”, for, as Loraux puts it, the ideas and their overlaps “need no untangling”: the tangles and complexities are part of the point.⁵⁵ In a different context Loraux writes of letting apparent ancient paradoxes retain their complexity, instead of “taking [modern

original *impositio* and explaining its formal *declinatio* from this original state. The past is recovered at the same time as the present ruin is explained.”

⁵⁴ Cf. Hall 2002, 47: “The purpose of these tales [i.e., myths of origin] was invariably to explain circumstances and to justify actions in the present; as social or political conditions in the present changed so the past was reconfigured to legitimate these new circumstances.”

⁵⁵ Loraux 1993, 57-58.

psychoanalytic] metaphors for [ancient social] realities.”⁵⁶

Avoiding traditional oppositions, by “choosing not to choose” and by letting ancient discursive logics remain tangled, may sound like a methodological *recusatio*. But there is room for method that takes account of these theories and the limits of the ancient evidence. As noted, the evidence for folk linguistics or indeed any linguistics in the ancient world is limited. Despite long interest in Greek, apparently “pervasive interest” in the first century BC in Greek and Latin, and aside from some well-known exceptions and anecdotes, the surviving sources are mostly silent on most internal features of the ancient languages as actually spoken. For example contemporary phonology and syntax are topics treated only rarely and unsystematically.⁵⁷ Moreover the ancient texts tend to preserve versions of Greek and Latin that were learned and literary, relatively fixed over unusually long periods of time, and thus in fact if not always on purpose distinct from the spoken languages.⁵⁸ As a result, sociolinguistic analysis of the ancient languages is limited. At issue should be the covariation of

⁵⁶ Loraux 1993, 20. Against the wholesale psychologizing of cultures generally, Gruen 1992, 2 and 224-227; see further Chapter Six.

⁵⁷ “Pervasive interest”: Rawson 1985, 105, 109, 119. Well-known examples include e.g. the variation in Latin between *o* and *au*, linked by the Romans to social class (e.g. Suet. *Vesp.* 22; see Leumann 1963, § 59, and Sihler 1995, § 62.a); Catullus’s parody of one Arrius’s affected (mis)pronunciation (84); and Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ statement to the effect that Romans “sound a little funny” (*DH* 1.90.1). Neither these nor the works of the late-classical grammarians (concerned exclusively with literary language; see Kaster 1988) are frequent or systematic enough to be the basis of sociolinguistic analysis. The modern researcher is also faced with apparent Greek and Roman disinterest in languages other than Greek and Latin; see e.g. Werner 1992 and the discussion in Chapter Five.

⁵⁸ In some cases the distinction between spoken and written language is a conscious one. This is especially true of Greek, in which different real and artificial dialects were used for different literary genres; see the survey in Palmer 1980, 83-173. In the so-called Second Sophistic, certain authors writing in Greek used a highly Atticizing style, thus consciously distancing their language and themselves from the linguistic and cultural *koiné* surrounding them (Swain 1996).

language with extra-linguistic or socio-cultural variables, and how to account primarily for the former in terms of the latter – how is language variation, including language choice, organized according to social factors such as age, class, and level of education, and cultural factors such as ethnicity and religion?⁵⁹ This deficit has been stressed by earlier studies. For example, one of the fullest accounts to date of Greco-Roman sociolinguistics, after introducing itself as a “sociolinguistic study”, admits that the “restrictions of the data” make it “impossib[le]” to use the “method and models used by modern sociolinguistics.”⁶⁰

This paradoxical state of the art, and the state of the ancient evidence, allow for an alternative approach deviating slightly but significantly from sociolinguistics. Instead of a sociology of language, the ancient evidence makes possible what may be called a sociology of philosophy of language, or a sociology of linguistics – concerned with language *not* as it was *spoken* by its speakers, but as it was *perceived, analyzed, and discussed* by them (and by others).⁶¹ The focus thus shifts from how language was spoken to how it was thought about by its speakers and others; and, indeed, to why

⁵⁹ Milroy and Milroy 1997 *passim*. For convenience, I refer to ‘sociolinguistics’ throughout, without meaning to oversimplify the discipline; see Coulmas 1997 *passim*.

⁶⁰ Kaimio 1979, 9 and 10; restrictions explained 14-19.

⁶¹ With similar attention to the peculiarities of “corpus languages”, but with ultimately a more traditionally sociolinguistic focus, see Langslow 2002, 25-6: “Often, of course, we cannot say who is saying or writing what to whom in which language, when, where, and why: but in many cases we can, and from these cases we stand to learn not only about the grammars of the languages in contact but also about aspects of the socio-cultural context of the document, such as education, citizenship, attitudes to various forms of language, and many others.” For the general project of this chapter, drawing on terminology and usage to uncover ideas, cf. the “axiom” proposed by Barker (2002: 23): “something of the character of the conceptual spectacles a scientist is wearing, and of the relations between concepts in his or her repertoire, can be detected through an examination of the idiosyncrasies of the language in which they report the phenomena.”

'language' as such occupied the ancient imagination and intellect as it so clearly did. The objects of study are the ideas and theories of ancient linguistics, their covariation with extra-linguistic or socio-cultural variables, and their possible relationships to social or cultural concerns: a *sociology of ancient linguistic thought*.⁶²

Against Koerner's pessimistic judgment of the potential value offered to linguistic historiography by sociological models, I consider the evidence with such models in mind specifically to correct the persistent application of limiting modern distinctions and unconsidered critical vocabularies to the ancient evidence. I write in the spirit of the sociology of knowledge as developed first by Mannheim and later elaborated by others with particular reference to the internal organizations and external connections of intellectual disciplines, and to innovation and the spread of ideas in and among the same.⁶³ Although other approaches are possible and will occasionally be noticed throughout this dissertation, some attention to ancient sociology reveals the complexity of ancient linguistic thought as a subject practiced by people and thus related in complex ways both to their lived experience, as individuals and as members of groups, and, more visibly because of the limitations of the evidence, to their perceptions and conceptualizations of that experience.

Recent work on scientific knowledge and society, for example, has argued against just the sort of dichotomization of 'knowledge' and 'belief' seen in the

⁶² Cf. Spolsky 1985 for an attempt to ground "historical sociolinguistics".

⁶³ Mannheim 1929, 1952. Curtis and Petras 1970 offers a survey of classic works, later works, and some criticism. The seminal application of sociology of knowledge to a modern discipline (primarily physical science) is Kuhn 1970; more generally Stehr 1994. For a magisterial and comprehensive sociology of Western philosophies and philosophers, see Collins 1998.

distinction between *Sprachwissenschaft* and 'folk linguistics'. H. Longino, in an attempt to resolve the dysfunctional opposition between sociological ("social") and philosophical ("cognitive rational") explanations for the spread of ideas in modern science, rightly "insists[s] on an epistemology for living science, produced by real, empirical subjects ... [that] accepts that scientific knowledge cannot be fully understood apart from its deployments in particular material, intellectual, and social contexts."⁶⁴ For Longino knowledge is distinct from belief only to the extent that it is categorized according to the knowledge-producing standards of a community: knowledge is social in that its production depends on interactions among people whose community standards allow ideas to become (classified as) knowledge.

The distinction between knowledge and belief is already being challenged in ancient studies, with the result that ancient disciplines mixing the two methods of knowing may be considered more historically and holistically. M. Sassi sums up this recent challenge to traditional dichotomies in the preface to the English translation of her work on *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece*. Although admitting that her topic, anthropology, "did not exist in ancient Greece as an independent discipline, with its own minimal set of methodological rules", that is as a scientific discipline along modern lines, she argues that an "anthropological *discourse* did exist."⁶⁵ She situates her own work alongside contemporary and subsequent investigations of other "non-systematic forms of knowledge" including "physiognomics, astrology, and medicine."⁶⁶ Such

⁶⁴ Longino 2002, 9 and *passim*; cf. Wallerstein 2001.

⁶⁵ Sassi 2001, xi; emphasis added

⁶⁶ Eadem xvi-xvii.

research rightly recognizes its subject-matter as not “constrained by the traditional boundaries between science and “pseudo-science””. By ignoring that modern distinction such research begins to do justice to the complexities of ancient knowledge, recognizing its historical contingency, its concomitant discontinuity from modern disciplines, and its surprising ubiquity as a means by which the ancients came to grips with their own contemporary experience.

Ancient ideas about language may also be studied as a form of “non-systematic knowledge”. Although linguistics did not exist as a scientific discipline, with even grammar arguably not systematized until the first century BC, ideas about language were ubiquitous and important from the earliest preserved sources on. Indeed, the most recent work on ancient ideas on language origins, D. Gera’s *Ancient Greek Ideas on Speech, Language and Civilization*, relies on just those early sources, and positions itself in just the space opened up, but left relatively underexplored, by recent scholarship on ancient linguistic thought.⁶⁷ Aiming to survey “Greek attitudes, assumptions, conjectures, and theories on the beginnings of language,” Gera stresses that her “work is not ... an account of the development of the Greek language *nor is it a study of linguistic and grammatical investigations* undertaken in the ancient world.”⁶⁸ By leaving language science as such to one side, Gera focuses on folk linguistic thought in order to explore the “links between speech and civilization” imagined by the Greek

⁶⁷ Gera’s work was published relatively late in the composition of this dissertation. I was delighted not only to discover active contemporary interest in ancient ideas on language origins, but also to find that my own interpretations are in general not vitiated by Gera’s careful scholarship and in many cases may be supported by it. Special convergences are to be found in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation, on topics treated by Gera 2003 *passim* and 68-111, respectively.

⁶⁸ Gera 2003, vii, emphasis added.

sources.⁶⁹

Gera's exploration centers around the persuasive notion that language is crucial to ancient Greek definitions of human civilization, separating contemporary, familiar humankind from primitive antecedents, exotic or mythic creatures, marginal societies, and animals. Thus she treats topics both adumbrating and belonging to the larger topic of the history of human civilization:

the opposing views of society as either deteriorating from a golden age of long ago or progressing from primitive beginnings, the importance of society and technical skills for linguistic development, the relation between language and diet, [and] speech as a unique human capacity.⁷⁰

As this Introduction has tried to show, I am in general agreement with Gera's conclusions and especially her purpose, which "is not to assess or grade [ancient] ideas on some scale of philosophical or scientific progress."⁷¹ Given this avowed avoidance of teleology, both Gera's work and this dissertation are organized thematically rather than chronologically. At the same time I offer interpretations of some of the same evidence treated by Gera which are not contradictory but rather complementary, focused less on the origins of language and human civilization (a topic treated to some extent in Chapter Three) than on the role played by language origins in perceptions of group interaction and overlap in historical times. This dissertation also differs in its more expansive canvassing of the ancient evidence: although Gera does not refer exclusively to Greek sources, I attempt to explore both Greek and (Greco-)Roman

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Eadem viii. Also treated is "the meaning of names."

⁷¹ Ibid.. See above, esp. pp. 2-3.

ideas. On the other hand, I also make less use than Gera of sources external to Greco-Roman antiquity for comparative purposes, limiting myself mainly to brief discussions in footnotes.

Conclusions

What counts as ancient knowledge about language depends not on modern standards but on the ways in which, and the purposes for which, ideas about language were developed and spread within and among ancient societies. As such ancient linguistics counts, again, as a topic embedded in a variety of popular and intellectual discourses: it should be interesting in the first place because it was interesting to the ancients and manipulated by them like myth, made meaningful for a variety of purposes. Ancient ideas about language, like myth generally, “exhibited aspects of social life that were otherwise concealed.”⁷² I attempt to explore how linguistic ideas, as non-systematic knowledge, could be used to address the lived and perceived non-linguistic experiences of the people who held them, and in particular a persistent albeit grudging awareness of group overlap at various scales.

Modern linguistics is tied to the history of the modern world, including episodes and movements its supposedly scientific practitioners would perhaps just as soon forget. Historical linguistics for example emerged from the comparative study of Indo-European languages, itself a product of late German Romanticism and the emerging ideas and ideal of the nation-state.⁷³ In the early twentieth century the bifurcation of linguistics into historical (or diachronic) and structural (or synchronic) areas paralleled

⁷² Lenfant 1999, 210; citing Buxton 1994, 210.

⁷³ Lincoln 1999, Robins 1997, 189-221; Lehmann 1967.

European political philosophies and historical events.⁷⁴ And in more recent decades, linguistics like other fields has been informed in part by feminism and the more general idea of cultural relativity and diversity, impacted by multiculturalism and globalization. The history of modern linguistics, like its ancient counterpart, is thus not “independent”, and the discipline not “autonomous”, but rather linked strongly to the decisive events, politics, and cultural and social transformations that have made the modern period extraordinary and at times intolerable.⁷⁵

This is not a new point but it is a necessary one. Historians of linguistics have had little trouble in concluding that previous generations and centuries of language study were unduly influenced by their times and by outmoded beliefs, were in a word unscientific. The same conclusion is predictably less often applied to contemporary research into language. So it must be reasserted: linguistics, ancient or modern, is a product of its times, an act of intellectual production rooted in a particular historical context whose cultural, social, political, and economic arrangements make such a thing as ‘thought about language’ possible. As a result, ideas about language, even outmoded ones, have much to say about their contexts and their thinkers’ relationships to them:

a language’s resources (or lack of) for talk about language reflect differences between the ways in which different cultures treat language as a form of behaviour. Languages and concepts of language are

⁷⁴ Harpham 2002, 1-67.

⁷⁵ Roy Harris has achieved a sort of infamy among linguists by continually pointing to just this contingency underlying linguistics: for Harris linguistics is not and can never be a “science”, because it is too much a product of its concealed history (1980, 1981). Cf. Harpham 2002, who argues that modern literary and social criticisms have almost universally adopted “language” as a solution to otherwise intractable problems and thereby shows, not incidentally, that linguistics cannot be scientific because its topic, language, cannot truly be defined.

themselves constitutive parts of cultural patterns.⁷⁶

By the same token, interpretations of linguistic ideas no less than the ideas themselves are historically and culturally contingent. The modern professionalization of linguistics as a discipline, and the consequent search for (or creation of) a disciplinary history, has resulted at times in an anachronistic application of modern metahistorical categories to ancient evidence. Ancient linguistic thought as an intellectual and cultural practice should at least not *a priori* be interpreted with, for example, states (e.g. Greece, Rome) as the fundamental categories of analysis.

It has been said that “the Greeks had a word for it.”⁷⁷ In the spirit if not the letter of this law I have chosen Aristotle as an epigrammatist for this Introduction. He writes that “just as not all men have the same letters, neither do they have the same sounds [OR: languages]” (ὡσπερ οὐδὲ γράμματα πᾶσι τὰ αὐτὰ, οὐδὲ φωναὶ αἱ αὐταί; *Interp.* 16a5-6).⁷⁸ As the rest of this work will explore, Aristotle could just as correctly have written that “not all men have the same *linguistics*”, if only the Greeks had indeed had a word for that discipline. But the closest Greek equivalent, γραμματικά (and its Latin transliteration, *grammatica*) literally the “study of letters”, approximates only imperfectly to philology (textual criticism) and even less perfectly to modern “language

⁷⁶ Harris 1980 §1.

⁷⁷ Most famously in a 1930 play thus titled by Zoë Akins.

⁷⁸ Aristotle is concerned here with different vocal expressions of common experiences of the spirit (τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα; 16a3-4). To describe the differences in speech he shifts from singular τῇ φωνῇ to plural αἱ φωναί. It is unclear whether he has in mind differences merely in pronunciation among the dialects of a single language (probably Greek), or the more radical differences between different languages (e.g. Greek v. a barbarian language); thus both “sounds” and “languages” are possible.

science”, introducing considerations not included therein but also not covering either all the interesting folk linguistic ideas so abundant in antiquity or, given its focus on elite literary culture, the wide range of people who may have held them.

In the absence of a precise ancient term for this topic a bit of fudging and some awkward circumlocutions must suffice for the project: a sociology of ancient folk linguistics, aimed at rereading the ancient ideas as much as possible with an eye to the uses to which they were put as myth, “good to think with” about non-linguistic issues.⁷⁹ As acknowledged by many moderns but put into practice relatively infrequently and with difficulty, what counts as linguistics or thought about language differs between cultures and societies, and within them too. As a result a history of linguistics or of linguistic science, presupposing distinct categories of scientific *Sprachwissenschaft* and non-scientific folk linguistics, should give way to a historiography of linguistic thought: an ecumenical survey of ancient ideas about language, scientific and non-scientific both, that is informed by method and informative of the ancient “climate of opinion”, the *episteme* whose shape underwrites fundamental differences between ancient and modern thought.

If Greek and Roman ideas on the origin of language are interesting in the first place because of their cultural specificity, because of their interest to Greeks and Romans, they are interesting also because of the light they may shed on their modern

⁷⁹ Alongside “myth”, the ideas may also be read as “memes”, or inherited cultural topoi both conditioning thought and modified by it over time; see Dawkins 1986; for an application to ancient thought see Campbell 2003, 11 and 180-184, esp. 181: “both [an ancient author] and his sources will be similarly infected by the memes of prehistory, and will tend to reproduce them partly in an unreflective way, and also each will identify, adopt, and use intentionally many of them, and each will give them an individual twist that will suit their own purposes”, with a table of memes (“Themes in Prehistories”) 336-353; Campbell 2002; Schrijvers 1999; and Spoerri 1959.

counterparts and the intellectual societies in which the latter find their expression. The broader lesson is that ancient literature and history still has much to teach even modern students. I hope to show that ancient ideas on language origin, not despite but because of their being 'unscientific' like other ancient ideas on language, may richly repay a revised consideration.

A quite famous philosophical debate.
- P. Nigidius Figulus (ap. Gellius 10.4.1)

CHAPTER ONE

BEYOND 'NATURE' AND 'CONVENTION'

In the first century BC, the esoteric Roman philosopher P. Nigidius Figulus described the question of language origins as a “quite famous philosophical debate” (*rem sane philosophiis disertationibus celebrem*; Gell. *NA.* 10.4.1). This debate is supposed to have centered on two mutually exclusive positions: language is either ‘natural’ (by φύσις, *natura*), words having been rightly linked to things by natural compulsion or by similarity between sound and essence; or ‘conventional’ (by θέσις or νόμος, *impositio*), words being the product of agreement among the (early) speakers of (a given) language.¹ This supposed debate among philosophers between ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ has been taken as the hallmark of ancient inquiry into language origins.² Studies treating individual authors or philosophical traditions as belonging to one or the

¹ The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for example lists the “rather general question” of “[t]o what extent was language a natural or inborn capacity of human beings, and how far was it the result of a tacit convention or social contract?”. It continues by outlining two positions, implicitly making Plato and Aristotle ‘conventionalists’ and having “the Stoics [favor] the naturalist origin of language” (OCD s.v. *linguistics, ancient* 2 and 3; the author is R.H.R. Robins). The modern position on semantics since de Saussure is supposed to be ‘conventional’, with words only arbitrarily representing things. Some more recent neurophysiological work on language origins argues for a ‘natural’ connection between some phonemes and basic meanings; see Allott 1973.

² Throughout this and subsequent Chapters I place ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ in inverted commas in order to indicate their provisional status as abstract terms and the fluidity of their definitions; when the terms translate an ancient word or phrase they appear in quotation marks.

other position may be multiplied; this is especially common in works on the history of linguistics or on the origin of language by non-classicists.³

Thus broadly applied, the opposition between ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ oversimplifies the range of ancient ideas on language origins, and obscures both their thematic similarities and their variation by author and context.⁴ Ancient authors could indeed write in terms of ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’ origins for language: at least since Plato the terms appear as notional poles. But even in philosophical texts, not to mention incidental references to language origins, the two categories were not completely opposed or even consistently defined, but continually redefined in response to other concerns.⁵ The malleable meanings of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ in the discourse on the origin of language allowed ancient authors to use that discourse to address other non-philosophical and indeed non-linguistic issues. In particular, as suggested in the Introduction and as subsequent Chapters will argue in detail, thought on language origins was “good to think with” about mytho-social concerns about group identity, organization, and overlap.

By way of preparing for later Chapters’ explorations of the rhetorically subtle, almost sociological use of thought on language origins, this Chapter examines six

³ Seminally, Dahlmann 1928 and Steintal 1890-1; see recently Rochette 1996a, 92 and 94; for studies of individual ancient authors see the discussions below with references. A more complex schema including ‘conventionalism’ and ‘naturalism’ alongside a third category, ‘revelationism’, has been argued for medieval Islamic thought on language origins; see Weiss 1974.

⁴ For attention to nuance cf. intermittently Steintal 1890-1891 and Fehling 1965, 212-229.

⁵ Cf. Gera 2003, 169: “This distinction [sc. between conventional and natural] goes back to ancient authors, but the terminology is confusing.” Gera rightly points out that both Proclus (*In Crat.* 17) and Ammonius (*In Arist. de Int.* 34.15) “note that there is not always a sharp distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’” (2003: 169 n.199, citing Allen 1948, 36-37 and 52-53; and Fehling 1965, 218).

thinkers whose ideas about the origin of language may at first glance seem to fall to one or the other side of the “famous philosophical debate”. These are Cratylus and Hermogenes, as represented in Plato’s *Cratylus*, and the four authors linked to them by Proclus in his commentary to that dialogue (16): the Cratylans, supposedly ‘naturalists’, Pythagoras and Epicurus; and the Hermogeneans, supposedly ‘conventionalists’, Aristotle and Democritus. Pythagoras and Democritus are explicitly contrasted by Proclus as belonging to opposed schools of thought. As this Chapter will attempt to show, since none of these thinkers is so simply classified, none of their accounts of language origins may be read as so simply belonging to opposed schools. This will be true *a fortiori* for authors whose stated interests are already less or non-philosophical, as an example of which this Chapter considers Varro. The space thus opened up in seemingly ‘philosophical’ thought will be seen in subsequent Chapters to have been filled by the sort of social concerns discussed in the Introduction.

Neither notional position, ‘naturalism’ or ‘conventionalism’, is internally consistent enough to be a school: the ‘naturalists’ use ‘nature’ to mean different things and with correspondingly different consequences; while e.g. Aristotle comes close to supporting the ‘conventionalism’ swiftly rejected by Plato in his *Cratylus*. Such problems in interpretation are due in part to the canonical texts in this area being considered, normally without argument, ‘philosophical’.⁶ This has the additional effect

⁶ The continued confusion in modern scholarship may be due in part to schematic readings of Plato by neo-Platonists and others later in antiquity. Cf. Fehling 1965, 221: “Die natürlichste Annahme scheint mir zu sein, dass erst Plato selbst ... die ihm sei es von den Herakliteern sei es anderwoher zugekommene Lehre von der Richtigkeit der Bezeichnungen mit der alten Vorstellung vom Namengeber verbunden hat.” A further problem conditioning readings of Classical and Hellenistic ideas on language origins is the traditional opposition of νόμος and φύσις in culture, which overlapped with but was not identical to that alleged between θεσις and φύσις in language.

of excluding from consideration non-philosophical texts as well as texts outside of the canon of ‘language science’ (as described in the Introduction); examples include Herodotus’ report of Psammetichus’ experiment on language origins (see Chapter Four) as well as most Roman evidence, including first century BC interest in the origin of Latin as a dialect of Greek (see Chapter Six). For these texts a classification according to ‘naturalism’ and ‘conventionalism’ is *a fortiori* less useful.

Another source of confusion is insufficient distinction between, on the one hand, the historical or actual origin of language, including individual languages, and, on the other hand, the possibility of truth in language.⁷ In Classical and subsequent thought the former, apparently an earlier concern, came quickly to focus on the idea of a human ‘name-giver’ ((ὀ)νομοθέτης), perhaps a rationalizing replacement for an elided divine agent; while the latter focused on the ‘rightness’ of words (ὀρθοέπεια) relative to their referents’ ‘essence’ (οὐσία). Authors are thus not consistent in treating individual words, in the sense of their rightness (and/or within ‘words’ something even more specific like ‘common nouns’ or ‘names’ as opposed to ‘verbs’), or language in general; nor in attempting to account for linguistic diversity in these terms; nor in imagining the same mechanisms for either words or dialects applied equally well to language change or to the ultimate historical origin of all language. These are all areas of ancient thought on language origin left relatively unexplored by a classification of authors and their ideas according to opposed philosophical schools.

⁷ Campbell 2003, 290: “While it may be quite true that, for Plato, the origin of language and the correctness of names are quite different things, for Epicurus the notion of the natural link between names and things ensures that the two will be seen as part of the same process.” Blank 1998, 176-177 distinguishes clearly between these “historical” and “semantic” topics; cf. Barnes 1982, 466-467; Fehling 1965, 218-229; and Barney 2001, 25 n.4 (quoted below, “Plato: *Cratylus*”).

With this definitional fluidity kept in mind, greater attention to ancient nuance becomes possible. A 'natural' origin for language need not preclude later 'conventional' changes in language, whether towards 'rightness' (e.g. as suggested most clearly by Epicurus) or away from an originally pure state towards 'barbarization'. By the same token an original creation of language by social convention need not prohibit the words thus created from rightfully representing their referents (e.g. as implied by Aristotle, for whom 'conventionalism' does not preclude standards of usage). 'Nature' and 'convention' may thus mean different things when applied to the origin of language and to the possibility of verbal truth; and in general are made to mean different things depending on the mytho-social concerns of the author.

Plato: *Cratylus*

For traditional accounts of ancient language science, and for a division of the ancient ideas into 'naturalist' and 'conventionalist' camps, the *locus classicus* on language origins is Plato's *Cratylus*.⁸ Although not the earliest it is by far the longest treatment, and was clearly taken as seminal by later authors. Perhaps following this judgment, non-specialists and non-classicists also routinely cite the *Cratylus* as the first Western expression of philosophical interest in the origins of language, parallel to but in contrast with the theological Biblical account of Babel.⁹ The comparison is apt but not

⁸ The bibliography on the *Cratylus* is huge. Especially relevant are the works cited by Baxter under the heading "Individual Works on the *Cratylus*" (1992: 189-191); a magisterial survey of works from the nineteenth century through 1971 may be found in Derbolav 1982, 221-312.

⁹ In these authors Plato like other ancient sources may do little more than offer a putative ancient pedigree or patina to modern research; e.g. Trabandt 2001, Leroy 1974; for a comparison of the *Cratylus* with Heidegger, Jeanmart 1999.

always for the reasons its authors might have intended. As noted in the Introduction, the story of Babel itself is not about the origin of language, but about the origin of linguistic diversity. Similarly the *Cratylus*, as has long been recognized, is also not about language origins as such. Although exploring and relying on etymology, it only infrequently generalizes to the history of language as a whole or even to that of individual languages. As stressed by more recent work, the *Cratylus* focuses on the possibility of truth or rightness in meaning in language, in other words semantics.¹⁰ Moreover the debate between Cratylus' 'natural' and Hermogenes' 'conventional' arguments for how words have meaning, as represented in the dialogue itself, is ultimately more complicated than a binary reading would allow. Although later authors could and did read the dialogue in terms of opposition, the supposed opposition is challenged, if not collapsed outright, in its first appearance as the dialogue's interlocutors hold their conversation and as Cratylus in particular is led by Socrates' dialectic to modify his position. This complication of the opposition in its first appearance at least suggests caution in applying the traditional terms to other texts. Thus a rereading of the *Cratylus* remains central to a discussion of ancient ideas on the origin of language, both for the dialogue's own ideas and for its obvious influence on

¹⁰ E.g. Barney 2001, Baxter 1992, Keller 2000, Reeve 1998, Rijlaarsdam 1978, Robinson 1969, and Fehling 1965, 218-229. In Baxter's words the dialogue is concerned with a "prescriptive" theory of naming, not a "descriptive" one: to Socrates (but not, as Baxter notes, to Cratylus or Hermogenes) the question of whether e.g. Greek is or was once the ideal philosophical language may only be settled by dialectic, but has not been settled and thus the question of how Greek or another language came to be, i.e. language origins, is quite irrelevant; see esp. 41-43 ("The issue is the correctness of names, a quite separate matter" from the origin of language) and 136-138 (comparing the *Cratylus* to the Derveni Papyrus, understood by Burkert 1970 to bear on language origins).

subsequent works and lessons in interpreting them.¹¹

The explicit concern of the *Cratylus* is with the origin and/or possibility of the ‘rightness of words’ (ὀρθότης τοῦ ὀνόματος); this turns out to be a concern with the possibility of truth in language, and thus with the possibility of uncovering that truth through the proper readings of present forms - etymology.¹² Plato presents a discussion of these topics that, at first glance, pits ‘naturalist’ explanations against ‘conventionalist’ ones. The dialogue’s eponymous sophist, Cratylus, is credited with the ‘naturalist’ idea that “a word’s rightness is produced according to the nature of things” (ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων φύσει πεφυκυῖαν; 383a4-5). Later in the dialogue this is elaborated as meaning that words (ὀνόματα) indicate the essence (οὐσία) of the things to which they refer (393b7ff). By contrast, Cratylus’ interlocutor, Hermogenes, doubts that “a word’s rightness is anything other than conventional agreement” (οὐ δύναμαι πεισθῆναι ὡς ἄλλη τις ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία; 384c11-d2). The verbal root in συνθήκη, the same as in θέσις, ‘convention’, apparently puts this statement squarely in a recognized

¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to grapple with all the problems raised by the relation of the *Cratylus* to Plato’s complex oeuvre. Although some issues are mentioned in the notes, I read the dialogue without attempting to ask how it does or does not represent Plato’s own ideas about linguistic meaning by virtue of belonging to a given stage of his thought (see e.g. Bostock 1994, Mackenzie 1986, Moline 1981, White 1976); and in particular without specific attention paid to Plato as stylist or literary artist (see e.g. Blondell 2002, 1-52).

¹² Barney calls this sort of etymologizing “strong etymology”, and contrasts it with others (2001, 55-56); cf. Sedley 1999, Baxter 1992, Fresina 1991, Brumbaugh 1957/8. Harrison 1997 sees “a number of passages in [Herodotus’s] *Histories* which are suggestive of the idea, famously proposed in Plato’s *Cratylus*, of the natural appropriateness of names, a ‘certain rightness of names ... the same both for Greeks and barbarians’ (Pl. *Crat.* 383a-b)”, e.g. 4.45.2-5. Other thinkers to “self-consciously ally themselves to Plato” on the topic of etymology are the Stoics, although it “seems exaggerated” to “clai[m] that the Stoics were major proponents of etymology and took it to fantastic lengths” (Long 1987, 195, citing Diog. Laert. 7.83).

'conventionalist' camp (cf. 433e, where Socrates' summary of Hermogenes' position puts the latter in a group including "many others" (ἄλλοι πολλοί)). The consequences of each initial position, at least for the possibility of truth in language, are clear: Cratylus believes that words, by definition, must express the truth of their referents; while Hermogenes believes that the meanings of words are available to listeners only by conventional agreement.¹³

Cratylus and Hermogenes, thus opposed in these first respects, also seem to differ on a further point, whether or not words may change or, more broadly, language may have a history (and thus require an origin). Cratylus is firmly against the idea of words changing. Since words (ὀνόματα) by definition rightly reflect the essence (οὐσία) of things, and since essence is unchanging, if words change then the link between word and essence is lost. Any such change means that a name is, strictly speaking, no longer a 'name' (430e and 432a).¹⁴ This technical claim is reiterated several times. At one point for example Socrates proposes a contrast between verbal and visual representation: "both kinds of representation, images and words, have rightness, but the words in addition to rightness also have truth" (ἐπ' ἀμφοτέροις μὲν τοῖς μιμήμασιν, τοῖς τε ζῶοις καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, ὀρθήν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ὀνόμασι πρὸς

¹³ Barney (2001: 27 n.7) summarizes: "naturalism can evidently be rephrased as simply the thesis that there *is* such a thing as the correctness of names, and conventionalism as the denial of it" (emphasis in original). Williams sees a further distinction in the dialogue, between "*the name of X* and *the correct name of X*" (1994: 28; emphases in original), arguing that the dialogue concludes by rejecting Cratylus' hypothesis of mimetic language; cf. Baxter, who emphasizes the dialogue's rejection of Cratylus not only on linguistic grounds, in that words must not be trusted as guides to things, but as part of Plato's adoption of Socrates as his true teacher (1992: 184-186 and *passim*)

¹⁴ Cf. Williams' paraphrase of Cratylus (1994, 28): "for Cratylus, the question whether some word '*N*' is the *correct* name of a given item is the same as the question whether '*N*' is that item's name at all."

τῶ ὀρθῆν καὶ ἀληθῆ; 430d3-5). Cratylus agrees: “in representational images it is possible for things to be apportioned incorrectly, but in words it is not, rather it must always be rightly” (ἐν μὲν τοῖς ζωγραφήμασιν ἢ τοῦτο, τὸ μὴ ὀρθῶς διανέμειν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν οὐ, ἀλλ’ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ αἰεὶ ὀρθῶς; 430d8-e2). Thus for Cratylus ‘words’ so called, being fixed relative to their referents’ essences, cannot have histories any more complex than a dichotomy between ‘not existing (at one point)’ and ‘existing (later)’.

Cratylus’ first conclusion about linguistic history prohibits right or true meaning by ‘convention’, a prohibition he endorses throughout the dialogue. Late in the discussion Socrates asks Cratylus a joking question: “Shall we count up words just like votes, and their rightness will lie therein? Whatever the words clearly signify more, those things will be the truth?” ([ΣΩ.] ὥσπερ ψήφους διαριθμησόμεθα τὰ ὀνόματα, καὶ ἐν τούτ’ ἔσται ἡ ὀρθότης; ὁπότερα ἂν πλείω φαίνηται τὰ ὀνόματα σημαίνοντα, ταῦτα δὴ ἔσται τὰ ληθῆ; 437d3-6). Cratylus responds in all seriousness: “That’s not right” (Οὐκ οὐκ εἰκός γε; 437d7). For him meaning, or at least right meaning, may be decided only by expertise and authority (see further below). In this way Cratylus steels his position against a strong ‘conventionalism’, the one endorsed by Hermogenes, in which words signify thanks to agreement among their speakers.

By contrast, Hermogenes’ ‘conventionalist’ position requires language change and thus decouples words from essences or truths, linking them instead to agreement among speakers, the very position refused by Cratylus. Several mechanisms for change are described by Hermogenes and by Socrates, including corruption from old age (linked intriguingly with barbarian language: “[Socrates:] on account of words changing

in every respect, it would be no surprise if the ancient language, as opposed to the modern, were no different from barbaric language. [Hermogenes:] You're saying nothing unseemly"; διὰ γὰρ τὸ πανταχῆ στρέφεσθαι τὰ ὀνόματα, οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν ἂν εἴη, εἰ ἢ παλαιὰ φωνὴ πρὸς τὴν νυνὶ βαρβαρικῆς μηδὲν διαφέρει. [EPM.] Καὶ οὐδὲν γε ἀπὸ τρόπου λέγεις; 421d1-6);¹⁵ sociological changes (distinct groups or schools are responsible for some words, as the Orphics are for σῶμα; 400c4-10, cf. 401d3-e1)¹⁶ or differences depending on gender (Socrates claims that Athenian women speak an earlier version of Attic closer to the original truthful forms of words; 392c5ff, 418b-c);¹⁷ and most often euphonic changes made to improve pronunciation or for beauty (409c8-9, 412d8-e3). Whatever the reasons for change, Hermogenes acknowledges the fact of change and thus concludes that the comprehensibility of language can only be a matter of continued agreement among its speakers.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cf. 409d9-e2: "For I know that the Greeks, especially when living near barbarians, took many words from the barbarians" (ἐννοῶ γὰρ ὅτι πολλὰ οἱ Ἕλληνες ὀνόματα ἄλλως τε καὶ οἱ ὑπὸ τοῖς βαρβάροις οἰκοῦντες παρὰ τῶν βαρβάρων εἰλήφασιν). Cf. the link between linguistic age and a people's 'relative antiquity' in Herodotus (2.2-4; cf. the discussion in Chapter Four).

¹⁶ See Ferwerda 1985.

¹⁷ The older form is distinguished by a greater use of *iota* and *delta*, possibly among other things: "You know that our ancestors used *iota* and *delta* quite a bit, and not least the women, who preserve for the most part the ancient language" (οἶσθα ὅτι οἱ παλαιοὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι τῶ ἰῶτα καὶ τῶ δέλτα εὖ μάλα ἐχρῶντο, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα αἱ γυναῖκες, αἵπερ μάλιστα τὴν ἀρχαίαν φωνὴν σφύζουσι; 418b8-c1). Hermogenes confirms this: "that's true" (ἔστι ταῦτα). For additional references to older Attic, see further Chapter Six.

¹⁸ At another point Hermogenes concludes that a word may mean based solely on its usage by a single individual (385d2-e3); he is thus able to account for linguistic variation, but he is also careful to defend himself from the charge of Protagorean relativism. The crucial distinction seems to be between 'naming', i.e. baptism, performable by an individual; and 'calling', i.e. using a name once given, which requires agreement among speakers; see Barney 2001, 28-36.

All of these mechanisms taken together result in a language not necessarily expressive of truth. At one point Socrates states that phonological changes “are made by men who don’t think at all about truth, but who shape their mouths such that by adding many things to the original words they end up making it the case that no man agrees what the word means at all” (ποιουῖσιν οἱ τῆς μὲν ἀληθείας οὐδὲν φροντίζοντες, τὸ δὲ στόμα πλάττοντες, ὥστ’ ἐπεμβάλλοντες πολλὰ ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τελευτῶντες ποιουῖσιν μηδ’ ἂν ἐνὰ ἀνθρώπων συνεῖναι ὃ τι ποτὲ βούλεται τὸ ὄνομα; 414c10-d3). Later on he affirms the basic principle: “by adding letters and by taking them away [humans] drastically alter the meanings of words” (προστιθέντες γράμματα καὶ ἐξαιροῦντες σφόδρα ἀλλοιοῦσι τὰς τῶν ὀνομάτων διανοίας; 418a6-8).¹⁹ Thus for Socrates and, at this point, Hermogenes, words and their meanings are changed over time by their speakers, with the result that words, at least as they are currently used, do not express truth and do not need to in order to qualify as ‘names’.²⁰

It is to be expected that Hermogenes acknowledges that languages change; his ‘conventionalism’ requires it. More striking, however, and more important than the exact mechanisms of language change, is the fact that Cratylus, the ‘naturalist’, comes

¹⁹ This would follow from the theory of letters as the minimal meaningful roots of language, στοιχεῖα (see 424-427 and 434-435); this theory of the *Cratylus* differs from the logical or philosophical use to which Socrates puts letters, as an analogy for other arguments, in the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*; see Ryle 1960.

²⁰ Although Socrates at points seems to argue that ancient Attic was closer to the truth than contemporary language (e.g. 398b5-8, 398d2-3), he ultimately adopts the more extreme position that even etymologies cannot reveal truths, i.e. that even the supposedly original forms of words do not accurately represent their referents’ natures; he shows this by producing contradictory etymologies for given words, pointing to the fallibility of name-givers (438c5-6). The dialogue’s aporetic conclusion is that words are no good guides to the truth; see Baxter 1992.

to agree with him. As part of the general debate on the possibility of truth in language, all three interlocutors must acknowledge that language, or at least right language (if it exists), came into being at some point in time. For all three speakers, right language thus has at least a minimal history of not-being before being; Cratylus and presumably Socrates also take as their projects correcting an additional, subsequent history of deformation by reformation to rightness grounded in philosophical analysis. This history is described by the interlocutors as motivated or originated in various ways and by various agents, including natural compulsion, human name-giving, and divine name-giving.

The dialogue is peppered with references to an unspecified human name-giver or -givers, the man or men who first set names to things. All three interlocutors discuss the idea, the ‘naturalist’ Cratylus no less than Hermogenes, such that the very person of the name-giver seems to imply a history of language combining both ‘naturalist’ and ‘conventionalist’ notions. At one point, for example, Hermogenes praises Socrates’ etymology of βλαβερόν, ‘harmful’. Socrates demurs: “It’s not me who’s responsible, Hermogenes, but the men who set the words” (οἱ θέμενοι τὸ ὄνομα; 418a2-3). Both the circumlocution, οἱ θέμενοι, containing the root θε- found in θέσις, and the idea behind it seem to link the name-giver(s) to a ‘conventional’ origin for language. But later Socrates asks whether the first name-giver(s) were skilled and knowledgeable: did they have “the law-giving skill” (τὴν τέχνην ... νομοθετικὴν; 437e3-4 [Versio A]) and “set the first names using knowledge of the things to which they set them” (τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα ... γινώσκοντες τὰ πράγματα, οἷς ἐτίθεντο, ἐτίθεντο ἢ ἀγνοοῦντες; 437e6-7 [Versio A])? Here it is Cratylus who answers both questions in the affirmative: the first name-givers were ‘certainly’ skilled (πάνυ γε); and “I think

that they were knowledgeable” (Οἶμαι μὲν ἐγὼ ... γινώσκοντες). The ideas emerging here, in addition to sketching out a history of language, complicate an assignment of Cratylus and Hermogenes into opposed camps.

There are of course additional differences between the changing positions attributed to the two. A first disputed point is the nature of the name-giver(s), whether divine or human, and, if human, whether fallible or not. Whereas Hermogenes holds to an extreme ‘conventionalism’ in naming (if not in subsequent calling), allowing even individual usage to set right names to things,²¹ Cratylus insists on expert and authoritative name-giving. The sort of ‘natural’ creation of names Cratylus outlines is not random, but a specialized activity dependent on advanced or unusual knowledge, and finding only its actual, historical expression in ‘convention’. Cratylus may refer to ‘name-givers’ only as a matter of convenience, in order to frame his points in the common language of the conversation.

Cratylus is thus able to respond to Socrates’ next question in the passage just quoted (How did the namegivers know things before they were named?) with confidence: “I think that the truest explanation for these things, Socrates, is that a power greater than human set the first names to their things, with the result that it was necessary that they were right” (Οἶμαι μὲν ἐγὼ τὸν ἀληθέστατον λόγον περὶ τούτων εἶναι, ὃ Σώκρατες, μείζω τινὰ δύναμιν εἶναι ἢ ἀνθρωπεῖαν τὴν θεμένην τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν, ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι αὐτὰ ὀρθῶς ἔχειν; 438b8-c3). Here Cratylus does not refer to a name-giver as such, but to a

²¹ This extreme conventionalism was held most famously by Diodorus Cronus, who believed that meaning comes from the speaker’s intention and, as a demonstration, is reported to have named one of his slaves ‘But indeed’, ἀλλὰ μὴν (Diodorus fr. 7 Giannantoni=Ammonius *In Ar. De Int.* 38.17-20).

‘superhuman power’ that assigned names to things; these names qualify as ‘names’ because they are guaranteed to be ‘right’ by the assigning power.²²

Earlier, Cratylus’ argument required “that a knowledgeable being was the one who set the words; if not, as I said before, they would not be words” (ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰδότα τίθεσθαι τὸν τιθέμενον τὰ ὀνόματα· εἰ δὲ μή, ὅπερ πάλαι ἐγὼ ἔλεγον, οὐδ’ ἂν ὀνόματα εἶη; 436c1-2). Cratylus may *now* be willing to concede that name-givers existed, i.e. that language has a ‘conventional’ component to its first use, provided that those name-givers are granted superhuman knowledge of the essence of things, i.e. that they could know ‘words’ that are truly ‘words’. This is more than merely acknowledging sociologically that, regardless of whether and how ‘words’ are right, humans are involved in the use of language. If Cratylus were merely conceding the point that a human name-giver was the first to *use* language, he would not need to insist on the name-giver’s superhuman knowledge of essence; just as Hermogenes’ name is not right, so too could the first human(s) to use language have used it incorrectly and not thereby altered the fact, for Cratylus, that ‘words’ so called have right reference. Instead, by insisting on superhuman knowledge, while keeping the whole possibility of human name-giving just that, a possibility (ἀναγκαῖον ἢ), Cratylus may be using ‘name-giver’ only, as it were, by convention, drawing on a term common to the discussion for his own underformulated argument about how words were revealed in history for the first time. For Cratylus the ‘name-giver’ may be

²² This idea, in content if not in terms, makes Cratylus’ ‘naturalist’ account, not Hermogenes’ ‘conventionalist’ one, approach that attributed to Protagoras in the *Protagoras*, where divine skill directly underwrites human name-giving. Cf. Socrates’ etymology for the name of the god Hermes: “all of his business involves the power of speech” and thus εἰπεῖν, ‘to speak’, shows his nature (407e5-408b3).

metaphor for an unformulated original process of naming.

Although it is difficult to decide where the dialogue as a whole leaves the question of name-giver identity, it seems clear that in the view of the interlocutors human name-giver(s) was (were) not infallible; in contrast especially with divine namings, the names produced by humans are imperfect representations of the natures of things.²³ Near the end of the dialogue (436b5-c6), Socrates asks Cratylus the following: “It is clear that the man who first set names set such names as he thought things were, as we say. Right?” (Δῆλον ὅτι ὁ θέμενος πρῶτος τὰ ὀνόματα, οἷα ἤγεῖτο εἶναι τὰ πράγματα, τοιαῦτα ἐτίθετο καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ὡς φάμεν. ἦ γάρ;). Cratylus agrees, and Socrates continues: “So if that man did not think rightly, and set such as he thought, why do you think we, the followers, will be persuaded by him? Some reason other than being deceived?” (Εἰ οὖν ἐκεῖνος μὴ ὀρθῶς ἤγεῖτο, ἔθετο δὲ οἷα ἤγεῖτο, τί οἶει ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀκολουθούντας αὐτῷ πείσεσθαι; ἄλλο τι ἢ ἐξαπατηθήσεσθαι;). Cratylus tries to avoid the implications for historical language by returning to his technical definition of ideal ὀνόματα: if words are not true, then they are not really ‘words’.

But the suggestion made here that human name-giving is relatively flawed, and thus meaning depends on agreement produced by deception, is taken up elsewhere. Cratylus’ conclusion that human name-givers were made knowledgeable by a force greater than human is echoed by an opinion voiced earlier by Socrates and seconded by Hermogenes. Socrates argues that “we know nothing of the gods, neither of them nor of

²³ Ultimately the dialogue may conclude that names are always only imperfect representations and thus no good guides to truth; see esp. Baxter 1992, with Barney 2001 and Williams 2000.

the names that they call themselves; for it is clear that they, at least, call things truthfully” (περὶ θεῶν οὐδὲν ἴσμεν, οὔτε περὶ αὐτῶν οὔτε περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἄττα ποτὲ αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοὺς καλοῦσιν· δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνοί γε τᾶληθῆ καλοῦσι; 400d7-e).²⁴ Nonetheless, it is at least possible that human name-givers acted with some knowledge of things, if not the absolute knowledge credited to the gods. Hermogenes agrees that this is a balanced (μετρίως) reading of the situation (401a7). But Socrates does not think that the first human namer(s) was (were) especially knowledgeable. For he continues by calling “the first men to set words ... certain airheads and chatterboxes” (οἱ πρῶτοι τὰ ὀνόματα τιθέμενοι οὐ φαῦλοι εἶναι ἀλλὰ μετεωρολόγοι καὶ ἀδολέσχοι τινές; 401b7-9). The names are not flattering, and only highlight Socrates’ dismissal of the idea, central both to Hermogenes’ non-relativizing conventionalism and to Cratylus’ belief in words reflecting essences, that human name-givers had sophisticated knowledge of things before naming them.

On the other hand, Socrates is not much more accepting of the idea, apparently mooted at first in all seriousness, that the gods set the first names to things:

I think it clearly laughable, Hermogenes, that things became apparent having been represented by letters and syllables; but nevertheless it is necessary. For we have nothing better than this to which we have been moved concerning the truth of the first words, unless you want us, just like the tragedians whenever they lose their way and take refuge in the *deus ex machina*, to be free saying that the first words were set by the gods and thus are right. (425d1-8).

Γελοῖα μὲν οἶμαι φανεῖσθαι, ὦ Ἑρμόγενης, γράμμασι καὶ συλλαβαῖς τὰ πράγματα μεμιμήμενα κατάδηλα γιγνόμενα· ὁμῶς δὲ ἀνάγκη. οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν τούτου βέλτιον εἰς ὅτι ἐπανενέγκωμεν περὶ ἀληθείας τῶν πρώτων ὀνομάτων, εἰ μὴ

²⁴ On the language of the gods in ancient thought, see Lau 2003.

ἄρα βούλει, ὡσπερ οἱ τραγωδιοποιοὶ ἐπειδάν τι ἀπορῶσιν ἐπὶ τὰς μηχανὰς καταφεύγουσι θεοὺς αἴροντες, καὶ ἡμεῖς οὕτως εἰπόντες ἀπαλλαγῶμεν, ὅτι τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα οἱ θεοὶ ἔθεσαν καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ὀρθῶς ἔχει.

Thus, for Socrates, writing off the origins of the first words to the gods (or, at 426, to barbarian languages or sheer old age) is no better than a contrived ending to tragedy, implying that the storyteller or philosopher has somehow failed to explain the topic at hand logically. As noted above, his conclusion about all of these explanations for word-origins is dismissive: they are ‘hybristic and laughable’ (ὕβριστικά εἶναι καὶ γελοῖα; 426b5-6).

The overlap of ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’, especially striking in Cratylus’ changing thinking, is spelled out in another passage. Cratylus, although holding to an ideal representation of things by right ὀνόματα, recognizes that language of course continues to function despite internal changes. For example, Socrates asks if Cratylus knows what he means by σκληρόν, even though their discussion has shown that the word should be σκληρόν, as λ is not the right στοιχεῖον for expressing ‘hardness’. Although the word has thus changed away from its ‘natural’ form, Cratylus replies that he does know what it means, ‘because of custom’ (διὰ γε τὸ ἔθος; 434e4). Socrates then asks for clarification from Cratylus, to see if he is still against ‘conventionalism’: “By saying ‘custom’ do you think you’re saying something different from ‘convention’? Do you mean something by ‘custom’ besides this: when I utter this word and mean hardness by it, you know what this is what I mean? Isn’t that what you’re saying? -Yes.” (Ἔθος δὲ λέγων οἶει τι διάφορον λέγειν συνθήκης; ... Ναί; 434e5-435). Cratylus thus agrees that ‘conventionalism’ in language operates in practice.

As Socrates implies (and will shortly spell out), Cratylus’ thoughts about linguistic history (as opposed to his argument about right naming) share features of

Hermogenes'. First, both ἔθος and συνθήκη may be translated as 'convention' or 'agreement'; the latter has a more developed technical sense in this and other linguistic contexts,²⁵ but the underlying idea for both is that the only standard linking words to things and to meanings is human agreement. Second, Socrates' apparent initial contrasting of the two terms is not an attempt to give Cratylus a way to acknowledge 'custom' while still not yielding to 'conventionalism', but rather a demonstration by dialectic that the two terms are not meaningfully different and thus that Cratylus must concede a 'conventionalism' in ordinary understanding of language. Socrates thus concludes that:

the correctness of names has become a matter of convention for you, for isn't it the chance of custom and convention that makes both like and unlike letters express things? And even if custom is completely different from convention, still you must say that expressing something isn't a matter of likeness but of custom, since custom, it seems, enables both like and unlike names to express things. ... both convention and custom must contribute something to expressing what we mean when we speak.

σοι γίγνεται ἡ ὀρθότης τοῦ ὀνόματος συνθήκη, ἐπειδὴ γε δηλοῖ καὶ τὰ ὅμοια καὶ τὰ ἀνόμοια γράμματα, ἔθους τε καὶ συνθήκης τυχόντα; εἰ δ' ὅτι μάλιστα μή ἐστι τὸ ἔθος συνθήκη, οὐκ ἂν καλῶς ἔτι ἔχοι λέγειν τὴν ὀμοιότητα δήλωμα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔθος ἐκεῖνο γάρ, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ὀμοίῳ καὶ ἀνομοίῳ δηλοῖ ... ἀναγκαῖόν που καὶ συνθήκην τι καὶ ἔθος συμβάλλεσθαι πρὸς δήλωσιν ὧν διανοούμενοι λέγομεν.

In summary, Cratylus' theory of 'right' words is taken to imply that letters, also, must have right meaning, i.e. must be στοιχεῖα, 'roots', for reference to the qualities they specify. But not all words use the στοιχεῖα whose meanings would rightly correspond to those words' referents (e.g. σκληρόν). Nevertheless those words are understood

²⁵ On the "thesis thesis", see Barney 2001, 36-39.

correctly; this can only be by convention (435a). In other words, according to Socrates, Cratylus' 'naturalism' in naming actually implies 'conventionalism' in calling or usage.

The seeds for this overlap were sown early on in the dialogue. Near its beginning, Hermogenes strongly defines his own position, as against 'naturalism', by using among other terms the very one used here by Cratylus, ἔθος (384c11-d7):

I cannot be persuaded that the rightness of words is anything other than conventional agreement. ... For there is no name for anything arising according to the nature of each thing, but according to law and custom of those having done the setting and doing the calling.

οὐ δύναμαι πεισθῆναι ὡς ἄλλη τις ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία. ... οὐ γὰρ φύσει ἐκάστῳ πεφυκέναι ὄνομα οὐδὲν οὐδενί, ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει τῶν ἐθισάντων τε καὶ καλούντων.

Thus the same term is applied to both non-'conventionalism' and to non-'naturalism'. At the very least, an alternative position may be alternative to both the traditional positions – 'naturalism' and 'conventionalism' are not necessarily opposites. Both Hermogenes and Cratylus, despite their differences about the possibility of truth in ideal language, agree that language *in practice* depends on 'convention' or agreement among speakers, Hermogenes because that is his 'conventionalism', Cratylus apparently as a result of his conversation with Socrates.²⁶

The two positions overlap in another way, with the work of the first name-giver guided by 'nature' (φύσις): "The name of Poseidon seems to me to have been named by the first namer, because while he was walking the nature of the sea restrained him ... like a chain for his feet" (Τὸ μὲν τοίνυν τοῦ Ποσειδῶνός μοι φαίνεται

²⁶ Later than or external to the dialogue, Cratylus is commonly supposed to have become a hard-core Heraclitean, believing that all things are in a constant state of flux (cf. 440d8-e2). This is still not opposed to his belief that the origin of truth in language depends on φύσις.

ώνομάσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ὀνομάσαντος, ὅτι αὐτὸν βαδίζοντα ἐπέσχευεν ἡ τῆς θαλάττης φύσις ... ὥσπερ δεσμὸς τῶν ποδῶν; 402d11-e3). This example, attributed to Socrates, may not reflect the original ideas of either Cratylus or Hermogenes.²⁷ What it does show however is that in the dialogue generally ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ overlap, structured together in linear time: words ideally should respond to the ‘nature’ of their referents, but have been made to do so in fact through human agency or ‘convention’.

Thus there was a name-giver who assigned words to things; afterwards, language has changed in various ways, mostly sound changes, and continues to operate because of agreement among its speakers. The two supposedly opposite positions of ‘naturalism’ and ‘conventionalism’ coexist in the *Cratylus*, and in its principal interlocutors, by being assigned to logically distinct categories: language as ideal/philosophical, and language as actual or historical.²⁸ ‘Naturalism’ may or may not impinge on language origins, but ‘conventionalism’ is an irrefutable fact of subsequent practice.²⁹

The dialogue as a whole has seemed to scholars to hinge on the question of

²⁷ Both Cratylus and Hermogenes do however alter their arguments in response to Socrates, agreeing with his suggestion that words are ‘representations’ of things (τὸ ὄνομα ὁμολογεῖς μίμημά τι εἶναι τοῦ πράγματος; 430a12-b1). The connection between ‘nature’ and ‘convention’, in the form of language forced by reactions to natural constraints, appears in more elaborate form in Epicurean thought; see below, “Epicurus”.

²⁸ See the works cited in nn.6 and 10, above.

²⁹ Only thus may Plato acknowledge foreign elements in Greek: “La constatation que les mots incompréhensibles en grec ont souvent une origine barbare est généralisée et devient une affirmation que tous les mots incompréhensibles de la langue grecque viennent d’une langue barbare” (Rochette 1996a, 96).

Socrates' seriousness, a question for this argument answered by the limits of the dialogue's interest in language. After enumerating different options for how words may be right, Socrates says that "these would all be ways out, and pretty ones at that, for someone not wanting to give a reasonable explanation for how the first words were rightly assigned" (αὐταὶ γὰρ ἂν πᾶσαι ἐκδύσεις εἶεν καὶ μάλα κομψαὶ τῷ μὴ ἐθέλοντι λόγον δίδοναι περὶ τῶν πρώτων ὀνομάτων ὡς ὀρθῶς κεῖται; 426a1-4).³⁰ Two points are noteworthy. First, the sorts of explanations just treated (i.e. that the gods were the first name-givers; or that Greeks borrowed words from barbarians [incidentally proving that "barbarians are older than us" (εἰσὶ δὲ ἡμῶν ἀρχαιότεροι βάρβαροι; 425e2-3)]; or that on account of extreme antiquity it is impossible to tell) are grouped together as 'ways out' (ἐκδύσεις) and contrasted with 'reasonable explanation[s]' (λόγον). Socrates' tone is dismissive, such that here as elsewhere in the *Cratylus* it is difficult to decide how serious any of the mooted explanations are (γελοῖα καὶ ὑβριστικά, combining two very different judgments).

Second, the explanations, whether serious or not, do not look back to the origin of all language, but attempt to answer just the specific question posed by the dialogue: how the first words were *rightly* assigned. As throughout, the concern is not with ultimate origin but with the possibility of rightness and truth; a different explanation, or none, may thus be imagined for the language faculty in general. This point bears emphasis because it is one of many in the *Cratylus* interpreted too schematically by later authors. Later authors are fond of taking to task the theory of the name-giver (e.g.

³⁰ Socrates similarly describes his own thoughts on στοιχεῖα as "entirely outrageous and absurd" (426b).

Lucretius 5.1041-1055), without acknowledging that Plato's account treats not all language but 'right' language, which as Pythagoras and others will note is a task that is difficult but within reach of the wisest of men.³¹

Without these qualifications, it means little to call Cratylus a 'naturalist' and Hermogenes a 'conventionalist'. For as shown both come to agree that language has changed over time, and that in its current form it depends on agreement or 'convention' for consistency of usage and meaning. Both also at least entertain the notion of a name-giver responsible for setting names to things, and Cratylus apparently changes his position from a firm 'naturalism' to a more mixed position (see the conclusions, below). The interlocutors' shared ideas cut across their ancient titles. Where the two differ is less in their ideas about actual linguistic history (although they might be imagined to disagree about individual etymologies) than in their ideas about the rightness of language. This lesson is broadly applicable to other authors in the Classical and Hellenistic periods: although later authors adopted in general the terms of the debate set by Plato, 'nature' and 'convention' continue to interact, less mutually exclusive opposites than rhetorically subtle symbols that become useful for expressing non-linguistic and non-philosophical ideas.³²

One lesson to be learned from the overlapping positions in the *Cratylus* is that as descriptive terms 'nature' and 'convention' are too simplifying when so baldly applied even for a seemingly philosophical debate in the most seminal of texts on language origins. In the first place it is not clear to what stage of language history, if any, the

³¹ On Lucretius see Chapter Three. On Pythagoras see below.

³² On "rhetorically subtle symbols" see Cohen 1991, 36 n.15.

terms refer:

The claim that language is ‘by nature’ might be (a) the *normative* claim that there is a natural standard of correctness applicable to language (Cratylus’ thesis); or (b) the further claim that our actual languages meet this standard of correctness; or (c) the very different *historical* claim that the origins of language were somehow ‘natural’, as in the Epicurean view that language began with utterances made spontaneously in response to various objects.³³

In general it is agreed, as suggested above, that the express concern of the *Cratylus* is not with a historical or an actual origin of language, but with a philosophical or ideal account of language’s possibilities for rightness or truth.³⁴ In this connection reference may be made to Socrates’ repeated characterization of all the interlocutors’ ideas, including his own, as ‘laughable and hubristic’; and to the equally repeated search for an ‘explanation’ or ‘rational account’, λόγος, for etymologies. Thus the concerns of the *Cratylus* may be contrasted with those of e.g. the *Protagoras*, whose eponymous sophist offers not a λόγος but a μῦθος, ‘story’, including precisely the topic not treated but only assumed by the *Cratylus*, the actual history of language.

So-called ‘Naturalists’: Pythagoras and Epicurus

The ideas attributed to Cratylus and Hermogenes complicate the simple titles of ‘naturalist’ and ‘conventionalist’, respectively. Similar complications hold true for the thinkers described by Proclus’ commentary to the *Cratylus* as following in Cratylus’

³³ Barney 2001, 25 n.4.

³⁴ See the works cited in nn. 6 and 10, above. It is not clear whether this distinction, between ‘actual’ or ‘historical’ and ‘ideal’ or ‘philosophical’ understandings of language, is implicit in Greek thought generally or a unique contribution of Plato’s. I hope to explore this further in future work.

and Hermogenes' respective footsteps (16). Different definitions of the terms 'nature' and 'convention', both between schools and, especially strikingly, among the authors of a given putative school, render problematic any easy categorization according to the traditional terms. The *loci classici* of the "famous philosophical debate" do less to answer the question at its heart than to change continuously its terms and, thus, the import of the question itself. Later Chapters will show how the question may be made to respond to other contemporary concerns; for now it suffices to show by way of prelude the question's myth-like malleability.³⁵

Pythagoras

Like other areas of his thought Pythagoras' ideas about language origins are largely fragmentary and difficult to reconstruct fully or exactly.³⁶ There is not even an ancient consensus. On the one hand, Proclus in his commentary to Plato's *Cratylus* writes simply that Pythagoras was a "Cratylan" who thought that "words were in accord with nature" (φύσει ἄρα τὰ ὀνόματα; *ad Crat.* 16). As noted above the naïve division of ancient interest in language origins into two opposed camps may owe a great deal to misreadings of the *Cratylus* by neo-Platonists like Proclus; thus his statement in Pythagoras' case no doubt oversimplifies. But whatever its purity or the lengths to which it was pushed, a 'naturalist' position of this sort is not impossible for a

³⁵ Especially among the Romans does the question of language origins address a pervasive concern with contemporary and ideal group organization, in the form of a link with the origin of human culture generally. For this reason the Roman sources are treated only minimally in this Chapter, in order to show how they too cannot be classified easily according to the traditional opposition; the sources are treated more fully in later Chapters as their themes become relevant.

³⁶ See Kraus 1987, 39-40; and Vogel 1966, 135-136 and 218-220.

philosopher who believed that numbers, at least, reflect underlying reality. Moreover the idea that words correspond to the essence of their referents seems to undergird much of ancient etymology, which purported to reveal the original states of things through proper readings of their present forms. It has been argued that this principle, which played a great role in Hellenistic thought, looks back to Pythagoras.³⁷ Thus Pythagoras could have held a ‘naturalist’ position, at least as regards the (ideal?) origins of individual words relative to their referents.³⁸

On the other hand, Pythagoras is also explicitly credited with beliefs that at least at first glance are ‘conventionalist’, in the full sense of language being both grounded in and tending to the emergence of human society. Cicero, in a passage discussing famous individual inventors, asks after the anonymous man “who was the first to assign names to all things, which seemed to Pythagoras the highest wisdom” (*qui primus, quod summae sapientiae Pythagorae visum est, omnibus rebus imposuit nomina; TD. 1.62*).³⁹ Cicero then mentions him “who gathered together scattered humankind” (*qui dissipatos homines congregavit*) and him who created the alphabet (*qui sonos uocis ... paucis litterarum notis terminavit*).⁴⁰ Although the extended context is thus Cicero’s, the

³⁷ Delatte 1915, 281; Boyance 1941, citing Philon *Qu.* 1.20, 4.194.

³⁸ This may be strengthened by subsequent “Pythagoreans” being called ‘naturalists’; Nigidius is one example.

³⁹ For the sentiment cf. Philo of Alexandria: “wise were the men who first assigned names to things” (σοφούς τοὺς πρώτους τοὺς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα θέντας; *Leg. allegor.* 2.15). On such εὐρήματα, cf. Cic. *Brut.* 205, Verg. *Aen.* 6.662, Sen. *Ep.* 90.20-24 (criticizing Posidonius’ attribution of arts to ‘philosophers’, *sapientes*), Pliny *NH.* 7.191-215; in general Kleingünther 1933.

⁴⁰ On the introduction of the alphabet, cf. Hecataeus *FGrHist* 1 F 20, Dionysius of Miletus *FGrHist* 687 F 1, Anaximander *FGrHist* 9 F 3, Andron *FGrHist* 10 F 9, Apollodorus *FGrHist* 244 F 165,

connection between language and human society is not his alone but an increasingly common trope in Classical and Hellenistic thought, and thus may look back not just to e.g. Plato and Protagoras but also to Pythagoras.

One of the Pythagorean ἀκούσματα ('things worth listening to') deals with the question of language origins in much the same suggestive way as Cicero's account, referring to 'convention'. Under the heading "what is wisest?" (τί τὸ σοφώτατον), a first answer deals with the perfection of wisdom depending on numbers (a central Pythagorean concern). The second speaks to the present topic: "secondly, he who assigns names to things" (δεύτερον δὲ ὁ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα θέμενος). This is matched by a summary provided by Proclus: "Pythagoras says that the task of fashioning names belongs not to just anyone, but to the man who sees intellect and the nature of things" (οὐκ ἄρα φησὶ Πυθαγόρας τοῦ τύχοντός ἐστὶ τὸ ὀνοματουργεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ τὸν νοῦν ὀρῶντος καὶ τὴν φύσιν τῶν ὄντων). As in the passage of Cicero just quoted, and as shown above in the central text of the *Cratylus*, 'conventional' origins for language may be read, as here, as a single person providing names for things.

The identification, however, is as usual not so simple. In the first place, as shown, Pythagoras is also credited with 'naturalist' leanings otherwise. In the second place, even this sort of 'conventionalist' account tends to make the single name-giver act in accordance with 'nature', providing names reflective of their referents' essences. That accord is the point of the name-giver being "most wise": his wisdom gave him

Stesichorus fr. 213 PMG, E. fr. 578 N, Gorg. *Pal.* 30, Pl. *Phil.* 18c, *Phdr.* 274c-d, Arist. fr. 501 Rose. For Greek ideas on the origins of writing, see Grassl 1972, Jeffery 1967; cf. Steiner 1994.

knowledge of the nature of things, a nature he could then build into their names.⁴¹ If Pythagorean ideas about words and truth are in fact picked up by later etymologists, this early combination of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ seems necessary.

Epicurus

Better evidence than for Pythagoras exists for Epicurus and subsequent Epicureans. In a letter addressed to Herodotus, Epicurus outlines an origin for language closely tied to the prehistoric development of human society.⁴² His scheme combines ‘naturalist’ and ‘conventionalist’ elements into a timeline, with nature first compelling humankind to produce speech sounds, and individuals and groups later agreeing on alterations to language for reasons of societal necessity and lexical efficiency.⁴³ So explicit a combination of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ is evidently unique in the ancient

⁴¹ See Chapter Two for Aristotle’s and others’ insistence on ‘intellect’ (νοῦς, *mens*) to distinguish human language (λόγος) from even the language-like vocal sounds of some other animals (διάλεκτος).

⁴² Brunshwig (1977: 161) argues convincingly that the letter discusses only language, as opposed to other common examples of *Kulturgeschichte*, because in Epicurean theory it is the means by which culture, as a cumulative social experience, is made possible: language “n’est pas un simple exemple, parmi d’autres, d’une production naturelle de l’homme ... mais [il] peut représenter toutes les autres, parce qu’il en est la condition.” Cf. Cole 1990, 67: “Language is ... the essential medium for the whole process by which men go about securing these advantages” [sc. “cooperation and mutual defense”]. Cf. Lucretius 5.1452-1456: “use and, at the same time, the diligent mind’s experience gradually taught them as they inched forward. Thus time gradually brings each thing into common use, and reason lifts it into the borders of the light: for in their hearts they see one thing from another becoming clear” (*usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis / paulatim docuit pedetentim progredientis. / sic unum quicquid paulatim protrahit aetas / in medium ratioque in luminis erigit oras: / namque aliud ex alio clarescere corde uidebant*).

⁴³ Cf. the complementary roles played in Lucretius’ account by *natura* and *utilitas*, the latter with strong social connotations (see Chapter Three). Whereas “[t]he Epicureans used custom and social mechanism to account for the subsequent development of language ... the Stoics used a nativism of logic and ideas” (Glidden 1994, 141).

sources (excluding some subsequent Epicureans and authors influenced by them).⁴⁴ It was also misunderstood or modified, not least by other ancient Epicureans themselves.⁴⁵ Given both the traditional filter of ‘nature’ v. ‘convention’, and the philosophical and moral contempt in which supposedly Epicurean ideas were held by other ancient authors, some distortions to Epicurus’ complex ideas on language origins were perhaps inevitable. Nonetheless his own writings and those of his followers allow for a plausible reconstruction.

Epicurus outlines two stages in the emergence and development of language (75-76).⁴⁶ In the first stage (ἐξ ἀρχῆς), words came about as reactions to experiences (πάθη) and the mental perceptions thereof (φαντάσματα). The forms of these first words varied from group to group because individuals experience and perceive in ways peculiar to themselves: “the very natures of humankind, having experiences peculiar to

⁴⁴ Gera 2003, 171: “Epicurus’ ideas here are strikingly original.” Perelli 1966-7, 205: “La dottrina di Epicuro sull’origine del linguaggio sembra originale, e difficilmente può essere accostata a quella dei suoi predecessori”; *contra* Arrighetti 1960, 476, who argues for a connection with Aristotle (perhaps thinking of τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα; *Interp.* 16a); the difference between Aristotle and Epicurus on language is clearly explained by Everson 1994, 91-99, esp. 91: “whereas Aristotle takes words to be conventional Epicurus believes that some words at least are naturally significant” and 96: the nature involved is human nature, built into a “psycholinguistic theory of reference.” Cf. Dahlmann 1928, 5: “Epicurum ... in loquellae origine enarranda ceteros omnes philosophos antiquos, quos quidem novimus, prudentia et iudicio superavisse, complures uiri docti iam dudum affirmaverunt.”

⁴⁵ E.g. Lucretius and Diogenes of Oenoanda, both of whom compress the several stages laid out by Epicurus; cf. Pigeaud 1983, 129: “les successeurs grecs d’Epicure ne se soient pas préoccupés de ce problème philosophique” (namely how diversification was possible without idiolect; thus later authors could make do with reduced systems). Epicurus’ student Metrodorus apparently held an “extreme conventionalist view of meaning” (Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 2, 19E=Epicurus *Nat.* 28.31-13.23-14.12).

⁴⁶ Some studies identify three stages (e.g. Campbell 2003, who however also says “two stages”!), but for the purposes of this Chapter the final two, both ‘conventional’, may be treated together in contrast with the ‘natural’ first stage.

themselves group by group, and perceiving mental images peculiar [sc. to themselves group by group], expelled breath in particular ways, the breath having been produced by each experience and mental image” (αὐτὰς τὰς φύσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καθ’ ἕκαστα ἔθνη ἴδια πασχούσας πάθη καὶ ἴδια λαμβανούσας φαντάσματα ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν στελλόμενον ὑφ’ ἐκάστων τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν φαντασμάτων).⁴⁷ Epicurus explicitly opposes this first stage of language to “convention”: “words in the beginning did not arise due to convention” (τὰ ὀνόματα ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὴ θέσει γενέσθαι). At the same time, the “natures” referred to are not the natures of things (to which words then rightly correspond),⁴⁸ nor merely ‘nature’ as a general compulsive force (as will play a role in later Epicureanism), but the distinct natures of individuals and groups; a better translation than “natures” might thus be “inherent characters”.⁴⁹ The consequence of this sort of ‘naturalism’ is that words, although explicitly not ‘conventional’, nonetheless differ from group to group and place

⁴⁷ Cf. Usener frag. 334: “unlike what the Stoics think, Epicurus teaches [that] words come about by nature, with the first humans having broken off some speech sounds according to things” (διδάσκει Ἐπίκουρος (ἐτέρως ἢ ὡς οἴονται οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς) ὡς φύσει ἐστὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ἀπορρηχάντων τῶν πρώτων ἀνθρώπων τινὰς φωνὰς κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων); the phrase “having broken off some speech sounds” may indicate the sort of “articulation” of language more usually referred to as διάρθρωσις, but this would already be complicating ‘nature’ with ‘convention’ (unless such articulation depends only on the physics of the vocal apparatus). Cf. Demetrius Lacon *P Herc.* 1012 lxvii. 7-10: “we say that the first uttering of words came about by nature” (φύσει δὲ τὰς πρώτας τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀναφωνήσεις γεγονέναι λέγομεν).

⁴⁸ *Contra* Brunschwig 1977, who argues for the natures being “appropriate” to objects, not for philosophical rightness but in order that there be no “langue privé” prior to “langue commun” (163-167).

⁴⁹ This internal use of “nature” is entirely in the ambit covered by φύσις generally; cf. Pigeaud 1983, 125: “La notion est assez large pour inclure des sens aussi divers que nature, nature humaine ...”. Cf. the less specific use in Usener frag. 335: “Epicurus thought that words came about by nature” (ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἐπίκουρος ὡς ᾤετο φύσει εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα).

to place: the result is that “there is diversity [sc. of language] according to the locations of the groups” (ὡς ἂν ποτε καὶ ἡ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἔθνων διαφορὰ ᾗ).⁵⁰ With individual and group peculiarity of experience and perception at every turn (ἴδια πάθη, ἴδια φαντάσματα, ἰδίως), this ‘naturalism’ leads not to right language but, inevitably and like traditional ‘conventionalism’, to linguistic diversity as such (ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν).⁵¹

The second stage of linguistic prehistory is more ‘conventional’, with deliberate consolidation of language practice within groups for efficiency of communication: “Later, the peculiar words were set in common within each group so that explanations to one another would become less confusing and more concise” (ὕστερον δὲ κοινῶς καθ’ ἕκαστα ἔθνη τὰ ἴδια τεθῆναι πρὸς τὸ τὰς δηλώσεις ἦττον ἀμφιβόλους γενέσθαι ἀλλήλοις καὶ συντομωτέρως δηλουμένως). The verb used for this process contains the root θε-, seen also in θέσις, the regular byword of ‘conventionalism’. No individual name-giver is named. The adverb ‘in common’, κοινῶς, suggests to the contrary that this second stage of language origins is imagined by Epicurus as a group activity. This seems confirmed by the explicit role played by knowledgeable men in the subsequent creation of words for apparently unusual classes of things: “those knowledgeable of and suggesting things unseen passed on certain sounds, being compelled to speak” (οὐ συνωρώμενα πράγματα εισφέροντας τοὺς

⁵⁰ Brunschwig 1977, 165 makes much hay about the καί, arguing that the idea of diversity is thereby relegated to a supplementary role.

⁵¹ In the idea of diversity among groups (ἔθνη) I am in broad agreement with Sedley 1973, 17ff; see further Chapter Five.

συνειδότης παρεγγυῆσαι τινὰς φθόγγους ἀναγκασθέντας ἀναφωνῆσαι).⁵²

Epicurus' 'conventionalism' imagines a community standard for most (?) words, resorting to expert knowledge only for some types of words.

Both stages in Epicurus' scheme differ from their respective counterparts in other Classical authors. In general, his 'naturalism' and 'conventionalism' are combined in a strong context of the emergence of human civilization. As noted, the "nature" referred to by Epicurus' 'naturalism' is not, as in the *Cratylus*, the essential truth of things as perceived by uniquely knowledgeable men (or gods); nor, as in Aristotle, the physiology making articulate speech possible, although the 'nature' of humankind as social and, arguably, rational plays a large part.⁵³ Instead it is an external nature almost personified as against developed humankind, and thus able to impress itself in the form of mental perceptions of external things.⁵⁴ 'Nature' in this first stage implies not just 'convention' as its opposite but 'civilization', and is linked less to words or truths than to the originally primitive state of humankind. The 'nature' at work in Epicurus' *Letter* thus presupposes key developments in *Kulturgeschichte*, including, in a decisive switch from Archaic ideas, primitivism (the idea that humankind acquired civilization and

⁵² Arguments against an original individual name-giver are common, especially in later Epicurean thought; cf. the discussions of Lucretius and of Diogenes of Oenoanda in Chapter Three.

⁵³ Thus Epicurus does not discuss the prehistoric or even abstract origin of language as a capacity, but the historical origin and development, involving human reason, of different languages in the form of words for things. Cf. Lucretius, who shows by analogy with animal traits that language is a natural capacity (*uis*) distinct from animal vocalization because of human reason; see Chapter Three and cf. Brunschwig 1977, 164: "le problème d'Epicure est ici d'expliquer, non la genèse du langage en un sens indéterminé du mot, mais la genèse du lexique ou des lexiques (τὰ ὀνόματα)"; Brunschwig uses this to justify his incorrect "objective" reading.

⁵⁴ See Clay 1969. Cf. Gera 2003, 170: Epicurean "speech is natural in an entirely new way."

culture only in time) and the attendant idea of progress (the idea that human culture is getting better).⁵⁵ For the scheme to work, that is, humankind has to start out poorly and develop culture within history. There can be no sudden emergence for any cultural institution, language perhaps foremost among them.

In the same way Epicurus' 'conventionalism' is particular. It is not like Hermogenes', whose ideas allowed even individuals in isolation to create meaningful words. Epicurus is closer to Aristotle, for whom 'convention' meant that distinct communities created their own words through agreement at the group level: agreement among speakers attempts to maximize the efficiency of their communication, with languages already varying according to place and group. This 'convention', while a human activity apparently unrelated to the essential meanings of things, is not solitary name-giving but dependent on group standards. Although the dependence on place may be traced back to Archaic ideas, it takes on new meaning in the context of *Kulturgeschichte* and the Hippocratic doctrine of environmental determinism:⁵⁶ place does not determine language directly, but it conditions the people who inhabit it; since their perceptions lead to language, place thus impacts language at a second remove. In Epicurus 'nature' and 'convention' are thus intimately connected because grounded in developed theories of place:⁵⁷ place determines human 'nature', which by experiencing

⁵⁵ See Dodds 1973, Edelstein 1967, Heinemann 1945, and Taylor 1947.

⁵⁶ Cf. the context of e.g. Plato's *Protagoras* and later authors (Chapter Three).

⁵⁷ Pigeaud (1983) argues similarly for an Epicurean combination of nature and convention in language origins, in the specific form of ἔθνος being inherently both natural and conventional and thus a means for human vocalization to move from individual reactions to intra-group systems of communication: "L'ethnie fournit [to Epicurus] le lieu d'une convention naturelle" (127).

reality produces the first stage of language; and place also leads to ‘convention’, in that groups are formed by cohabitation in distinct places, are aided by language, and then refine their languages internally by ‘convention’ for various reasons, chief among them ease of communication (later *utilitas*).

So-called ‘Conventionalists’: Aristotle and Democritus

No less than the “Cratylans”, the authors identified by Proclus as “Hermogenean” show that ‘naturalism’ is not easily separated from ‘conventionalism’.⁵⁸

In the supposedly fixed terms of the traditional debate on language origins, Aristotle is made to fall squarely on the side of ‘conventionalism’.⁵⁹ There is some reason for this, but as ever complication is the rule. As opposed to Cratylus and especially to the Stoics, Aristotle does argue that words signify not through direct relation with the natures of their referents, but by agreement among the speakers of a language: “And so a word is a vocal sound, meaningful according to convention ... since no word is by nature” (“Ὄνομα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ φωνὴ σημαντικὴ κατὰ συνθήκην ... ὅτι φύσει τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδὲν ἐστίν; *Interp.* 16a).⁶⁰ Aristotle thus sticks to, and perhaps helps to canonize, the two terms of the debate, preferring ‘convention’, *συνθήκη*, to ‘nature’, *φύσις*.

⁵⁸ Seemingly unambiguous arguments against naturalism are given by the late antique author Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* 1.142-154; see Blank 1998.

⁵⁹ E.g. OCD s.v. *linguistics, ancient* 2. Cf. Kretzmann 1974.

⁶⁰ On Stoic semantics, see Long 1978, 131-139; and idem 1987, 183-236; and the discussion relative to Quintilian in Chapter Two.

But immediately his ‘conventionalism’ differs from e.g. Hermogenes’; for while Hermogenes’ idea could be summarized as meaning that no standard for correct language exists, Aristotle makes just such a standard a corollary of his basic argument. Elsewhere he writes similarly that the best guide for correct speech is not a natural standard but analysis of contemporary usage, i.e. the very state of language arrived at through a historical process including conventional agreement among speakers: “Diction is clearest when composed of words in everyday use” (σαφειστάτη μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἢ ἐκ τῶν κυρίων ὀνομάτων; *Poet.* 1458a).⁶¹ Thus Aristotle’s ‘conventionalism’ is indeed unlike Cratylus’ or the Stoics’ ‘naturalism’, but is also different from Hermogenes’ ‘conventionalism’; the differences run deep.

As among the interlocutors of the *Cratylus*, a notional similarity links Aristotle to his predecessors: both his basic argument and its corollary for correct speech imply further that language has a history. Aristotle is aware of changes over time in words and in a given language, and of the larger problem of linguistic diversity (see Chapter Five). Moreover it would be meaningless to cite usage as a guide if all usage were always the same. Thus words change, usage changes, and language(s) has (have) a history.

The traditional categories of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ apply to Aristotle’s ideas about language and language origins only with great qualifications. His ‘naturalism’ is not, as for Cratylus, a matter of words so called and thus language as a whole deriving from right relationships with the “natures” of things, but indicates the close relationship,

⁶¹ For poetry, “what is needed” is a blend of familiar and unfamiliar. Cf. *Interp.* 16b: “and there is *logos*, meaningful as a whole, not like a tool but, as said earlier, according to convention” (ἐστὶ δὲ λόγος ἅπας μὲν σημαντικός, οὐχ ὡς ὄργανον δέ, ἀλλ’ ὡς προεῖρεται, κατὰ συσθήκην). Aristotle thus seems to argue directly against one of the strands in the *Cratylus*, in which words are compared to tools; see Kretzmann 1974 and Barney 2001.

indeed dependence, between the possibility of meaningful language about philosophically and politically important concepts, on the one hand, and on the other the “nature” of humankind: only humankind’s unique ‘intellect’ (νοῦς) allows it to perceive and thus speak about those higher-order classes of concepts.⁶² The function of human language is tied to human nature: “why humankind is a political animal more so than any bee or herd animal is clear: for nature, as we say, does nothing in vain; and humankind alone among the animals has language” (διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πάσης μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζώου μᾶλλον, δῆλον. οὐθὲν γάρ, ὡς φαμέν, μάτην ἢ φύσις ποιεῖ λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζώων; *Pol.* 1253a). Humankind is a political animal, and language is a tool for the formation of political societies and the expression of political and philosophical ideas.⁶³ Aristotle, not a ‘naturalist’ in the traditional sense, nonetheless makes a kind of nature central to his theory of language.

Aristotle is usually called a ‘conventionalist’, but like his ‘naturalism’ his ‘conventionalism’ also differs from the classic model. Both Hermogenes and Aristotle agree that convention accounts for language change and thus linguistic diversity. But whereas Hermogenes continued by denying the possibility of any standard for right usage, Aristotle makes his ‘conventionalism’ its basis: the best standard for correct speech is contemporary usage. Moreover Hermogenes’ ‘conventionalism’ took an

⁶² Both Cratylus and Aristotle may thus be said to let ‘knowledge’ play a large role in language: but while Cratylus makes such ‘knowledge’ depend on superhuman beings, Aristotle makes it natural to humankind. For Aristotle’s rejection of Cratylus’ hypothesis, cf. Cauquelin 1990, 55-60.

⁶³ Dierauer (1977: 125) goes too far in writing that “[d]as menschliche Privileg der Sprache ... ist nach Aristoteles nur ein äusseres Hilfsmittel zur Kommunikation der sittlichen Werte, die den Staat begründen.”

extreme form, with meaningful (or right) words able to be generated even by individual usage in isolation of community standards. For Aristotle this is impossible: contemporary usage is the best standard, so presumably the individual cannot be an authority on his own – language in isolation is meaningless (and thus technically not “language” or even “voice”; see Chapter Two).⁶⁴

To the extent that human input features in various cultural practices, Aristotle’s idea of the origin of language may be called ‘conventional’. At the same time, it is important to distinguish his ideas about the origins of contemporary usage (and of correct usage) from his ideas, if any, on the ultimate emergence of language in general: the former is conventional, dependent on learning between generations, while the latter is ‘natural’ in a new sense, tied to the essence not of things but of the creatures producing speech. Thus language, being a human product, is ‘naturally’ political.

These two aspects of Aristotle’s thought work together: ‘nature’ provides an origin of sorts for all human language, in that humankind’s own nature reaching the point of possessing intellect is a necessary condition for language as such; while ‘convention’ is the origin of individual words, and thus of linguistic diversity (dependent on localized language acquisition). Aristotelian language, for all its ‘conventionalism’, is an index of human nature.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ For Aristotle’s rejection of Hermogenes’ individualistic conventionalism, cf. Cauquelin 1990, 61: “Or, s’il y a bien arbitraire du signe ce n’est pas pour autant la marque d’une passion humaine, d’un législateur qui aurait nommé les choses selon son bon vouloir, en demiurge, mais le signe que nous avons affaire à un système, à un ensemble de règles composées entre elles, règles sans sujet fondateur, mais qui fondent tout sujet.”

⁶⁵ See further Chapter Two.

Democritus

Democritus, born around the midpoint of the fifth century, is attributed an elaborate theory about the origin of language in Proclus' commentary to Plato's *Cratylus*.⁶⁶ Language according to Democritus is a matter of 'convention' (θέσις) and 'chance' (τύχη): "Democritus say[s] that words are due to convention" (ὁ δὲ Δημόκριτος θέσει λέγων τὰ ὀνόματα; Proclus *in Crat.* 16). He deduces this from four linguistic facts: polysemy (a given word has more than one meaning); isorropy (there is more than one way of saying the same thing),⁶⁷ metonymy (names for things change), and nonymy (there are things without names). Since language is thus both overburdened and underrepresentative of the universe of things, it is not wholly in accord with nature and must be 'conventional'; moreover it is not deliberately 'conventional' but due at least in part to chance: "words are due not to nature but to chance" (τυχή ἄρα καὶ οὐ φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα).

The formulation is straightforward but has complex implications. Democritus relies on two underlying assumptions. First, a language produced by nature should establish a one-to-one relationship between words and things: no word names more than one thing, and nothing goes unnamed.⁶⁸ Second, if language is not 'natural' then by process of elimination it is 'conventional': at first sight, for Democritus language may be either one or the other but not both. Such an unqualified distinction between the two

⁶⁶ On Democritus generally including dating, Cartledge 1999; cf. Cole 1990.

⁶⁷ On this aspect of Democritus' position see Luce 1969.

⁶⁸ This first assumption resembles the "perfect languages" sought by Medieval and Renaissance theorists; see Eco 1994. Democritus is clearly not zealous in the same sense, as evidenced enough by the subtlety of his analysis of the actual state of language.

poles, unusual in antiquity, would put Democritus in a minority.

But even here the opposition is not so simple. An ideal language apparently would link words directly to things on a one-to-one basis, without ambiguity or overlap. By contrast, actual words are rooted not just in ‘convention’, but in the combination of ‘convention’ and ‘chance’ (τύχη). According to Democritus, language lacks not just accord with the essence of things, but also, to paraphrase later accounts, a deliberate arrangement by sensible men: language is at least partially random.⁶⁹ Thus the ‘conventional’ grounding of Democritean language is similar to e.g. Aristotelean language, where convention is identified with contemporary usage and thus allows for anomaly over analogy. But similarity with Aristotle only goes so far, in that Democritus emphasizes “chance” while Aristotle seems to make even the arbitrariness of symbolic systems, including writing and language, more rule-governed than not.⁷⁰

A passage in Diodorus Siculus may be Democritean: “by establishing symbols among each other for each thing close to hand, they [sc. primitive humans] made for themselves a rational interpretation of all things” (πρὸς ἀλλήλους τιθέντας σύμβολα περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ὑποκειμένων γνώριμον σφίσι αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι τὴν περὶ ἀπάντων ἐρμηνείαν; 1.8.3).⁷¹ If this is Democritean, then his ideas are more mixed, involving both randomness and a reason not unlike Aristotle’s ‘intellect’, νοῦς: conventional agreement among speakers for chance things produces “rational

⁶⁹ Of course even in Classical Greek thought “chance” or “fortune” could be personified, making its effects not random but capricious; it is difficult to tell whether Democritus thought along these lines.

⁷⁰ Kretzmann 1974.

⁷¹ For this as Democritean see Perelli 1966-7; on Diodorus and Democritus see Dellis 1983.

interpretation". Moreover if authentic the passage would also seem to move Democritus away from the form of 'conventionalism' most vilified by its opponents, that of a single name-giver ultimately responsible for the origin of language.⁷²

It is an open question also whether Democritus means to limit his analysis to individual words or to apply it more broadly to language in general. Later authors are able to combine a historical emergence of language according to nature (or compulsion thereby) with subsequent changes resulting from diverse sources including conventional agreement and randomness (or loss of ἀκριβεῖα). Due to the fragmentary state of his evidence it is impossible to decide Democritus' fuller position.

For the same reasons the relationship of his position with that of contemporary and later authors is also difficult to pin down. As an atomist Democritus is usually figured as antagonistic to most of his contemporaries and successors; the OCD (s.v. *Democritus*) argues that "the best brains preferred his opponents' arguments [about metaphysics], and Epicurus and Lucretius were his only influential followers [in antiquity]". But as has been shown Democritus' views about the origin of language are at least similar to Aristotle's. Thus there may be more of a connection between Democritus' ideas and those espoused by later authors.

A Later and *a fortiori* Example: Varro

The complications true of the texts supposedly most prototypical of 'naturalist' and 'conventionalist' positions are true *a fortiori* of less typical, non-canonical texts.

⁷² Cf. Perelli 1966-7, 215: "[d]a questo passo di Diodoro si può escludere che Democrito aderisse alla dottrina del singolo impositore di nomi."

Epicureans aside, the Romans generally are ‘conventionalists’, but with a particular twist: ‘conventionalism’ means not just (and in some cases, not at all) that the link between language and the world is arbitrary, but, crucially, that the link both depends on and articulates the organization of human society, especially in its ideal form as a moral society founded on traditional values.⁷³ The links between glottogony and anthropogony are discussed further in Chapter Three. Here a single example, Varro, shows how the Romans, too, can be called ‘conventionalist’ only with qualification.

Varro’s ideas on language origins have been preserved only in fragments. A treatise dedicated to the origin of Latin (*De origine linguae latinae*), which presumably would have revealed much of his ideas on the more general topic, has not survived.⁷⁴ From the few fragments found in the surviving second half of his *De lingua latina*, Varro seems at first to be strongly ‘conventionalist’ in his account of language origins, imagining a process of ‘assigning names to things’, *impositio*. But even that original assignment is guided by ‘nature’, *natura*, as is inflectional morphology. Ultimately Varro makes language both ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’, in line with his view of usage guided by ‘use-value’, *utilitas*, and his use of etymology to respond to contemporary

⁷³ An exception to this general rule is Nigidius. According to Gellius, Nigidius argued that language was ‘natural’: “names and words were made not by chance placement, but by a certain power and reason of nature” (*nomina uerbaque non positu fortuito, sed quadam ui et ratione naturae facta esse*; *N.A.* 10.4.1); words were “natural rather than conventional” (*naturalia magis quam arbitraria*). As examples Gellius cites the personal pronouns: the second person (*tu, uos*) involves the lips pointing away from the speaker and thus ‘naturally’ indicating another person. For the argument cf. Chrysippus *SVF* 2.895 (οὕτως δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐγὼ λέγομεν κατὰ τοῦτο, δείκνυντες αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὴν διάνοιαν εἶναι, τῆς δείξεως φυσικῶς καὶ οἰκειῶς ἐνταῦθα φερομένης) with Dahlmann 1932, 8-9.

⁷⁴ See Bardon 1952.

issues outside of language.⁷⁵ Although partially framed in some philosophical terms, Varro's thoughts on the origins of language cannot be tidily contained by those terms and look both to larger mytho-social concerns and to Varro's interest in promoting an analogical theory of language.

Varro mentions "the men who were the first to assign names to things" (*illi, qui primi nomina imposuerunt rebus*; 8.7).⁷⁶ This is the classic formulation in Latin of 'conventionalism', especially as the position was represented by its detractors (e.g. Lucretius; see Chapter Three) as well as others (e.g. Cicero, discussing Pythagoreanism; see above). Varro evidently imagines more than one name-giver.⁷⁷ It is difficult to decide from this statement alone whether by *nomina* Varro means literally only 'names', in the technical Stoic sense of nouns as opposed to 'verbs'; or means 'words' more generally (possibly including derivational and inflectional forms). Varro's status as linguist might indicate the former, as would the focus on 'things' (*rebus*) if taken in a concrete sense (i.e. as opposed to actions). This stricter reading would have Varro imagining a first stage of language origins in which only nouns were created. This is possible, as Varro's formulation includes the possibility of iteration: while the men he describes were "the first to assign names to things", there is nothing in his usage or in

⁷⁵ On the last see esp. Bloomer 1991, 38-72: "etymologizing presents language expertise as a diachronic mode. Synchrony along with syntax is displaced. This allows a fixity of culture, a restoration of a pristine state" (50); and cf. the discussion of glottogony and anthropogony in my Chapter Three.

⁷⁶ Varro discusses name-giving also at 5.7, 5.9, 6.36-37, and elsewhere.

⁷⁷ Varro also writes of a single name-giver (*impositor*; 7.1 and 7.2); perhaps he imagines individuals responsible for individual words, or for semantic groups. Cf. Perelli 1966, 216: "Varrone non parla mai di un singolo sapiente come inventore, ma di piu ὀνομαθῆται, <<la cui individualità rimane completamente nell'ombra>>"; cf. Dahlmann 1966.

the larger context to prevent subsequent assignations by others (of additional words or, if needed, of verbs as opposed to nouns); indeed in other passages, discussed below, Varro acknowledges that subsequent change in language must be taken into account in deciding usage. Thus Varro's briefest of statements may point to a 'conventionalism' along the lines of Epicurus' image of multiple stages.

The question of stages is also raised in a second, more complicated passage. At 8.27 Varro writes that:

words were assigned to things thus for reason of utility, so that they would signify them; they [sc. the assigners] wanted the roots to be as few as possible, so that they would be able to learn them by heart more quickly; [but they wanted] the declined [forms to be] as many as possible, so that everyone could say what they needed to more easily.

utilitatis causa uerba ideo sunt imposita rebus ut eas significant;
impositicia nomina esse uoluerunt quam paucissima, quo citius ediscere
possent, declinata quam plurima, quo facilius omnes quibus ad usum
opus esset dicerent.⁷⁸

This passage uses highly specialized terms; the meanings are made clearer by the logical sequence of events outlined and by the words' roles in Varro's work generally.

The assigners of names had two purposes guiding their activity: first, to make language-learning quicker, and second, to make it easier to keep fixed the relationship between name and thing when grammatical circumstances change. Both of these fall

⁷⁸ Dahlmann (1966: 13) thinks that Varro is the source for the grammarian Sergeius' ideas: "when our ancestors saw the nature of things and did not know how to name them, they established names for their own use, with which they could name different things" (*cum maiores nostri uiderent rerum naturam et nescirent quem ad modum appellarent, constituerunt sibi nomina, quibus diuersa appellarent*; GL 4.488 3ff K). Despite *rerum naturam* Sergeius' strong 'conventionalism' would seem to preclude Lucretius as a source.

under the heading of *utilitas*: language is meant to have ‘use-value’.⁷⁹ The assigners’ solution is two-fold: first, to make the number of ‘roots’ (*impositicia nomina*) as small as possible, and second, to make the ‘forms derived’ from them (*declinata*) as numerous as possible. These meanings for *impositicia* and *declinata*, respectively, are assured by their consistent usage in Varro generally. *impositicius* means “inditus, constitutus, tributus” (*TLL* q.v. 2),⁸⁰ and in Varro’s linguistic thought is opposed to both *declinatus* (*L.L.* 8.5) and *naturalis* (*L.L.* 10.53 and 10.61): “I call ‘will’ the assigning of words, and ‘nature’ their inflection” (*uoluntatem dico impositionem uocabulorum, naturam declinationem uocabulorum*; 10.51).⁸¹ The two are compared at 8.5: “*impositio* and *declinatio*, the first like the source, the second like the river” (*impositio et declinatio, alterum ut fons, alterum ut riuus*). *declinatus* and *naturalis* are identified to the extent that *naturalis* suggests the regularity of analogy in derivation and inflection, as opposed to the irregularity of anomaly, against which Varro argues throughout his work.⁸²

The second passage considered (8.27) thus expands on the terser statement of the first (8.7). Varro clearly imagines a complex creation of language, involving

⁷⁹ Cf. *L.L.* 9.48: “because ... oratory was introduced for reasons of use-value” (*cum ... utilitatis causa introducta sit oratio*). The same term is used by the staunchly anti-conventionalist Lucretius as “stamping names to things” (*utilitas expressit nomina rerum*; 5.1029). Neither author means “necessity”.

⁸⁰ Cf. Plin. *N.H.* 28.7: *impositiuorum nominum*. Cf. the glossary in Taylor 1974, s.v. *impositio*: “The act of naming, the creation of a new word in accordance with an individual’s will”; and Guaspari 1998.

⁸¹ Taylor 1974, s.v. *declinatio naturalis*: “the structured and stable aspect of language ... based on nature, the system of the world”; this is opposed to both *declinatio uoluntaria* and *impositio*. Cf. s.v. *uoluntas*: “Mankind’s will as opposed to Nature’s system. The human source of new lexical items.”

⁸² See *idem*, *passim*; Dahlmann 1964, 12f.

multiple name-givers (*impositores*) and at least logically separating the creation of ‘roots’ (*impositicia nomina*) from the creation of derived forms and inflectional patterns (morphology, *declinatio*).⁸³ It is not clear whether these logically separate types are imagined as historically fused or spread out into stages (cf. Epicurus’ bipartite account); or indeed whether the analogizing activities of Hellenistic and Roman authors, including Varro himself, would count towards language creation inasmuch as they contribute to its use-value (*utilitas*). In any case, this account presents the creation of language as a deliberate act on the part of several men, but without (or at least not explicitly with) advanced philosophical knowledge. In all of these senses Varro’s account is strongly ‘conventional’: language is created (i.e., words are assigned to things) by men; and the end product is judged successful not according to a philosophical standard, much less truth, but according to its usefulness, defined as ease of acquisition and flexibility.⁸⁴

But this strong ‘conventionalism’ is tinged by ‘naturalism’ in two ways. First, although the first stage is the assignment of names to things by humans, ‘nature’, *natura*, “was humankind’s guide for the purpose of assigning names” (*dux fuit ad uocabula imponenda homini*; 6.3). Read slightly differently, the Latin may imply that humankind had no choice but to assign the names suggested by its ‘guide’: *imponenda* may be taking *homini* as dative of agent and thus imply obligation or necessity. In either

⁸³ Bloomer argues that Varro’s goal for etymologizing at all is to practice “comparative culture making, working backwards from the present word to explain the reasons for its original *impositio* and explaining its formal *declinatio* from this original state” (1991, 49). For more on how such practices allow “[t]he past [to be] recovered at the same time as the present ruin is explained”, see Chapter Three.

⁸⁴ This combination makes Varro’s image of language creation seem like an exercise in constructed languages, especially popular in the 19th century; see Eco 1994.

case 'nature' plays the lead role in humankind's assignment of names to things.

Second, inflection and derivation, that is morphological changes, may once created be given over again to 'nature'. At 10.53 Varro writes that:

he who will make assignments the beginning of analogy, will need to decline from them the oblique cases; he [who will make] nature [the beginning of analogy], [will need to do] the opposite; he [who will derive analogy] from both, [will need to derive] the remaining declinations from inflections of this same sort. Assigning is in our control, but we are in nature's: for each man assigns a name howsoever he wants, but declines it howsoever nature wants

qui initia faciet analogiae impositiones, ab his obliquas figuras declinare debet; qui naturam, contra; qui ab utraque, reliquas declinationes ab eiusmodi transitibus. impositio est in nostro dominatu, nos in natura<e>: quemadmodum enim quisque uolt, imponit nomen, at declinat, quemadmodum uolt natura.

As above (8.7), Varro here distinguishes two areas of linguistic activity: the assigning of names (*impositio*), and the production of derived and declined forms from them (*declinatio*). At 8.7 both activities were the province of unnamed assigners (*impositores*), and both apparently dealt with the actual origin of the words and forms involved. By contrast, at 10.53 Varro seems to be discussing the production of linguistic forms in an unspecified present, as if e.g. in speech. In this post-original setting, speakers have control only over *impositio*, the assignment of names, while *declinatio*, roughly inflectional morphology, follows nature: Varro goes so far as to have this mean that "we are in nature's [control]".

This complex combination of 'convention' and 'nature' in language is explicit also at 9.34: "I think that the declinations of words are both voluntary and natural, voluntary for the things to which humankind have imposed certain names ... natural as those which are inflected from imposed names for tenses or cases" (*ego declinatus*

uerborum et uoluntarios et naturalis esse puto, uoluntarios quibus homines uocabula imposuerint rebus quaedam ... naturales ut ab impositis uocabulis quae inclinantur in tempora aut in casus). Here declination, that is, as noted above, inflectional and derivational morphology, is *both* ‘voluntary’ or conventional *and* ‘natural’.

The complexity in Varro’s accounts seems to come less from a dispute over philosophical terms or positions than from Varro’s pragmatic acknowledgment of the realities of usage (9.35):

nor must [analogy] be followed in every word: for if custom has declined any words wrongly, such that they [cannot be produced] in another manner without offending many people, the rationale of actual speech shows that the rationale of the words must be ignored.

neque ideo statim ea in omnibus uerbis est sequenda: nam si qua perperam declinauit uerba consuetudo, ut ea aliter <non possint efferri> sine offensione multorum, hinc rationem uerborum praetermittendam ostendit loquendi.

Although words may have had as their origin a right assignment in accordance with ‘nature’, the situation now is different: words and their objects have changed, and that change must be recognized for language to continue to function.⁸⁵

Ultimately, the general shape of Varro’s scattered but coherent accounts of language origins may be related to his purpose in the *De lingua Latina* in promoting a theory of analogy in language.⁸⁶ If it is right, as has long been argued, that the ancient debate between ‘analogists’ and ‘anomalists’ was largely a matter of Varro’s own invention, then his vested interest in analogy may be expected to have influenced his

⁸⁵ This view of language turns out to be very Roman, and is explored further in Chapter Three.

⁸⁶ See Taylor 1974.

ideas on language origins.⁸⁷ Prominent place is indeed given to analogy in the passages discussed above and thus, it seems, in Varro's image of language origins. Although Varro acknowledges needing to weigh analogical regularity against the anomalous usage of the 'many' in everyday speech (9.35), this seems a concession away from a preferred linguistic situation in which analogy could be followed as often as possible. This preference appears throughout the *De lingua Latina*, and in Varro's differential treatment in the passages discussed above of two groups of concepts: on the one hand, analogy, *declinatio*, and 'nature'; and, on the other hand, anomaly, *impositio*, and 'human'. That part of language showing the most analogy, *declinatio*, follows 'nature's wish' (*declinat quemadmodum uolt natura*; 10.53). This natural, analogical part of language implicitly takes pride of place over the anomalous human part, *impositio*. For whether or not *impositio* is historically prior to *declinatio* (cf. 8.7 and 8.27), originally even that first assignment of names was directed by 'nature' (6.3), that is, implicitly in accordance with analogy. In other words Varro, despite his use of the 'conventional' image of the name-giver(s) assigning words to things, may implicitly make *declinatio* more original, not because it is 'natural' but because it is *analogical* and *thus* preferred to the anomalous assignment of names by humankind.

All told, Varro seems to imagine two areas of linguistic activity, *impositio* and *declinatio*, at two separate periods: the origin of language, and subsequently in its actual use.⁸⁸ As regards the first period Varro is 'conventional' in that name-givers are

⁸⁷ On Varro's possible invention of the debate see Fehling 1956-1957.

⁸⁸ Ancient authors are aware of language change. See the discussions in Chapters Five and Six; and cf. Rochette 1996a and Uhlfelder 1963.

involved, but also already ‘naturalistic’ in that nature guides the givers in their work. The elements of both *impositio* and *declinatio*, respectively roots (*impositicia*) and morphological forms (*declinata*), are created by men (who however may be guided by nature).⁸⁹ Unnamed but purposeful, these men created language such that it would be both easy to learn and able to express what needs to be expressed; in a word, such that it will have ‘use-value’ (*utilitas*). In the second period Varro introduces a stronger element of ‘naturalism’ but retains a pragmatic sense of the ‘conventional’ along Aristotelian lines, i.e. usage. While the assignment of names (*impositio*) is still the province of their users, in derivation and declination (*declinatio*) those users are subject to ‘nature’, which may be trumped still later by popular convention or usage. Thus Varro’s accounts combine ‘conventionalism’ and ‘naturalism’ in the origin of language.

Conclusions

A division of ancient thought on language origins into two opposed camps of ‘naturalism’ and ‘conventionalism’ oversimplifies the complexities of the evidence. The very texts in which the question of language origins is supposed to have been given its classical formulation, and the very authors who are taken as most responsible for the *loci classici*, show great variation. Not only do their answers to the question of language origins differ, but also in their hands and minds the question itself takes on different forms, with crucial terms repeated but continually redefined. Authors like Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus each link their discussions of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ to the

⁸⁹ Book 5 of *De lingua latina* is concerned with explaining “how words were assigned to things” (5.1). On “creativity” in *impositio*, with special reference to fish names, see Guaspari 1998.

larger, contemporary issue of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, but in diverse ways. In Plato the terms mean respectively ‘[a word’s accord with] the essence of a thing’ and ‘setting [a word] by social (or even individual) decision’; it is not clear from the *Cratylus* whether Plato (or Socrates), although aware of language change, subscribed to an origin of language tied more or less to either term. In Aristotle, ‘nature’ for language is ‘human nature’, both physiologically (the possession of an articulating tongue) and, more importantly, psychologically (the possession of ‘intellect’, νοῦς, and thus access to higher-order categories); while ‘convention’ is differentiation of groups by place, a cause of linguistic diversity.⁹⁰ And in Epicurus, ‘nature’ is almost ‘the external world’, producing language in the form of expressed reactions to ‘mental perceptions’ (φαντάσματα); while ‘convention’ is a deliberate but mostly non-expert process of refining language for intragroup communication. The differences between these authors just on a definitional level are manifold.

A similar point may be made about the other authors considered in this Chapter. The conclusions reached about Pythagoras and Democritus, authors explicitly opposed by Proclus, show up the limits of the binary classification. Neither author may easily be classified, and while their accounts of language origins differ there are similarities enough to problematize any strict opposition. Pythagoras, called “Cratylan” by Proclus and thus classified as a ‘naturalist’, is said to have reckoned among the wisest of men the νομοθέτης, attacked by Lucretius and other traditional ‘naturalists’ as typical of ‘conventionalism’. Democritus, called “Hermogenean” and thus classified as a ‘conventionalist’, is in his physics an atomist and thus one source for the Epicureans,

⁹⁰ On Aristotle’s physiology and psychology of language see Chapter Two.

who were traditionally, and certainly in Lucretius, at least ostensibly the strongest of ‘naturalists’. Thus the “Cratylan” admires ‘conventionalism’, and the “Hermogenean” inspired the seemingly most adamant ‘naturalists’ of them all.

Cratylus’ subsequent intellectual history further illustrates this systemic overlap. The paradigmatic advocate of ‘naturalism’, of words in accordance with φύσις, was to become a moderate Heraclitean, that is a disbeliever in permanent meaning or reality. Heraclitus himself wrote that “nature likes to hide” (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ; B 123 DK). Indeed, and vice versa: at least in language origins, ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ conceal one another. The traditional terms of this “famous philosophical debate” thus turn out to mean too many things in the different sources to support a binary classificatory scheme. Instead their permutations mean that the answers to the question of language origins, as well as the question itself, changed over time. As a means of addressing contemporary concerns, it turns out that asking about the origin of language returns answers primarily about the organization of different groups: from Nigidius’ and Proclus’ schematic division of their predecessors into two camps, the power of inquiry into language origins to divide and organize the world according to language saw substantial ramifications in ancient thought. The following Chapters will show how answers to the question of language origins address more fundamental mytho-social concerns about group organization and both group and individual identity.

*Such as have speech also have voice, but
such as have voice do not all have speech*
- Aristotle *Historia Animalium* 536b2-3

CHAPTER TWO

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE: HUMANS, ANIMALS, AND OTHERS IN HESIOD, ARISTOTLE, AND LUCRETIUS

Chapter One concluded with the notion that ancient ideas about the origin of language were used to articulate contemporary non-linguistic and even non-philosophical concerns, especially about real and ideal group organization. In this way the very existence of human language is used to draw one relatively clear dividing line, between humankind and non-human animals, and a second line, somewhat less clear, between humans and gods.¹ This theme appears early on, beginning with implicit contrasts embedded in usage (especially of αὐδή and φωνή and their derivatives), and is developed variously in different hands: from a set-piece for rhetorical display into the kernel of elaborate theories about how language, and thus by extension humankind and human culture, is rooted in its biology, physiology, and/or psychology (φωνή as ‘vocal sound’ is contrasted with ψόφος, ‘noise’, and is a part of διάλεκτος, ‘speech’, and

¹ For language as distinctive of humankind, see Pelliccia 1995, 25-26, 62, and *passim*; Renehan 1981; Vretska 1976, 31: “Die Sprache ist das Hauptunterscheidungsmerkmal vom Tier, das ja auch hier als Gegensatz angezogen wird”; and the ancient etymologies deriving ἄνθρωπος from ἄψ and φωνή (Dickerman 1909, 25 n.1). Cf. Tuplin 1999, 51 n.15: “*Differentiae* between man and animal [in Greek thought] tend to recall those between Greek and barbarian”, with sources there; see discussion below on marginal peoples and human-animal hybrids. On humans and animals in ancient thought generally see Dierauer 1977, esp. 12, 32-34, 125-128, 234-236, and 268-270; and Sorabji 1993.

λόγος, ‘language’).²

The most important physiological attribute in this connection is the tongue. In both Greek and Latin, as in many modern languages, there is a constant overlap between ‘physical tongue’ and ‘language’, but with humans, animals, and gods using γλῶτται or *linguae* that functioned in different ways and contexts (a sort of identifying or essentializing pragmatics).³ The tongue is thus given an origin not in historical time (certain exceptional individual cases notwithstanding), but at the boundary between history and prehistory, as an index of the panhistorical natures of its possessors. The increasing ubiquity over time of the theme of ‘articulation in language’, διάρθρωσις, that is the segmentation by the tongue of voice into speech including consonants or consisting of phonemes, attests to the equally ubiquitous articulation in ancient thought of inter- and intra-group organization. As they have or do not have ‘(articulate) tongues’, ‘voice’, ‘speech’, and ‘language’, so are humans, animals, and others linked to or distinct from each other.

The increasing sophistication of biological thought, with its corollary in the increasing complexity of the terms and taxonomies over time, means that humankind in particular sees itself continually redefined as against the other animals.⁴ As examples of

² The Latin terms are less numerous but perform the same distinguishing functions; see below.

³ On γλῶτται and διάλεκτος, see Munz 1921.

⁴ This developing distinction is in line with some ancient conceptions of the Golden Age, in which humans, animals, and gods were all able to communicate, as opposed to later times in which communication became impossible; see Gera 2003, 18-67, and Chapter Three. The setting was used for fables: one Greek equivalent for “once upon a time” was “At the time when animals could speak” (ὅτε φωνήεντα ἦν τὰ ζῷα; Xen. *Mem.* 2.7.13); see Nagy 1979, 314-316.

language are found among non-human animals and marginal cultures, additional elements are regularly needed to keep human language and thus normal human nature distinct. Such elements move over time away from physiology and even articulation to higher-order abstractions like intellect, the meaning or content of language including political and ethical propositions, and truth or right moral behavior.⁵ By contrast, over the same time period, and despite the partially linguistic division of the world into barbarian and non-barbarian groups, human groups and cultures are seen as increasingly overlapping, eventually culminating in the assertion that Latin, like the Romans themselves, was originally and is still essentially Greek (see Chapter Six).

Αὐδή and Φωνή

Αὐδή and φωνή refer to types of voice, speech, and language, namely ‘the *capacity* for (articulate or human) speech’ and ‘*actual* vocal utterance’, respectively.⁶ The terms are used by the ancient authors to arrange speakers into implicit taxonomies of distinct but interacting and even overlapping groups. If such taxonomies are as a rule synchronic, the ubiquitous link between language and identity or essence, and the link between essence and origin, mean that the synchronic schemata may be read as charting the relationship between past and present on the axis of language, of ‘the tongue’. Thus by examining ancient usage we return to an etymology of sorts, ancient in form if not content, divining prehistoric origins for ‘language’ in the proper reading of its terms and

⁵ E.g. Isocr. 3.5: (λόγος) πάντων τῶν ἐνόητων ἐν τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσει πλείστων ἀγαθῶν αἰτίον ἐστί, τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοις οἷς ἔχομεν οὐδὲν τῶν ἄλλων ζώων διαφέρομεν; and 4.48.

⁶ Cf. Chantraine 1968-1980 s.v. αὐδή: ‘voix humaine’; φωνή: ‘son de la voix’.

their usage.

Ideas about the biology or physiology of language are implicit in the earliest available texts. The earliest Greek texts already show patterned usage of *αὐδή* (and its adjectives *αὐδήεις* and *ἄνσυδος*, as well as related verbs) and *φωνή* (*φωνήεις* and related verbs). Although the texts are not systematic expositions of linguistic ideas, they establish definitions for the two terms that are linked, importantly, to the perceived differences between the overlapping groups of humans, animals, and gods. The terms become part of a discourse about language and its social correlates. In later authors the meanings of *αὐδή* and *φωνή* are changed and expanded, and these two original terms are joined by others, as the biology of language, like the taxonomies it underlies, becomes increasingly more complex.

Hesiod is explicit about the origin of at least one individual's ability to speak. In both his *Theogony* and his *Works and Days* he refers to crucial events in the prehistory of humankind: *Theogony* 512-616 treats the story of Prometheus, including the creation of women, a subject also treated in *Works and Days* (47-105); and *Works and Days* 106-201 describes the succession of four ages of humankind plus an interpolated age of heroes. Human prehistory in Hesiod does not have the systematic form later achieved by Classical and Hellenistic *Kulturgeschichte*. Nonetheless his works include explicit references to language, to types of language use, and to differences among their users; these references hint at language origin and creation.

Portions of both Hesiodic texts at first glance imply that language may be a direct creation of the gods.⁷ Each describes how the gods create woman for humankind;

⁷ This sort of language origin is relatively rare in Greek and Roman authors; exceptionally *Orph.* 28.4 Abel, Nonnus *Dionys.* 26.284. See Allen 1948, 37-39, for whom divine origins (he cites as parallels

in the *Works and Days* she is named Pandora. Pandora plays slightly different roles in the two texts: in the *Theogony* she is humankind's specific punishment for Prometheus' theft of fire (πῆμα μέγ[α] ... θνήττοισι; 592), while in the *Works and Days* she is one explanation for the omnipresence of toil in human life.⁸ But in both texts her fabrication by the gods is similar. The primary role is played by Hephaestus, who fashions Pandora from earth and gives her other attributes, while she receives other abilities and qualities from different gods and goddesses. In the earlier *Theogony* no mention is made of her speech.

The *Works and Days* is more explicit about Pandora's language, linking it to the activity of the gods and to Pandora's identity as human and individual.⁹ There are two moments of interest. First, Zeus' first task for Hephaestus after having him fashion the woman from earth and water is "to set inside her the speech of humankind / and motive force" (61-62: ἐν δ' ἀνθρώπου θέμεν αὐδὴν / καὶ σθένος); Hephaestus is said to have obeyed (69, 71). A similar instance of 'speech' given to artificial beings occurs in Homer at *Il.* 18.419-420, describing another creation of Hephaestus, his female robots: "within them is intellect and thought, and both speech / and motive force" (τῆς ἐν μὲν νόος ἐστὶ μετὰ φρεσίν, ἐν δὲ καὶ αὐδὴ / καὶ σθένος).

Old Norse accounts, Chinese tradition, and Indian ideas) are "more primitive" than others; he traces their continued existence in Greco-Roman sources "to professional religious interference", namely "Jewish or early Christian writers".

⁸ West 1966, 305-308.

⁹ Cf. Clay 2003, 123: "In keeping with the human perspective of the *Works and Days*, Hesiod gives us a more subjective view of Pandora, not as a robot, but as a beautiful and enticing living woman, whose looks and voice have a devastating effect on men. *Her speech above all constitutes the vehicle of seduction and deception*" (emphasis added).

It is suggestive of the link between language and identity that speech, given by Hephaestus to Pandora and to his mechanical handmaidens, is paired with ‘motive force’, σθένος, the power that makes a living creature live (and, in Homer, with ‘intellect’, νόος, on which see further below, “Aristotle”).¹⁰ But it is not immediately clear what is meant by αὐδή: the vocal apparatus, the ability to speak (a sort of language faculty), and/or a particular language may all be intended. Its dependence on the genitive ἀνθρώπου, ‘of humankind’, implies a difference between human and other kinds of language; this is confirmed by Hesiod’s and Homer’s usage generally.

Complication and potential resolution for the problem of αὐδή are supplied by, first, an apparent second gift of language to Pandora by a different god in the same passage and by, second, parallels in usage elsewhere in Hesiod and in the Homeric texts. After Hephaestus has fashioned Pandora, and after other gods and goddesses have contributed appropriate skills and traits, “the messenger of the gods / set inside her voice, and named that woman / Pandora” (79-81: ἐν δ’ ἄρα φωνήν / θῆκε θεῶν κήρυξ, ὀνόμηνε δὲ τήνδε γυναῖκα / Πανδώρην). On their own, these lines are fairly clear: Hermes, the messenger-god, gives Pandora language and also names her; there is thus a connection made between Pandora’s ability to speak and her identity.¹¹ But of course this second gift of language must be reconciled somehow with the first, which is supported by the explicit command of Zeus earlier in the passage. The

¹⁰ Homer’s link between language and ‘motive force’, σθένος, in the breast is echoed, perhaps surprisingly, in Diogenes of Babylon’s argument (ap. Galen *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s doctrines* 2.5.9-13) that language “does not have its source in the head, but lower down; for it is obvious that utterance passes out through the windpipe” (translation from Long 1987, 318).

¹¹ The text explains the name: “because all the dwellers of Olympian homes / gave a gift” (81-82). But the close association of language and identity still stands.

difficulty was recognized already by ancient commentators, who called the second gift ‘superfluous’ or ‘redundant’ (περίττον; Proclus ad loc.); one ancient solution was to discard the offending half-verses, a solution some moderns have followed.¹²

A better solution is to make the first gift, αὐδή, mean ‘the *capacity* for articulate speech’, and the second gift, φωνή, mean ‘*actual* speech or utterance’. As West argues ad loc., however, elsewhere αὐδή by itself may mean ‘actual articulate speech’: at *Il.* 19.407 when Achilles’ horse Xanthus is made by Hera to speak Greek it is described as αὐδήεντα; thus according to West “the commentators were forced to distinguish αὐδή and φωνή in precisely the opposite way.”¹³ For West this semantic overlap between the texts is enough to refute any clear difference between the two terms in the Hesiodic passage. He tries to do away with the problem, concluding that “whoever wrote the [second] line did not consider that Hephaestus had been said to give the woman a voice”; he adds somewhat obscurely that this does not prevent Hesiod from being the author of both lines.

West’s analysis seems to err on two counts. First, a technical linguistic vocabulary was not available before the late Classical or Hellenistic period; overlapping meanings are characteristic of the Archaic texts and cannot be used alone to invalidate the lines.¹⁴ Second and more importantly, the Homeric passage adduced by West does

¹² It is perhaps not coincidental that 79-80 (through κήρυξ) are nowhere quoted “earlier than about 1200” (West 1966, 92, describing the testimonia), while 80 beginning at ὀνόμησε does appear.

¹³ West 1966, 163.

¹⁴ At the same time the terms are used in Homer and Hesiod quite consistently relative to each other, i.e. they are not only or even mainly metrical variants; at the very least the passages considered show emerging lexical specificity; on the possible constraints and freedoms of meter in early hexameter poetry see Foley 1999 and Nagy 1996b, 3-128.

not reverse the meanings of αὐδή and φωνή as used by Hesiod, but presents the same distinction between ‘capacity for speech’ and ‘actual utterance’. At *Il.* 19.407 Hera made the horse ‘able to speak’ (αὐδήεντα).¹⁵ At 19.417, after Xanthus has spoken, he is described as ‘having spoken’ (φωνήσαντος) and the Erinyes stop his ‘voice’ (αὐδήν). If there is any contrast implied here it is opposite to what West represents the Homeric commentators as inferring, and the same as the scholia’s ingenious solution for the Hesiodic embarrassment of riches: the root in φωνή refers to Xanthus’ actual utterance (actual speech), while αὐδή refers to his capacity to speak (vocal apparatus). Only this contrast would make sense of the passage and the explicit timing of the actions it describes: the Erinyes could not have stopped the horse’s ability to speak (αὐδήν), his voice, before he had actually finished speaking (φωνήσαντος), unless his last word or two (ἴφι δαμῆναι) are meant to be onomatopoeic for his Greek trailing off into neighing.¹⁶ The passage also carries overtones of the function of αὐδή in Homer generally, indicating the capacity for articulate speech in a non-human: in addition to Xanthus, others described as αὐδήεις include semi-divine beings like Circe (*Od.* 10.36,

¹⁵ Johnston rightly notes that the passage “does not say that Hera caused Xanthus to speak at the very moment that he replied to Achilles ... she could have endowed Xanthus with this quality at any time” (1992: 87). Yamagata remarks “If it is unusual for Homeric horses to talk, it is perfectly normal for them to understand human speech”; e.g. *Il.* 8.184ff and 23.417ff (1993: 148). On Xanthus see Gera 2003, 15-16, and Pelliccia 1995, 105-108. Cf. the donkey made to talk by God in the Old Testament, *Numbers* 22:27-30.

¹⁶ Why the Erinyes should be invoked to stop Xanthus, their only appearance in the *Iliad*, has been much discussed. Johnston 1992 rejects earlier arguments (e.g. the Erinyes are fulfilling their normal role as “guardians of the natural order”; so Dodds 1967, 7) in favor of seeing the episode as part of a tradition of heroic and semi-divine horses; *contra* Pelliccia 1995, who finds Johnston’s arguments unconvincing and points out that Homeric animals only talk when commissioned to do so for reasons of prophecy (105-108 and 167 n.104).

11.8 and 12.150) and Calypso (*Od.* 12.449).¹⁷ Thus Xanthus does not help to invalidate the second Hesiodic gift of language to Pandora.

With both lines allowed to stand, and the Homeric passage not impinging on but agreeing with Hesiod's usage, the two linguistic gifts to Pandora may be reconciled: αὐδή is the capacity for articulate speech, while φωνή is actual utterance, the voice itself.¹⁸ This solution has the additional virtue of making each gift appropriate to the abilities of the god giving it: Hephaestus fashions the vocal apparatus (αὐδή), a physical and artistic act; while Hermes imparts speech itself (φωνή), arguably part of his purview as herald.¹⁹ The discrete gifts of actual tongue/vocal apparatus and language *per se* are thus of a piece with the gifts given by the other gods and goddesses; for example Hephaestus again has made Pandora's form but it is Aphrodite, the Graces, and Persuasion who show her how to put that form to use (65-66, 73-75). In this context the gift of language to Pandora may, like her other gifts, carry a bad connotation, for she is of course fashioned to introduce toil to humankind; the text connects her gifts, in which language must be included, directly with her role as 'misery' (πῆμα): she was named "Pandora, because all the inhabitants of Olympus / gave her as a gift, misery for

¹⁷ See Nagler 1977. By contrast, the eagle who visits Penelope in a dream speaks to her in φωνή (19.545).

¹⁸ Cf. the discussion of Hesiod's terms for types of language in Leclerc 1993, 31-48. To strengthen the sense of vocal sound, it might be added that φωνή is related to φημί and cognate with Latin *fari* and *fateor*, all derived from PIE **bheH₂-* (pointed out to me by Brian Krostenko, private communication).

¹⁹ Cf. Verdenius 1985 ad loc.: "It is only natural that Hermes as herald of the gods makes her speech sounding." West ad loc. notes rightly that Hermes is referred to by title (κῆρυξ) rather than by name to stress his appropriateness as the one to name or announce "Pandora". Cf. *Il.* 18.419-420, where Hephaestus gives 'human voice' (αὐδή), among other attributes, to his automata.

hard-working men” (81-82: Πανδώραν, ὅτι πάντες Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες / δῶρον ἐδώρησαν, πῆμ' ἀνδρασιν ἀλφειστῆσιν). The *Works and Days* thus hints at the idea that language is bad, but as an aspect of laborious life language is by no means unique and not much may be made of the idea here.²⁰

The meanings thus established for αὐδή and φωνή in Hesiod's treatments of Pandora, and in Homer's treatment of Xanthus, are confirmed by a more general taxonomy of language in both Hesiod and Homer. The taxonomy is implicit in the authors' usage, with terms for types of language, and for where language occurs physiologically, varying according to the kind of creature doing the talking, whether human, animal, divine, or other. Alongside αὐδή, φωνή, and related words, are the terms ὄσσα, 'sound, rumor', and ὄψ, 'non-human or extraordinary human vocal sound, esp. singing'; while the physiological location of language is described by γλῶσσα, 'tongue', and/or στόμα, 'mouth'. The terms are used fairly consistently to refer to types of vocal sound and speech available to distinct but overlapping groups.²¹

Αὐδή connotes 'meaningful communication with or among humankind'.²² In addition to being given to Pandora and the robots, the noun and its relatives are used of

²⁰ Ambivalence about language runs through ancient and modern Western thought. In antiquity e.g. Augustine *Urbs* 19: *linguarum diversitas hominem alienat ab homine ... ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno*. More recently Stephenson 1992, Crow 2000, Palahniuk 2003.

²¹ For these terms for types of speech in Homer, see Ford 1992, 172-179, with Gera 2003, 2-3: "in Homer the word φωνή is used of sound or noise [e.g. *Il.* 18.219, *Od.* 10.239], while αὐδή refers to comprehensible speech [e.g. *Il.* 19.407, *Od.* 5.334]"; citing Clay 1974.

²² Cf. Cunliffe 1972 s.v. αὐδή: West ad *Th.* 31 calls αὐδή a 'faculty'. In general cf. Leclerc 1993, 45: "Seuls les animaux n'ont pas de part à cette capacité ... Les valeurs reconnues ... pour αὐδή sont celles de l'harmonie et de la communication du sens, y compris entre hommes et dieux"; and 41: αὐδή is the "capacité à communiquer du sens avec harmonie"; and Benejam 1989.

divine, semi-divine, and even animal creatures only when speaking with humans.²³ In Hesiod it is used of the Muses (*Th.* 31-32: “they blew their divine speech into me” (ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδήν / θέσπιν); and 39-40: “sweet speech flowed freely from their mouths” (τῶν δ’ ἀκάματος ῥέει αὐδή / ἐκ στομάτων ἠδεῖα)), and the poet himself (*Th.* 97: “sweet speech flows from his mouth” (γλυκερή οἱ ἀπὸ στόματος ῥέει αὐδή)). *Αὐδή* is used of the gods when they are involved in human affairs. This connotation of communication with or among humans may only be emerging in Homer, as the noun and its adjective are almost limited to the *Odyssey*. In the *Odyssey*, the noun is used seven times of a god speaking audibly to humans (with five instances of Athena adopting the *αὐδή* of a human: 2.268 and 401; 22.206, 24.503 and 548; cf. 2.297 and 4.831); and twice of Odysseus’ voice being audible to an immortal, Circe (10.311 and 481).²⁴ *Αὐδήεις* describes Circe (10.136=11.8=12.150), Calypso (12.449), and Ino, who, strikingly, “used to be a mortal of [sc. human] speech / but now in the salt sea has a share of the gods’ honor” (ἦ πρὶν μὲν ἔην βροτὸς *αὐδήεσσα*, / νῦν δ’ ἄλως ἐν πελάγεσσι θεῶν ἐξέμμορε τιμῆς; 5.334-5): Ino’s change to divinity, and thus away from humanity, is marked precisely by her loss of mortal *αὐδή*. The adjective is also used when Odysseus, having washed ashore at Phaeacia, wonders if he is “near humans of human speech” (ἀνθρώπων ... σχεδὸν *αὐδηέντων*; 6.125). By contrast, the noun and adjective appear in the arguably earlier *Iliad* less often. *Αὐδή* is used only a few times: of Nestor (1.249), Hector (13.757), and Talthibios (19.250, similar to *Od.*

²³ The majority of examples, which are common, are of humans addressing each other; see Cunliffe 1972 s.v. *αὐδάω*, *ἐξαυδάω*, *μεταυδάω*, *παραυδάω*, and, especially, *προσαυδάω*.

²⁴ It is also used when a mortal speaker’s voice has unusual qualities, likened to the divine (1.371=13.4).

1.371), as well as of Apollo (14.270, similar to 13.757). Not having αὐδή makes one ‘mute’ (4.430).²⁵ Αὐδήεις appears only once in the *Iliad*, describing Xanthus precisely when that horse is made to speak to Achilles (19.407; see above). Thus the later *Odyssey* may be more concerned than the *Iliad* with language as a feature distinguishing among groups.²⁶

Φωνή is broader than αὐδή, not limited to human speech but encompassing ‘vocal sounds’ generally and, by metaphorical extension, other sorts of sounds. In Hesiod it is given alongside αὐδή to Pandora (discussed above), and is used of the Muses (*Th.* 39: “agreeing in voice” (φωνῆ ὁμηρεῦσαι)) and of the gods in combat (*Th.* 685-686: “the voice of both calling out reached the starry heavens” (φωνῆ δ’ ἀμφοτέρων ἴκετ’ οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα / κεκλομένων)).²⁷ In Homer φωνή and the verb φωνέω are common, and may apply to the same variety of groups, including humans (e.g. *Il.* 15.686 and 16.111) and gods (θεῶς ὅπα φωνησάσης; *Od.* 24.535).²⁸ Although in both Homeric epics the noun may be used in reference to both human and non-human sounds, including inanimate sounds (‘the voice of a trumpet’; φωνή, ὅτε τ’ ἴαχε σάλπιγξ; *Il.* 18.219), as with αὐδή a greater variety of examples comes from the *Odyssey* (‘lowing’ of cattle, βοῶν δ’ ὧς γίνετο φωνή (12.396); ‘song’ of the

²⁵ Thus the use of the adjective ἀναυδός, twice, in the *Odyssey* to describe Odysseus’ silent broodings (5.456, 10.378).

²⁶ For different modes of human speech in the *Iliad* see Mackie 1996 and Chapter Five.

²⁷ In Homer this expression is less gigantic (e.g. *Il.* 2.153, 12.338).

²⁸ See Cunliffe 1972 s.v. φωνή, φωνέω, and μεταφωνέω; many examples in the *Iliad* seem like formulaic line-endings.

nightingale, χέει πολυδευκέα φωνήν (19.521); ‘oinking of pigs’, συῶν ... φωνήν (10.239)).²⁹ This distribution may support the suggestion made above that the distinction between αὐδή as ‘meaningful communication (with human beings)’ and φωνή as more general ‘(vocal) sound’ is only emerging, and not yet complete, in the Homeric texts.

Φωνή is also used in Hesiod to describe an unusual case, the many sounds made by the monster Typhoeus (*Th.* 829-834):

voices were in each of its terrible heads, producing every kind of ineffable utterance: for in one place it vocalizes as if understandably to the gods; in another the sound of a proud, loud-bellowing bull, in strength ungovernable; in another that of a lion with a shameless heart; in another a sound like puppies, amazing to hear; in another hissing, and the great mountains echoed beneath.

φωναὶ δ' ἐν πάσησιν ἔσαν δεινῆς κεφαλῆσι, / παντοίην ὅπ' ἰεῖσαι
ἀθέσφατον· ἄλλοτε μὲν γὰρ / φθέγγονθ' ὡς τε θεοῖσι συνιέμεν,
ἄλλοτε δ' αὖτε / ταύρου ἐριβρύχεω μένος ἀσκέτου ὄσσαν
ἀγαύρου, / ἄλλοτε δ' αὖτε λέοντος ἀναιδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντος, /
ἄλλοτε δ' αὖ σκυλάκεσσιν εἰκότα, θαύματ' ἀκοῦσαι, / ἄλλοτε
δ' αὖ ροίζεσχ', ὑπὸ δ' ἤχεεν οὔρεα μακρά.

In reference to Typhoeus, φωνή covers a variety of sounds. Although the sounds produced by his different heads have their own names and descriptions (ὄσσαν, ροίζεσ[κε]) these are all apparently included in the rubric of ‘vocal sound’ provided by φωνή, explained by the following ‘every kind of ineffable utterance’ (παντοίην ὅπ[α] ἀθέσφατον). Although Typhoeus is an exceptional example, the range of sounds makes clear that φωνή can include animal vocalizations as well as other sounds not ‘effable’, that is repeatable, by the poet and, in addition, not ‘understandable’ even

²⁹ The last example describes Odysseus’ companions when changed into pigs by Circe.

to the gods.³⁰ Thus the general pattern of use in Hesiod suggests that φωνή lacks some of αὐδή's sense of meaningful communication with humankind.

Ὅσσα, 'sound' or 'din', shows intriguing overlap with but difference from φωνή. Like the latter it is used of the Muses (*Th.* 10: "they tend to come³¹ during the night, uttering their very beautiful sound" (ἐννύχιαι στείχον περικαλλέα ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι), 43: "uttering their immortal sound" (ἄμβροτον ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι), 65-67: "they sing uttering a lovely sound through their mouths, and make famous the laws and cherished customs of all the immortals, uttering their charming sound" (ἐρατὴν δὲ διὰ στόμα ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι / μέλπονται, πάντων τε νόμους καὶ ἦθεα κεδνὰ / ἀθανάτων κλείουσιν, ἐπήρατον ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι); the gods when in combat (*Th.* 701: "to see with the eyes or to hear a sound with the ears" (ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδεῖν ἢ δ' οὐρασίῃ ὄσσαν ἀκοῦσαι)), and Typhoeus (*Th.* 832, quoted above). Other than of Typhoeus it is not used of any specific animal; this may be an accident of the poems' content. But ὄσσα, unlike both φωνή and αὐδή, is also not given as a gift to Pandora nor used to describe human voice. Indeed its possessors, already distinct from humankind by their possession of φωνή without αὐδή, are removed further from identification with or even regular interaction with humankind. The Homeric examples of ὄσσα add to this, in that they refer exclusively to 'rumor' (*Od.* 1.282, 2.216), that is a sort of speech

³⁰ The sounds of Typhoeus have a complex history in ancient thought. Some ancient authors agree with Hesiod that the monster produced many types of (animal) noises; e.g. Nonnus 1.157-162, 2.250-257 and 367-70. Apollodorus 1.6.3 mentions only hissing. West ad loc. compares the Egyptian myth of Seth, noting that voices ascribed to Typhoeus by Hesiod are "typical metamorphoses". If poetry is the human vocal activity most ordained by the Muses as children of Zeus and Memory, one wonders what sort of human speech or poetic activity would have obtained had Zeus not defeated Typhoeus.

³¹ On this sort of "typifying" imperfect see West ad loc. and ad 7.

beyond individual human control and liable to personification as semi-divine (*Il.* 2.93; *Od.* 24.413). "ὄσσα thus seems a marked type of language or speech unwanted by the human world.

"ὄψ is similar to ὄσσα in both Hesiod and Homer, referring mostly to the utterance of a non-human, or of a human being of unusual ability or in unusual circumstances. In Hesiod ὄψ is used of the Muses (*Th.* 41 and 68) and of Typhoeus (*Th.* 830, quoted above); a compound is used of Zeus ('wide-uttering Zeus': *Th.* 514 and 884, *Op.* 229, 239 and 281).³² It appears more often in Homer but still refers most often to the 'voice' or 'utterance' of a non-human or exceptional human being. Thus it is used of the Muses (*Il.* 1.604 and *Od.* 24.60), the gods (*Il.* 2.182=10.512, 7.53, and 20.380; *Od.* 24.535), and the songs of immortal beings like Circe (5.61), Calypso (10.221) and, especially, the Sirens (*Od.* 12.52, 160, 185, 187, and 192).³³ "ὄψ is thus not the sort of vocal sound normally or even desirably heard by human beings.³⁴

"ὄψ is even less often produced by humans, limited to instances where the speaker is exceptional (*Il.* 3.221, Odysseus' famously persuasive speech; 18.222, Ajax's voice likened to a trumpet) or when the circumstances are unusual (*Il.* 22.451, Andromache hears her dead mother's 'voice'; *Od.* 11.421, Agamemnon's shade reports

³² The epithet could also come from the root in ὄψομαι, and thus mean 'far-seeing' (LSJ s.v.).

³³ Cf. Hesiod fr. 150 l.33, where the Sirens have ὄψ: Σειρήνων τε λίγ[ε]ι[α]ν [ὄπ]α κλύον.

³⁴ It is intriguing that, whereas the Muses, the gods, and both Circe and Calypso are also described as ἀυδήεις, the Sirens are not, having only ὄψ; ὄψ may capture a distinction between groups not on the level of comprehensibility but on that of acceptability or desirability.

hearing Cassandra's death-cry;³⁵ 14.492, Odysseus reports in character 'Odysseus' advice to himself at Troy; 20.92, Odysseus overhears Penelope's weeping). Twice a human being's 'voice' is ὄψ when described as 'unkind', ἀμείλικτον (*Il.* 11.137 and 21.98). ὄψ refers unambiguously to a more or less normal human utterance only when paired with αὐδή ('Ἀτρεΐδεω ὄπος ... αὐδήσαντος; *Il.* 16.76). Finally, it may also be produced by animals (lambs, *Il.* 4.435; and cicadas, *Il.* 3.152). This patterned usage of ὄψ reinforces the suggestion that certain types of speech and voice are external to ordinary human experience and thus that their users are, at least on this axis of language, themselves distinct from ordinary humankind or from humankind generally.

The emerging meanings of the two most basic terms, αὐδή, 'meaningful communication with/among human beings', and φωνή, 'vocal sound', are thus confirmed by the two additional terms present in Hesiod's implicit taxonomy and in Homer, ὄσσα, 'rumor', and ὄψ, 'non-human or extraordinary human vocal sound, esp. singing'. Despite some overlap, the four refer to relatively distinct types of vocal sound and to equally distinct valuations of the groups using those types. The basic distinction is between humans (αὐδή, perhaps φωνή) and non-humans (αὐδή when interacting with humankind; otherwise ὄσσα, ὄψ, and φωνή), with the latter including gods or divinities (Muses, the gods as such, immortal beings), the products of the gods (Pandora, Hephaestus' automata, parts of Typhoeus), and animals (lambs, cicadas, other parts of Typhoeus).

This relatively clear distinction is complicated by a simultaneous contrast at the

³⁵ This cry may be doubly unusual, in that Cassandra is often represented as not speaking Greek; see Aesch. *Ag.* 1050-1051 and the discussion below ("Aristotle").

level of physiological or biological point of origin for speech. Hesiod and Homer use two terms in this connection: γλῶσσα, ‘tongue/language’, and στόμα, ‘mouth’. The pattern produced by these two terms cuts across the distinction between human and non-human speech. Creatures using γλῶσσα to produce speech include humans when exhorted against bad behavior (*Op.* 322: if someone ‘plunders with his tongue’, ἀπὸ γλώσσης λήσεται; and *Op.* 709: ‘nor offer false tongue-favor’, μηδὲ ψεύδεσθαι γλώσσης χάριν) and immoderate speech (*Op.* 719-720: “you know that among men the tongue’s best treasure is to be sparing, and its greatest favor when it moves in moderation”, γλώσσης τοι θησαύρους ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἄριστος / φειδωλῆς, πλείστη δὲ χάρις κατὰ μέτρον ἰούσης);³⁶ and ‘whomsoever the [Muses] honor’ (*Th.* 83: ἐπὶ γλώσση γλυκερὴν χεῖουσιν ἔέρσην). Γλῶσσα is also used to refer to Typhoeus’ monstrous over-abundance of tongues in both the physical sense (one-hundred heads means one-hundred tongues) and the metaphorical sense (as many sorts of sounds, including speech comprehensible to the gods, are produced as there are tongues). Creatures using στόμα to produce speech include ‘whomsoever the [Muses] honor’ (*Th.* 84, overlapping with γλῶσσα in 83); the Muses as distinct from the other gods (*Th.* 40 and 65, both quoted above); and the poet himself (*Th.* 97, quoted above). The distinction is slight, in that the Muses are attributed only στόμα; although the poet so called is also given only στόμα, ‘whomsoever the [Muses] honor’, a category presumably including poets, is associated with both στόμα and γλῶσσα.

A stronger distinction may be found in Homer, albeit, again, perhaps only just emerging in the later of the two Homeric epics. It may be right to argue that Homer is

³⁶ For parallels cf. West ad loc..

concerned with speech among humans, and not yet language in the abstract, to the extent that γλῶσσα refers primarily to the physical tongue (*Il.* 5.74 and 292, 16.161, 17.618; *Od.* 3.332 and 341) and only secondarily on its own to ‘language’ (*Il.* 2.804 and 4.438; *Od.* 19.175).³⁷ The physical tongue may be combined with other words for speech to convey an overall impression of a speaker’s ‘speech’ (e.g. Nestor’s ‘sweet-flowing’ speech, *Il.* 1.249; in the trope of the poet needing ‘ten tongues’ to relate the Catalogue of Ships, *Il.* 2.489;³⁸ and in a proverbial description of human speech as ‘glib’, στρέπτη, and tending to ‘story-telling’, μῦθοι, *Il.* 20.246-250).

Στόμα is more common than γλῶσσα in Homer, referring to the ‘mouth’ (and, metonymically, the ‘face’) mostly as a location for physical actions. These include ‘touching’ (*Il.* 24.506, Priam hoping to touch deceased Hector’s face; cf. *Od.* 11.426, Agamemnon’s shade reporting how Clytemnaestra did not shut his corpse’s mouth), but most examples are acts of violence (*Il.* 6.43, 14.467, 16.345, 349 and 410, 23.395; *Od.* 18.97) or less destructive mucking-up of the mouth (*Il.* 23.777, Ajax falls while running and eats dirt; *Od.* 5.322 and 456, Odysseus’ mouth is briny from the sea). As a physical location the ‘mouth’ may also contain signs for emotions (fear is teeth clattering in the mouth, *Il.* 10.375; a berserk Hector foams at the mouth, 15.607; a fearful Andromache feels her ‘heart in her mouth’, 22.452).

By contrast, it is only occasionally that στόμα relates to language in Homer; as

³⁷ The last two instances refer to linguistic diversity among the Achaean troops and on Crete, respectively; see further Chapter Five.

³⁸ These ‘ten tongues’ are alongside ‘ten mouths ... an unbreakable voice ... and a bronze heart’ (δέκα δὲ στόματ’ εἶεν, / φωνή δ’ ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνεΐη; *Il.* 2.489-490), all stressing the daunting task before poet. Cf. *Od.* 12.78; on the many tongues ‘topos’ see Hinds 1998, 34-47.

with ὄψ, these last examples refer to beings, both human and other, whose speech is abnormal or otherwise marked. Undesirable mouths belong to Thersites, chastised by Odysseus for speaking out against Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.250); to Agamemnon, rebuked by Odysseus for his deceptive test of the Achaeans (*Il.* 14.91); and to the Sirens (*Od.* 12.187), by whose songs men are led to their deaths. The poet may also wish for ‘ten mouths’ in order to sing certain songs like the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.489-490, quoted in n.38). All told, στόμα in Homer seems to refer more to the physical mouth than to the mouth as site of normal language; this may be strengthened by its greater presence in the *Iliad*, which as suggested seems less concerned with ‘language’ as such, than in the *Odyssey*.³⁹

Hesiod on the other hand seems to prefer στόμα, rather than the γλῶσσα later generalized as ‘language’, as the site for meaningful or normal communication with or among humankind. His linking of στόμα with αὐδή is made clear by *Th.* 97, which tells how a “sweet voice flows from the mouth” (γλυκερή οἱ ἀπὸ στόματος ῥέει αὐδή) of a man loved by the Muses – such a voice may soothe one’s concerns, i.e. it is made sweet for a social setting;⁴⁰ and by *Th.* 39-40, where the Muses address Zeus: “their untiring voice flows sweetly from their mouths” (τῶν δ’ ἀκάματος ῥέει αὐδή / ἐκ στομάτων ἠδεῖα).

Hesiod’s preference for στόμα over γλῶσσα may relate to his interest in

³⁹ Στόμα may also refer to the ‘mouth’ of things other than people, including rivers, weapons, and, more metaphorically, ‘the great jaws of bitter war’ (πτολέμοιο μέγα στόμα πευκεδανοῖο; *Il.* 10.8); see Cunliffe 1972 s.v. στόμα.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Il.* 1.249: ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέειν αὐδή. On the image see Boedeker 1984, 80-99.

anthropogony, with language a defining feature of humankind linked not only to biology.⁴¹ In general he seems concerned with language to the extent that it is ‘language’ as such, that is human language and vocal interactions both within humankind and between humans and others. Although biology does distinguish this human language from non-human vocal sounds (as shown by the limits of both στόμα and γλῶσσα as well as by the use of ἀύδη), already in Hesiod as in Homer there is an emerging emphasis on non-biological and even performative bases for ‘language’ as essential to humankind. It may thus be significant that στόμα is closely associated with the poetic activities of the Muses – Hesiod’s use of στόμα may accord with his focus on poetry as an institution relating humans and the divine and separating both from animals not only biologically but also, as it were, culturally and thus perhaps even more fundamentally.⁴² As the creations of language in Xanthus and in Pandora make clear, from the point of view of both the Hesiodic and Homeric texts human language, like humankind, is always already distinct, if sometimes fuzzily, from its multiple others. Moreover the distinction is always more than physiological: Pandora’s speech is linked to her ‘motive force’, σθένος, while Xanthus is not explicitly given new physiology but is made ‘able to communicate’, ἀύδηεις. All told, although more creatures than humankind have ‘a physical tongue’, γλῶσσα in its first sense, only humans and those interacting with them have, in both Homer and Hesiod, either γλῶσσα in its second

⁴¹ In later authors greater emphasis is placed again on the biology of human language as distinct from animals and their capacities; see below, “Aristotle”, “Lucretius and Other Romans”.

⁴² “Hesiod is very much creating his own world ... and, in displaying his universal knowledge, secures his own position. The message has its aim and social context. The wonderful order of the world is the foil for the distribution of power and knowledge within society” (Buxton 1999, 103).

sense, ‘language’, or στόμα in the sense of ‘site for language’.⁴³

The emerging specificity of terms for language in Homer, and Hesiod’s more rigorous albeit still mostly implicit taxonomy of language, need not imply an origin of language as such. Although the Pandora episode, for example, makes clear that the gods are able to create language in an individual, just as the Homeric treatment of Hera and Xanthus shows that they may do the same for animals, Hesiod does not thus seem to be going in for a strong thesis of divine creation of language. The gift of language to an individual, whether human, animal, or other, need not replicate the origin of all language.⁴⁴ For Homer this is strengthened in that another origin for language, place, is relatively clear (see Chapter Five). For Hesiod the Pandora episode rather presumes that language already exists as a characteristic feature of humankind. The same may be seen in the passage treating the ages of humankind where there is no separate or explicit origin for language. Although it might be argued that any divine creation of humankind(s), like that in the Myth of Ages, automatically implies divine creation of language, this logical consequence was apparently not taken up by the ancients.⁴⁵ All

⁴³ This basic contrast is paralleled and furthered by later authors, e.g. Lucretius, in whom humankind has *lingua* but animals always have only *uox*; see below, “Lucretius and Other Romans”. For γλώσσα used of language as performative of identity, see e.g. Soph. *Aj.* 1259-1263, where Agamemnon upbraids Teucer’s behavior as not befitting a ‘free man’ (ἄνδρα ... ἐλεύθερον; 1260) by saying “I would not understand, were you the speaker, for I don’t know the barbarian language” (σοῦ γὰρ λέγοντος οὐκέτ’ ἂν μάθοιμ’ ἐγώ / τὴν βάρβαρον γὰρ γλώσσαν οὐκ ἐπαίω; 1262-1263).

⁴⁴ Other cultural inventions also began to be separated from divine influence in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. E.g. fire was imagined to have been discovered when lightning set trees ablaze.

⁴⁵ The Myth of Ages is presented alongside Prometheus-Pandora as ‘another story’ (ἕτερον λόγον) about humankind’s descent into toil; as West ad loc. notes its explanation of toil “is in fact incompatible” with that offered by “the Prometheus-Pandora myth”.

told the evidence in Hesiod and Homer hints mainly at an emerging centrality in human identity of language or vocal communication.⁴⁶ To whom or to what, if anything, that essential ability owes its origin is not clear.

Aristotle

The most explicit ancient theorization of the biology of language, and indeed the need to move beyond biology or physiology for a complete definition of human language, occurs in Aristotle. Drawing on the ancient distinction between αὐδή and φωνή as part of his own wide-ranging comments on animal tongues, Aristotle produces a taxonomy of sounds ranging from meaningless ‘noise’ to ‘language’ as such. Since each is tied intimately to the physiology of different animals and groups, that is literally to their essential nature as expressed physically, the taxonomy also organizes those different groups vis-à-vis one another in a hierarchy encoding the capacity to express types of meaning.

Aristotle’s ideas about language origins are inherent in his general discussions of language.⁴⁷ Most important in this regard is his taxonomy of sounds and its intersection with his ideas about the distinctive nature of humankind. Beginning with implicit distinctions made or presupposed by Archaic and earlier Classical ideas,

⁴⁶ This centrality and its impact on cultures and individuals is explored further in subsequent Chapters.

⁴⁷ Cf. Araos San Martin 1999, 14: “[E]l filósofo en ningún libro trata tematicamente estas cuestiones. Solo encontramos textos aislados, digresiones, tratamientos indirectos o, a lo sumo, uno que otro capítulo esparcido a lo largo del *Corpus aristotelicum*.” In writing this section I have benefited enormously from Araos San Martin and from Zirin 1980; cf. the exposition in Whitaker 1996, 45-51.

Aristotle produces a set of terms that make explicit the differences between different types of sounds (inanimate, animate/vocal, and language). By grounding these terms in observation and discussion of biology, he continues to emphasize that “speech” (διάλεκτος) is uniquely characteristic of humankind, separating it from the (other) animals. More explicitly than most other Classical or Hellenistic authors, Aristotle links the identifying function of language with another of humankind’s characteristic traits, political life.⁴⁸ As a result it may also be argued that he views the problem of language origins as part of the larger problem of the origin of humankind and of human civilization. To the extent that human input features in various cultural practices, Aristotle’s idea of the origin of language may thus be labeled ‘conventional’. At the same time, it is important to distinguish his ideas about the origins of contemporary usage (and of correct usage) from his ideas, if any, on the ultimate emergence of language in general: the former is ‘conventional’, dependent on learning between generations, while the latter is ‘natural’ in a new sense, tied to the essence not of things but of the creatures producing speech. Thus language, being a human product, is ‘naturally’ political.

Aristotle’s basic argument and its corollary for correct speech imply that language has a history. Aristotle is aware of changes over time in words and in a given language, and of the larger problem of linguistic diversity (see below and Chapter Five). Moreover it would be meaningless to cite usage as a guide, as he does, if all usage were always the same. Thus words change, usage changes, and language(s) has (have) a

⁴⁸ Thus Aristotle goes further than the idea attributed by Plato to Protagoras, for whom language is necessary but not sufficient for sustainable human society. On language and society see Chapter Three.

history. But does all this mean that Aristotle has in mind any origin for language generally?⁴⁹

Other statements of his about language suggest that he does. His technical vocabulary for sounds is revealing in this regard. If Aristotle is able to use ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ as did previous authors (with qualifications as discussed in Chapter One), his vocabulary for ‘language’ and its parts is much more sophisticated and deserves close scrutiny. He carefully distinguishes at least three types of sounds and a fourth category of speech act: ‘noise’ (ψόφος), ‘voice’ (φωνή), and ‘speech’ (διάλεκτος), with ‘language’ (λόγος) a less common and trickier category requiring additional elements.⁵⁰ At *Hist An.* 535a27-535b3 the first three terms are defined physiologically:

Voice and noise are different, and speech differs from both of them. Vocal sounds are produced by no other part of anyone/thing than the pharynx; on account of this such as do not have lungs do not make vocal noises. Language is articulation of the voice by the tongue. The voice and the larynx produce the vowels, while the tongue and the lips produce the consonants; from these language is formed. Accordingly such as do not have a tongue, or have one that is not flexible, do not make speech; but it is possible to make noise also with other parts.

φωνή καὶ ψόφος ἕτερόν ἐστι, καὶ τρίτον τούτων διάλεκτος.
 φωνεῖ μὲν οὖν οὐδενὶ τῶν ἄλλων μορίων οὐδὲν πλὴν τῷ
 φάρυγγι· διὸ ὅσα μὴ ἔχει πνεύμονα οὐδε φθέγγεται· διάλεκτος δ’
 ἢ τῆς φωνῆς ἐστὶ τῇ γλώττῃ διάρθρωσις. τὰ μὲν οὖν φωνήεντα
 ἢ φωνὴ καὶ ὁ λάρυγξ ἀφίησιν, τὰ δ’ ἄφωνα ἢ γλώττα καὶ τὰ
 χεῖλη· ἐξ ὧν διάλεκτός ἐστιν. διὸ ὅσα γλώτταν μὴ ἔχει ἢ μὴ

⁴⁹ Cf. the point made by Baxter 1992, 41-43, that whereas Cratylus is *required* to discuss language origins, because he assumes that Greek matches or has matched the conditions for ideal language and thus must explain how it emerged thus, Socrates may ignore the question of language origins, focused as he is on prescriptions for ideal language rather than description of any language in particular.

⁵⁰ See Ax 1984 and 1978.

ἀπολελυμένην, οὐ διαλέγεται· φοφεῖν δ' ἔστι καὶ ἄλλοις μορίοις.

The three basic terms refer in order to increasingly limited classes of sounds. 'Noise' (ψόφος) is the largest category, comprising any sound, whether or not produced by the vocal apparatus. 'Voice' (φωνή) is distinguished from 'noise' in that it is produced by the breathing of a living creature (ἔμψυχον), with the soul moving air through the windpipe: "voice is the striking of exhaled air against the so-called windpipe by the soul in these parts [i.e. the respiratory system]" (ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ ἀναπνεομένου ἀέρος ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν τούτοις τοῖς μορίοις ψυχῆς πρὸς τὴν καλουμένην ἀρτηρίαν φωνὴ ἐστίν; *De Anima* 420b26-28).⁵¹ Finally, 'speech' (διάλεκτος) is produced when the tongue (and lips; see below on dolphins) articulate the voice; such articulation seems to be a matter of segmenting a stream of vowels by means of consonants (see further below).

As the classes of sounds become more limited, so do the range of objects and creatures capable of producing them. 'Noise' may be produced by both inanimate objects and animals. Objects produce only 'noise'; only "by analogy are they said to have voice, e.g. a flute or a lyre" (καθ' ὁμοιότητα λέγεται φωνεῖν, οἷον αὐλὸς καὶ λύρα; *De Anima* 420b7-8).⁵² Any sound made by an animal other than through its vocal apparatus (with additional qualifications discussed below) is also 'noise': "not

⁵¹ See the commentary by Thomas of Aquinas, *In De Anima* 2.18.477.

⁵² Similar imagery and terminology appear in 1 Corinthians 1:14:7: "Similarly with lifeless [lit. 'spirit-' or 'breathless'] things that produce voice, if they do not make a distinction in their sounds, how will one know what is being played?" (ὁμῶς τὰ ἄψυχα φωνῆν διδόντα, εἴτε αὐλὸς εἴτε κιθάρα, ἐὰν διαστολὴν τοῖς φθόγγοις μὴ δῶ, πῶς γνωθήσεται τὸ αὐλούμενον ἢ τὸ κιθαριζόμενον;). Paul's point in chapters 13 and 14 is that language, including glossolalia and prophecy, is not meaningful without "love", an interesting illustration of the diversity of ideas about language in antiquity.

every animal sound is voice ... for it is possible to make [only] noise even with the tongue, as when people cough” (οὐ γὰρ πᾶς ζῶου ψόφος φωνή ... ἔστι γὰρ καὶ τῇ γλῶττι ψοφεῖν καὶ ὡς οἱ βήττοντες; *De Anima* 420b29-33). Moreover some animals do not have a (complete) vocal apparatus, and are thus limited to ‘noise’: “such as do not have a tongue, or have one that is not flexible, make neither voice nor speech; but it is possible to make noise with other parts” (ὅσα γλῶτταν μὴ ἔχει ἢ μὴ ἀπολελυμένην οὐ διαλέγεται ψοφεῖν δ’ ἔστι καὶ ἄλλοις μορίοις; *Hist An.* 535b1-4). Examples of animals that may produce only ‘noise’ include insects and some species of fish.

‘Voice’, produced by exhaled air against the larynx, is the province of literally animate creatures (ἔμψυχα, ‘with a soul inside’), including animals other than humans.⁵³ Aristotle distinguishes these animals in general from ‘wild animals’ (θηρία)⁵⁴ and at various places lists or discusses dolphins (*Hist An.* 535b33-536a3); oviparous quadrupeds (whose voices are ‘weak’, ἀσθένη) including frogs;⁵⁵ and viviparous quadrupeds including pigs, goats, and sheep. These animals all have inarticulate tongues incapable of producing speech (e.g. a dolphin’s “tongue is not

⁵³ For the relationship between Aristotle’s psychology and zoology, see Lloyd 1996, 38-66.

⁵⁴ This might serve as additional evidence that language as such separates human from non-human worlds.

⁵⁵ Frogs are described as using their voices for mating: “the croaking which comes about in the water is produced by the male frogs, whenever they summon the females for breeding” (τὴν ὀλολύγονα δὲ τὴν γιγνομένην ἐν τῷ ὕδατι οἱ βάτραχοι οἱ ἄρρενες ποιοῦσιν, ὅταν ἀνακαλῶνται τὰς θηλείας πρὸς τὴν ὀχεῖαν; *Hist an.* 536a11-16); the point is made more generally: “the animals have specific voices for intercourse and association” (εἰσὶ γὰρ ἐκάστοις τῶν ζῶων ἴδιαι φωναὶ πρὸς τὴν ὀμιλίαν καὶ τὸν πλησιασμόν).

flexible, nor does it have lips such that it can produce an articulation of its voice” (τὴν γλῶτταν οὐκ ἀπολελυμένην οὐδὲ χεῖλη ὥστε ἄρθρον τι τῆς φωνῆς ποιεῖν)). Finally, some animals with articulate tongues, such as birds, are able to produce not just voice but language sounds (536a4-6 and 11-16).⁵⁶

There is thus a continuum of tongue articulations, such that ‘voice’ is implied by ‘speech’ but not vice versa: “such as have speech also have voice, but such as have voice do not all have speech” (ὅσα μὲν γὰρ διάλεκτον ἔχει, καὶ φωνὴν ἔχει, ὅσα δὲ φωνὴν, οὐ πάντα διάλεκτον; 536b2-3). The two categories shade together as the tongue becomes more articulate. The animate creature most capable of speech is of course humankind: just before describing the overlap of ‘voice’ and ‘speech’, Aristotle states without apparent qualification that “it [sc. speech] is peculiar to humankind” (ἀλλ’ ἴδιον τοῦτ’ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν).

Elsewhere Aristotle makes clear that this peculiarity results from the human tongue being especially suited to articulation of phonemes (*Part. An.* 660a17-25):

Humankind has a tongue especially flexible, soft and flat, such that it is useful for both of the following uses: the perception of flavors ... and being soft and flat it is useful for the articulation of phonemes and for language; for being such and flexible it would thus be able to extend and contract in every way.

Ὁ μὲν οὖν ἄνθρωπος ἀπολελυμένην τε καὶ μαλακωτάτην ἔχει μάλιστα τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ πλατεῖαν, ὅπως πρὸς ἀμφοτέρας ἢ τὰς ἐργασίας χρήσιμος, πρὸς τε τὴν τῶν χυμῶν αἴσθησιν ... καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων διάρθρωσιν καὶ πρὸς τὸν λόγον ἢ μαλακὴ καὶ πλατεῖα χρήσιμος· συστέλλειν γὰρ καὶ προβάλλειν παντοδαπῇ τοιαύτῃ οὔσα καὶ ἀπολελυμένη μάλιστ’ ἂν δύναιτο.

⁵⁶ On the linguistic abilities of birds, see below.

The physical characteristics of the human tongue, namely its being ‘especially flexible, soft and flat’ (ἀπολελυμένη, μαλακωτάτη, πλατεῖα), lead directly to its ability to articulate phonemes and thus produce language.⁵⁷ That τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων διάρθρωσιν means ‘the articulation of phonemes’, that is the segmentation of the voice stream into meaningful elements by consonants, as opposed e.g. to simply ‘sounds’ or even, as etymologically, ‘letters’, is confirmed by the counterexample that follows.⁵⁸ People whose tongues are “not overly flexible speak unclearly and lisp, and this is a lack of phonemes” (μὴ λίαν ἀπολέλυται· φελλίζονται γὰρ καὶ τραυλίζουσι, τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἔνδεια τῶν γραμμάτων).⁵⁹ Thus in all, and even just among

⁵⁷ The other specialty of the human tongue named here, its ability to taste flavors (τὴν τῶν χυμῶν αἴσθησιν) may be linked to statements by later, especially Roman, authors to the effect that different languages have different scents (e.g. Cic. *De Orat.* 3.44: [es] *quaedam certa uox Romani generis urbisque propria, in qua ... nihil sonare aut olere peregrinum*; Quint. *Inst.* 8.1.3: *quare, si fieri potest, et uerba omnia et uox huius alumnus urbis oleant, ut oratio Romana plane uideatur, non ciuitate donata*). This synaesthetic experience of language, where normative human language is smooth and *sweet-smelling*, has to my knowledge gone largely unexplored in work on ancient ideas on sense-perception (e.g. Lilja 1972a and b), and I hope to explore it in future work.

⁵⁸ See Zirin 1974. Cf. *Prob.* 895a10-14, “these [sc. consonants] along with vowels make speech” (ταῦτα δὲ ποιεῖ μετὰ τῶν φωνηέντων τὴν διάλεκτον) while “language is not signification with the voice” (ἔστι δὲ ὁ λόγος οὐ τὸ τῆ φωνῆ σημαίνειν) but signification “with states of the voice ... [and] phonemes are the states” (ἀλλὰ τοῖς πάθεσιν αὐτῆς ... τὰ δὲ γράμματα πάθη ἐστὶ τῆς φωνῆς). In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* Socrates links ‘meaningful communication’ to the phoneme-forming tongue: “Now of all the animals having a tongue, only that of humankind did they make such that, by touching one part of the mouth at one time, and another part at another time, it articulates the voice and indicates everything we want to one another” (καὶ μὴν γλωττὴν γε πάντων τῶν ζώων ἔχόντων, μόνην τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησαν οἷαν ἄλλοτε ἀλλαχῆ ψάφουσαν τοῦ στόματος ἀρθροῦν τε τὴν φωνὴν καὶ σημαίνειν πάντα ἀλλήλοις ἃ βουλόμεθα; 1.4.12).

⁵⁹ Cf. *Prob.* 3.31 (875b19-33): “Why do drunks’ tongues stutter? Is it because, just as the whole body stumbles in drunkenness, so too does the tongue, stumbling, stutter and become unable to articulate speech?” (Διὰ τί τῶν μεθύνων ἡ γλωττα πταίει; πότερον ὅτι καθάπερ τὸ ὅλον σῶμα ἐν τῇ μέθῃ σφάλεται, οὕτω καὶ ἡ γλωττα σφαλλομένη πταίει καὶ οὐ δύναται τὴν λέξιν διαρθροῦν;)

humans, articulation is best seen as a continuum of values, ranging from wholly inarticulate (e.g. in the absence of a tongue or vocal apparatus) to fully articulate.⁶⁰

Although the paradigmatic representative of the articulate end of the continuum is humankind, any simple understanding of ‘voice’, φωνή, or even ‘speech’, διάλεκτος, as uniquely human for purely physiological reasons is problematic.⁶¹ The physical characteristics most dispositive of the human tongue’s capacity for articulation, and thus its production of language, are not exclusive to humankind. It is true that most other animals have tongues ill-suited to articulation. Examples mentioned by Aristotle include “blooded and live-birthing quadrupeds ... [whose] tongue ... [is] stiff, inflexible and thick” (τὰ δ’ ἔναιμα καὶ ζωοτόκα τῶν τετραπόδων ... σκληρὰν τε γὰρ καὶ οὐκ ἀπολελυμένην ... καὶ παχεῖαν τὴν γλῶτταν; *Part. An.* 660a); “land-animals, both oviparous and blooded, most [of which] have a tongue ill-suited for the use of the voice, thick and hard” (τῶν δὲ πεζῶν καὶ ὠοτόκων καὶ ἐναίμων πρὸς μὲν τὴν τῆς φωνῆς ἐργασίαν ἄχρηστον τὰ πολλὰ τὴν γλῶτταν ἔχει καὶ προσδεδεμένην καὶ σκληρὰν; 660b1); and “fish[, who] have a tongue, but its articulation is not clear” (οἱ δ’ ἰχθύες ... ἔχουσι μὲν οὐ σαφῆ δ’ ἔχουσι τὴν

⁶⁰ The concept of ‘articulation’, διάρθρωσις, drawing on an earlier literal sense of ‘separating at the joints’, is applied to language increasingly from Plato onwards (Protagoras’ account of the origins of human civilization; see Chapter Three): e.g. Xenophon *Mem.* 1.4.12 (cf. *Xen. Mem.* 4.23.12, Isoc. 3.6), Strabo 2.1.30, Diodorus 1.7-8 (see Chapter Three), Philodemus *D.* 3.14 and *Po.* 994.6, Luc. *Enc. Dem.* 14, and Plut. *Dem.* 11; see Laspia 1997. ‘Articulation’ may be read as one example of how the discourse on language and language origins expressed its continued relevance by drawing on other discourses as they emerged: as the biological similarities between humans and other animals became more apparent, a more detailed distinction was needed, and biological thought itself was a useful source of metaphors for describing the distinction on the axis of language.

⁶¹ On the limits of articulation defining human language, see Whitaker 1996, 45-51.

διάρθρωσιν τῆς γλώττης; 661a).⁶² These animals all lack language because their tongues lack the physical characteristics most peculiar of the human tongue: they are ‘stiff’ (σκληρά) and ‘hard’ (παχεῖα), ‘inflexible’ (οὐκ ἀπολελυμένη); while the human tongue is different and in some categories exactly opposite, ‘soft’ (μαλακή, even μαλακοτάτη), ‘flexible’ (ἀπολελυμένη), and ‘flat’ (πλατεῖα).

But there are exceptions, especially birds and their tongues: “the race of birds produces voice; in particular those have speech that have a flat tongue, and those that have a smooth tongue” (τὸ δὲ τῶν ὀρνίθων γένος ἀφήσει φωνήν· καὶ μάλιστα ἔχει διάλεκτον ὅσοις ὑπάρχει ἡ γλώττα πλατεῖα, καὶ ὅσα ἔχουσι τὴν γλώτταν αὐτῶν λεπτήν; *Hist. An.* 536a20-22). As shown above, ‘voice’, φωνή, occurs in any animal that has a vocal apparatus; thus for birds to have voice is not unexpected. But Aristotle goes further, ascribing to birds not just voice but ‘phonemes’, γράμματα: “Aside from humankind, most of all among the animals do species of birds produce phonemes; such are the flat-tongued birds especially” (μάλιστα δὲ τῶν ζῴων μετὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον γράμματα φθέγγεται ἕνια τῶν ὀρνίθων γενή· τοιαῦτα δ’ ἐστὶ τὰ πλατυγλώττα αὐτῶν μάλιστα; *Hist. An.* 504b1-3). The same point is made elsewhere: “those birds that most of all produce phonemes are flatter-tongued than the rest” (τῶν ὀρνίθων οἱ μάλιστα φθεγγόμενοι γράμματα πλατυγλωττότεροι τῶν ἄλλων εἰσίν; *Part. An.* 660a). Some birds are thus credited with the physiology necessary to produce phonemes, the elements of language as such: their tongues are ‘flat’ (πλατεῖα, with the birds themselves πλατυγλώτται

⁶² On fish cf. *Hist. An.* 503a2-3: “fish have a tongue that is thorny and inflexible” (οἱ ἰχθύες ἀκανθωδῆ καὶ οὐκ ἀπολελυμένην ἔχουσι τὴν γλώτταν).

and πλατυγλωττότεροι) and ‘smooth’ (λεπτή).⁶³ In line with the physiological bases of his sound taxonomy, Aristotle explicitly admits the articulatory (consonant- or phoneme-forming) power of some birds’ tongues.⁶⁴

Moreover birds advance further in the continuum from ‘voice’ to ‘speech’, and thus closer to human ‘language’, by the functions of their vocalizations. Birds use their voices in ways similar to humankind: “all use their tongue for communication with one another, some more than others, such that among some there seems to be learning from each other” (καὶ χρῶνται τῇ γλώττῃ καὶ πρὸς ἑρμηνεῖαν ἀλλήλοις πάντες μὲν, ἕτεροι δὲ τῶν ἐτέρων μᾶλλον, ὥστ’ ἐπ’ ἐνίων καὶ μάθησιν εἶναι δοκεῖν παρ’ ἀλλήλων; *Part. An.* 660a-b).⁶⁵ Aristotle discusses language learning among animals also at *Hist. An.* 536b5-8: “just as the young are not in control of their other parts, so are they at first not [in control of] their tongue, and it does not fulfill its purpose, and it becomes loosened later, with the result that many of them speak unclearly and lisp” (τὰ δὲ παιδία ὥσπερ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μορίων οὐκ ἐγκρατῆ ἐστίν, οὕτως οὐδὲ τῆς γλώττης τὸ πρῶτον, καὶ ἐστὶν ἀτελὴ, καὶ ἀπολύεται ὀψιαίτερον, ὥστε

⁶³ But having a ‘smooth’ (λεπτή) tongue is not sufficient for articulation (508a21).

⁶⁴ Cf. *Prob.* 895a8-10: “some animals can produce none [i.e., no letters], while others two or three consonants” (τῶν δὲ ἄλλων τὰ μὲν οὐδέν, ἕνια δὲ δύο ἢ τρία τῶν ἀφώνων); and, outside of Aristotle, e.g. Sextus Empiricus *Adversus mathematicos* 8.275-276: Stoics “say that it is not uttered speech but internal speech by which man differs from non-rational animals; for crows and parrots and jays utter articulate sounds” (translation Long 1987, 317-318); and perhaps Homer *Od.* 5.66: ‘long-tongued sea-crows’ (τανύγλωσσοί τε κορώναι). Thus the distinctiveness of humans’ articulate tongues even in Greek thought may be exaggerated (e.g. Gera 2003, 135: “articulated sound points to a unique human physiological capability”).

⁶⁵ Modern research has indeed shown that “there is ... a great deal of variability in the acquisition of songs” by birds (Demers 1988, 330; cf. Thorpe 1974 and 1961).

ψελλιζουσι καὶ τραυλιζουσι τὰ πολλά).⁶⁶ But birdsong is put to different, not to say higher-order, purposes than the vocalizations of other animals, who as noted may use their vocalizations especially for mating but arguably not much else. Elsewhere Aristotle is apparently comfortable enough comparing human and bird language to draw conclusions *about the former based on the latter*: just as birdsong varies from place to place, so too does human language (see further Chapter Five).⁶⁷

Outside of Aristotle an analogy is frequently drawn between the sound of bird-speech and the stereotyped or literary sound of non-Greek, i.e. barbarian, languages.⁶⁸ An early instance of this analogy is the description of the Trojan forces at *Il.* 3.2-3, where the noisy soldiers are likened to birds: “the Trojans moved with a clamorous cry, like birds, / when the clamor of cranes rises in heaven” (Τρῶες μὲν κλαγγῆ τ’ ἐνοπῆ τ’ ἴσαν, ὄρνιθες ὡς, / ἥύτε περ κλαγγῆ γεράνων πέλει οὐρανόθι πρό). Although the simile precludes direct identification of Trojan language with bird-speech,⁶⁹ and although the Trojans are presented throughout the *Iliad* as if Greek-speakers (see further Chapter Five), the passage clearly contrasts their noise, and the character of that noise, with the orderliness of the Greek forces (“but the Achaeans

⁶⁶ Cf. Aristoph. *Av.* 199, where the birds speak Greek because they were taught by Tereus.

⁶⁷ All of this is in line with Aristotle’s more general position that “other animals often have traces of human characteristics” (Whitaker 1996, 50, citing *Hist. An.* 588a16ff); for the fuzziness of Aristotle’s zoological genera and species, see Lloyd 1996, 67-82. Democritus seems to have located the origin of human song in birdsong (DK 68 B154) as does Lucretius (5.1379-1383).

⁶⁸ See Tuplin 1999, 50 with n.14 (noting also that barbarian language could be compared with a sputtering frying pan, Eubulus fr. 108 K.-A.); Harrison 1998 near n. 71.

⁶⁹ On Homeric similes see Muellner 1990 and Scott 1974 who argue, respectively, that the similes are a meaningful sub-genre to epic and that they are, less meaningfully, formulaic.

moved in silence”; οἱ δ’ ἄρ’ ἴσαν σιγῇ ... Ἀχαιοί; 3.8). Elsewhere the Greeks themselves are described by a similar analogy, but at a moment when the diverse composition of their multi-ethnic force is stressed (*Il.* 2.459-465):

Τῶν δ’, ὡς ὀρνίθων πετεηνῶν ἔθνεα πολλά, / χηνῶν ἢ
γεράνων ἢ κύκνων δουλιχοδείρων, / Ἀσίῳ ἐν λειμῶνι,
Καυστρίου ἀμφὶ ρέεθρα, / ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ποτῶνται ἀγαλλόμενα
πτερύγεσσι, / κλαγγηδὸν προκαθιζόντων, σμαραγεῖ δέ τε
λειμῶν, / ὡς τῶν ἔθνεα πολλά νεῶν ἄπο καὶ κλισιάων / ἐς
πεδίον προχέοντο Σκαμάνδριον.

Just as the many flocks of winged birds, geese and cranes and long-necked swans, on the Asian shore, around the streams of Kaystrios, fly here and there delighting in their wings, settling down with a clamor, and the shore echoes, thus their many groups set forth from ships and huts onto the plain of Skamander.

Just as the ‘many groups’ of birds refers to different species, so too must the ‘many groups’ of the Greeks refer precisely to different groups, and not to large numbers alone.⁷⁰ Taken together, these similes imply that the image of noisy birds is appropriate when what is represented is the tumult resulting from many sorts of speakers all speaking at once, that is from linguistic diversity and its incomprehensibility.

The analogy between bird-speech and barbarian language is taken up in later authors, especially the dramatists. Aeschylus has Clytaemnestra say of Cassandra: “she has taken up a language inscrutable and barbaric, like a swallow’s” (χειλιδόνος δίκην / ἀγνώτα φωνὴν βάρβαρον κεκτημένη; *Ag.* 1050-1051). Part of the phrasing

⁷⁰ Tuplin 1999, 54 n. 24 is thus half-right when arguing that “[t]he comparison of Greeks with birds (swans, cranes) in [*Il.*]2.460 is about numbers, not behaviors.” Numbers, yes (esp. with 468: μυριοί, ὅσσα τε φύλλα καὶ ἄνθεα γίγνεται ὥρη), but insofar as different groups have different languages, a large number of languages, and thus “behaviors”, as well.

(“inscrutable” and “barbaric”) is repeated by Sophocles with reference to bird sounds: “I hear the inscrutable voice of birds, screeching because of an evil and barbarized goad” (ἀγνώτ’ ἀκούω φθόγγον ὀρνίθων, κακῶ / κλαζόντας οἴστρω καὶ βεβαρβαρωμένω; *Ant.* 1001-1002). The swallow reappears in Aristophanes, again linked to barbarism: “[some] Thracian swallow roars terribly, sitting upon a barbaric leaf” (δεινὸν ἐπιβρέμεται <τις> / Θρήκια χελιδῶν / ἐπὶ βάρβαρον ἐζομένη πέταλον; *Ran.* 679-682). Aristophanes also has some birds originally barbaric in language, only later learning what is arguably Greek: “I taught them, who were barbarians before this, the language, staying with them a long time” (ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτοὺς βαρβάρους ὄντας πρὸ τοῦ / ἐδίδαξα τὴν φωνήν, συνῶν πολὺν χρόνον; *Av.* 199-200).⁷¹ Outside of the tragedians, Herodotus rationalizes a story about the oracle of Dodona, making its alleged talking black dove an Egyptian woman, the oracle’s first priestess, who sounded, because she spoke a non-Greek, barbarian tongue, like a twittering bird (2.57).⁷² Thus bird-sounds are a regular literary stand-in for barbarian language.⁷³

The analogy between birdsong and barbarian language was both extended to

⁷¹ Cf. the scholion ad loc.: καὶ Αἴσχυλος [=fr. 450 N.] τὸ βαρβαρίζειν χελιδονίζειν φησί, καὶ Ἴων ἐν Ὀμφαλῇ [=fr. 76 v Bl.] τοὺς βαρβάρους χελιδόνας ἀρσενικῶς φησί; and see the discussion of language and identity in Chapter Five.

⁷² See Moggi 1991.

⁷³ Sounds other than speech may be likened to bird-song. The bow-string plucked by Odysseus before the slaughter is said to “sing, similar to the swallow in voice” (ἄεισε, χελιδόνι εἰκέλη αὐδήν; 21.411); the analogy works both ways, with the tongue in turn described as a bow (e.g. Aesch. *Suppl.* 446, Pind. *Isth.* 5(4).47, Pl. *Phaed.* 63a). One wonders what these and other ancient authors would have made of Silbo Gomero, the whistled language of the Canary (!) Island of La Gomera, near Morocco.

include other marginal peoples represented in the ethnographic tradition (alongside some exceptional talking birds), and generalized to compare non-standard speech with the noises of animals other than birds.⁷⁴ Aeschylus in *Seven Against Thebes* likens barbarian speech to the noises made by horses (463). Herodotus reports that the Troglodyte Ethiopians speak a language like no other but similar to the sounds made by bats (γλῶσσαν δὲ οὐδεμιῇ ἄλλῃ παρομοίην νενομίκασι, ἀλλὰ τετρίγασι κατάπερ αἱ νυκτέριδες; 4.183.4). Ctesias in his *Indica* describes a race of beings called ‘Dog-heads’ (κυνοσκέφαλοι) who could understand human language but, because of their canine cranial physiology, could themselves only bark and gesture by way of communicating.⁷⁵ They represent an unusual but logical permutation of Aristotle’s emerging components of language: they evidently have ‘intellect’, νοῦς (on which see below), but do not have an articulate tongue, γλῶσσα, or human voice, φωνὴ ἀνθρωπίνη.

A second extreme example of these physiological and ethnographic tendencies are birds in distant foreign lands who speak human language. Ctesias describes Indian parrots who “have a human tongue and speech” (γλῶσσαν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχει καὶ φωνήν) and could “speak Indian just like a human being, and if they learned Greek, could even speak Greek” (διαλέγεσθαι δὲ αὐτὸ ὡσπερ ἄνθρωπον Ἰνδιστί, ἂν δὲ

⁷⁴ Other boundaries than language also separate normal from marginal human and non-human worlds; see Romm 1992, e.g. 10: “Perhaps the most fundamental act by which the archaic Greeks defined their world was to give it boundaries, marking off a finite stretch of earth from the otherwise formless expanse surrounding it”; an example is the Pillars of Heracles (17-19). Romm notes that “[t]he era in which the Greek and Roman classics were first being widely published and studied was also the heyday of New-World exploration” (6); how to organize the world and its contents is always an issue.

⁷⁵ FGrHist 688 F 45.37 and 40-43; see Gera 2003, 184-187, and Romm 1992, 78-80.

Ἑλληνιστὶ μάθη, καὶ Ἑλληνιστί; *FGrHist* 688 F 45.8).⁷⁶ Other ancient authors who discuss the parrot also mention its ability to speak.⁷⁷ The same ability was also credited to crows and ravens.⁷⁸ As Gera remarks, the overlap of animal and characteristically human (or even distinctly Greek) features makes talking birds difficult to reconcile with the traditional binary opposition of Greek and barbarian: “[s]urely we cannot think a Greek-speaking bird cultured, and an Indian-sounding parrot, barbarian.”⁷⁹ It is a logical consequence of the emerging physiological definitions of language that such a traditional opposition offers too few categories to distinguish among all the complex possible combinations of language, culture, and other traits. Language and way of life (especially diet) could thus serve to locate certain creatures, who already lived at or beyond the boundaries of the known world, in a notional space between the human and animal worlds.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ See Gera 2003, 208-210; Glidden 1994; Bigwood 1993; and Sorabji 1993, 80-86. Bigwood argues that Ctesias' description is of the species *cyanocephala* (1993: 325); the similarity between the name of this talking animal and that of Ctesias' 'dog-heads' (κυνοσκέφαλοι) would have struck ancient etymologists as potentially meaningful.

⁷⁷ Ovid *Amor.* 2.6, Pliny *N.H.* 10.117, Apul. *Flor.* 12, Plut. *Soll.* 973a, Solin. 52.43-45; the Roman sources are discussed in Capponi 1979, 458-461; additional sources are listed in Thompson 1936, 236-238. Philosophers often attributed *logos* to birds (Sextus *P.H.* 1.65ff and 1.3ff; Porphyry *Abstinence* 3.2ff and 3.7ff; Philo *Anim.* 12ff and 16ff); see Sorabji 1993, 80-86 and 216. Cf. a similar attribution of divine spirit and blessed life to bees: e.g. Virg. *G.* 4.220-221: *esse apibus partem diuinæ mentis et haustus / aetherios dixere*; Petron. *Sat.* 56: *apes enim ego diuinæ bestias puto*; with Richter 1957 ad Virg. *G.* loc. “[R]ecent exaggerations of the talking abilities of *Psittacula columboides*” (Bigwood 1993: 326) may be found in Ali and Ripley 1969, 186-187.

⁷⁸ Varro *L.L.* 6.56, Ov. *Am.* 3.5.21, Pliny *N.H.* 10.124; cf. Statius *Silu.* 2.4.20 (a partridge).

⁷⁹ Gera 2003, 209.

⁸⁰ On the role of diet paired with language see Gera 2003, *passim*. On the edges of the known world see Romm 1992. On mixed cultures and “mixed languages” see further Chapter Six. Modern linguistic thought has continued the comparison between human language and animal communication,

To return to Aristotle. His taxonomy of sounds is in large part physiologically motivated. Of special importance is the idea that more sounds are capable of being produced even by the vocal apparatus than count as linguistic sounds. That is, just as ‘voice’ is not limited to creatures with tongues, even animate creatures with articulating tongues do not always produce ‘voice’, much less ‘speech’ (διάλεκτος) or ‘language’ (λόγος). As an example Aristotle cites coughing. But Aristotle also hints at a crucial difference between animal voices, including even the articulate speech produced by instructive birds, and human language: ‘language’, διάλεκτος, is applied to animal voices only by analogy (*Hist An.* 536b10-12; note the potential optative: “which one would call as if it were speech”; ἢ [sc. φωνή] δ’ ἐν τοῖς ἄρθροισι, ἢν ἄν τις ὥσπερ διάλεκτον εἴπειεν). The woodpecker, for example, although having a “flat” tongue, is not credited with speech (*Hist An.* 614a34-b2). Despite their similar physiological bases, something separates articulate bird-speech from articulate human language.

The gap between the two is first bridged by an added component, ‘meaning’; this in turn depends on ‘intellect’, νοῦς, the existence of which is grounded in the creature’s nature (φύσις).⁸¹ The upshot of all this is that the biological taxonomy goes only so far in explaining language ‘conventionally’ (e.g. accounting for linguistic diversity); beyond that point ‘language’ per se, as opposed to ‘voice’ or even ‘speech’, requires a ‘natural’ component after all. Aristotle is clear about the role of ‘meaning’:

including the notion that “birds are the group which ought to have been able to evolve language in the true sense and not the mammals” (Allott 1989, 5; cf. Thorpe 1967).

⁸¹ Cf. a modern reflex in Allott 1989, 9: “The difference [between speech-sounds in birds and humans], of course, is ... that no matter what the parrot or the mynah bird says, he is not telling us anything.”

‘voice’, as opposed to ‘noise’ generally, “is a meaningful sound” (σημαντικός γὰρ δὴ τις ψόφος ἐστὶν ἢ φωνή; *De Anim.* 420a). The presence of such meaning as a sort of content attached to the vocal sound depends on the perceptions of the creature producing the sound. As a result, “not all sounds of an animal are vocal sounds ... but it is necessary that the thing that strikes [sc. to produce the sound] be both animate and have some mental image” (οὐ γὰρ πᾶς ζῴου ψόφος φωνή ... ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἔμψυχόν τε εἶναι τὸ τύπτον καὶ μετὰ φαντασίας τινός; 420b). The mental image is a perception on the part of the creature producing the sound; such perception requires a ‘soul’. Thus the soul has two functions in Aristotle’s taxonomy of sounds: first, *physiologically* the soul is responsible for moving air against the windpipe or larynx; second, *psychologically* the presence of the soul allows for perception of mental images, and thus for meaning in sounds.⁸² Only together do these two functions of the soul distinguish non-vocal sounds or mere cries from vocal sounds.

But even combining these two functions, the soul is not sufficient to produce ‘language’ or even ‘speech’, as opposed to mere ‘vocal sounds’. ‘Language’ (λόγος) expresses advanced perceptions of higher-order categories: this requires ‘intellect’ (νοῦς).⁸³ Aristotle describes this enlarged difference between animal sounds (here,

⁸² The “attempt to explain linguistic meaning by reference to the intentional content of the psychological states of speakers” (Everson 1994, 77) further confuses ‘naturalism’ and ‘conventionalism’, as variants of it are subscribed to by Aristotle, as indicated, and Epicurus, as discussed below; see further Everson 1994, *passim*, and Glidden 1994.

⁸³ Cf. Whitaker 1996, 50-51: “Man is ... unique in being the only creature to possess rationality. ... Man is also able to register good, bad, just, and unjust, and the means of communicating these perceptions is rational speech ... Aristotle’s position, then, is that articulation and rationality go together.” There is some semblance of this as early as Homer, where αὐδή alone may imply the combination of φωνή and νοῦς (e.g. *Il.* 18.419ff, where Hephaestus’ automata have νοῦς and αὐδή; and *Od.* 10.239ff, where Odysseus’ transformed companions have νοῦς but not φωνή and are thus not described as αὐδήεις; see Pelliccia 1995, 103-105).

‘voice’, φωνή) and human language (here λόγος) at *Pol.* 1253a10-18:

Of the animals, only humankind has language. The voice is a sign of pain and pleasure, so the other animals also have it (for their nature has progressed this far, so that they have perception of pain and pleasure and signify these to each other). But language is for indicating the helpful and the harmful, just as also the just and the unjust; for in contrast with the other animals, this is peculiar to humankind, that it alone has perception of good and bad, just and unjust, and other things.

λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζώων. ἡ μὲν οὖν φωνὴ τοῦ λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος ἐστὶ σημεῖον, διὸ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχει ζώοις (μέχρι γὰρ τούτου ἡ φύσις αὐτῶν ἐλήλυθεν, τοῦ ἔχειν αἴσθησιν λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος καὶ ταῦτα σημαίνει ἀλλήλοις), ὁ δὲ λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ δηλοῦν ἐστὶ τὸ συμφέρον καὶ τὸ βλαβερόν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἄδικον· τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τὰλλα ζῶα τοῖς ἄνθρωποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἴσθησιν ἔχειν.

Whereas ‘voice’ is symptomatic, apparently expressing only the sensation of pleasure and pain, ‘language’ is fully significant, able to articulate advanced topics of moral and philosophical concern; the difference between the two depends on the consciousness of the creature producing the sounds.⁸⁴ These definitions elaborate upon those given in the *Historia* and *Partes Animalium*. Both ‘voice’ and, here, ‘language’ are ‘meaningful’, i.e. capable of communicating information about sensations. Where the two part ways is not the physiology of voice, but literally the physiology (from φύσις, ‘nature’) or even psychology of the creature using the voice. Animals vocalize only about pain and pleasure not primarily because of the physiological limits of their vocal apparatus, but because of their psychological limits: their spirits are not open to higher-order

⁸⁴ See Kretzmann 1974 and Zirin 1974. Parallels may be found in Stoic thought, e.g. Diogenes of Babylon (ap. Galen *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s doctrines* 2.5.9: “meaningful articulate utterance ... is language” [adapted from Long 1987, 318]); see further below with respect to Quintilian.

sensations. By contrast, humankind, alone among the animals, is capable of language *per se* because of the larger range of its sensations: not limited to pain and pleasure, humankind can perceive such things as just and unjust. Crucially, what separates the other animals from humankind is that their ‘nature’ (φύσις) has only advanced so far.

Thus ‘language’ as such depends on ‘nature’.⁸⁵ Although still φύσις, this is a very different sort of ‘nature’ than the one put forth by e.g. Cratylus for linking words to things. Rather than referring to the nature of things, to be expressed by words, this Aristotelian nature is the nature of the creature using speech sounds for communication. It is not a question of the rightness of individual words, judged by the match between word and referent-nature, but of the possibility of ‘language’ at all as opposed to ‘voice’ or even ‘speech’. Although both ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ or ‘language’ are meaningful, capable of communicating information, the types of information they may share depend on the perceptions of the creature doing the sharing. This last boils down to νοῦς: thus ‘language’ has an ‘origin’, i.e. an ideal or definitional separation from ‘voice’ and even ‘speech’, in a specific kind of nature: the nature of the creature engaged in the speech act. Human language (λόγος) is ‘natural’ in that it is made possible by the nature of humankind, that is by its possession of νοῦς. Zirin sees this as a “radical differentiation” of humankind from the other animals, in that νοῦς alone is not biological, as are the other differentiations in the taxonomy, but independent of body.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Cf. Cauquelin 1990, 42: “[C]e n’est pas qu[e l’homme] parle parce qu’il a une bouche mobile, une langue molle et agile et des dents pour prononcer les voyelles et les consonnes. Non. Il possède ces organes parce qu’il est doué de parole et que la nature en agence les parties pour qu’il accomplisse au mieux cette fin”; and generally 40-44. Cf. *Part. An.* 4.10.687b.

⁸⁶ Zirin 1980, 346. Just possibly the fifth-century BC philosopher Archelaus discussed ‘intellect’ as a crucial element of human language (DK 60 A4, 5-6); see Gera 2003, 136-137, and Lämmli 1962. A similar distinction seems to have been drawn by the Stoics, for whom animal voice is struck by

The taxonomy that has emerged in this discussion of Aristotle may be summarized as follows:⁸⁷

Table 2.1 Aristotle's Taxonomy of Sounds

| <u>sound</u> | <u>physiology</u> | <u>psychology</u> | <u>functions</u> | <u>animals (e.g.)</u> |
|------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 'noise', ψόφος | 'parts', μόρια | (none needed) | (none?) | insects, fish |
| 'voice', φωνή | 'windpipe', φάρυγξ | 'soul', ψυχή | society; mating; sensation | dolphins, frogs |
| 'speech', διάλεκτος | 'articulation' διάρθρωσις 'flexible tongue' γλῶσσα ἀπολελυμένη | (none added) | communication; learning | birds |
| 'language', λόγος | (none added) | 'mind', νοῦς | higher concepts | humankind |

Only humankind's unique 'intellect' (νοῦς) allows it to perceive and thus speak about those higher-order classes of concepts using its articulate tongue to produce

'impulse' (ὄρμη) whereas human voice is 'articulated' (ἑναρθρος) by 'mind' (διάνοια) (Diog. Laert. 7.55-57); see Glidden 2000, 133-135, esp. 134: "Humans speak because they think, and humans think in concepts. Animals do not speak, because they cannot think in concepts. And so they make noise instead"; Sorabji 1993, 81; Long 1987, 183-236; and idem 1978, 131-139.

⁸⁷ For a fuller philosophical discussion of Aristotle's definitions of language and its parts, see Araos San Martin 1999, 19-96.

articulated language.⁸⁸ For Aristotle, the meaning-bearing function of human language is tied to human nature: “why humankind is a political animal more so than any bee or herd animal is clear: for nature, as we say, does nothing in vain; and humankind alone among the animals has language” (διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πάσης μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζώου μᾶλλον, δῆλον. οὐθὲν γάρ, ὡς φαμέν, μάτην ἢ φύσις ποιεῖ· λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζώων; *Pol.* 1253a). Humankind is a political animal, and language most of all a tool for the formation of political societies and the expression of political and philosophical ideas.⁸⁹

Aristotle is usually called a ‘conventionalist’, but like his ‘naturalism’ his ‘conventionalism’ also is particular. Both Hermogenes and Aristotle agree that convention accounts for language change and thus linguistic diversity. But whereas Hermogenes continued by denying the possibility of any standard for right usage, Aristotle makes his conventionalism its basis: the best standard for correct speech is contemporary usage. Moreover Hermogenes’ conventionalism took an extreme form, with meaningful (or right) words able to be generated even by individual usage in isolation of community standards. For Aristotle this is impossible: contemporary usage is the best standard, so presumably the individual cannot be an authority on his own –

⁸⁸ Cf. Gera 2003, 136: “Words—a combination of sound and significance—require both the unique physical qualities *and* the unique mental capabilities ... attribute[d] to humans” (emphasis in original). Both Cratylus and Aristotle may also be said to let ‘knowledge’ play a large role in language: but while Cratylus makes such ‘knowledge’ depend on superhuman beings, Aristotle makes it natural to humankind. For Aristotle as rejecting Cratylus’ hypothesis in particular, see Cauquelin 1990, 55-60.

⁸⁹ Cf. Everson 1994, 3: “For Aristotle, the sign of man’s distinctiveness as a political animal is that only humans are capable of speech (*logos*).” Dierauer (1977: 125) goes too far in writing that “[d]as menschliche Privileg der Sprache ... ist nach Aristoteles nur ein äusseres Hilfsmittel zur Kommunikation der sittlichen Werte, die den Staat begründen.”

language is meaningless (and thus technically not ‘language’) in isolation.⁹⁰

These two aspects of Aristotle’s thought work together: ‘nature’ provides an ‘origin’ of sorts for all human language, in that humankind’s own nature including intellect is a necessary condition for ‘language’ as such; while ‘convention’ is the ‘origin’ of individual words, and thus of linguistic diversity (dependent on localized language acquisition, in parallel with localized birdsong). Absent a theory of evolution, it is difficult to pin down the emergence of νοῦς in humankind to a particular moment in history or prehistory; thus it is difficult to determine when (and how) human ‘voice’ (φωνή: meaningful) became human ‘speech’ (διάλεκτος: also articulated), and similarly when and how ‘speech’ became characteristically human ‘language’ (λόγος: concerned with higher-order classes of perceptible reality, and having differentiated types of words). All told, however, Aristotle no less than the other authors considered continues to view language *per se* as characteristically human, separating humankind from the other animals, and making society possible if not guaranteeing its existence. This separation, and the highly developed terminology in which it is encoded, allows Aristotle to be quite specific about even his unanswered and possibly unanswerable questions about language: “why does humankind show great variety of voice but other animals have only one, unless they are of different species? Or does even humankind have only one voice but many varieties of speech?” (διὰ τί μᾶλλον ἄνθρωπος πολλὰς φωνὰς ἀφίησιν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα μίαν, ἀδιάφορα ὄντα τῷ εἶδει; ἢ καὶ τοῦ

⁹⁰ For Aristotle’s rejection of Hermogenes’ individualistic conventionalism, see Cauquelin 1990, 61: “Or, s’il y a bien arbitraire du signe ce n’est pas pour autant la marque d’une passion humaine, d’un législateur qui aurait nommé les choses selon son bon vouloir, en demiurge, mais le signe que nous avons affaire à un système, à un ensemble de règles composées entre elles, règles sans sujet fondateur, mais qui fondent tout sujet.”

ἀνθρώπου μία φωνή, ἀλλὰ διάλεκτοι πολλαί; *Prob.* 895a).

Lucretius and Other Roman Authors

From their Greek predecessors, Roman authors inherited and expanded upon the relatively clear separation of humankind from the non-human animals on the axis of language. Although their notices seem less interested in the details of language physiology, at a general level the ideas themselves remain roughly the same. The fact of language is still taken as indicating a qualitative difference in nature between human and animals, with the former possessing ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ and thus interested in and capable of expressing correspondingly more complex meanings. Although ‘natural’, this crucial difference may yet be imagined as requiring cultivation in the form of ‘conventional’ education or social interaction.

There are also differences between Greek and Roman ideas. In the switch from Greek to Latin the terms involved of course change, including some circumlocutions and metaphors for human language that resonate in particularly Roman contexts: language is ‘to denote things with the voice’, *res uoce notare*, or, strikingly, is ‘stamped out’, *pressa*, both terms making words meaningful almost structurally, as elements in systems of difference. And the concept of ‘articulation’ becomes more of a linguistic abstraction in Roman hands, important less for its link to the physiology of the vocal apparatus than for its role as index of human superiority, not just physical and intellectual but moral as well.

As with Greek authors, so in Roman sources is mention of language origins mostly incidental to other topics. I consider in detail the most complete account, Lucretius’ famous passage on the origins of language (5.1028-1090). If his account is

the fullest, it is also, as a result of his express concern to convey Epicurean teaching, perhaps also the most eccentric. In order to see which ideas are commonly Roman and which the result of particular philosophical leanings, other Roman authors are discussed as thematically appropriate, including Quintilian, Sallust, and Cicero. Cicero's ideas in particular offer an interesting comparison with Lucretius', in that the orator's staunch anti-Epicureanism might be expected to make his take on language origins conflict with the Epicurean poet's. Differences of explanation and emphasis do occur, but are superimposed over seemingly more fundamental similarities of both terminology and purpose. All told, even in famously contradictory Roman hands human language continues to embody the intellectual and moral distinctiveness of humankind.

The separation of humankind from the other animals by language, among other human activities or abilities, is a common trope in Roman authors. Cicero for example writes that (*De Inventione* 1.4.5):

Humankind seems to me at least to surpass the beasts in this thing above all, the ability to speak; wherefore that man seems to me to have acquired something outstanding, who excels humankind itself in the very thing in which humankind surpasses the beasts.

ac mihi quidem uidentur homines hac re maxime bestiis praestare, quod loqui possunt: quare praeclarum mihi quiddam uidetur adeptus is, qui qua re homines bestiis praestent, ea in re hominibus ipsis antecellat.

Although language separates humankind from the other animals in terms of nature, its full development depends on culture, not to say 'convention', in the form of education.⁹¹ Both the natural superiority of humankind, and the effort involved in

⁹¹ Cf. *De Orat.* 1.32, where Crassus is made to say that "in this one thing we surpass wild animals most of all, in that we have conversation with each other and are able to express our sensations in speech (*hoc enim uno praestamus uel maxime feris, quod conloquimur inter nos et quod exprimere dicendo sensa possumus*). The acquisition of rhetorical skills in particular depends on practice in social interaction: "the whole rationale of speaking, moreover, located in common ground, is developed in

capitalizing thereupon, are echoed by Sallust: "It is fitting that all men who strive to surpass the other animals rely on the highest effort, lest they spend their lives in silence, like the flocks which nature has made prone and obedient to their bellies" (*omnis homines qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus summa ope niti decet ne uitam silentio transeant, ueluti pecora quae natura prona atque uentri oboedientia finxit; Cat.* 1.1). The result of such effort is moral superiority: Sallust concludes by praising 'virtue' (*uirtus*) as against 'the glory of wealth and beauty' (*diuitiarum et formae gloria*) (1.4).⁹²

Lucretius' extended treatment of language origins puts this trope to particular use. Although he, too, acknowledges the role of education in developed human language, he focuses on the 'natural' aspects of language in order to refute 'conventionalism'. He begins by comparing the origin of language with the gestural language of pre-linguistic infants and with nascent animal abilities (5.1028-1040):

Nature compelled [humankind] to utter the various sounds of language, and utility stamped out the names of things, with an explanation not much different than when the inability to speak seems to lead children to gestures, when it makes them point out what is present with their finger. For each [creature] senses how it may use its capacities. Before the horns are born and protrude from the calf's forehead, he seeks with them in anger and thrusts about, maddened; the young of panthers and lion cubs already fight with claw, foot, and bite, even when their teeth and claws are hardly created; moreover we see that the entire race of birds trusts to their wings and seeks unsteady help from their feathers.

uarios linguae sonitus natura subegit / mittere, et utilitas expressit
nomina rerum, / non alia longe ratione atque ipsa uidetur / protrahere ad
gestum pueros infantia linguae, / cum facit ut digito quae sint praesentia

particular use and in the customs and speech of men" (*dicendi autem omnis ratio in medio posita communi quodam in usu atque in hominum more et sermone uersatur; De Orat.* 1.12).

⁹² For physiological maps of morality cf. the parable of the body politic told to the plebs by Menenius (Livy 2.32.8-12), and parallels in e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 2.3.18 and Aeschin. 197.

monstrent.⁹³ / sentit enim uis quisque suas quoad possit abuti: / cornua
nata prius uitulo quam frontibus extent, / illis iratus petit atque infestus
inurget; / at catuli pantherarum scymnique leonum / unguibus ac pedibus
iam tum morsuque repugnant, / uix etiam cum sunt dentes unguisque
creati; / alituum porro genus alis omne uidemus / fidere et a pennis
tremulum petere auxiliatum.

From an Epicurean standpoint, it is not surprising that the same reason, *ratio*, should underpin each creature's instinctive use of its natural capacities: an animal's abilities are part of its atomic structural inheritance. The general import of the passage is thus that human language, like the observable traits of other animals, is 'natural' to humankind, an instinctive response to nature in the external sense.⁹⁴ Moreover it seems as if Lucretius imagines the same reactive principle operating both ontogenetically (in the individual's acquisition of language) and phylogenetically (in the prehistory of the species as a whole): at least for language and perhaps for other natural (or cultural?) capacities, human prehistory is an 'infancy' of sorts (see further below).⁹⁵

The extended passage imagines both similarity and difference between humankind and the other animals on the axis of language. On the one hand, given the

⁹³ For a possible reflection of *digito ... monstrent* see Cic. *Rep.* 8.26: "this is not an image that can be pointed out by a finger" (*non ea figura quae digito demonstrari potest*).

⁹⁴ The 'naturalism' of abilities in Epicurean thought is always non-teleological, following Empedocles against e.g. Plato; see Campbell 2003, 1-18, Campbell 2000, and Furley 1989. Campbell distinguishes the argument of this passage, that human language and animal abilities are similarly innate (and thus the case against 'conventionalism' is stronger *a fortiori*), from that of 1056-1090, where human language is compared specifically to animal vocalizations (2003 ad locc.).

⁹⁵ Cf. Borle 1962, 163, who draws attention to how the poem imagines early humans as "si frères que le poète ne les imagine guère adultes", citing 5.816-7: "the earth provided food for the boys, the mist clothing, the grass bedding" (*terra cibum pueris, uestem uapor, herba cubile / praebebat*). The comparison of cultural development with the stages of human life is common in ancient sources; see Lehmann 1999 and the discussion of Ovid's linguistic exile in Chapter Five. Ancient aitiological literature relies on an almost Lamarckian evolutionary schema in which acquired traits may be inherited by subsequent generations; see Myers 1994, 27-60.

explanatory models imposed by Epicurean physics, language is presented as a human capacity (*uis*) exactly equivalent in explanation (*ratio*) to the capacities of the other animals. The equivalence holds down to the level of variation, with human linguistic or lexical diversity likened to the various vocal sounds made by animals in response to different conditions (1056-1061):

What is the least bit surprising in this situation, if humankind, in whom voice and language thrive, should note things with varying sounds depending on their varying sensations, when the mute flocks, when indeed the generations of wild beasts are accustomed to crying out different and varying sounds, when there is fear or pain and when their joy swells?

quid in hac mirabile tantoperest re, / si genus humanum, cui uox et
lingua uigeret, / pro uario sensu uaria res uoce notaret, / cum pecudes
mutae, cum denique saecla ferarum / dissimilis soleant uoces uariasque
ciere, / cum metus aut dolor est et cum iam gaudia gliscunt?

It is not at first clear whether *uaria uoce* refers to lexical plurality, to linguistic diversity, or to both (see further below).⁹⁶ In either case, what is true of animals is true *a fortiori* of humankind: both utter the same ‘vocal sounds’ (*uoce, uoces*), ‘varying’ them (*uaria, uarias, dissimilis*) in similar ways according to the vicissitudes of perceived experience (*pro uario sensu*).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Elsewhere Lucretius uses letters composing words as an analogy for primordial elements comprising matter (1.823-827, 197 and 912-914, and 2.688-694 and 1013-1014); working the analogy backwards it might perhaps be argued that, just as there was at least originally a huge (but not infinite) variety of things, so too was there at some point a huge variety of words; both things and words would then be pared down naturally by similar processes of extinction (see Campbell 2003, 115-138).

⁹⁷ There is no question in Lucretius’ account of language origins of the rightness of words (cf. Schrijvers 1962, 338: “les théories d’Epicure et de Lucrèce portent en premier lieu sur le problème historique de l’origine”). From an Epicurean standpoint it is to be expected that instinctive sounds would match their stimuli as physically iconic at an atomic level. But in language “utility” trumps “necessity”, and thus words become *symbolic* for things (onomatopoeia aside). There is no reason for *indexical* signs to be rightly or elegantly representative of things at the beginning. On the other hand, Epicurus at least is clear that both rightness and elegance were attempted at later stages (with agreement among speakers for

On the other hand, the passage also implicitly distinguishes between human and animal vocalizations at other levels, including the traditional measure of articulation.⁹⁸ The distinction between articulated human language and inarticulate animal vocalization underwrites a tour-de-force display of technical terms for animal sounds in different psychological contexts. Dogs growl (*irritata ... ricta fremunt*; 1063-1064),⁹⁹ bark or howl (*latrunt*; 1066) in anger (*rabie*; 1065),¹⁰⁰ whimper in affection (*gannitu uocis adulant*; 1070),¹⁰¹ bark loudly out of loneliness (*deserti baubantur in aedibus*; 1071),¹⁰² and wail when struck (*plorantis fugiunt ... plagas*; 1072). Horses produce different whinnies (*hinnitus ... differe uidetur*; 1073) in love, in battle, and in fear

communicative elegance, and with the introduction of new terms by people knowledgeable of their referents), and both he and his followers practiced a philosophical poetics in line with this, at least ostensibly seeking to reduce language to its clearest possible form; see Milanese 1989, Ferguson 1987.

⁹⁸ Thus, as throughout the poem, animals are most like *primitive* humankind; see Schiesaro 1990, 122-3, and Gale 1991, 415.

⁹⁹ *Irritata* is onomatopoetic. Cf. Donatus *Ad Ter. Andr.* 597: *ducitur uerbum [sc. irritatus est] a canibus, qui restrictis dentibus hanc litteram 'r' imitantur.*

¹⁰⁰ *Latrare* refers to dog-like noises. Cf. Catull. 60.2: *Scylla latrans infima inguinum parte*; Prop. 3.11.41: *latrantem ... Anubim*. By extension it gives an animalistic quality to other sounds: e.g. Hor. *Serm.* 2.2.17-18: *cum sale panis / latrantem stomachum bene leniet.*

¹⁰¹ Such affection was the special province of dogs: Nonius Marcellus 17.2: *adulatio est blandimentum proprie canum*. On 'affectionate whimpering', Paulus-Festus 88.4: *gannitio canum querula murmuratio*. *Gannitus* is rare, occurring most often in Apuleius *Met.* (e.g. 4.1, 6.27, 10.22, meaning 'amorous utterance').

¹⁰² *Baubari* is onomatopoetic; cf. the parallels in most IE languages (e.g. Greek βούζω). In Latin it is almost unique to Lucretius (Pigeaud 1983); in a fragment Suetonius needs to explain it as a synonym of *latrare*: *canum latrare seu baubari* (161); cf. Nonius Marcellus 80.29: *baubari latrare a canum uoce.*

(1073-1076).¹⁰³ Finally, birds “make vocal sounds quite differently at different times” (*longe alias alio iaciunt in tempore uoces*; 1081), including when looking for food and during and before storms.¹⁰⁴ The terms are highly specific and often onomatopoeic. They strengthen the notion that Lucretius’ vague image of ‘natural’ linguistic variation covers both lexical plurality (different sounds for different [perceptions of] things) and linguistic diversity proper (different groups with different sets of sounds, both between species and, at least for humankind and arguably among birds, within a given species).¹⁰⁵ Thus the proliferation of terms, with its implicit comparison of limited animal sounds and human lexical abundance, strengthens Lucretius’ central argument against the possibility of a single name-giver (if nature can produce so many terms, a name-giver is not needed; see further Chapter Three).

But the variety and specificity of terms also clearly separate the animal sounds from human sounds and the terms used to describe them. As indicated in the notes, some of the circumlocutions are explained by ancient commentators as having special reference to animal sounds and sensations in particular. With the exception of *plorare*

¹⁰³ For *hinnitus* cf. e.g. Cic. *Diu.* 1.73: *exaudiuit hinnitum*; Var. *Men.* 3: *oui’ balat, equi hinniunt*. Verg. *G.* 3.93-94 (lines which like Lucretius’ series of terms may serve “to eliminate the boundary between man and animal and to suggest that the human condition is identical with that of the animal” (Thomas 1988b ad 89-94)): *altum / Pelion hinnitu fugiens impleuit acuto*; Hor. *Carm.* 2.16.34-35: *tollit hinnitum / apta quadrigis equa*. Like *gannitus* and *latrare*, it could be applied metaphorically to human noises: *quantum hinnitum atque equitatum* (Lucil. 1275).

¹⁰⁴ On birds announcing the weather see e.g. Cic. *Prog.* fr. 4 Ewbank; Virg. *G.* 1.351-463, esp. 388: *tum cornix plena pluuiam uocat improba uoce* (with Thomas 1988a ad loc., Catalano 1960, and Jermyn 1951); Hor. *C.* 3.17.12-13; and Pliny *N.H.* 18.362-363.

¹⁰⁵ 5.1078 (*genus alituum uariaeque uolucres*) is not tautological, with *uariae* meaning only ‘dappled’ (like Gk. ποικίλος), but precise, meaning “the race of birds and its differing species”: *uarietas* in this Lucretian context must refer to linguistic diversity among distinct natural groups (see Pigeaud 1983, 136 and 131-134).

(2.575-6: *mixtos uagitibus aegris / ploratus*), the terms are used in Lucretius and elsewhere of human speech only by metaphorical extension. Three of the terms appear in Lucretius only in this passage (*hinnitus, gannitus, baubantur*). At 6.1192 *rictu*, ‘grimace’, is used for one of the symptoms of the plague at Athens; this is a visual description, not an auditory one; and at 2.16-17 *latrare* appears in an unusual sense with ‘nature howling for nothing other’ than to be free of pain (*nihil aliud sibi naturam latrare nisi ut qui / corpore seiunctus dolor absit*). Outside of Lucretius, *gannire* may mean ‘to speak in an ill-natured or hostile manner’ (OLD s.v. 2). Although it may thus be used for human speech (e.g. Catull. 93.4: *gannit et obloquitur*) this use is frequent mostly in Apuleius, of characters attempting to communicate with the main character who has been changed into an ass (e.g. 2.15: *me placidis gannitibus ab impetu reuocatum*) and of animals (e.g. 5.28: *haec illa uerbosa ... auis in auribus Ueneris ... gannit*). *hinnire* was apparently applied to human noises only satirically: *quantum hinnitum atque equitatum* (Lucil. 1275). Similarly, *latrare* could be applied to human speech only when the speech is less than ideal, “if a man is changed from a good man into a ranter and a howler” (*si a uiro bono in rabulam latroremque conuertitur*; Quint. *Inst.* 12.9.12); or unacceptable in polite or political context, as when a woman evaded punishment by “harassing the tribunal with howling not customary in the forum” (*inusitatis foro latratibus adsidue tribunalia exercendo*; Val. Max. 8.3.2). In all of these examples the sound terms are applied to things other than animals only by extension, because of the perceptual, sentimental, or political savagery of the sounds involved: their force lies in their original animal meanings.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Animal noises may also be transferred to instruments: e.g. Ennius fr. 6 Courtney (=Varro *L.L.* 7.103-104): *multa ab animalium uocibus tralata in homines ... (104) minus aperta ut ... Ennii a*

Aside from the onomatopoeic terms the only word used by Lucretius for animal sounds is *uox*. Animals have *lingua* only in the literal sense of the physical tongue (e.g. 5.1067: “when [dogs] try to wash their pups soothingly with their tongues” [*catulos blande cum lingua lambere temptant*]). Humankind, by virtue of not simply reacting to but also naming things with speech, moves beyond *uoces* and beyond even *sonitus* into *lingua*.¹⁰⁷ Thus the poet is able to affirm categorically, with a subjunctive of characteristic, that humankind, by implicit contrast with other animals, has ‘thriving voice and language’ (*genus humanum, cui uox et lingua uigeret*; 1057). In this passage Lucretius has in mind all of humankind, past and present: “there is no qualification of humanity as there is in 925 ‘*genus humanum ... illud*’, and the first humans are possessed of the same vocal abilities as modern humans.”¹⁰⁸ Thus Lucretius seems not to be arguing for an evolution of language, but for transition from innate capacity to instinctual and then cultural realizations thereof.¹⁰⁹ This distinction between inherent capacity for *lingua*, ‘language’, and the more limited *uox*, ‘voice’, parallels that already seen in Hesiod and others, in which humans (and those interacting meaningfully with them) have ἀνδρή, ‘the capacity to communicate’, and φωνή, ‘voice’, while non-humans (including animals) have only φωνή.¹¹⁰

uitulo: tibicina maximo labore (!) mugit; cf. Stat. Th. 6.120: mugit tibia.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Gale’s argument (1991) on Lucretius’ and Virgil’s distinct comparisons of humans and animals, with Lucretius mostly interested in literal comparability of human and animal physiology.

¹⁰⁸ Campbell 2003 ad loc.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. idem 2003 ad 1033-1040.

¹¹⁰ See Laspia 1997. For *lingua* as meaningful human language cf. e.g. Grattius *Cynegetica* 196 (“the Calydonian dog with its meaningless tongue”; *uanae ... Calydonia canis linguae*), and Luc. *BC*

In line with this basic distinction, in which *uox* is a part of *lingua* but not vice versa, the extended comparison between human and animal speech sounds to which the series belongs is framed by slightly but significantly different definitions of those sounds. Human speech, tacitly *lingua*, is described as “to note things with varying sounds” (*uaria res uoce notare*; 1058) or “to note things now with one sound, now with another” (*alia atque alia res uoce notare*; 1090). By contrast, animal vocalization is “to cry out varying sounds” (*uoces uarias ... ciere*; 1060) or “to utter varying sounds” (*uarias emittere uoces*; 1088). The difference between the two types of speech sounds is pointed. *Notare* is to mark something with the effect of distinguishing it from other similar things (OLD q.v.). It also connotes a combinatorial system for making and understanding the marks, for example scripts and shorthands.¹¹¹ *Notare* thus lends to human speech a technical or skillful cachet.¹¹² In each case the human speech uses *uoces* to denote *res*, and is thus expressly and perhaps purposefully symbolic (only perhaps because *inuentis* may connote either deliberate invention or accidental

3.223-224 (“only birds and beasts and animals carved in stone preserved magic languages [before Phoenician script]”; *et saxis tantum uolucresque feraeque / sculptaque seruabant magicas animalia linguas*); as in Lucretius, the rare instances of animal-signs and –speech being significant always depend on a human interpreter being present: e.g. Pac. *Trag.* 83 (“those who understand the language of birds”; *isti qui linguam auium intellegunt*).

¹¹¹ Cicero in the *De Re Publica* uses *nota* thus: “the infinite sounds of the voice are all signified and stamped out with a small number of discovered/invented marks” (*uocis ... infiniti soni paucis notis inuentis sunt omnes signati et expressi*; 3.3).

¹¹² Cf. 1.700 and the frequent references to ‘skill’ in language origins in the Greek sources; ‘skill’ is linked to ‘articulation’: e.g. Plato *Prot.* 322a6 (φωνήν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῇ τέχνῃ). I thus disagree with Bailey ad loc., who sees *notare* here as depending on the special meaning of *nota* as “a mark of condemnation placed by the censors against the names of citizens degraded by them” (OLD s.v. *nota* 4a); clearly Lucretius does not mean that human language singles out its referents for opprobrium (Bailey is more restrained ad 1043: “the metaphor [is] perhaps dimly felt”).

discovery). Lucretius supplies an example elsewhere, where ‘fire’, *ignis*, is distinguished from ‘wood’, *lignum*, by a single letter, the meaningful difference thus depending on a system of meanings (*ligna atque ignis distincta uoce notemus*; 1.914). By contrast, the vocalizations of animals are not used to designate things but only to react to them, that is they are not symbols but only indices, not arbitrarily or purposefully (*quid uellet*) representative but only contiguously so.¹¹³ Thus the passage as a whole works to define human speech as a set of articulated symbols, as opposed to animals’ (mostly) unarticulated indexical cries.¹¹⁴

This difference is seconded by the line *quid uellet facere ut sciret animoque uideret*, “in order to know and see in the spirit what he wants to do.” This makes intention or purpose, and thus intellect, as integral a component of language *per se* as the component to which it is linked, *utilitas*.¹¹⁵ A truly representative and symbolic

¹¹³ Bird- and other animal-signs are exceptions, but even these are symbols only to humankind, not to conspecifics. Cf. Dahlmann 1928, 21: “Neque umquam ad symbolicam ... significationem progrediuntur [sc. bestiae], numquam mens animalium uerbum eo sensu capere potest, quo homines.” For the meanings of symbol, index, and other types of signs, Sebeok 1994; for zoosemiosis Sebeok 1977 and 1972; for language and animal communications as symbolic systems, Bickerton 1990; *contra* Deacon 1997, arguing that symbolic representation is peculiar to human language.

¹¹⁴ I do not disagree substantially with Campbell, who sees Lucretius emphasizing the inarticulate status of animal sounds: “although animals vocalize according to their emotions, these do not seem to be affected by objects in such a way as to cause the production of *words*, but only of *sounds*. We may presume the mechanism of the process is the same for humans and animals, but the animals’ lack of the physical equipment for speech prevents proper words being produced, and so they do not produce words as such but only sounds” (2003 ad 1056-1062). This is right to the extent that Lucretius does not explicitly endorse the ancient tradition of some animals, especially birds, being able to imitate or produce human language sounds, i.e. words.

¹¹⁵ I disagree with Schrijvers 1962, 364, who relies on too Stoic a definition of *ratio* and thus does not find “reason” or “intellect” in Lucretius’ account of language origins. Perelli also argues that Lucretius’ account has no room for “reason”, because it is opposed to contemporary Stoic ideas on ‘conventionalism’ (Perelli 1966-7, 218). Lucretius hardly deals with the Stoics directly; see Lévy 1999. On the scant evidence for Stoic ideas on language origins, see Blank 1998, 21f, 77 n.5; Frede 1974, 333ff;

sign-system comes about only through the unique mental nature of humankind, and only in conjunction with use-value, itself dependent on social interaction. Just as only humans may make meaning of even animal vocalizations, so too is human language a language as such only because of its social context.¹¹⁶

This reliance of human language on human intellect is spelled out more fully by Cicero, discussing intellect and the search for truth (*De off.* 1.4.11-13):

Between man and beast this is the greatest difference, namely that the beast is only moved by sensation, and responds only to that which is present and immediate ... but man ... has reason. ... The same nature [sc. that gave capacities to all living things] uses the power of reason to adapt man to man and to the sharing of speech and life. ... Above all it is characteristic of humankind to seek out and investigate the truth ... What is true, simple, and unblemished is most suited to the nature of humankind. ... Nor indeed is it a small capacity of nature and reason, that this animal alone senses what order is, what is suitable, what moderation there is in words and deeds.

Inter hominem et beluam hoc maxime interest, quod haec tantum, quantum sensu mouetur, ad id solum, quod adest quodque praesens est, se accomodat ... Homo autem ... rationis est particeps ... Eademque natura ui rationis hominem conciliat homini et ad orationis et ad uitae societatem ... Inprimisque hominis est propria ueri inquisitio atque inuestigatio. ... quod uerum, simplex, sincerumque sit, id esse naturae hominis aptissimum. ... Nec uero illa parua uis naturae est rationisque, quod unum hoc animal sentit, quid sit ordo, quid sit quod deceat, in factis dictisque qui modus.

As in Lucretius, the difference between humankind and the other animals is qualitative.

Whereas the other animals are turned only to their immediate experience (*quod adest*

Pohlenz 1964, 2.23; and Dahlmann 1928, 58-62; for Stoic ideas about language generally, see Long 1987, 183-236, and idem 1978, 131-139.

¹¹⁶ Cf. 5.110-112 (discussed above) for the strong connection made between *ratio*, 'reason', and language as poetic, philosophic, and pedagogic instrument.

quodque praesens est) humankind has the capacity for and is interested in a higher-order category, here 'truth'. In terms of representations, animals are limited to indices while humankind can create symbols. This essential difference finds its fullest expression in human language, which has as its bases 'mind' and 'reason': Cicero states without qualification that "mind stamped words to things ... by the sweetest bond of speech among themselves [sc. humankind]" (*mens uerba rebus impressit ... iucundissimo inter se sermonis uinculo; De Rep.* 3.3). The human capacity for symbolic language is the link between natural *ratio* and socially necessary, but naturally underdetermined, *oratio*.

The qualitative difference between human and animal vocalizations at the level of intellect responds to and clarifies both Lucretius' original description of the emergence of human language at 5.1028-1029 and the implicit definition of human language which informs the whole passage. 'Nature' (*natura*), in the external sense of a world experienced as 'perceptions' (*sensus*), is necessary for the 'sounds of language' (*linguae sonitus*), and is thus by extension sufficient for momentary utterances like cries.¹¹⁷ But external nature is not sufficient for the creation of human language as such, since the same stimuli result in vocalization from humans and from other animals. Instead, 'utility' leads to the "production of names for things" (*utilitas expressit nomina rerum*).¹¹⁸ The extended analogy between human and animal speech sounds, with its

¹¹⁷ Hozenat 1998 argues that *sonitus linguae* are already "articulated", since articulated language is a matter of physiology; cf. Offermann 153-154 and 156. Schrijvers 1962, 340 disagrees, finding articulate sounds only in the second stage (*nomina rerum*; cf. Bailey ad loc.). While *lingua* must include the physiological basis for articulated language, and is thus different from *uox*, *sonitus linguae* are not necessarily human language as such, that is symbols, unless and until 'mind' is involved.

¹¹⁸ For *utilitas* like *usus* not being 'need' cf. 5.860-861: "Many [animals], which remain commended to us because of their use-value, are given over to our protection" (*multaque sunt, nobis ex*

conclusions about the favorable distinctiveness of humankind, suggests that for Lucretius this ‘utility’ is a function of a second kind of ‘nature’, the internal nature of humankind inherent in its unique atomic structure (and thus closer to *ingenium* than to *natura*, an overlap already present in the Greek φύσις)¹¹⁹ and realized in its social structures.¹²⁰

Although the capacity for language is as inherent to humankind generally as it is to infants individually, and as the other capacities named are to their respective animals, its realization as language *per se* apparently depends on something more. To follow the logic of Lucretius’ implicit comparison, just as ‘nature’ (*natura*) produced ‘the various sounds of language’, but ‘utility’ (*utilitas*) articulated those sounds into ‘names for things’ (*nomina rerum*), so too are the infant’s noises made into articulate language only outside of this passage, and thus with either further experience of nature or, more intriguingly, of human culture. The explanation might work better in reverse: just as the infant’s natural capacity for language, or more properly semiosis (including gestural signs), remains undeveloped without additional stimulus, so too did humankind’s propensity for language not emerge just from the perception of nature until an additional condition was met.

In the case of infants, Lucretius is clear as to what allows their capacity for

utilitate sua quae / commendata manent, tutelae tradita nostrae); see Farrell 1994 and Schrijvers 1962, 342-343; cf. the discussion of χρεῖα in Hollerbach 1964, 82ff; *contra* Perelli 1966-7, 211. Lucretius of course emphasizes ‘nature’ as part of refuting the idea of a single name-giver (see 5.1046-1049, quoted and discussed below, where *utilitas* clearly arises from social interaction).

¹¹⁹ On φύσις in Epicurus and Lucretius, see Clay 1969.

¹²⁰ Lucretius’ account is thus similar to Aristotle’s in seeing a social or conventional role for language inherent in human nature (Aristotle *Pol.* 1253a10).

language to become language as such: linguistic input provided by their caretakers. At 5.221-234 he describes how humankind is less immediately suited to physical survival than the other animals. Unlike humans, the young of other animals “don’t need rattles, nor does anyone among them need the sweet babytalk of a nourishing nurse” (*nec crepitacillis opus est, nec cuiquam adhibendast / almae nutricis blanda atque infracta loquela*).¹²¹ Their natural capacities are enough, whereas the capacities of a human infant require cultivation and education for their fruition.¹²²

What condition separated humankind’s inarticulate sounds (as represented perhaps by the book’s references to ‘groaning’, *gemitu* [992], ‘moaning’, *plangore* [972], and ‘voices’, *uocibus* [996]) from language so called? In Lucretius the Epicurean, such a condition needs to agree with the physical and physiological definition of speech sounds in book 4.¹²³ Lines 4.533-534 argue that “there is no doubt that speech sounds and words are comprised of corporeal beginnings” (*haud igitur dubiumst quin uoces uerbaque constant / corporeis e principiis*), with different qualities of sounds made up of different *principia*. This general point is made specific to human speech sounds (here *uoces*) and, arguably, language *per se* (4.549-556):

Therefore, when we stamp out these speech sounds deeply from the body
and utter them straight out through the mouth, the mobile tongue,

¹²¹ This is not to say that animals do not learn. Animal learning was a part of Hellenistic biology (e.g. Aristotle, above), of which Lucretius was well aware (see Schrijvers 1997). The Stoics agreed that children were not fully linguistic until later in life (Glidden 2000, 133). Contrast the assumptions underlying Psammetichus’ famous experiment to determine the original language, including an inheritance not just of language capacity but of language as such, discussed in Chapter Four.

¹²² Cf. Sallust, *Cat.* 1.1 (quoted above, this section). On baby-talk cf. Tibull. 2.5.93-94: *nec taedebit animum paruo aduigilare nepoti / balbaque cum puero dicere uerba senem*.

¹²³ Cf. Epicurus 1.53. On Lucretius’ account of hearing, Koenen 1999.

ingeniously skilled with words, articulates them, and the forming of the lips does its part by shaping them. When this is not a long space from which each single voice may advance to reach [the listener], the words themselves must also be wholly heard and discerned as articulated; for the voice maintains the forming and the shape.

hasce igitur penitus uoces cum corpore nostro / exprimimus rectoque
foras emittimus ore, / mobilis articulatur uerborum daedala lingua, /
formaturaque labrorum pro parte figurat. / hoc ubi non longum spatiumst
unde una profecta / perueniat uox quaeque necessest uerba quoque ipsa /
plane exaudiri discernique articulatum. / seruat enim formaturam
seruatque figuram.

Human speech, like other sounds, uses *uoces* composed of *primordia* iconically representative of at least the qualities of their referents: *formatura* and *figurata* emphasize the shapes of the underlying sounds and, as indicated in the preceding passage, their similarity to the shapes of their referents.

But whereas other animal sounds stop there, human language goes further: the terms used make language as such a matter involving both simple or reactive utterance and more complex skill. Human language is “articulated”, a traditional qualification as against animal speech sounds and inanimate noises.¹²⁴ In the current passage the role of articulation is given to the vocal apparatus, primarily the tongue, *daedala lingua*, and to a lesser extent the lips, *formatura labrorum*.¹²⁵ *Daedala* as an epithet for the tongue is

¹²⁴ Cf. Epicurus Usener frag. 334: “unlike what the Stoics think, Epicurus teaches [that] words come about by nature, with the first humans having broken off certain speech sounds according to things” (διδάσκει Ἐπίκουρος (ἐτέρως ἢ ὡς οἴονται οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς) ὡς φύσει ἐστὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ἀπορρηχάντων τῶν πρώτων ἀνθρώπων τινὰς φωνὰς κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων): although the Greek is unique, “having broken off certain speech sounds” neatly paraphrases ‘articulation’.

¹²⁵ Cf. Cicero’s description of articulation: “located in the mouth, the tongue is bounded by the teeth. It fashions and limits the voice, poured forth without moderation, and makes the sounds of the voice distinct and precise, when it touches the teeth and the other parts of the mouth” (*in ore sita lingua est finita dentibus. ea uocem immoderate profusam fingit et terminat atque sonos uocis distinctos et pressos efficit, cum et dentes et alias partes pellit oris; N.D. 2.59.149*).

especially suggestive, implying not just the advanced technical skills of its mythological eponym, but also variation, *uariare*: “It is easy to understand that the earth is called *daedala* in Lucretius on account of the variety of its things and creations ... because Greeks use $\delta\alpha\iota\delta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$ to mean ‘to vary’” (*daedalam a uarietate rerum artificiorumque dictam esse apud Lucretium terram ... facile est intellegere, cum Graeci $\delta\alpha\iota\delta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$ significant uariare*; Paulus-Festus 59.26). By being *daedala* the tongue is linked with Lucretius’ general presentation of language as *uaria*, that is of linguistic diversity. Thus the physical or natural aspects of language are put to use in a decidedly social, and even ‘conventional’, context.

These two aspects are immediately combined in the pairing of *exprimimus*, ‘we stamp out’, and *emittimus*, ‘we utter’ (4.527). While the latter implies simple production of speech sounds (and is thus also used of animals), the former more strikingly connotes manufacture or coin-production.¹²⁶ Both verbs indicate a physical act, but *exprimimus* connotes one dependent on developed technical methods and, if the coining metaphor may be pressed, on individual products assuming meaning in a system of products with recognized relative values.¹²⁷ Together *exprimimus* and *emittimus* thus make the

¹²⁶ Cf. Cicero *Rep.* 3.3: “mind stamped words to things” (*mens uerba rebus impressit*) and *N.D.* 2.59.149 where the tongue “makes the sounds of the voice distinct and precise” (*sonos uocis distinctos et pressos efficit*). Although *pressos* in rhetoric means ‘measured’ or ‘precise’, it shares the same root as *impressit* and Lucretius’ *exprimimus* and may thus draw on the same metaphor.

¹²⁷ See Bailey ad loc.: *expressit* “in the derived sense in which it is used of sculpture”; cf. Lewis 1986, 166-168 (on Catull. 65.16): “In a practical sense, the word *expressa* is used as the equivalent of *translata* or *uersa*, but in a more artistic sense, it conveys the idea that ... the poem has been “sculpted” ... with some effort and physical strain.” *Contra* Perelli 1966, 211, who argues that *expressit* “non significa <<dar forma>> ... ma indica l’uscir fuori del suono del nome sotto la spinta del bisogno [*utilitas*]”. Perelli cites as a parallel Orig. *Cels.* 1.24; he misses Lucretius’ deliberate poeticity, misinterprets *utilitas* as ‘need’ (see above, n. 118), and ignores the ‘artistic’ uses of *exprimere* in *TLL* V², 1787-1792.

physical act of human speech systematically, not to say ‘conventionally’, meaningful. The same pairing at the crucial lines 5.1028-1029 shows that the source of that meaning is society, that is a natural human group within which speech sounds may be organized into language *per se*.¹²⁸

Some differences separate Lucretius’ Epicurean account from those professed by other, less zealously philosophical Roman authors. While Lucretius imagines language separating humankind from the other animals, other authors go a step further than the “godless Epicurean” by using language to link humankind with the divine. Sallust, for example, immediately after contrasting humankind with “flocks who live in silence”, writes that “our whole strength is located in spirit and body: we use the command of the spirit rather [than that of the body], and the servitude of the body rather [than that of the spirit]; the one we hold in common with the gods, the other with the beasts” (*nostra omnis uis in animo et corpore sita est: animi imperio, corporis seruitio magis utimur; alterum nobis cum dis, alterum cum beluis commune est*; 1.2). By choosing to obey their spirits rather than their bodies, humans move away from animals and towards the divine.

Quintilian makes the movement explicit by drawing on Stoic thought distinguishing humans from the other animals by virtue of their reason.¹²⁹ Since in Stoicism “being ‘rational’ connotes the ability to speak articulately”, humankind is

¹²⁸ Cf. Manuwald 1980, 42: “die Sprache ist eine soziale Erscheinung ... und ihre *utilitas* mit dem Aufkommen der menschlichen Gemeinschaftsbildung eng verknüpft”; and Westphalen 1957, 66.

¹²⁹ See e.g. Origen *On principles* 3.1.2-3: “animals and plants have the cause of movement in themselves, and so, quite simply, does everything sustained by physique or soul ... a rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason” (adapted from Long 1987, 313). See Long 1974, 173-178.

distinct from the other animals in its possession of ‘articulate language’.¹³⁰ Humans are thus similar to the gods.¹³¹ But in addition to linking humankind to the gods through language, Quintilian also apparently, and unusually, makes language origins a matter of divine intervention (2.16.12-14):

And certainly that first god, the father of things and the fashioner of the world, separated humankind from other living things, those at least that are mortal, with no ability more than that of speech ... [and] gave us an outstanding reason, and wanted us to share it with the immortal gods.

Et hercule deus ille princeps, parens rerum fabricatorque mundi, nullo magis hominem separavit a ceteris, quae quidem mortalia essent, animalibus quam dicendi facultate ... rationem igitur nobis praecipuam dedit eiusque nos socios esse cum dis immortalibus voluit.

This account like the others considered makes a physical or technical change, the origin and possession of language, the hallmark of an intellectual or moral difference. Thus Quintilian shifts easily from ‘the ability to speak’ (*dicendi facultate*), a physical capacity, to ‘outstanding reason’ (*rationem ... praecipuam*), an underlying explanation or motive force and humankind’s characteristic link with the gods. In the same passage Quintilian compares human language with the characteristic, natural abilities of other living things. Just as the other creatures ‘know ... by their very nature’ (*sciunt ... ipsa ratione*), so human language is indicative of the ‘nature’ of humankind – rational as are the gods.

¹³⁰ Quoted material from Long 1974, 124. Although “rationality is an extremely broad concept in Stoicism ... thinking and speaking are two descriptions or aspects of a unitary process” (ibid.). On ‘language’ cf. Galen, *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s doctrines* 2.5.9: “meaningful articulate utterance ... is language” (adapted from Long 1987, 318). On ‘language’ in Stoic thought generally see Long 1974, 131-139.

¹³¹ Cf. Sallust *Cat.* 1.1, quoted above in this section. Quintilian’s account may be read as a divinized version of Sallust’s account (I owe this suggestion to Brian Krostenko, private communication).

Quintilian is relatively rare among Romans in presenting a god as responsible for humankind's unique nature and ability to speak. His purpose in 2.16 is to argue against those who think that rhetorical training is worthless or worse. This involves an extended and traditional comparison of human capacities with those of other animals. In sum, although "reason was god's greatest gift" to humankind, held in common with the divine (2.16.15):

reason on its own would neither help us so much nor be so evident in us, if we were unable to express in speech as well the things we had conceived of in the mind; we see that this is more lacking from the other living things than intellect and a certain cognition.

sed ipsa ratio neque tam nos iuuaret neque tam esset in nobis manifesta, nisi, quae concepissemus mente, promere etiam loquendo possemus, quod magis deesse ceteris animalibus quam intellectus et cogitationem quandam uidemus.

This second passage, like the first, draws on a Stoic thought, in which 'language' as such is the outward manifestation of an inner reason. Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus mathematicos* 8.275-276) thus represents the Stoics as saying that:

it is not uttered speech but internal speech by which man differs from non-rational animals; for crows and parrots and jays utter articulate sound. Nor is it by the merely simple impression that he differs ... but by impressions produced by inference and combination. This amounts to his possessing the conception of 'following' and directly grasping, on account of 'following', the idea of sign. ... Therefore the existence of signs follows from man's nature and constitution.¹³²

¹³² Adapted from Long 1987, 317-318. This idea is also not dissimilar to Aristotle's theory of meaningful language being dependent not only on 'articulation' but on 'intellect', νοῦς, and thus ultimately on human nature.

Human nature, being rational, thus leads directly to meaningful, i.e. significant, language. But since reason is a gift of the gods, at least the *fabricator mundi*, so too is 'articulate language', i.e. language as such, also a divine gift.

Although Quintilian thus attributes human language to the gods, it is difficult to decide how much of a sincere belief in this attribution is implied here. Two points militate against such belief. First, the god is unnamed, the creator of the whole world and thus, in this context, the assigner of all abilities to all animals. This anonymous creator is less a god than a stand-in for 'Nature' itself, that is the right (moral and physical) order of things. Second, sincere Roman belief in the divine in general is questionable, the more so during the empire and before Christianity. Although various Roman authors argued for, and various statesmen used, religious practices as means of social engineering and control, there need not have been sincere belief in the religious ideas ostensibly expressed thereby.¹³³ Thus Quintilian may refer to the divine only to highlight the uniquely rational status of humankind, as against the other animals.

Conclusions

At each stage considered, a once seemingly fast distinction between human and other language is seen to have partially collapsed; thus at each stage additional sophistication is needed to keep human language, and with it humankind, distinct from both the other animals and from the divine. Initially, φωνή on its own meant 'speech' and 'language', with αὐδή referring to the fact of communication with humankind in human language (a sort of pragmatics at the heart of the system: identity, or at least

¹³³ See King 1998; I owe this reference to Richard Saller, personal communication.

identification with a given group, comes not from essence but from practice). But even in the earliest texts not only humans but gods and even animals could be (made to be) *αὐδήεις*. Indeed, the existence of the adjective implies that the society of human speakers is always already infiltrated by non-human speakers; what this implies for humankind and human groups, namely overlap, is only gradually and begrudgingly accepted by the ancient sources.

A similar point may be made about the ‘tongue’. Throughout ancient thought the terms mean both ‘physical tongue’ and ‘language’. By the classical period this was no longer enough, and the ‘articulate tongue’ was born, with human language as such its product.¹³⁴ Even this critical distinction failed for some authors sufficiently to separate human language from animal speech sounds, such that the former became defined not just biologically but also psychologically, involving ‘intellect’, ‘mind’, or ‘reason’, and semantically, depending on its referents: language is defined by what it is used to discuss, including political life, rhetoric, and the search for truth. The fact that this last inherence of language in human nature must be specified so deliberately, even pedantically, shows how that nature had become non-obvious over time: from Homeric texts comparing humans and animals by means of simile, to Aristotle and other authors classifying humankind as one animal, if a special one, among others.

This situation is neatly summarized by the first- and second-century AD Roman sophist Aelian, who in the prologue to his work *Περὶ ζώων ιδιότητος* (*On the Uniqueness of Animals*) dilates on the difference between fully linguistic humans and

¹³⁴ In apparently only one case (Soph. *Trach.* 1060) is ‘tongue-less’, *ἄγλωσσος*, used to mean “barbarian” in the linguistic sense of non-Greek-speaking; otherwise the tongue separates humankind from non-linguistic animals and entities more generally.

even somewhat linguistic animals:

There is perhaps nothing surprising in that humankind is wise and just, is most thoughtful of its own children, shows due regard for its parents, seeks out food for itself, guards against plots, and has the other gifts given to it by nature: for humankind has received language, the most honorable of all things, and has been granted reason, which is most helpful and useful. ... But that also the unspeaking [sc. animals] possess some kind of virtue by nature, and have many amazing human advantages, is indeed remarkable.

Ἄνθρωπον μὲν εἶναι σοφὸν καὶ δίκαιον καὶ τῶν οἰκείων παίδων προμηθέστατον, καὶ τῶν γειναμένων ποιεῖσθαι τὴν προσήκουσαν φροντίδα, καὶ τροφήν ἑαυτῷ μαστεύειν καὶ ἐπιβουλάς φυλάττεσθαι καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ὅσα αὐτῷ σύνεστι δῶρα φύσεως, παράδοξον ἴσως οὐδέν· καὶ γὰρ λόγου μετείληχεν ἄνθρωπος τοῦ πάντων τιμιωτάτου, καὶ λογισμοῦ ἡξίωται, ὅσπερ οὖν ἐστὶ πολυαρκέστατός τε καὶ πολυωφελέστατος ... τὸ δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀλόγοις μετεῖναι τινὸς ἀρετῆς κατὰ φύσιν, καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πλεονεκτημάτων καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἔχειν συγκεκληρωμένα, τοῦτο ἤδη μέγα.

The admirable qualities of humankind, including, importantly, its survival, morality, and society, are made here to depend directly on its possession of ‘language’, λόγος, and ‘reason’, λογισμός, together.¹³⁵ With this pair as its natural inheritance (δῶρα φύσεως), humankind cannot but behave the way it does, that is have the moral culture that it does. By contrast, the other animals are explicitly not guaranteed ‘virtue’ (ἀρετῆς), and implicitly not guaranteed even survival, much less the other essentials of human culture, precisely because they do not possess language or reason. For Aelian, as for others, this crucial difference between humankind and the other animals, finding its expression in the presence and absence, respectively, of language as such, is ‘natural’.

¹³⁵ Λόγος seems to mean ‘language’ by way of contrast here with λογισμός, the more abstract ‘reason’.

Whether defined physiologically as *κύδη* against *φωνή*, or as articulate against inarticulate tongues; or semantically in terms of its ability to symbolize higher-order content, human language, that is language as such, is both a component and an expression of human 'nature' in all its social and cultural particularity. To that nature we now turn, exploring the link between the origin of language and the origin of humankind and human (moral) culture, both real and ideal, normative, and perceived.

In humankind voice and language thrive.
- Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 5.1057

CHAPTER 3

GLOTTOGONY AND ANTHROPOGONY: LANGUAGE AND CIVILIZATION

Chapter Two showed how language was viewed in antiquity as distinguishing humankind from the other animals (and, less clearly, from the gods). Indeed, language was viewed as central enough to humankind that the latter is rarely pictured without the former: lack of language, or of comprehensible speech, could be enough to locate an individual or group outside of normative human culture (see further Chapter Five). Thus even examples of incomprehension are based in deviations from an assumed standard of comprehensible language use.

An immediate corollary of this is that human language as such is considered central not only to *humankind*, but also to human *culture*. Language distinguishes humankind from non-human animals not only through its simple presence and its reflection of physiological and psychological traits, but also because of its close association with other traditional hallmarks of human culture. The origin of language is often linked with the origins of human civilization, where ‘civilization’ is a normative term opposed to the ‘uncivilized’ lifeways of exotic, marginal, and barbarous peoples. For many Greek and Roman authors, the origin of language is coterminous with the origin of society: developments in language both inform and depend on developments

in social organization.¹ In this sense reflections on language origins proved especially useful in charting the purported emergence of idealized societies that, regardless of their specific political organization, are all highly moral according to the standards of their authors.² Thus many ancient authors who longed for better *anthropogony*, or even *cosmogony*, turned to *glottogony*.

Even when language is listed among several other traditional features of human culture, it is arguably more central to civilized human life than some of the others.³ This is in line with the defining force of language as discussed in Chapter Two: since language is dependent on intellect and, in the words of Euripides, is itself the ‘messenger of reason’ (see below), it is a more crucial component of human culture than, say, agriculture, navigation, or warfare, all of which may be treated by ancient ethnographers as epiphenomena which serve more to articulate differences within human history and between human groups.⁴ Language is also viewed more positively

¹ See generally Gera 2003, 112-181; esp. 179: “Speech is presented as a unique human capacity which contributed to the transformation of early beastlike men into full-fledged civilized human beings, whose advantage over animals lay in their rational, social, and technical capabilities.”

² This moralizing force is enjoyed by ancient prehistory generally; see Campbell 2003, 9-10: “Modern human society will be the main ethical focus of any prehistory”; Blundell 1986, 135-136; Lévi-Strauss 1958.

³ Cf. Campbell 2003, 283: “it would seem that [language] was one of the most important aspects of prehistory for the Epicureans”; and 285: “This close linking of language and the formation of society is also found in a non-Epicurean rationalist tradition” including e.g. Diodorus Siculus, Vitruvius, and Cicero. This is not to argue that language is always or even ever the defining trait of *all* types of human groups, especially “ethnicity”. Language like e.g. dress or manner of production is at most an *indicium* of ethnic affiliation, itself dependent on the perception of common descent; see Hall 1997 and 2002a. Language is not included in all ancient histories of human culture; see below.

⁴ Thus e.g. Herodotus arrays the lifeways of different groups into continua of difference; see Hartog 2001.

than those other traits. While those other traditional trappings of culture are often discussed with ambivalence, regret, or even outright hostility,⁵ language *per se* is rarely disparaged and regularly praised as the hallmark of humanity.⁶

Often only implicit, ideas about language origins relate to contemporary thought about origins more generally, and to the perception of group interpenetration. Just as the origins of nominally distinct groups take their place in a history and especially a prehistory marked by the mixing of peoples, so too are individual languages and language in general given origins rooted in group interaction and overlap.⁷ This double contingency – ideas about language origins imagining a world of historical and prehistorical interactions; and the ideas themselves made possible by historical preconditions and forms of knowledge – implies that, since ancient frameworks for the origins of people remained relatively consistent from the archaic through the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, ideas about language origins will show structural similarities to explanatory modes developed more generally in Greek and Greco-Roman anthropological thought (*Kulturgeschichte*). As such they embody explanatory tropes ubiquitous in antiquity: in particular, prehistory as normative echo of recent history and of present society, politics, and culture. Most evident in the increasingly paired

⁵ Navigation, agriculture, the use of metals, and private property are all routinely linked with moral degradation; e.g. Hes. *Op.* 156-158, Plat. *Tim.* 24, Aratus *Phaen.* 109-111, Verg. *Ecl.* 4.31-33, Ov. *Met.* 1.128-130.

⁶ Thus loss of language was viewed negatively, as loss of communication and thus of human social identity, or even as a symptom of a terminal disease (Montiglio 2000, 228-233). Individual language use including dialects and accents, and the fact of linguistic diversity, could be deplored. For both of these ideas see further the discussion in Chapter Five.

⁷ On ancient ideas on the origins of peoples, see Fromentin and Gotteland 2001; seminally, Bickerman 1952.

practices of eponymy and etymology, this embodiment was no limited literary *topos*, but a powerful explanatory model purporting to reveal past, original, or even ideal states in the proper reading of present forms.⁸

This Chapter explores the link between language and human civilization as discussed in several authors, ranging from Plato and the Epicureans to Cicero and Vitruvius. These widely differing authors put the origin of language to remarkably consistent use, in descriptions of the prehistoric origin of civilization and in evocations of idealized societies for the present and future. Although the authors imagined different roles for e.g. the divine in human civilization, the role played by language stayed substantially the same. Despite what may be regarded as increasing rationalism, central aspects of a general 'myth' of language origins, including phrasing, remain roughly the same over time. From Plato to Vitruvius we in fact come full circle, with phrasing at least recycling from Plato's description of Prometheus' theft of fire and involvement in language origins to Vitruvius' unusual emphasis on fire in early human civilization. Although other elements of human civilization may thus receive greater or lesser emphasis, not to mention belief, language continues to be perceived as crucial to culture. Ancient thought on language origins provided a malleable prehistoric framework for discussing contemporary human civilization: the idealized origins of human groups, *anthropogony*, are addressed through reflection on the origin of

⁸ On eponymy, e.g. Malkin 1985. On etymology, e.g. Fresina 1991. Aetiological explanations of this sort imply fixity of things explained over time, that is throughout history as distinct from prehistory; especially in explanations of human nature and civilization, this may be a reflection of widespread ideas of anthropogony, linked with zoogony as part of cosmogony and thus in virtually all ancient sources based on fixity of species. See generally Bloomer 1991, 38-72, Furley 1989, and Blundell 1986; on specific authors e.g. Schrijvers 1999 (Lucretius), Myers 1994 (Ovid *Metamorphoses*), and Campbell 2000 (Plato *Timaeus*, arguably an exception in that it seems to imagine mutation across species boundaries).

language, *glottogony*.

Plato: *Protagoras*

In Plato's *Protagoras*, the sophist of that name tells a 'story' (μῦθον) in order to explain how virtue is teachable (320c8-328c3).⁹ The god Epimetheus is tasked with giving abilities to the animals to insure their survival; because of his lack of foresight, by the time he reaches humankind he has run out of abilities to give. His brother Prometheus then steals for humankind fire from Hephaestus, the skill to use it, and, lastly, "the other [skill] of Athena" ([τέχνην] τὴν ἄλλην τὴν τῆς Ἀθήνας; 321e2).¹⁰ For these thefts both Epimetheus and Prometheus are punished. The consequences for emergent humankind are more promising (322a1-8):

By contrast, because humankind shared divine lot, first, on account of their kinship with the divine alone among the animals, they believed in [OR: cultivated] gods, and strove to erect altars and statues for the gods; then they swiftly and skillfully fashioned articulate speech and words, and discovered dwellings and clothing and shoes and beds and the produce of the earth.

ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, πρῶτον μὲν διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζώων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, καὶ ἐπεχείρει βωμούς τε ἰδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα θεῶν· ἔπειτα φωνὴν καὶ

⁹ Protagoras offers his audience a choice between a 'story' and a more logical telling; apparently the content would be the same in either case, but one wonders how the reported story was categorized by the author of the *Cratylus*, who as discussed in Chapter One considered many tales of language origins 'laughable' (γελοῖον) and not λόγοι. At the end of his speech Protagoras says that he has used μῦθος and λόγος together. See Murray 1999; Most 1999, 33-34; and Calame 1999, 125 with n.9. For the linguistic implications of this 'story' see also Gera 2003, 127-147.

¹⁰ Cf. *Pol.* 274c: πῦρ μὲν παρὰ Προμηθέως, τέχναι δὲ παρ' Ἡφαίστου καὶ τῆς συντέχνου.

ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῷ τέχνῃ, καὶ οἰκήσεις καὶ ἐσθῆτας
καὶ ὑποδέσεις καὶ στρωμνὰς καὶ τὰς ἐκ γῆς τροφὰς ἤϋρετο.

The crucial sentence is underlined. Several points are noteworthy. The collocation of ‘speech’ and ‘words’ is generalizing, suggesting human language as opposed to any specific language (normally *διάλεκτος*). It is also pseudo- or proto-technical: at least in Aristotle *φωνή* comes to mean ‘vocal sounds’ as opposed to the noises of inanimate objects,¹¹ while even in Plato *ὀνόματα* is already specialized, meaning ‘words’, normally ‘nouns’, which may be checked for the ‘rightness’ of their representation. Put into the mouth of Protagoras, this emergence of human language is thus given a sophistic or philosophical context. It is an open question whether this first language is imagined as full language, i.e. with syntax, or as consisting only of ‘nouns’ or ‘names’.¹²

But the context supplied by the narrative is also broadly aitiological, both anthropologically, focused on the history of society, and theologically, linking the possibility of civilized life to the immanence of the divine. Human language is paired with the emergent features of civilization, including shelter and sustenance, as part of humankind’s inheritance, rightful or not, from the gods. Thus the features distinguishing humankind from the other animals, broadly speaking the hallmarks of *Kulturgeschichte*, are not just dependent on divine intervention but part of divine kinship. Humankind’s first act (*πρῶτον*) is to ‘establish a custom’ about (*ἐνόμισεν*) and represent (*ἐπεχείρει*

¹¹ On *φωνή* in Plato see Soulez 1996.

¹² Protagoras’ relativism could imply that this first language should be a matter of individual idiolect, like Hermocrates’ extreme ‘conventionalism’; on the other hand even Heraclitus, who professed that all things and thus potential referents for words are continually in flux, nonetheless argued that words could be ‘natural’ half of the time (see Gera 2003, 139, with nn. 97-100).

βωμούς τε ιδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα) this kinship. The primacy of this act acknowledges the deep role in all human activities and abilities played by the gods.

In partial contrast with the putatively rationalizing tendencies of Classical thought, here the gods play a role in the emergence of human language.¹³ Although the first representations created by humankind, ‘altars’ and ‘statues’ for the gods, are expressly non-linguistic, they pave the way for language. For immediately afterwards there is an elaboration in humankind’s representational abilities: from having evidently only plastic signs (at least indices, perhaps symbols) for the gods, humankind develops more complex language. The crucial sentence italicized above means literally “they swiftly articulated speech and words with their skill.” The terms used all resonate with contemporary and later technical usage on the topic of language and language origins. φωνή and διηρθρώσατο may imply that humankind previously had less articulate or inarticulate speech or non-speech sounds.¹⁴ The sequence is later made explicit by Diodorus Siculus: humankind starts with ‘confused speech’ before eventually ‘articulating’ (διαρθροῦν) and ‘setting’ it, a process imagined as producing different languages in different communities (1.7-8).¹⁵

Also important is τῇ τέχνῃ, ‘by their skill’. Which ‘skill’ is ambiguous, its

¹³ The difference may not have to do with Protagoras’ account being a μῦθος, for he offered his audience a choice between μῦθος and λόγος. See generally the papers in Buxton 1999. Cf. the rationalistic account of the *Cratylus*, where divine names for things are (perhaps not seriously) discussed.

¹⁴ The sequence of humankind’s first actions is marked by πρῶτον and ἔπειτα; these may indicate not temporal but logical order.

¹⁵ The two terms are combined by other authors, e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.12: ἀρθροῦν ... τὴν φωνήν; cf. 4.23.12 and see further below. For the sentiment cf. Isoc. *Nic.* 5-6, *Ant.* 254, and *Paneg.* 48; and Ael. 2.135.

genealogy confused in the story.¹⁶ For humankind to survive, Prometheus stole from Hephaestus and Athena together ‘the skillful wisdom’ (τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν) and fire (321d1-2). Upon receiving this gift humankind is said to have had ‘the wisdom for survival’ (τὴν ... περὶ τὸν βίον σοφίαν; 321d3-4). This wisdom, held jointly by Hephaestus and Athena, is contrasted with the ‘political’ (τὴν πολιτικὴν) wisdom guarded by Zeus. In this first instance, as elsewhere in literature, Hephaestus and Athena are linked as artistic gods. Because of Zeus’ ‘frightening guards’, Prometheus does not try to steal political wisdom, but turns (then? again?) to Hephaestus and Athena, from whom he takes ‘the fire-related skill of Hephaestus’ (τὴν ... ἔμπυρον τέχνην τὴν τοῦ Ἡφαίστου) and, at the same time but distinctly, ‘the other [skill] of Athena’ (τὴν ἄλλην τὴν τῆς Ἀθήνας). Athena’s skill, evidently different from Hephaestus’, goes unnamed.¹⁷ A metaphorical case may be made here for the appropriateness of Hephaestus’ skill to the creation of human language, for his skill as a craftsman is reflected in the verb used for that act: διηρθρώω means literally ‘to joint’ or ‘to make jointed or articulate’. Following immediately on the heels of their fashioning altars and statues, humankind’s creation of language assumes a distinctly material cast, but no workaday one: this construction is in line with the other divine creations.¹⁸

¹⁶ Some translations avoid the ambiguity by eliminating the phrase, following e.g. Deuschle’s 1861 edition. For the similar role played by “skill” in the development of medicine, cf. Miller 1955.

¹⁷ Taylor ad loc. suggests that the skill intended may be “spinning”, “weaving”, “pottery”, and/or “the cultivation of the olive”.

¹⁸ That the skill used to fashion language is that stolen from Hephaestus gains some support from that god’s minor role in creating language for Pandora in Hesiod; see Chapter Two and below. Cf. Cratylus’ conclusion that the first name-givers were knowledgeable and skilled (Chapter One). On “articulation” generally Laspia 1997.

Despite its divine pedigree, human language in this story is not as directly important for *Kulturgeschichte* as in some other contemporary and later accounts. Like the two skills, language is here not sufficient for the creation of society or political life. As noted, upon receiving Prometheus' gift humankind had 'the wisdom for survival', but not 'the political' kind of wisdom, guarded by Zeus. At first they live 'separately' (σποραδίην) and are easy prey for wild animals. They then try but fail to create *poleis*: humankind "treated each other unjustly because they did not have the political skill, with the result that they were dying, having become scattered again" (ἡδίκουν ἀλλήλους ἅτε οὐκ ἔχοντες τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, ὥστε πάλιν σκεδαννύμενοι διεφθείροντο; 322b7-8). Finally Zeus sends Hermes to give humankind 'justice and a sense of shame' (δικὴν καὶ αἰδῶ), with which they are able to form lasting associations among each other.¹⁹ Thus language makes societies possible but cannot make them good nor, therefore, useful for survival. Although integral to humankind's divine inheritance, and thus to its difference from the other animals, language here seems insufficient for the creation of lasting society; the history of individual groups is not discussed.²⁰

Does this story of human prehistory and its implications make Protagoras, as reported by Plato, a 'conventionalist', a 'naturalist', or neither? According to his story, does language come about by νόμος or by φύσις or through a combination of the

¹⁹ It is interesting that the sequence of gods responsible for gifts to humankind parallels that responsible for Pandora's gifts in Hesiod: first Hephaestus and then Hermes.

²⁰ Plato treats the origins and history of society elsewhere: *Crit.* 110-112, *Laws* 3.676-682, *Pol.* 273-274, *Tim.* 72-73.

two?²¹ Clearly humankind is here immediately responsible for ‘articulate speech’; this might imply νόμος, especially in parallel with uses of the verb διαρθρώω by later authors to indicate a ‘conventional’ or societal smoothing out of language after an earlier, natural origin (e.g. Diodorus 1.7-8), and given that ‘skill’ indicates a developed art or technique. But further reflection makes simple identification impossible. First, the nameless, almost impersonal subject of διηρθρώσατο depends for its abilities on the more distinctive gods. As such and in the focus of all its activities in this passage the human subject is little more than their proxy, fulfilling the role that Epimetheus did not and thus only carrying out the gods’ charter. This creation of language is hardly yet ‘rationalized’, despite the use of a term bound to become (perhaps because of this passage) almost a technical term in ancient literature on the subject.²² Humankind’s first linguistic act comes second to a first act, also representational but perhaps indexical rather than symbolic, the cultivation of the gods. Elsewhere Plato ascribes to the gods almost alone an awareness of words’ ‘rightness’: the language of the gods is a more accurate expression of its referents’ essences, οὐσίαι, and thus guided more by φύσις (*Crat.* 391d7-e, 400d-e). Given the degree of inspiration involved, can the unspecified collective responsible for fashioning articulate speech be the same as the νομοθέτης, literally ‘convention-setters’, imagined by later sources as the inventors of human language and thus lauded by them as the wisest among men? In this connection it is an

²¹ It is uncertain whether the story and its ideas are Protagoras’ (who is attributed a work “On the original state of things”; D.L. 9.55) or Plato’s; in either case they fit with fifth-century thought (Taylor 1976, 78).

²² διηρθρώσατο: cf. Diog Oen., et al. Of course there is rationalization here: the speaker is a sophist, the author is Plato – the overall topic is the teachability of virtue but the immediate context is the origin of humankind, the subject par excellence of Classical *Kulturgeschichte*.

open question if the first linguistic act described by Protagoras, although performed by human hands, is properly 'conventional' if made possible by divine skill and kinship.

On the other hand, the passage seems to turn also in the other direction. For if divine kinship ties human language close to nature, it also separates humankind from the other animals. The distinction thus imagined is the traditional and classical one, pervasive in the fifth century and in *Kulturgeschichte*, between 'nature' (φύσις) and 'culture' (νόμος). The meanings here are somewhat different from above: the former means not 'essence' but 'non-civilization', while the latter, although involving laws (νόμοι) and thus literally 'convention', finds its conditions of possibility in humankind's part-divine inheritance and nature (φύσις). Nature and culture have different referents, even different basic meanings, depending on their context; it is thus impossible consistently to pose the one against other, and to choose which a given author makes the basis of human language.

That nature and culture determine between them a continuum of possibilities is important for reading the ideas of contemporary and later authors. Protagoras' account of the origin of language is brief but, as has been shown, complex. Other authors are more expansive and thus, although at times more explicit about the difference between the origin of human language and the possibility of truth or rightness in individual words, no less complex in their invocation of φύσις and θέσις. The terms, like the two areas of language origins, are relational, their meanings dependent on context: natural origin is not the same as natural rightness of words, but also not necessarily opposed to or irreconcilable with a conventional creation of language, especially as in the case made by Protagoras, where human 'convention' is in fact underwritten by a skill and/or wisdom (Athena's skill) literally superhuman and thus, to judge from other sources,

more in touch with 'nature'.²³

Euripides and Diodorus Siculus

A second work seeming to endorse the relatively rare involvement of the divine in fashioning human language is Euripides' *Suppliants*.²⁴ Euripides has Theseus say the following about the emergence of human civilization (201-213):

And I praise whoever of the gods arranged our life away from confusion and savagery, first placing in us intellect, then giving us language, the messenger of reason, such that we understand the voice; and the growing of crops and watery drops from the sky for their nourishment, so that things might grow from the earth and our stomachs be satiated of thirst. In addition he gave protection against winter, and [the means] to ward off the heat of the sun-god/sky, and expeditions on the sea, so that we whose lands are poor would have interchange with each other. And those things that are without symbol and which we do not clearly know, seers foretell from looking into flame, according to the blemishes of innards, and from birds.

αἰνῶ δ' ὅς ἡμῖν βίωτον ἐκ πεφυρμένου / καὶ θηριώδους θεῶν
 διεσταθμήσατο, / πρῶτον μὲν ἐνθεῖς σύνεσιν, εἶτα δ' ἄγγελον /
 γλῶσσαν λόγων δούς, ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅπα, / τροφήν τε
 καρποῦ τῇ τροφῇ τ' ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ / σταγόνας ὑδρήλας, ὡς τὰ
 τ' ἐκ γαίας τρέφη / ἄρδη τε νηδύν· πρὸς δὲ τοῖσι χείματος /
 προβλήματ', αἴθου <τ'> ἐξαμύνασθαι θεοῦ, / πόντου τε
 ναυστολήμαθ', ὡς διαλλαγὰς / ἔχοιμεν ἀλλήλοισιν ὧν πένοιτο
 γῆ / ἃ δ' ἔστ' ἄσημα κού σαφῶς γινώσκομεν, / ἐς πῦρ
 βλέποντες καὶ κατὰ σπλάγχνων πτυχὰς / μάντεις
 προσσημαίνουσιν οἰωνῶν τ' ἄπο.

Like the authors treated in Chapter Two, Euripides implies a biological or

²³ On the *Protagoras* and the origin of language see further Fehling 1965, 212-217.

²⁴ See Gera 2003, 118-120; Collard 1975 ad locc.; and Lämmler 1962 i. 63ff.

physiological basis for human language. Here language at least comes after ‘intellect’ or ‘understanding’, σύνεσιν; it is simultaneously the ‘messenger of reason’ or of ‘persuasive discourse’, ἄγγελον λόγων. This close connection between language and reason at the physiological level is perhaps emphasized by the implied distinction between ‘language’, γλῶσσαν, and ‘voice’ or ‘utterance’, ὄπα. Since the former is introduced ‘to understand’ (ὥστε γιγνώσκειν) the latter, the implication is that ‘voice’ existed prior to ‘language’, the sequence described by other authors, e.g. Hesiod and Aristotle. Thus Euripides (or Theseus) toes a common line by seeming to regard language as part of humankind’s faculties for which biology is necessary but not sufficient.

As noted, however, Euripides is unusual among the extant sources in filling the gap with divine action. At the same time the suggestion is not very strong. The god goes unnamed (ὄς ... θεῶν) and might be a personification of the process of cultural emergence itself, rather than hidden invocation of a known deity. Also unusual, but more important than the weak reference to the divine, is the context: language takes its place in a clear series of *cultural* developments. Theseus’ praise is for whichever god led humankind away from ‘confusion and savagery’ (πεφυρμένου καὶ θηριωδοῦ), i.e. into civilized life. In this connection language is only one thing to be thankful for, and stands alongside agriculture, shelter and/or clothing, and navigation and trade. All of these are traditional hallmarks of human civilization: thus language is a part of the progress of civilization.

Finally, the coda to Theseus’ hymn is also intriguing, for in it Euripides moves away from traditional elements of the emergence of human culture to practices less commonly cited in that context. These divinatory practices, summarized here as ways of

discovering “those things that are without symbol and which we do not clearly know” (ἅ δ’ ἐστ’ ἄσημα κού σαφῶς γιννώσκομεν), were traditionally regarded as ways by which divine intent was communicated to humankind; thus the unnamed god of Theseus’ hymn, perhaps only a placeholder, may creep back in at the end. More striking is the final practice: augury, or the reading of bird-signs (οἰωνῶν τ’ ἄπο). Although bird-signs are of course common in Greek and Roman divinatory practice, their appearance here, at the end of a summary of humankind’s emergence into civilization, may be the more meaningful inasmuch as that emergence features language. Despite the centrality of intellect and its handmaiden, the tongue, something unspeakable must remain in the relationship between human culture and the (super)natural world. Language may be (one of) the distinguishing feature(s) of humankind as against the other animals, but clearly there remain further distinctions between humankind and the gods, or at least those beings with access to other realms of knowledge. Thus in this passage no less than elsewhere the distinguishing function of human language is subtly emphasized: just as the difference between comprehensible and incomprehensible speech is enough to separate civilized humankind from both non-civilized groups and the other animals, so too are the limits of human language, and of the human knowledge or reason to be expressed by it, enough to put even civilized humankind squarely in its place.

Later references to the divine in language origins point outside the Greco-Roman world while retaining its developed terms for the topic. Diodorus Siculus reports that the Egyptians attributed the origin of language, among other cultural inventions, to

Hermes (1.15.9-1.16.1):²⁵

Most highly honored of all by [Aegyptus] is Hermes, endowed with a unique character for devising things able to improve the common life. For it was by Hermes that the common language was first articulated and many nameless things received an appellation, that the discovery of letters came about, and that honors and sacrifices for the gods were established.

τιμᾶσθαι δ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ μάλιστα πάντων τὸν Ἑρμῆν, διαφόρῳ φύσει κεχορηγμένον πρὸς ἐπίνοιαν τῶν δυναμένων ὠφελῆσαι τὸν κοινὸν βίον. (16) Ὑπὸ γὰρ τούτου πρῶτον μὲν τήν τε κοινήν διάλεκτον διαρθρωθῆναι καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνωνύμων τυχεῖν προσηγορίας, τήν τε εὗρεσιν τῶν γραμμάτων γενέσθαι καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰς τῶν θεῶν τιμὰς καὶ θυσίας διαταχθῆναι.

The terms used to describe Hermes' activity are intriguing because specific to the Greek tradition of language origins. The god is reported to have both 'articulated' (διαρθρωθῆναι) language and to have assigned names to things (προσηγορίας). In this way Hermes is represented as addressing both of these long-standing issues in Greco-Roman thought on the origin of language: language's historical origin, distinguishing it from non-human animal and non-vocal sounds (ultimately a physiological problem, solved by 'articulation', here as usual διάρθρωσις); and its ideal origin in which words are assigned to things (ultimately a psychological problem, solved by the possession of 'mind' or 'intellect', here ἐπίνοια).²⁶ In this connection Diodorus refers to a common etymology of Hermes' name when he writes that Hermes

²⁵ See Burton 1972 ad 16.1: "The Greeks commonly identified Hermes with the Egyptian god Thoth." Thoth was credited with the creation of language and/or writing by both Egyptian (P. Hearst VI 9f, P. Ebers I 8-10) and Greek sources (Plato *Phil.* 18b-d, *Phaedr.* 59).

²⁶ Posidonius may have in mind a similar notion if he grounds linguistic diversity in "forethought" (πρόνοια; Strabo 2.3.7); see Chapter Five.

“also taught the Greeks about interpretation or explanation” (καὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας διδάξει τοῦτον τὰ περὶ τὴν ἑρμηνείαν, ὑπὲρ ὧν Ἑρμῆν αὐτὸν ὠνομάσθαι; 1.16.2). Thus beneath Diodorus’ reference to the divine, already at one remove from his own belief thanks to its attribution to Egyptian sources, lies the much more common Greco-Roman association of language with human physiology and psychology, an association made explicitly by Diodorus elsewhere (1.7, discussed above).²⁷ In each case discussed, the role played by the divine in Greco-Roman ideas on language origins is limited.²⁸

Epicureans: Lucretius, Diogenes of Oenoanda, Horace

Squarely opposed to any divine origin for language, Epicurean thought nonetheless links language strongly to other elements of human culture. “[T]he Epicureans saw the development of language as closely involved with the development of both justice and piety, and of course their opposites.”²⁹ As discussed in Chapter One, Epicurus’ coupling of ‘natural’ and ‘conventional’ stages, with each stage tied to a corresponding development in human society, was apparently not taken up as such by his followers. His Roman adherents in particular seem to have selectively presented

²⁷ Cf. Burton 1972, 79: “Diodorus’ account of Hermes is obviously a conflation of Greek and Egyptian elements.”

²⁸ At the same time, Diodorus, like Protagoras ap. Plato, links language origins with religious ritual (here ‘honors and sacrifices for the gods’; τὰς τῶν θεῶν τιμὰς καὶ θυσίας). Although these practices are not implicitly indexical as are the ‘sculptures’, ἀγάλματα, named by Protagoras, in Diodorus they follow immediately on the origin of writing and may thus continue humankind’s definitive semiotic turn.

²⁹ Campbell 2003, 284; cf. Sedley 1998, 121-122, and Obbink 1996, 306 and 349-366.

Epicurean accounts of language origins in order to make points more attuned to the politics and social problems of their times. Lucretius thus focuses on Epicurus' first stage, emphasizing how the foundation for right language and social behavior is provided by a correct understanding of 'nature', *natura*, and nothing more; while Horace's account acknowledges precisely the role played in language by politics and its power over 'convention', *usus*. Other Roman authors reject Epicureanism while paralleling Lucretius' and Horace's application of language origins, *glottogony*, to right behavior as reflected in the ideal origins of humankind, *anthropogony*.

The fullest evidence is provided by Lucretius at *DRN* 5.1028-1090, where the poet intends a renewed philosophical understanding of *natura*, 'nature', and *utilitas*, 'use-value', in language origins to ground language against the dangerous slippage encouraged by contemporary Roman politics. His ideas depend on Epicurean thought, but neither simply nor slavishly, and sometimes incorrectly, incompletely, or, as has at times been argued, archaically: there is some reason to think that Lucretius took little part in contemporary Epicurean society, preferring literary sources.³⁰ Thus this passage, like the poem generally, raises the 'Lucretian question': what is the relationship between Lucretius and his philosophical ancestor?³¹ How 'pure' is his doctrine, or by contrast how mediated by Hellenistic and later models, both philosophical and poetic, not to mention Lucretius' own experiences and ideas?³²

³⁰ On Lucretius' possibly multiple sources see Lück 1932. Canfora 1992 argues that Lucretius spent time in Rhodes in an Epicurean setting, according to Diogenes' letter to Menneas (fr. 122); against which, and against all dependence of Diogenes on Lucretius, see Smith 1993b and 1997.

³¹ Gale 1994, 129 and 1-5. On the name and history of the "question", see Clay 1983, 13-35.

³² Gale 2000, 171-172: "It has been suggested that the pervasive use of etymology in *De Rerum Natura* should be connected with Epicurean linguistic theory; but an equally (or perhaps more) plausible

Adding to these questions are several common ideas about Lucretius. The *DRN* is commonly supposed to have exerted relatively little influence on its contemporaries or successors, either as philosophy or as literature: it was surpassed in its time by the more accessible philosophical works produced by Cicero (helped by the widespread appeal of an eclectic and undemanding Stoicism),³³ and it was passed over for the more popular neoteric poetry of the *poetae noui* (quotations and parallels in Virgil and some few other authors notwithstanding).³⁴ Lucretius also has left little trace of himself or his life: in his poem he alludes to a relationship with one Memmius;³⁵ and he is mentioned by contemporaries and successors only infrequently, to the point of not being mentioned at all.³⁶ From these apparent lacks, of literary or philosophical influence and of documented interpersonal interactions, and from the singular nature of his poem, Lucretius has traditionally been imagined as a sort of recluse who, in a nod to Epicurean

connection might be made with the prominence of etymological play in Alexandrian and neoteric poetry.” Cf. Sedley 1998.

³³ See Sedley 1998.

³⁴ Thus Conte writes that “[o]nly Virgil in his *Georgics* seems to have taken Lucretius seriously as a fellow poet” (1994: 171); cf. Hadzits 1935; Gellius 1.21.7. Gale 1991 sees strong Lucretian influence on Virgil’s *Georgics*; she also argues for a connection between Lucretius and the epic tradition, but mostly in his being influenced by it (Gale 1994, 99-128); on Lucretius and Virgil see further Suerbaum 1980. *Contra* Rochette 2001, 19: “L’influence de Lucrèce sur les poètes de l’époque augustéenne est sans contest importante.” See Zetzel 1998 for parallels between Lucretius and Cicero’s *De Republica*; and Sedgwick 1923 for Cicero’s poetry. On Lucretius’ *Nachleben* in general see the essays in Poignault 1999.

³⁵ Probably C. Memmius L. f. (*RE* 8); for his relationship with Lucretius see Dudley 1965, 19ff; he was also patron to Catullus (28.9) and Cinna.

³⁶ Cicero provides the only contemporary reference to the *DRN* in a letter to Quintus (2.10.3); for quotes of and allusions to the poem in Cicero’s works, see Pucci 1966.

dictates, had little to do with his times: the mind of a Donne in the life of a Dickinson.³⁷

More recently, however, Lucretius and his poem have been recognized as attuned to contemporary social and political life.³⁸ In addition to using social terms and concepts to illuminate Epicurean ideas about the physical world,³⁹ Lucretius seems to advocate political change to make the ideal philosophical life more possible. Ideally politics would be avoided by everyone, since it is ultimately inspired by an irrational fear of death (3.59-86). Thus for example Lucretius trenchantly compares the Roman *cursus honorum* with the myth of Sisyphus (3.998-1002).⁴⁰ Practically, however, even the Epicurean philosopher must deal with the world, including its politics, as is. Lucretius has a “realistically sceptical view of social institutions ... The political institutions of Rome are better than anarchy, but they are imperfect, and the wise man will avoid getting involved in them unless he has to.”⁴¹

³⁷ E.g. Boyancé 1963, 12: “sa hautaine figure [est] celle d’un isolé”, producing (57) “une oeuvre qui ... au Ier siècle avant notre ère, devait être inattendue.” This image of Lucretius was beloved of the Modernists.

³⁸ See Grimal 1978, *passim*, e.g. 233: “en réalité le poème *Sur la nature* est en rapports étroits avec une réalité politique et spirituelle qui est celle des dernières années de la République romaine.” The point may be made about Epicureans more generally; see e.g. Long 1986, 292: “an Epicurean will value political communities, in so far as they are useful to the stable provision of those things that he regards as supremely worthwhile”; and the sources cited in nn. 60-73, below.

³⁹ See Cabisius 1984/5; Davies 1931/2, 36-38; and Kenney 1977, 33.

⁴⁰ See Fowler 1989, 140-141; and West 1969, 100-102. Contrast the better sort of height reached by Epicurus in his discovery of true philosophy: e.g. 5.1457, *artibus ad summum donec uenere cacumen* (with Asmis 1996, 775-776: “*cacumen* may well point to the solitary, culminating peak of Epicurus’ discovery. ... [E]ven if Lucretius has in mind artistic achievement in general, what makes this achievement so outstanding is that it culminates in Epicurean philosophy as the greatest art of all”).

⁴¹ Fowler 1989, 148-149.

Lucretius' discussion of language origins may thus be read, in the context of his disdain for contemporary politics and society, as an attempt to ground a hoped-for rejuvenation of the Roman cultural lexicon in right philosophy instead of in wrong-headed political maneuverings. His discussion is also impacted by the close relationship imagined by the poem between its author and Epicurus. Given the materialist thrust of Epicurean theory, language like other aspects of the world, including social aspects, has an origin ultimately grounded at least in part in its physics.⁴² Indeed, Lucretius more than many other authors is more easily identifiable with one side of the traditional opposition, 'naturalism'.⁴³ As always however the definition of 'nature' is crucial. The poem makes human language 'natural' in two senses.

First, it arises from humankind's experience of the natural world, that is from its internal reactions to perceived external phenomena. Lines 1028-1029 contain this idea: "But nature compelled [humankind] to utter the various sounds of language, and utility stamped out the names of things" (*at uarios linguae sonitus natura subegit / mittere, et utilitas expressit nomina rerum*). That 'nature' is here perhaps shorthand for humankind's perceptions of the world is suggested by other passages where humans utter sounds in response to various phenomena. The connection between emotional reactions to perception and their expressions in voice may be indicated by their absence: primitive humans "did not search with loud cries for the day and the sun in the fields,

⁴² See Campbell 2003, 15-18, 283-293, and commentary ad locc. Hozenat 1997 is a strong exponent of Lucretius as 'naturalist' in this sense; cf. Bailey ad 1033: "According to Epicurean doctrine, all the capacities of a thing, whether animate or inanimate, are implicit in its atomic structure."

⁴³ So e.g. Schrijvers 1962, 344: the "premier développement du langage formerait alors un processus naturel"; and 350: "l'analogie tirée dans ces vers de la vie des enfants et des animaux est en elle-même l'indice du caractère naturel de l'origine et du développement du langage."

wandering trembling in the shadows of the night, but looked forward to them in silence, entombed in sleep” (*nec plangore diem magno solemque per agros / quaerebant pauidi palantes noctis in umbris, / sed taciti respectabant somnoque sepulti*; 972-974). Here the point is not that primitive humans could not make sounds or even communicate, but rather that they did not experience the emotion, fear, often associated with darkness by civilized humankind.⁴⁴ These primitive humans knew that the sun would return: they were more concerned about the real possibility of being eaten while they slept (982-987; “entombed in sleep” thus reads as a grimly humorous *hysteron proteron*, sliding from metaphor to real description by looking ahead to *sepeliri* in 993).⁴⁵

Being eaten alive also results, naturally, in vocalization: “each one of them seized at that time provided living food for the beasts, being gutted by their teeth, and filled the woods and mountains and forests with groaning, seeing their living entrails entombed in a living grave” (*unus enim tum quisque magis deprensus eorum / pabula uiua feris praebebat, dentibus haustus, / et nemora ac montis gemitu siluasque replebat, / uiua uidens uiuo sepeliri uiscera busto*; 990-993); the final line with its repetition of *u* may be read as onomatopoeic of the groaning. Those who survived being gnawed on “wept for death with spine-tingling voices” (*horriferis accibant uocibus Orcum*; 996),

⁴⁴ Evidence for fear of the dark or of the night is scanty; see Stat. *Theb.* 4.282, Manilius 1.69. Asmis suggests that Lucretius’ “special target is Hesiod”, whose suggestion that golden age humans “died as though subdued by sleep” (θνησκον δ’ ἔσθ’ ὑπνω δεδμημένοι; *Op.* 116) is corrected by Lucretius, who makes sleep “a time of terror, not of calm repose” (1996: 767-768).

⁴⁵ On the living conditions of primitive humans in Lucretius, see Allen 1996. Campbell argues that the traditional debate between Lucretius’ “primitivism” or “progressivism” is misguided, “more often obfuscat[ing] than illuminat[ing] ancient theories” (2003: 10-12); cf. Asmis 1996 esp. 763; Cole 1990; Blundell 1986, 103-105; Long 1986, 308-311; Furley 1978, esp. 14-17; Dodds 1973, 1-25; and Edelstein 1967.

whether because of their ‘terrible wounds’ (*ulcera tetra*; 995) or because of the sorry state of primitive medicine (“savage twisting pains deprived them of life, lacking help because not knowing what their wounds needed”; *eos uita priuarant uermina saeua / expertis opis, ignaros quid uolnera uellent*; 997-998).⁴⁶ The combined effect of these instances of primitive vocalization is to show how language is dependent on the individual’s (emotional) experience of the natural world.⁴⁷ At the same time, it must be admitted that these primitive vocalizations need not be human language *per se*; this possible distinction is returned to below, after the second sense of ‘natural’ is considered.

In addition to meaning ‘nature as experienced perceptions’, *natura* in 1029 must also mean, second, ‘humankind’s nature’, in a sense similar to Latin *ingenium* or ‘inherent character’.⁴⁸ This second meaning for ‘natural’ language is implied by the

⁴⁶ Despite the dangers of primitive life the point of the passage, in keeping with Lucretius’ pedagogical aims, is to contrast the relatively non-misled life of prehistory with the foolhardy and hybriatic lives of contemporary humankind. For “progress and primitivism” in Lucretius, see the balanced appraisal of Asmis: “it is ‘preposterous’ to suppose that Lucretius prefers the fate of the human savage to that of modern man. [citing Taylor 1947, 189] At the same time, Lucretius clearly regrets much that has happened at every stage of human history” (1996: 763), “deploring one aspect – the escalation of desires as prompted by increased technical innovation” (1996: 775). See also Long 1986, 310: Lucretius “never suggests that we would be better off by returning to primitivism”; Furley 1978, who reads Lucretius’ prehistory as “a natural development that is non-moral, assessed by moral criteria drawn from outside that development” (17), namely Epicurean philosophy “underst[anding] the *limits* of things” (9, emphasis in original, citing *DRN.* 1.74-77 and 3.944-945) and concludes that “[I]t is both ludicrous and unnecessary to think that Lucretius commends to us a [primitive] life” (16); Borle 1962 and Taylor 1947.

⁴⁷ The same perspective may explain Lucretius’ own expressions of linguistic pride: his lived experience was of the troubled late Republic, when language had shifted from trustworthy to not; in this context his achievements read as a natural Epicurean emotional reaction. Cf. the sentimental perception of one’s own language in cacophony in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (Chapter Five).

⁴⁸ Both terms refer originally to ‘birth’ or ‘coming-to-be’; OLD s.v. *ingenium* 1 and s.v. *natura* 1 (along with 15, ‘the private parts’).

larger philosophical context in which a creature's atomic structure determines its capacities (*uires*), and by the larger poetic context with its focus on *Kulturgeschichte* and its comparison of humankind with other animals. Language, like other aspects of human life, is a cultural response to the physical world, and thus in part dictated by the make-up of that world. The continued comparison with animal attributes and abilities makes it clear that culture is a direct result of nature, or rather of the interaction of both kinds of 'nature', the physical world and the inherent capacities of humankind.

'Nature' (*natura*), in the external sense of a world experienced as 'perceptions' (*sensus*), is necessary for the sounds of language (*linguae sonitus*), and is thus by extension sufficient for momentary utterances like cries.⁴⁹ But external nature is not sufficient in the poem for the creation of human language as such, since the same stimuli result in vocalization from humans and from other animals. Instead, 'utility' leads to the 'production of names for things' (*utilitas expressit nomina rerum*).⁵⁰ An extended analogy between human and animal speech sounds (1063-1081), with its conclusions about the favorable distinctiveness of humankind, suggests that for Lucretius this "utility" is a function of a second kind of 'nature', the internal nature of humankind inherent in its unique atomic structure (and thus closer to *ingenium* than to *natura*, an overlap already present in the Greek φύσις)⁵¹ and realized in its social

⁴⁹ Hozenat 1998 argues that *sonitus linguae* are already "articulated", since articulated language is a matter of physiology; cf. Offermann 153-154 and 156. Schrijvers 1962, 340 disagrees, finding articulate sounds only in the second stage (*nomina rerum*; cf. Bailey ad loc.). Perhaps no clear distinction with *uox* may be made, since Lucretius is not as systematic a physiologist as Aristotle.

⁵⁰ For *utilitas* like *usus* not being 'need' see the discussion in Chapter Two.

⁵¹ On φύσις in Epicurus and Lucretius, see Clay 1969. Lovejoy and Boas list 66 meanings for 'nature' (1935: 447-456).

structures.

In addition to providing positive analogical arguments for ‘naturalism’ (albeit with ‘nature’ defined in two specific ways), the extended comparison of human language and animal vocalizations is presented as part of a refutation of one traditional form of ‘conventionalism’, the idea of a single name-giver individually responsible for the original creation of language. After comparing the gestural proto-language of infants to the nascent abilities of other animals, the poem continues (1041-1055):

It follows that to think that someone distributed names to things at that time, and that humankind learned its first words from him, is stupid. For why would this man be able to note everything with speech sounds and to utter the various sounds of language, if the others are thought unable to do so at the same time? Moreover, if there had not been others also using speech sounds socially, where did the noteworthiness of utility come from, and from where did that man first receive the power to know and see in his heart what he wanted to do? Likewise he alone would not have been able to compel and conquer the many, so that they would want to learn names for things. Nor is it easy with any rationale to teach and persuade the deaf what needs to be done: for they would not be open to it nor by any means would they tolerate their ears being beaten in vain by unheard-of sounds of speech.

proinde putare aliquem tum nomina distribuisse / rebus et inde homines didicisse uocabula prima, / desiperest. nam cur hic posset cuncta notare / uocibus et uarios sonitus emittere linguae, / tempore eodem alii facere id non quisse putentur? / praeterea si non alii quoque uocibus usi / inter se fuerant, unde insita notities est / utilitatis et unde data est huic prima potestas, / quid uellet facere ut sciret animoque uideret? / cogere item pluris unus uictosque domare / non poterat, rerum ut perdiscere nomina uellent. / nec ratione docere ulla suadereque surdis / quid sit opus facto, facilest. neque enim paterentur / nec ratione ulla sibi ferrent amplius auris / uocis inauditos sonitus obtundere frustra.

This is strong confirmation of an originary ‘naturalism’ free from ‘conventionalism’. The poem routinely praises Epicurus as uniquely knowledgeable, indeed near-divine, for having single-handedly brought truths to humankind through

language; and Lucretius at several points indulges his own pride at having rendered those truths into Latin. But such individual responsibility is denied, outright and at great length, for the emergence of language in the first place. Although Lucretius allows individuals moments of genius or inspiration in language use (e.g. Epicurus' original philosophical discoveries, Lucretius' own translation of the same into poetry), there is nothing like even the expert name-givers of Epicurus' second stage of language origins.⁵² Thus it goes almost without saying that Lucretius imagines no original νομοθέτης aside from *natura*.

At the same time as Lucretius thus strongly affirms an origin for language in 'nature' (albeit mostly in two senses, external and internal to humankind; and to a lesser extent in a third sense, reflective of the term's intuitive or etymological meaning in Latin) and strongly denies an origin in a traditional kind of 'convention', he cannot avoid a 'conventionalism' of sorts.⁵³ For if nature both forces speech sounds and makes

⁵² Thus Manuwald 1980, 41: "Es darf als gesichert gelten, dass bei Lukrezens Schilderung der Entstehung der Sprache ... die θέσις (bzw. λογισμός)-Phase, welche Epikur beschreibt ..., fehlt" (emphasis added); cf. Asmis 1996, 766, who accounts for the omission "because [Lucretius] deals only with the period in which language originated" whereas "the conventional stage ... succeeds the natural stage" (following Offermann 1972); and Perelli 1966-7, who explains the lack of second and third Epicurean stages in Lucretius (207) as the poet focusing his efforts on combating the Stoic idea of a single, rational name-giver (218). Manuwald is right to specify a "thesis-stage" "as described by Epicurus", for as shown below Lucretius' image of language origins does include at least 'non-natural' if not traditionally 'conventional' elements.

⁵³ Cf. Pigeaud 1983, 143: "Lucrèce, admettant le point de vue general epicurien que le langage est d'origine purement naturelle, ne pouvait pas ne pas réintroduire, sous une forme ou une autre, la convention, parce qu'il ne se contente pas d'affirmer un acte de foi ... mais qu'il veut demontrer ce qu'il affirme." Cf. idem 128, where it is argued that Epicurus' own more schematic discussion is a response to the same problem of language as such developing from its rudiments (*primordia*). *Contra* Dahlmann 1928, 21: "Lucretium negligere videmus postea quoque in lingua procreanda θέσιν aliquid valuisse", both of whose reasons ("neque dicit diversas ex initio fuisse loquellas neque distinguit inter ἐναργῆ et οὐ συνωρωμένα πράγματα"), while literally correct, miss the implication of linguistic diversity in Lucretius' account.

language an inherent capacity of humankind it does not thus produce language as such. The fact that the gap between speech and language is not bridged by nature alone, even internal nature including intellect, is made clear in the origin of language being compared not with the emergence of speech in children, but with their pre-linguistic recourse to gestures and thus with animals' nascent, undeveloped abilities (1028-1040). In modern terms, for Lucretius phylogeny is not the same as ontogeny, at least not without help in addition to nature.⁵⁴

A broadly similar Epicurean discussion of language origins, again with explicit rejection of the nomothetic 'conventionalist' thesis, is preserved in a second-century AD inscription commissioned by Diogenes of Oenoanda. There is some controversy about Diogenes' exact date and, even more, his intellectual relationships with his predecessors. I follow Smith, who argues that he is "unlikely to be post-Hadrianic by more than a few years."⁵⁵ The fragmentary nature of Diogenes' inscription makes difficult complete analysis of his relationship with Lucretius. But it may be concluded with Évrard that the two are mostly similar in content but dissimilar in style: "Lucrèce est un poète au style très imagé, capable d'élans lyriques nombreux et exaltés. Tout au contraire, Diogène ... pratique un style relativement simple et dépouillé."⁵⁶ Differences

⁵⁴ Cf. the discussion of Lucretius' use of *emittimus* and *exprimimus* in Chapter Two.

⁵⁵ Smith 1997, 68; this seems confirmed by letter-forms and the chronology of Oenoanda's constructions (Coulton 1986).

⁵⁶ Évrard 1999, 54; cf. 57: "Diogène a une capacité à présenter les chose de manière vive et humoristique"; cf. Casini 1949, 279. Similarity does not mean that Diogenes knew Lucretius personally, as some have argued (e.g. Canfora 1992); Smith goes further: 1997, 78: "Diogenes did not know Lucretius personally, was not a contemporary of his, and was not influenced by him"; and 74: "similarities between the two writers' expositions of Epicureanism can most reasonably be attributed ... to Epicurus' influence on both." There are some differences in the treatment of specific themes, e.g. *amicitia* (Évrard 1999, 60).

of date and mood notwithstanding, both authors present a similar Epicurean account of the history of human culture, with language playing a central role.

Fragment 12 (Smith, =HK fr. 48 and 49; =fr. 10 W) of the inscription is concerned with the origins of human civilization, including language. The first two sections discuss shelter and clothing, and stress that the proximal cause of these innovations is ‘necessity’, *χρεῖα*, arisen from the human experience of nature (“the accidents of history”, *περιπτώσεις μετὰ τοῦ χρόνου*):

[section I] on account of the caves to which they wandered as time passed, fleeing winter, they came upon the idea of shelter, and on account of the coverings which they made for their bodies, whether with feathers or with grass or even with skins, already seizing upon flocks, [they came upon] the idea of clothing (although not yet woven, but perhaps felt⁵⁷ or similar). Then the passage of time [II] added to their thoughts, or to the thoughts of those with them, also the loom. Accordingly it is due to no skill, there being none, nor to any of the gods nor Athena: for all things were produced by necessity and the accidents of history.

[διὰ μὲν τῶν σπηλαίων εἰς ἃ ἐφοίτων τοῦ χρόνου προ]- / [I] [βαί]νοντος, χειμῶνας / [φεύ]γοντες, εἰς ἐπίνοι- / [α]ν [οί]κημάτων ἦλθον, / [δι]ὰ δὲ τῶν περιβολῶν / ἅς ἐποιοῦντο τοῖς σώμα- / σιν, εἴτε φύλλοις αὐτὰ / [σ]κέποντες εἴτε βοτά - / ναις εἴτε καὶ δοραῖς, ἀναι- / ροῦντες ἤδη τὰ προ[ό]βα- / τα, εἰς ἐνθύμησιν ἐσ- / θητῶν (στρεπτῶν μὲν / οὔπω, κασωτῶν δ’ ἴσως / ἢ ὀποιωνοῦν). εἴτα δὲ / προβαίνων ὁ χρόνος / [II] ταῖς ἐπινοίαις αὐτῶν / ἢ τῶν μετ’ αὐτοὺς ἐνέ- / βαλεν καὶ τὸν ἰστόν. / εἰς οὖν οὐδεμίαν τέχνην, / [ὡς ο]ὐδὲ ταύτας, οὔτ’ ἄλ- / λον τινὰ θεῶν οὔτε / τὴν Ἀθηναῖαν παραλημ- / πτέον· πάσας γὰρ ἐγένε- / νησαν αἱ χρεῖαι καὶ πε- / ριπτώσεις μετὰ τοῦ / χρόνου.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Chilton 1971 ad loc.

⁵⁸ The text is Smith 1993.

Both the specific cultural artifacts and their ultimate grounding in necessity are in line with the thought of Epicurus and Lucretius. Diogenes explicitly disavows the involvement of the gods and, strikingly, any role played by ‘skill’, τέχνη: humankind creates culture ‘naturally’, that is both in accordance with its own nature and in response to external nature. The close pairing of ‘skill’ with the mention of Athena may mean that Diogenes is arguing against the sort of *Kulturgeschichte* attributed by Plato to Protagoras in the dialogue of that name. This notion is perhaps strengthened by the close argument against Plato’s *Cratylus* in the section of the inscription that follows. Diogenes makes clear that the basic explanatory framework for human culture includes language above all:

Even with respect to vocal sounds (I mean the names and words [III] whose first utterance was made by men born from the earth) we must neither accept Hermes as teacher, as some say (for this is quite clearly foolish), nor believe those philosophers who say that names were set to things according to convention and teaching, so that human beings have their own [IV] [names] for the sake of easy expression with one another. For it is ridiculous, indeed more ridiculous than anything, and also impossible, that one man on his own could gather together so many (for there were not kings at that time, nor letters anywhere nor sounds: for [V] it would be unworkable, unless through commands, for the gathering to come about), or, having gathered them, to conduct himself in the manner of a grammarist by taking up a rod, and touching each thing to say “Let this be called stone, and this wood, and this human or dog or ox or ass” [VI]⁵⁹

καὶ τῶν / φθόνγων δὲ ἔνεκεν (λέ- / γω δὲ τῶν τε ὀνομάτων /
καὶ τῶν ῥημάτων, ὧν [III] ἐποίησαντο τὰς πρώτας /
ἀναφθένεις οἱ ἀπὸ / γῆς φύντες ἄνθρωποι), / μήτε τὸν Ἑρμῆν
παρα- / λαμβάνωμεν εἰς δι- / δασκαλίαν, ὡς φασὶν / τινες
(περιφανῆς γὰρ / αὕτη γε ἀδολεσχία), / μήτε τῶν φιλοσόφων

⁵⁹ At VI the stone is broken off.

/ πιστεύωμεν τοῖς λέ- / γουσι κατὰ θέσιν καὶ / διδαχὴν
 ἐπιτεθῆναι / τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγ[μα]- / σιν, ἴν' αὐτῶν
 ἔχωσ[ι τὰ ἴδι]- / [IV] α τῆς πρὸς [ἀ]λλήλους ἔνε- / κα ῥαδίας
 ἀποδηλώσεως οἱ / ἄνθρωποι. γελοῖον γάρ / ἔστι, μᾶλλον δὲ
 παν- / τὸς γελοίου γελοιότε- / ρον, πρὸς τῷ καὶ τὸ ἀ- /
 δύνατον αὐτῷ προσεῖ- / ναι, συναγαγεῖν μὲν / τινὰ τὰ
 [το]σάδε πλήθη / ἕνα τυν[χά]νοντα (οὐδὲ / γάρ πω τότε
 βασιλέες ἦ- / σαν, οὐδὲ μὴν γράμμα- / τα ὅπου μὴδὲ οἱ φθόν- /
 γοι· περὶ γάρ τούτων καὶ / [V] ἀ[μῆχανον ἂν ἦν, εἰ μὴ] / [διὰ]
 προσταγῆς, τὴν / συ[ν]αγωγὴν αὐτῶν γε- / νέσθαι),
 συναγαγόντα / δὲ καθηγεῖσθαι γραμ- / ματιστοῦ τρόπον [κ]ερ-
 / κεῖδός τινος ἀν[τιλαβό]- / μενον, καὶ ἐκάστου τῶ[ν] /
 πραγμάτων θινγάνον- / τὰ ἐπιλέγειν ὅτι “του- / τεῖ μὲν
 καλείσθω λί- / [θ]ος, τουτεῖ δὲ ξύλον, / [τ]ουτεῖ δὲ ἄνθρωπος /
 ἢ κύων [ἦ] βοῦς ἢ ὄν[ος]

Diogenes' attack on 'conventionalism' refers probably above all to its presentation in Plato's *Cratylus*; 'conventionalism' is imagined in a strong, almost Hermogenean strain as meaning a single human name-giver responsible for the origin of language. This is also the form of 'conventionalism' attacked by Lucretius. Both Epicureans are equally vituperative: Diogenes' statement that the idea of a single name-giver is 'ridiculous, indeed more ridiculous than anything' (γελοῖον γάρ / ἔστι, μᾶλλον δὲ παν- / τὸς γελοίου γελοιότε- / ρον) echoes Lucretius' dismissal of the idea as 'stupid' (*desipere*; 5.1043, discussed above). But Diogenes' dismissal of the related idea that words were created to ease communication among men also contradicts Epicurus. For the latter, as discussed in Chapter One, explicitly described a second stage of language origins, in which words, having come about 'naturally', were modified by certain men precisely for the purpose of making communication easier, that is were altered by 'convention': "Later, the peculiar words were set in common within each group so that explanations to one another would become less confusing and more concise" (ὕστερον δὲ κοινῶς καθ' ἕκαστα ἔθνη τὰ ἴδια τεθῆναι πρὸς τὸ τὰς

δηλώσεις ἤττον ἀμφιβόλους γενέσθαι ἀλλήλοις καὶ συντομωτέρως δηλουμένας; *Hdt.* 76). The terms employed here are precisely those traditionally taken to indicate ‘conventionalism’.

The Epicurean ideas presented by Diogenes, Lucretius, and Epicurus, framed in human prehistory, are not divorced from participation in contemporary social and political worlds.⁶⁰ Lucretius’ poem, although ostensibly apolitical because Epicurean, may be read as containing a strong plea for peace (and thus, given the necessary contrast with contemporary social conditions, political transformation?). The prologue to the poem concludes with a request to Venus (1.38-43):

You, goddess, surround Mars with your holy body while he sleeps, and pour sweet speech from your mouth, seeking out, famous one, placid peace for the Romans. For neither am I able to carry out this task with equanimity at an unjust time in my fatherland, nor is the famous scion of Memmius able to abandon the common good amid such events.

hunc tu, diua, tuo recubantem corpore sancto / circumfusa super, suaui-
ex ore loquellas / funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem. / nam
neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo / possumus aequo animo nec
Memmi clara propago / talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.

Both Lucretius and his patron Memmius are depicted as unable to fulfill the Epicurean ideal of ἀταραξία, ‘non-disturbance’:⁶¹ Lucretius almost literally, with *aequo animo* translating the Greek term; and Memmius at a further remove, in that he cannot avoid

⁶⁰ Epicurus himself in *Hdt.* 75-76 may have been publicly correcting a ‘conventional’ idea espoused by his student Metrodorus; there are politics and then there are politics (see Περὶ Φύσεως 28, ed. Sedley 1973; with Campbell 2003, 285-286). On Lucretius (or the *De Rerum Natura*) as political see generally Minyard 1985 and Nichols 1976.

⁶¹ Cf. 3.939 and 962, 5.1119 and 1143-1151; Epicurus fr. 8 and 551 Usener; and Plut. *Col.* 1124d.

politics.⁶² Avoidance of politics and public life is one principal sign of ἀταραξία: “better by far quietly to obey than to want to rule things with empire and control kingdoms” (*ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum / quam regere imperio res uelle et regna tenere*; 5.1129-1130). In order to achieve this goal, Lucretius hopes that Venus will subdue Mars, that is that universal peace will put war to an end and make a better life possible.⁶³

To this end Lucretius seems to seek a transformation of contemporary political life.⁶⁴ His condemnation of political life is ubiquitous and trenchant. At one point he compares political ambition with the task of Sisyphus (3.998-1002).⁶⁵ Politics is pointless, motivated ultimately and uselessly by one irrational pillar of modern society, the fear of death. The same passage continues by making the point more generally, linking the base interests and desires of contemporary society with the punishment of the Danaids: just as they must continually try to fill porous jars with liquid, so too does

⁶² Grimal 1957 dates the prologue to shortly after Memmius, Lucretius’ patron, became a partisan of Caesar despite his anti-Caesarian sentiments.

⁶³ As Leonard and Smith note ad 41, *tempore iniquo* “would fairly describe the condition of Roman society at almost any time from the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C. to the establishment of the principate by Augustus in 27 B.C.” Momigliano 1960 sees the more specific time of 44 BC as a unique moment of concerted Epicurean involvement in politics; cf. Sedley 1997.

⁶⁴ *pace* Fowler 1989, 150: Lucretius “seems still focused upon individual salvation, how an individual Epicurean might survive in a hostile world. And the answer is the same as it always has been: stay away from politics”; and Grimal 1978, 252-254. But see also Fowler 1989, 122: “It is becoming a commonplace of modern scholarship that the *De Rerum Natura* is a political work, and like most commonplaces this is more true than false.” Cf. Asmis 1996, 777-778: “Lucretius does not, I think, have any illusion that this Golden Age will ever come about; and this, I think, accounts for the strain of pessimism that pervades his entire history of mankind.”

⁶⁵ Cf. Homer *Od.* 11.593-600, Cicero *T.D.* 1.5.10.

humankind try to fill its souls with delights, all in vain (3.1003-1010).⁶⁶ Lucretius may not have involved himself in politics or public life, but he was certainly concerned about both and able to imagine better alternatives. Contemporary society, Lucretius argues, instead of being centered around an inevitably unsatisfying political scramble, itself rooted only in an irrational fear of death, should, like language, be geared towards the real necessities of life (*utilitas*) as dictated by a philosophical understanding of nature (*natura*).

Lucretius' politics may condition his presentation of language origins. As noted above, Lucretius does not follow Epicurus' ideas completely: whereas Epicurus traces the development of language from its origin through its diversification by disparate groups to its modification by individuals, Lucretius dilates on the first stage. The first stage is when language is most correctly expressive of nature, when the connections between words and things are naturally instead of socially or politically motivated. A similar turn to nature underlies Lucretius' extended comparison of human language with animal sounds and abilities: just as animal abilities are clear examples of behaviors attuned to nature, and thus to 'use-value' (*utilitas*), so too should human language, in Lucretius' view, be attuned once more to nature as the ability most characteristic of humankind. That the best example of this is language origins goes hand-in-hand with Lucretius' contempt for the idea of a single name-giver and thus with his omission of Epicurus' own ideas on later name-giving. Although Lucretius treats the origins of civilization broadly, his account of language origins seems especially supportive of his apparent plea for a transformed political society.

⁶⁶ Cf. 1.2, 3.936, 6.20-21.

Regardless of its author's intentions, the *De Rerum Natura* and especially its section on human origins seems to have been adopted by politically-minded Epicureans as a sort of manifesto for revolutionary change.⁶⁷ In these other persons a vague plea for peace has been transformed into more specific requests for, and in some cases actions towards, ideally lawful and moral society during a time of governmental uncertainty. The *locus classicus* of this seemingly uncharacteristic Epicurean involvement in politics is the time leading up to and including the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC: “[f]or the first and last time the Epicureans deserted *en masse* their *hortulus* and became eminently political.”⁶⁸ The reasons for this participation in politics are complex, and must depend in the final analysis on individual motivations difficult to reconstruct.⁶⁹ But in general two points may be made. First, if avoidance of politics was the ideal (μη πολιτεύεσθαι; e.g. fr. 548, 554 and 556 Usener), participation in politics is condoned by Epicureans, and indeed by Epicurus himself, as a sort of necessary evil in order to lay the political or social foundations required for personal peace: “laws do well by the wise, not so that they don’t commit injustice, but so that they are not treated unjustly” (οἱ νομοὶ χάριν τῶν σοφῶν κείνται, οὐχ ὅπως μὴ ἀδίκωσιν, ἀλλ’ ὅπως μὴ ἀδικῶνται; fr. 530 Usener). Although this seems to have meant that Epicureans

⁶⁷ Cf. Rochette 2001, 16: “La description des origines de l’humanité ... doit sans doute sa popularité aux idées nouvelles qu’il présente sur le progrès de l’humanité, qui correspondaient fort bien aux aspirations des Romains de cette période de recherche d’une paix durable”; and Grimal 1978, 243: “Lucrèce a évidemment cherché à illustrer par l’expérience contemporaine les préceptes généraux de la doctrine [epicurienne].”

⁶⁸ Momigliano 1960, 385. Cf. Sedley 1997, 47: “a climate in which even Epicureans were apparently allowing the sage a sense of obligation to society at large.”

⁶⁹ Sedley 1997 argues convincingly for partially philosophical motivations for Brutus, Cassius, and others.

typically hoped only to endure political regimes, they also seem to have allowed themselves exceptions to the injunction against participation in politics “if time and necessity should become compelling” (Cic. *Rep.* 1.10: the wise man will avoid politics *extra quam si eum tempus et necessitas coegerit*).⁷⁰ This requirement for a suitable politics apparently led some Roman Epicureans (including Cassius) to tyrannicide.⁷¹

Second, Lucretius’ text may be read as playing a pivotal role in this politicization of his own ideally apolitical philosophy.⁷² Momigliano refers to *DRN* book 5 as “bring[ing] us even nearer to the revolutionary atmosphere of 44. ... The whole of Lucretius is a vigorous invitation to work and fight for high ideals.”⁷³ Indeed, to the extent that the avoidance of politics and public life is attacked by detractors of Epicureanism as characteristic of that school, it is clear that Lucretius’ poem was taken as representative of Epicurean beliefs.⁷⁴

Thus the language of Lucretius’ anthropogony appears undeniably and purposefully in succeeding authors who dilate on issues of ideal society, progress, and

⁷⁰ Cf. Sen. *De otio* 3.2 (= Epicurus fr. 9 Usener): *nisi si quid interuenerit*. On this “doctrine of ‘emergency action’” see Fowler 1989, 127-129; and Robert and Robert 1958, 198.

⁷¹ Momigliano 1960 discusses which Epicureans were for and against Caesar, and concludes: “Cassius was not an exceptional case among the contemporary Epicureans. The majority stood for the Republic against Caesarism.” On Cassius’ Epicureanism see Castner 1988, 24-31.

⁷² Cf. Rochette 2001, 20: “Ces vers avaient sans doute servi de manifeste, de <<credo>> d’une certaine façon, à des Épicuriens qui, comme Brutus et Cassius, aspiraient à un changement de régime dans l’atmosphère révolutionnaire des années 44.”

⁷³ Cf. Grimal 1978, 261-262: Lucretius “a prouvé que l’expression poétique pouvait cesser d’être un *lusus* ... et concerner les aspirations essentielles de la vie intérieure.”

⁷⁴ Its ideas are contested as such by e.g. Cicero *Rep.* 1.1.1-1.6.11.

the history of human civilization.⁷⁵ These include Virgil (a dependence noted already by Gellius 1.21.7: *non uerba autem sola, sed uersus prope totos et locos quoque Lucreti plurimos sectatum esse Uergilium uidemus*) and, especially, Horace. Horace, a politically active Epicurean himself, constructs a plea for lawful life, for *societas* based on *foedera*, that is thoroughly grounded in the language of Lucretius' anthropogony.⁷⁶

Like Lucretius, Horace embeds his discussion of language origins in a larger discussion of the origin of human society. This is not surprising, for Horace also lived through a period of similar political and social upheaval: reflection on human origins easily becomes reflection on ideals for a troubled present.⁷⁷ Moreover Horace was aware of Epicurean teachings, having been raised in Epicurean settings from his early childhood and having had access to an elite education.⁷⁸ Less concerned as he was, however, with the atomistic theory than with its moral implications, Horace produced an account of language origins with a distinctly moralizing or normative cast (*Sat.* 1.3.99-106):

When the animals [=humankind!] rushed forth from the first lands, a
mute and shameful herd, they fought for acorns and shelter with claws
and in battle, then with clubs, and further with the weapons that

⁷⁵ For a discussion of some of the political implications of Lucretius' larger *Kulturgeschichte*, see Fowler 1989, 141-145: Lucretius' "most extensive treatment of the political world in general comes in the account of the rise of civilization." Cf. Long 1986, 309-311; and Furley 1978.

⁷⁶ Cf. Rochette 2001, Brakman 1921. On allusion to Lucretius in Horace generally see Giesecke 2000, 95-155; on the origins of humankind and language in particular 96-98. Giesecke notes but does not discuss the specific verbal correspondences that obtain.

⁷⁷ On Horace's participation in political life, see *Sat.* 1.6 and 2.6, alongside the commissioned *Carmen saeculare*; see Seager 1993.

⁷⁸ Suet. *Uita H.*; Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.105-129, 1.6.75-80, *Epist.* 2.1.70ff.

experience had later fashioned, until they discovered names and the words with which they could note their voices and sensations. Then they started to abstain from war, to fortify towns and to set up laws, so that no one would be a thief, a brigand, or an adulterer.

cum prorepserunt primis animalia terris / mutum et turpe pecus, glandem
atque cubilia propter / unguibus et pugnīs, dein fustibus, atque ita porro /
pugnabant armīs quae post fabricauerat usus, / donec uerba quibus uoces
sensusque notarent / nomināque inuenere; dehinc absistere bello, /
oppida coeperunt munire, et ponere leges, / ne quis fur esset, neu latro,
neu quis adulter.

Several points are noteworthy, and may be divided into how Horace presents the origin of language, on the one hand (including his terminology), and on the other hand what his point is in presenting it at all.⁷⁹

First, Horace's origin for language draws explicitly on Epicurean ideas and terms, in particular the pseudo-technical vocabularies for this topic seen already in Lucretius.⁸⁰ Horace's phrase "words and names with which they could note their vocal sounds and sensations" (*uerba quibus uoces sensusque notarent / nomina*) is very close to Lucretius' own "note things with varying sounds depending on their varying sensations" (*pro uario sensu uaria res uoce notaret*; 5.1058). Both use *sensus* apparently to refer to human perception of external phenomena, Epicurean φαντάσματα, and *uox* to refer to speech sounds.⁸¹ Thus both authors essentially

⁷⁹ For more general readings of Horace's satires, see Rudd 1982 and Freudenburg 1961. His account of language origins is not to my knowledge discussed by Horace specialists.

⁸⁰ Cf. Giesecke 2000, 97: "it was the *De Rerum Natura* which served as Horace's primary model in this instance [sc. *Sat* 1.3.96-112] not only because of the significant degree of verbal correspondence between the two but also because of the undeniably Epicurean thrust of the passage inherent in the notion of *utilitas* as a catalyst of progress." Cf. Farrell 1994.

⁸¹ These speech sounds are both human and, at least in Lucretius, animal; Horace may rely on the same overlap, in that he refers to humans in this passage as *animalia* (but not, it should be noted, e.g. *fera*).

define human language as the systematic conjunction of human speech with perceived reality. An additional wrinkle in Horace's extended phrase makes this homology of 'word' and 'perceived thing' clear. Whereas in Lucretius it is always only 'things' (*res*) that are 'noted' by means of 'varying vocal sounds', Horace has 'vocal sounds' (*uoces*) themselves being 'noted' alongside the expected 'sensations' (*sensus*).⁸² The image is of previously (and 'naturally'? see below) undifferentiated continua of both *sensus* and *uoces* being broken into meaningful segments by means of 'words' (*uerba*) and 'names' (*nomina*).⁸³ As such Horace's phrasing is strongly connotative of human language being articulated, both in itself, as in the traditional understanding of phonological articulation, and in the classified reality that it represents.

So far, so Epicurean and thus so 'naturalist'. But a second wrinkle moves Horace's account farther from traditional Epicureanism, at least as expressed by Lucretius, and towards 'conventionalism'. In general, Horace's account may be read as a collapsed version of Epicurus' first and second stages. A previously undifferentiated spectrum of vocal sound is differentiated (articulated) into language as such. Unlike Epicurus and Lucretius, however, Horace in this passage does not state that words are a necessary human reaction to the experience of external nature. His focus away from Epicurean physics, he does not mention the internal, atomistic nature of humankind as guiding its vocal response to sensation.

⁸² For some perceived textual and semantic difficulties in the phrase *uoces notare*, see Spoerri 1959, 143 n.38.

⁸³ In Stoic hands these two terms would have technical force, referring respectively to 'verbs' and '(mostly common) nouns'; given their close conjunction here and the brevity of the account, such specifically grammatical meanings seem unlikely.

Instead, Horace offers an ambiguous phrase that highlights human agency if not human initiative: humans *inuenere* the ‘words’ and ‘names’ constituting human language. The term is ambiguous, meaning both ‘discovered’, that is found already existing (in ‘nature’), and ‘invented’, created out of whole cloth.⁸⁴ Other important events in the history of human culture are also described as ‘invented’, that is as added to human culture for the first time by human agents, often named mythological figures.⁸⁵ Writing is a traditional example.⁸⁶ So although the description of words and names as *inuenta* is generally reminiscent of Epicurus’ second stage, in which wise or specifically knowledgeable men added words to language, in Horace’s account the discovery or invention is more general and less expert, apparently accounting for language as a whole and not involving any special expertise; the last is in keeping with Lucretius, who explicitly argues against a single, expert name-giver. Thus the phrase leaves open the question of just how much ‘convention’ Horace sees at the beginning or basis of human language.

If the phrasing is thus ambiguous about the role(s) of ‘nature’ and ‘convention’

⁸⁴ OLD s.v. *inuenio* 1-5 (‘discover’) and 5-7 (‘invent’). The term has potent application in other Roman accounts of language origins; cf. Cicero’s definitions and uses of the term, discussed below.

⁸⁵ E.g. agriculture (Cic. *Uer.* 5.99: “on the island of Ceres ... where her fruits are said to have been discovered for the first time”; *in insula Cereris ... ubi primum fruges inuentae esse dicuntur*); military technology (Liv. 42.65.9: “a new kind of spear was invented”; *nouum genus teli inuentum est*); and ‘arts’ in general (Verg. *Aen.* 6.663: “those who cultivated life through invented arts”; *inuentas aut qui uitam excoluere per artis*).

⁸⁶ Writing is thought to have been brought to the Greeks by Cadmus, but not invented by him (e.g. Apollod. 3.1.1, 3.4.1-2, and 3.5.4). According to Plutarch the historian Iobas has Hercules teaching the Greeks writing (γράμματα τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἐδίδαξεν Ἡράκλῆς; *Quaest. Rom.* 59). Roman authors looked to the Arcadians and their leader Evander for the introduction of writing to Italy (D.H. 1.33.4, Liv. 1.7, Tac. *Ann.* 9.143).

in language origins, it nonetheless makes language, as in Lucretius and others, a part of the definition of humankind and of its survival as a species.⁸⁷ This larger context also helps to clarify the term *inuenere* by making the development of language a matter at least of internal human 'nature' if not of 'convention' so called.⁸⁸ Prior to language being *inuenta*, humans fought with each other for shelter and archetypically meager sustenance (acorns, *glandem*).⁸⁹ Towards these ends they enjoyed some technical advances, fighting first with tooth and claw, then with clubs, and finally with weapons "which experience had fashioned" (*armis quae post fabricauerat usus*). The source of the weapons, 'experience' (*usus*), is contrasted with the source of 'cities' (*oppida*) and 'laws' (*leges*): language. Whereas the former advances technology, the latter does more by advancing, or indeed by making possible at all, a just and moral society that refrains from war (*absistere bello*). In this role language (*uerba* and *nomina*) is identified, as in Lucretius, with 'utility' (*utilitas*), "almost the mother of justice and equality" (*utilitas, iusti prope mater et aequi*; 98).

If the experience of external nature is enough for the development of

⁸⁷ Cf. Campbell 2003, 312-313: "L[ucretius] explicitly describes the extinction of mute creatures (841), and the possession of a voice thus seems to be a requisite for the survival of a species in his scheme of adaptation." To this Lucretian conception of survival and extinction may be added e.g. the Hippocratic reading of silence as a sign of terminal disease (Montiglio 2000, 213-251, esp. 228-233), and the trope common to elegiac poetry of especially women showing their powerlessness through lack of voice; on the simultaneous loss of voice/language and identity see further Chapter Five.

⁸⁸ Part of the difficulty in specifying Horace's adherence lies in the fact that although he uses two distinct terms, *uerba* and *nomina*, he uses them non-technically to refer to language in general; thus the traditional question of whether *individual words* derive from 'nature' or 'culture' is inapplicable.

⁸⁹ Acorns are a classic component of representations of primitive human life; e.g. *Lucr.* 5.939, 965, and 1416; *Hes. Op.* 233; *Cic. Orat.* 31; *Verg. G.* 1.8 and 147-149; *Ov. Met.* 1.104-106 and 14.216 (for a fuller list, see Campbell 2003, 343).

technology, a qualitatively different nature, internal to humankind, is required for the creation of lawful life. Horace is explicit about 'nature' *per se* not being sufficient for the latter (111-114):

it is necessary to say that laws were invented from fear of injustice, if you examine the history and records of the world. Nature is not able to distinguish between the just and the iniquitous, as it has separated the good from various people and things from the people seeking them.

*iura inuenta metu iniusti fateare necesse est, / tempora si fastosque uelis
euoluere mundi. / nec natura potest iusto secernere iniquum, / diuidit ut
bona diuersis, fugienda petendis.*

Here Horace argues that moral categories are not recognized by nature. Justice and equity in particular are not (external) natural categories, but products of laws, themselves dependent on society and, in the first instance, human language. Thus Horace's image of language origins combines 'nature' and 'convention', in that language is both an element of human nature (as well as an ordering of perceptions of external nature) and the source of changes in human society and culture expressly denied to have come from "nature" as such. Human language, by being identified with *utilitas*, is thus made part of human nature. It still cannot be decided whether it is a natural advance, along the lines of Aristotelian language being a natural extension and expression of humankind's inherently political nature, or a conventional one, arrived at mostly through cultural initiative (and thus, perhaps, carrying the same ambiguous valuation as other cultural products).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ There is a strong tradition in antiquity of ambivalence towards cultural and technological advancements: e.g. Lucr. 5.1110-1116, Hes. *Op.* 156-158, Plat. *Tim.* 24 and *Crit.* 120e ff, Tibull. 1.3.49-51, Hor. *Ep.* 16.40-42 (for a fuller list, see Campbell 2003, 337). The idea that language itself is a mixed blessing or even bad does not seem to occur until Christian antiquity; e.g. Augustine *Urbs* 19: "the diversity of languages alienates men from men ... such that a man would more willingly be with his dog than with another man" (*linguarum diversitas hominem alienat ab homine ... ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno*); Campbell argues that in Lucretius "language is closely tied in to the

Horace recognizes the dangers inherent in this element of human nature, and thus human agency, being responsible for the organization and conduct of just society. In the fact of human agency lies a problem, and the point to which Horace puts his account of language origins. Human usage is subject to human whims, and thus language through practice or agreement (*usus, foedera*) may lose the ability to represent a moral human world (not the same problem as representation of right reality). This is a characteristically Roman concern: one effect of perpetual civic strife is that language has become depraved, and the traditional morality to which it should refer has been lost. There may be something hypocritical in this coming from Horace, who as a general fought on the losing side of the civil war, and who as Rome's poet laureate was commissioned to produce some of the most clearly propagandistic poetry for Augustus' new world (*Carmen saeculare*).⁹¹

But the same biography also reveals something honest in his account of language origins, and in particular its omission of Epicurus' second stage: for the poet laureate knows better than most how language is conditioned by political power. If Horace's account is less stridently naturalist than Lucretius', this is perhaps because the later author was more involved in politics than his all-but-invisible predecessor, and his language and understanding of language necessarily more constrained. Although their

development of society as a positive cohesive force, but also, in its association with the rise of religious error, it is a negative force involved in the descent into strife and violence" (2003: 17; citing Konstan 1973, 51-58). The idea has a long tradition in Western thought; see Eco 1994, 10: Babel became "the story of how a real wound had been inflicted on humanity, a wound that might, in some way, be healed once more"; cf. Wulfstan's homily *De falsis deis* 12.6-16; Milton *PL* 12.43-63 (with Edwards 1999); Shakespeare *Tempest* 1.2.355, 2.2, 2.2.66 (with Greenblatt 1990); Stephenson 1992; Crow 2000.

⁹¹ See Seager 1993.

lives should not be allowed to explain entirely the shapes of their accounts, whereas the reclusive Lucretius may try to enact a poetry in line with nature (a task already paradoxical in Epicurean thought), the more involved Horace composes in a world in which poetry, like politics, depends on ‘agreement’, *foedera*, between those with power and those without.

Perhaps in line with this feeling that a complete return to apolitical, ‘naturalistic’ language is impossible, Horace elsewhere argues that innovation in language and literature, however much a matter of ‘convention’ (*usus*), may be positive. In the *Ars Poetica* he champions the value of new poetry and even ‘new’ or ‘made’ words (48-69) against an apparently contemporary conservatism manifesting itself in a preference for older poets and for ‘native’ Latin words.⁹² Everything that is now old and famous was once new and unknown: if the latter are not allowed and even encouraged then the former will never exist. Although Horace cautions moderation, with new words not to be used willy-nilly and best to come from Greek,⁹³ “it always has been and always will be permitted to bring forth a name stamped with the mark of the day” (*licuit semperque licebit / signatum praesente nota producere nomen*; 58-59).⁹⁴

⁹² On Horace’s arguments in favor of neologism, see Duffalo 2005; on the *Ars Poetica* generally see Frischer 1991 (arguing that the poem is a “mock-didactic parody”, 4 and 87-99) and Brink 1971. Another author allowing for neologism in Latin is Varro (*L.L.* 9.21, comparing new words to other, more easily accepted new customs). Lucretius famously congratulates himself on his own neologisms, but only insofar as they help to translate unclear Greek philosophical terms and ideas (*DRN* 1.136-145); as Sedley argues, Lucretius wants to expose his readers as clearly as possible to Epicurean concepts but as little as possible to Greek culture (1998 ch. 2).

⁹³ Cf. *Ep.* 2.2.119 and *Sat.* 1.10.20-24, the latter satirizing a supposed fan of Lucilius who thinks that speech blended of Latin and Greek is like well-mixed wine (see further Chapter Six).

⁹⁴ Horace continues by comparing the life-cycle of words to that of leaves and to the endurance of feats of engineering (60-69); the simile, as has long been pointed out, comes from Homer *Il.* 6.146-149 (see Duffalo 2005, 96-99; and Brink 1971, 147).

The proper use of such new words, as of words generally, is the province of 'convention' or 'experience', *usus*, (70-72):

many words will be born again which are now dead, and many will die which are now held in esteem, if convention wants, in whose power is the decision and law and standard of speech

multa renascentur quae iam cecidere cadentque / quae nunc sunt in honore
vocabula, si volet usus, / quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma
loquendi.

This may seem a far remove from an Epicurean understanding of language as *originally* grounded in nature. Indeed it suggests a more pragmatic approach for *contemporary* users of language who need to acknowledge more than their group's or their own individual reactions to sense-impression; and more than even philosophical understanding of external nature. Horace's ideas on the origins and use of language, although drawing on 'naturalistic' Epicurean ideas and formulations through Lucretius, also acknowledge the contemporary importance of 'convention'.⁹⁵

Cicero

The persistence of the link between language and human civilization, and its status as a live debate in antiquity, may be emphasized by comparing the Epicurean thought just considered with the thought of an author in many respects staunchly opposed to Epicureanism: Cicero. Cicero is never 'Epicurean'.⁹⁶ His origin for

⁹⁵ Duffalo (2005, 91 and *passim*) argues that Horace does this by "diminish[ing] the force of the distinction between what is born and what is made."

⁹⁶ Cicero is opposed to Epicureanism in every way: "It is obvious, at the very least, that Cicero's political, ethical, and indeed cosmological views are antithetical to those of Epicureanism" (Zetzel 1998, 240); cf. Minyard 1985 and Maslowski 1974. Di Matteo 1999 argues that Cicero translates Epicurean doctrines and terms only in order better to attack them.

language, in particular, is never ‘natural’, if nature is taken in the Epicurean sense of perceived experience leading to innate responses including language. Arguing at times with Epicureanism clearly in mind, Cicero imagines a more thoroughly ‘conventional’ origin for language than do many other authors. On the other hand, his ideas do make language ‘natural’ in specific senses, and his ‘conventionalism’ emphasizes the link between language origins and the history of human culture.

The connection between glottogony and anthropogony-as-cultural-critique may be seen perhaps more easily in Cicero’s case than in e.g. Lucretius’, not only because the life of the former is better-known than the latter’s, but also because Cicero is clear, in both public and private discourse, about his take on contemporary politics and his mooted solutions to contemporary problems. His lifetime was “marked by decay and disintegration leading to the final collapse.”⁹⁷ As a member of Rome’s ruling class, Cicero, alongside his social peers, faced directly the crisis of confidence in Republican politics caused by long and debilitating civil war:

The conflict and disintegration of the last years of the Republic are possibly best understood as a crisis of the aristocracy, one freed from the constraints of a peasantry that lacked unity, militancy, and an institutionalized role of political opposition.⁹⁸

If it is thus true that “Cicero’s social and political thought can perhaps be most appropriately appreciated as a theoretical expression of this aristocratic crisis”, then this may be true as well for his references to language origins. Those references take on the character of the passages in which they are embedded, thus aiming to show the value for

⁹⁷ Wood 1988, 31

⁹⁸ Idem 40-41.

public life of 'philosophy' in general, 'oratory' in particular, and even an individual cultural hero, perhaps to be likened to the *nouus homo* philosopher-orator-politician himself.

In contrast especially with Lucretius, but also with Horace and Epicurus, Cicero emphasizes the part played in the elaboration of language and the creation of society by 'philosophy' so called (*T.D.* 5.5):

What could we have been, what indeed could the life of men have been without you [philosophy]? You gave birth to cities, you called together scattered humankind into social life, you joined them to each other first in shared houses, then in marriage, and then in the sharing of writing and speech, you were the inventor of laws, you were the teacher of customs and of discipline.

quid non modo nos, sed omnino uita hominum sine te esse potuisset? tu urbis peperisti, tu dissipatos homines in societatem uitae conuocasti, tu eos inter se primo domiciliis, deinde coniugiis, tum litterarum et uocum communione iunxisti, tu inuentrix legum, tu magistra morum et disciplinae fuisti.

'Philosophy' is thus responsible for the same series of moral and social achievements outlined by Horace, in which language, literally 'the sharing of letters and voices' (*communione litterarum et uocum*), occupies a central position and is linked with law (*legum*) and right behavior (*morum*). Where Cicero differs from Horace, and from Lucretius, is in identifying not 'nature', apparently of any sort, but philosophy as the source of these developments. This may be linked to the role Cicero hopes philosophy, in the form of a pragmatic Academic skepticism, will play in refashioning contemporary Roman life.

Earlier in the same passage Cicero implicitly contrasts philosophy and nature, with the latter providing only poorly for humankind's survival (*T.D.* 5.3-4):

I start ... to fear the imbecillity and the fragility of humankind. For I am

afraid that nature, after it had given us weak bodies and joined to them incurable diseases and intolerable pain, also gave spirits both of a piece with the pains of our bodies and, on their own, bound up in their own anguish and troubles. ... The correction for our vices and errors is to be found entirely in philosophy.

incipio ... humani generis imbecillitatem fragilitatemque extimescere. uereor ne natura, cum corpora nobis infirma dedisset isque et morbos insanabilis et dolores intolerabilis adiunxisset, animos quoque dederit et corporum doloribus congruentis et separatim suis angoribus et molestiis implicatos. ... uitiorum peccatorumque nostrorum omnis a philosophia petenda correctio est.

In this context, philosophy is broadly responsible for humankind's survival, by allowing the development of at least the social and moral aspects of human culture. Since this includes language, the origin of language in this passage is 'conventional' to the extent that it is not given by external nature but the result of a uniquely human capacity for rational thought.⁹⁹ Language for Cicero is thus an expression of a natural human capacity for philosophy: language and philosophy are originally, and as a result ideally, linked.

The focus on philosophy reappears in a passage in the *De Inuentione* (1.2). Here Cicero argues that language was necessary as the means by which reason, as channeled through individual culture-heroes, led humankind from savage primitivism to more advanced moral society:

There was a time when humankind wandered scattered throughout the fields in the manner of beasts ... At that time a man who was certainly great and wise recognized what raw material and how great a chance for the greatest things lay in the spirits of humankind. ... This man

⁹⁹ Although it may be argued that language like the other cultural artifacts mentioned is a cultural response to a particular need imposed by nature, this is far less rigorous 'naturalism' than in Epicurean theory. By 'philosophy' Cicero has in mind the betterment of Roman civic society by Greek culture; see Zetzel 1998.

compelled and gathered together into one place the men dispersed throughout the fields and hidden in branchy buildings. ... Now it seems to me that a silent wisdom and one incapable of speech could not have accomplished this. ... Finally, how could it have come about that humankind cultivates trust and maintains justice, if men could not convince [others] by speaking of those things which they had discovered by intellect?

Fuit quoddam tempus, cum in agris homines passim bestiarum modo uagabantur ... quo tempore quidam magnus uidelicet uir et sapiens cognouit, quae materia esset et quanta ad maximas res opportunitas in animis inesset hominum ... qui dispersos homines in agros et in tectis siluestribus abditos ratione quadam compulit unum in locum et congregauit. ... ac mihi quidem hoc nec tacita uidetur nec inops dicendi sapientia perficere potuisse. ... ut fidem colere et iustitiam retinere discerent ... qui tandem fieri potuit, nisi homines ea, quae ratione inuenissent, eloquentia persuadere potuissent?

The basic series of events is traditional: scattered humankind, living primitively like animals, is gathered together into a just and law-abiding society by means of language. In this passage language is a means to an end, and, more than that, motivated by an intellect that already perceives what that end should be: part of the role of language is thus philosophical, to convince others of truths that have been discovered (*inuenta*) by reason. Moreover the use of persuasive language to produce just society is attributed to a single man. It is hard to avoid seeing a parallel between this single inventor of society and language, and the role imagined by Cicero for himself, as agent of reason and philosophy, in helping contemporary Roman society to find better footing, *concordia ordinum* and *concordia bonorum*.¹⁰⁰

Cicero's account of language origins is also expressly opposed to contemporary Epicureanism. Cicero argues that wisdom (*sapientia*) and even reason (*ratione*) when

¹⁰⁰ E.g. *Cat.* 4.15; see Wood 1988, 159-175; and Badian 1968, 60-64.

not aided by the power of speech (*eloquentia*) could not have been shared among individuals and thus helped to develop human culture. By contrast, Lucretius (5.1053-1055, quoted above) and Diogenes of Oenoanda after him are explicit that oral persuasion can have had nothing to do with the origin of language. As discussed above, Lucretius introduces the general idea with one of his “most scornful formulae”, ‘it is stupid’, *desiperest* (5.1043).¹⁰¹ The two Roman authors view the same situation with diametrically opposed conclusions about the role of language in forming human society and, as a precondition, about the nature and origin of language.¹⁰²

Thus Cicero assigns the origin of language variously to reason in general, to philosophy in particular, to persuasive oratory, and to an individual culture-hero in a traditional ‘conventionalist’ mode, with some overlap among these four areas. The various ideas are put tendentiously to various purposes in, at times, the mouths of various men: thus the origin of language is philosophical in an early work (*Tusculan Disputations*), with philosophy a ‘natural’ capacity of humankind;¹⁰³ oratorical when Cicero’s purpose is precisely to highlight the importance of oratory (*De Oratore*); and attributed to an individual culture-hero, in a sort of ‘conventionalism’, when Cicero schematizes the history of culture to contextualize the history of government (*De Re*

¹⁰¹ Quote from Bailey ad loc.

¹⁰² Cicero generally judges Epicureanism to be of little oratorical import. E.g. *De Orat.* 3.63. Cf. Zetzel 1998, 241: the Epicureans “were not orators, they knew it, and Cicero could easily dismiss them as irrelevant to his argument.”

¹⁰³ Philosophy plays a large role in the *Kulturgeschichte* reported by Seneca (*Ep.* 90); focusing on technical and physical innovation more than intangibles, Seneca does not mention language. Language is similarly absent from Virgil’s description of Jupiter’s introduction of toil to the human world (*G.* 1.118-146); perhaps language is implicitly a product or a hallmark of the Saturnian age?

Publica). Throughout these variations Cicero emphasizes the role to be played by language, and the serious scholar of rhetoric, in the creation of a better society.

In a sense, Cicero's varied presentations are representative of the difficulties facing interpretation of ancient ideas on language origins, and thus, paradoxically, of the richness made possible by a sociology of ancient linguistic thought. For one point is precisely that the ideas cannot be reconciled, even within a single author: only thus can it be shown that the debate about language origins remained vital, a means of addressing complex contemporary concerns.¹⁰⁴ The complexity of the ideas, especially with their shifting definitions of crucial terms like 'nature', 'convention', 'culture', and 'invention', thus speaks to the complexity of the times: the role played by language origins as an intellectual response to trying times may clearly be conditioned by an individual author's (changing) take on those times. Cicero thus shows, again and perhaps more clearly, how a prototypically Hellenistic topic may become specialized to the lived experience of empire and to traditional Roman adherence to *mos*.

Vitruvius

Writing a generation later than Cicero, Vitruvius, in his work *De Architectura*, embeds the origin of language in the familiar context of *Kulturgeschichte* (2.1.33) but, atypically, links it to the discovery of fire.¹⁰⁵ At first, humankind lived 'like wild

¹⁰⁴ Gera suggests that Cicero's conflicting accounts may stem from a relative disinterest in *how* language came about, his concern being rather its power and use once given (2003: 144, comparing Cicero thus with Isocrates). Cf. Cicero's pragmatic approach to religion in the *Natura Deorum*.

¹⁰⁵ On Vitruvius' biography and purposes, Schrijvers 1989, Bajoni 1988, Baldwin 1990. On his approach to language origins see Gera 2003, 147-159.

animals' (*ut ferae*), with the traditional trappings of primitive life including living in forests and caves and eating uncivilized food (*cibo agresti*).

Afterwards, when things had quieted down and they, coming closer, noticed that there was a great advantage for their bodies in the warmth of the fire, throwing wood on the fire and preserving it they led others to it and nodding their heads showed what uses they could have from it. Because in this gathering of people they were variously pouring forth speech sounds from their breath, they established words as they happened to occur in daily habit, then by signifying things more often in their use they began to speak as the occasion demanded, and thus they created speech among each other.

postea re quieta propius accedentes cum animaduertissent commoditatem esse magnam corporibus ad ignis teporem, ligna adicientes et id conseruantes alios adducebant et nutu monstrantes ostendebant, quas habent ex eo utilitates. In eo hominum congressu cum profundebantur aliter¹⁰⁶ e spiritu uoces, cotidiana consuetudine uocabula, ut optigerant, constituerunt, deinde significando res saepius in usu ex euentu fari fortuito coeperunt et ita sermones inter se procreauerunt.

Vitruvius' larger point is to show that, as a result of humans living together, advanced architecture was made possible. He advances a common analogical argument: the dwellings of primitive contemporary peoples show how humankind must have lived in its own primitive state. Vitruvius thus relies on the notion of progress in human culture.¹⁰⁷

The role played by language in this scheme is acute: a consequence of humans coming together, it subsequently makes possible meaningful conversation. At first

¹⁰⁶ *aliter* is the *lectio difficilior*; some have suggested *naturaliter*. The ambiguity troubles Spoerri, who likes to classify authors into one of the two traditional categories: "Es lässt sich schwer ausmachen, in welche Kategorie der Sprachtheorien Vitruvs Bericht einzuordnen ist" (1959: 142).

¹⁰⁷ On "analogical" arguments, especially as regards comparison with 'primitive' peoples and/or children, see Nocentini 1992, Sorensen 1992, and Thomason 1991.

glance, Vitruvius' origin for language is straightforwardly 'conventional'. Language came about 'in that gathering of humankind', from 'daily habit', and reached a meaningful stage through 'use', a 'chance event'. The terms Vitruvius uses are openly, even aggressively 'conventional': *fortuito* is precisely the quality denied to language by Nigidius (according to Gellius; see Chapter One), who favors a natural origin for language; while *usu* and *congressu* are the terms used by other authors to describe the more or less 'conventional' aspects of language origins, whether, as in Horace and other Epicureans, at a stage after a 'natural' beginning, or, as in others like Cicero, to emphasize the social contexts of language.

At a further remove, however, even this straightforward-seeming conventionalism is complicated by being made to depend on nature. Vitruvius' larger point in this passage is to show how humankind, from primitive beginnings, reached a stage in which they were (and are) capable of advanced architecture. One of his arguments involves analogy, comparing primitive contemporary architecture with what must have been the architecture of primitive humankind. Obviously an engineer and pragmatist, Vitruvius locates the motivation for humankind's progress not, as do Cicero et al., in 'intellect', but in something more tangible: fire.¹⁰⁸

Fire is the watershed: 'on account of the discovery of fire' other cultural artifacts are made possible.¹⁰⁹ It is fire that leads to 'gathering', and 'gathering' to language.

¹⁰⁸ Fire may be a metaphor for intellect; cf. Gera 2003, 149-50 (with ancient sources), who argues that "[f]ire ... can represent ... the rational element found in humans." Vitruvius may also be like Cicero and Lactantius in imagining early language as gestural; see eadem, 161 with n.169; and Cole 1967, 63-67.

¹⁰⁹ For fire as central in *Kulturgeschichte* see Gera 2003, 147-154 with additional sources. Some modern paleoanthropologists also try to link the origin of language to the domestication of fire; see Goudsblom 1989; and cf. Bachelard 1938.

This order is exactly opposite that of Lucretius' in which fire *follows* language, and could thus imply even stronger 'conventionalism'. But the 'discovery' of fire here is precisely that: a discovery, not an invention, grounded not in human intellect but in nature. Although thus 'fortuitous', the discovery of fire depends not on the arbitrariness of any 'convention' but on pure chance, that is on the uncontrolled action of external 'nature': "in a certain place, close-packed trees, agitated by high winds, rubbed their branches together and produced fire" (*quodam in loco ab tempestatibus et uentis densae crebritatibus arbores agitatae et inter se terentes ramos ignem excitauerunt*; 2.33). Since fire leads to cultural artifacts and is 'natural', language, the cultural artifact par excellence, has ultimately 'natural' causes.

Thus Vitruvius' account shows, as have many others, that many possible definitions for 'nature' and 'convention' are needed. In this case, language is 'conventional' in that it results from human society, 'custom' (*consuetudine*), and 'experience' (*usu*); but such convention apparently does not include expert knowledge, and expressly does not include a single name-giver originally responsible for language in general. By the same token, language is not just 'conventional' but originally 'natural', not, as in some authors, because of special reference to a unique human nature (be it intellect, physiology, or political essence), but because a chance event in nature produced the preconditions necessary for language's emergence. This must be carefully distinguished from language being a natural response to perceived experience (the province of the Epicureans), and also from language as a natural gift to humankind. The last is especially indicative of the range of combinatorial meanings allowed the two traditional terms: although Vitruvius' account with its focus on fire looks back to myths like Prometheus', the randomness of the discovery leaves little room for divine

intervention.

Vitruvius is practically alone in antiquity in not expressly linking language to humankind's difference from the other animals. Although his treatment of language origins is part of a larger concern with *Kulturgeschichte*, Vitruvius does not emphasize the differences caused thereby between humankind and the other animals. Nonetheless he is closely linked to tradition and to the authors we have discussed so far: his mention of fire seems to bring us back, full circle, to the account of language and society origins presented in Plato's *Protagoras*. As in that 'myth', so in Vitruvius' studiously rationalistic account does 'fire' play a central role.

Conclusions

Language is always linked to humankind, as shown in Chapter Two, and, as this Chapter has tried to show, to human civilization. Thus the origin of one is taken to reflect the origin of the other: the origin of language becomes very early on an integral part of the more general origins imagined for human civilization, *Kulturgeschichte*. To the extent that the latter more or less inevitably turns its prehistorical setting and themes to the articulation of contemporary concerns, so too are ideas about language origins, although set in the past, used to address concerns about group organization in the present. The ideas also seem to make suggestions for the future, in that the 'civilization' to which early language is normally linked is society in its first flush of enthusiastic cooperation among individuals and groups. This society is more moral and more just than the contemporary, basely political worlds in which the authors considered find themselves living. The difference between past and present is broadly that between ideal and actual life: the continued reiteration of language origins and *Kulturgeschichte*

more generally reveals ancient authors' ongoing and obviously vested interest in trying to find more of the ideal in the actual, a search framed as finding more of the past in the present. Thus glottogony, linked strongly to anthropogony, becomes a sort of inverted cultural etymology, with the original meaning assumed rather than sought out and the present form itself examined for signs of the past ideal.¹¹⁰

This use of language origins, mostly implicit in Greek authors, may be seen more strongly in Roman authors, who draw familiar and even traditional ideas from their predecessors in order to make themselves heard about dramatically different circumstances. As Minyard has convincingly argued, the late Republic witnessed a frightening separation of words from their right meanings, and thus a disconnect between behavior and *mos maiorum*.¹¹¹ If the 1st century BC was marked by "pervasive interest in language",¹¹² this was not only, or even primarily, in the technical sense of burgeoning scientific grammar, but in an awareness of language not doing what it is supposed to, that is describing the world as it should be, and thus in the efforts of individuals and schools to reassert control over that fluid medium and its precipitously slipping elements. Each description of language origins does less to describe a historical origin than it calls for a renewed origin to write over the chaos of civil war, a new Roman glottogony reestablishing the proper connection of words with (right) things. To this end Roman authors cite a variety of motive forces underlying language, in varying

¹¹⁰ Cf. Bloomer 1991, 49: "The past is recovered at the same time as the present ruin is explained."

¹¹¹ Minyard 1985.

¹¹² Rawson 1985, 105, 109, and 119.

combinations, and encourage attention to them as a way of restoring right meanings and thus right behavior in language and society: *natura* and *utilitas* (Lucretius), *ratio/philosophia* (Cicero), *usus* or *foedera* (Horace), *ignis* (Vitruvius), *utilitas* and *impositio* (Varro, discussed in Chapter One). In each case the identification of the force is as prescriptive as it is descriptive: recognizing what underlay language in the first instance should, by virtue of its contiguity with civilization, allow for a rebuilding of society on right foundations, a recreation of the civilized world around its essential, original meanings. If differences in language describe how groups are different, then language origins may be used to prescribe how groups should be.¹¹³

¹¹³ It is characteristic of Roman myth-making that anthropogony and cosmogony are closely interconnected: whereas other Indo-European cultures had origin myths involving gods, the Romans mythologized their mortal history (e.g. Dumézil 1974). Thus any (re)creation of the world is all the more obviously a simultaneous (re)creation of human, or at least Roman, society; see Graf 1993, Bremmer and Horsfall 1987.

*Children without study, pains, or thought, /
are languages and vulgar notions taught.*
- S. Butler, *Satire upon the Imperfection
and Abuse of Human Learning*, 1.21-22

CHAPTER FOUR

AN ANCIENT EXPERIMENT: HERODOTUS ON PSAMMETICHUS

Chapter Three showed how the definitional function of language, taken early on to distinguish humankind from various non-human kinds, was strongly linked with another defining feature of humanity, human culture: the origin of language (glottogony) is linked with the origins of humankind (anthropogony) as a frequent element in the history of human civilization. Moreover, not only is language distinctive to humankind, but also are types of language normative among human groups, separating groups taken as prototypical by Greco-Roman thought from marginal groups: language distinguishes Greco-Roman civilization, above all, from the barbarians, and at a further remove from mute human groups, talking animals, and human-animal hybrids. Thus explicitly hierarchicizing, language and its origins could be implicated in other mooted hierarchies that organized human groups along a variety of axes.

One such axis, the relative antiquity of different groups, informs an experiment famously attributed by Herodotus to the Egyptian Pharaoh Psammetichus I, in which the language spontaneously produced by experimentally isolated children is taken as original and thus as proving the antiquity of the group to whom the language belongs.¹

¹ On the experiment generally see Gera 2003, 68-111, Vannicelli 1997, and Kassel 1991, 66-7. Aside from Lloyd's, commentaries on Herodotus tend to read the episode with minimal interpretation of its linguistic assumptions and implications, focusing instead on the question of relative antiquity.

The experiment's underlying assumptions underscore the relationship between linguistic thought and social organization, the latter both real and perceived. Because the notional success of Psammetichus' experiment depends on the existence of a link between language as it relates to general human origins and language as diagnostic of individual groups, Herodotus' report of the experiment bridges the gap between precisely those two functions of language.² The experiment, its report, and their apparent circulation in antiquity and afterwards, thus show the extent to which thought about language could articulate non-linguistic concerns, including group interaction in a multicultural and multilingual world.

Psammetichus' Experiment and the 'Foundling Myth'

Herodotus writes that Psammetichus wanted to know which people was the oldest. "Since he was unable to discover this by inquiry ... he devised the following" experiment (2.2.2-4):

He gave two newborn children from random peoples to a shepherd to be raised among the flocks in this certain way, decreeing that no-one speak at all in their presence, but that they remain in a deserted barn by themselves and that goats be led to them at a fixed time, and that he feed them milk and provide other things.

Psammetichus did these things and arranged them because he wanted to hear from the children, once they moved beyond insignificant babbling, what sort of speech they would utter first. And this indeed happened. For after two years of the shepherd doing these things, while he was opening the door and going inside both of the children fell forward, saying *bekos*

² Cf. Gera's characterization of the experiment's apparent popularity in the Enlightenment: "The relation between language and thought and language and society were favourite themes of the Enlightenment. Such deliberations were part of an interest in the wider question of the nature of humans"; citing Aarsleff 1982, Schreyer 1978, 15-17, and Formigari 1974.

(βεκός) and reaching up with their hands.

Although he heard this the shepherd kept silent, but while wandering over as part of his duty, as he often did, he heard this word many times, and indicating as much to his master he led the children to his sight as Psammetichus commanded. Psammetichus, having heard it himself, inquired as to which people said *bekos* for something, and having inquired discovered that the Phrygians call bread *bekos*.

παιδία δύο νεογνά ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων διδοῖ ποιμένι
τρέφειν ἐς τὰ ποιμνία τροφήν τινα τοιήνδε, ἐντειλάμενος μηδένα
ἀντίον αὐτῶν μηδεμίαν φωνὴν ἰέναι, ἐν στέγη δὲ ἐρήμη ἐπ’
ἑωυτῶν κεῖσθαι αὐτὰ καὶ τὴν ὥρην ἐπαγινέειν σφι αἴγας,
πλήσαντα δὲ [τοῦ] γάλακτος τᾶλλα διαπρήσσεσθαι.

ταῦτα δὲ ἐποίησεν τε καὶ ἐνετέλλετο ὁ Ψαμμήτιχος θέλων ἀκοῦσαι
τῶν παιδίων, ἀπαλλαχθέντων τῶν ἀσήμων κνυζημάτων,
ἦντινα φωνὴν ῥήξουσι πρώτην. τὰ περ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο. ὥς γὰρ
διέτης χρόνος ἐγεγόνεε ταῦτα τῶ ποιμένι πρήσσοντι, ἀνοίγοντι
τὴν θύρην καὶ εἰσὶόντι τὰ παιδία ἀμφότερα προσπίπτοντα βεκός
ἐφώνεον ὀρέγοντα τὰς χεῖρας.

τὰ μὲν δὴ πρῶτα ἀκούσας ἤσυχος ἦν ὁ ποιμήν, ὥς δὲ πολλάκις
φοιτῶντι καὶ ἐπιμελομένῳ πολλὸν ἦν τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος, οὕτω δὲ
σημήνας τῶ δεσπότη ἤγαγε τὰ παιδία κελεύσαντος ἐς ὄψιν τὴν
ἐκείνου. ἀκούσας δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ψαμμήτιχος ἐπυθάνετο οἷτινες
ἀνθρώπων βεκός τι καλέουσι, πυνθανόμενος δὲ εὗρισκε Φρύγας
καλέοντας τὸν ἄρτον.

Since the first word spoken by the isolated children, *bekos*, is Phrygian, Psammetichus concluded that Phrygian was the oldest language, and the Phrygians the oldest of all peoples.³

At first sight, the story is not about the origin of language. As noted,

³ That *bekos* is Phrygian appears confirmed by its attestation in neo-Phrygian inscriptions (e.g. 35 (r. 1905) Sinanlı); cf. the sources collected by Lloyd 1994, 7, and Brixhe 1999. Hipponax uses the word: Κυπρίων βεκός φάγουσι (Strab. 8.340=Eustathius *ad Il.* 305.33); as Masson notes “[I] est inexacte de deduire du contexte ... que ce mot serait chypriote” (1987: 167 n.6). The word appears in Ionian dialects beginning in the sixth century BC and appears to have an IE etymology (Pokorny I.113).

Psammetichus' intent was to discover not which language came first, or how language came about at all, but which people was the oldest. The narrative context provided by Herodotus makes this clear. "Psammetichus ... wanted to know which men had come into existence first" (2.2.2), and the result of the experiment is interpreted as providing that knowledge: "thus the Egyptians agreed ... that the Phrygians were older than they" (2.2.5). It is also in this context of the relative antiquity of distinct peoples that most modern commentators have interpreted the Psammetichus story.⁴ Lloyd, for example, subtitles his note ad 2.2-4 "The Antiquity of Egypt, a major G[reek] preoccupation"; he cites as parallels to the experiment only sources either explicitly mentioning some aspect of it or reporting some other opinion about which people is oldest, and cites no contemporary or later sources on the origin of language.⁵ It may thus be argued that Psammetichus' turn to linguistic experimentation was primarily a means to this larger, non-linguistic end.

But the experiment would not have been designed in this way, much less judged a success, as it seems to have been both by Psammetichus and by Herodotus and other ancient readers, without ideas about the origin of language and linguistic diversity built into its underlying assumptions.⁶ Moreover the story and its ideas seem to have been popular. Herodotus does not record his own opinion on the particular result of

⁴ But see Borst 1957, 39-40 and 99-100, where the story is placed in a linguistic context.

⁵ Lloyd 1994, 5; most of his and other parallels are considered below, "An Ancient Audience".

⁶ It is a general tenet of ancient history that the more incidental the reference to a cultural practice or an historical event, the more accurate the reference. E.g. Crawford 1983.

Phrygian,⁷ but he seems to treat the experiment in general as genuine. By describing his information-gathering he stresses his own trustworthiness and that of his sources, in this case Egyptian priests of Hephaestus in Memphis, and goes so far as to dismiss as ‘foolish’ (μάτταια; 2.5) other, Greek versions of the story which differ from his version not in outline but only in their details.⁸ In addition the story appears to have been widespread in antiquity: Herodotus claims to have compared ‘many’ (πολλά) versions in addition to the Egyptian and the foolish Greek kinds, and ancient commentaries on his account and on other references to the experiment include several variants.⁹ As far as Herodotus and the larger Greco-Roman world are concerned, then, Psammetichus really did perform what has rightly been described as “perhaps the most famous linguistic experiment of all.”¹⁰

Modern authors are not so sure, not to mention more squeamish. In 1978 a paper was published entitled “Beyond Herodotus: The creation of language in linguistically

⁷ But elsewhere Herodotus refers to the Phrygians as relative newcomers to Asia (7.73.1); he also famously marvels at the Egyptians’ high antiquity, at least in comparison to the Greeks. See Pearson 1941, von Fritz 1936.

⁸ The example cited by Herodotus as foolish has Psammetichus ordering the children’s nurses’ tongues cut out; this version of the story may be Hecataeus’ (Gera 2003, 71-72, Müller 1997, 211-213, Lloyd 1994 ad 2.2). Benardete 1999, 32 argues that Herodotus thought the Greek version “foolish” because it removed the only rational explanation for the children’s speech, namely imitation; but it is not clear that Herodotus disbelieves the spontaneous emergence of language.

⁹ The only other undeniable reference to the story in the literary tradition is Aristophanes *Nub.* 398: “You fool, smelling of the Kronioi and [being] moon-bread” (ὦ μῶρε σὺ καὶ Κρονίων ὄζων καὶ ΒΕΚΚΕΣΕΛΗΝΕ); the variants cited by the scholia to Aristophanes may all derive ultimately from (mis)readings of Herodotus. Differences among versions include the number of children, the length of their isolation, the identity of their caretaker(s), the type or presence of animals, and, in one case, the ruler involved (Sesogchosis instead of Psammetichus); see further below, “An Ancient Audience”.

¹⁰ Gera 2003, 68.

deprived deaf children”.¹¹ As indicated by the subtitle, the authors’ primary concern was to show how deaf children raised in a speaking language environment, without access to a formalized sign language, are able to create a sign language through interaction with other deprived deaf children.¹² The 1978 paper, like Psammetichus’ experiment, thus bears on several issues of intense interest in linguistics, including the differences between so-called ‘natural’ languages and ‘pidgin’ and ‘creole’ languages,¹³ the related problem of language acquisition,¹⁴ the larger question of whether or not “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”, and, perhaps most importantly, ‘innateness’: is language somehow inherent in and therefore characteristic of the human animal, or of human society? in what ways? and to what extent?¹⁵ These questions and others about innateness and human nature link modern linguistics to Psammetichus’ ancient and “forbidden” experiment, because they describe the history of a persistent and fascinating trope in linguistic thought, what has been called “foundling myth”.

For if the subtitle of that 1978 paper indicates the authors’ concern with topics appropriate to modern linguistic research, its full title points to a larger issue dealing not with the nature of language but with the nature of linguistics, that is with how the study

¹¹ Feldman, Goldin-Meadow, and Gleitman 1978.

¹² See now Goldin-Meadow 2003.

¹³ See Thomason and Kaufman 1988.

¹⁴ See Goodluck 1991.

¹⁵ Chomsky’s theorization of a Universal Grammar inherent in the human brain was in part a response to “the publication in 1957 by Skinner of *Verbal Behavior*, a thoroughly behaviorist treatment of language in general” (Hewes 1992, 17); see Chomsky 1969, Skinner 1957; for a recent review of modern positions on ‘innateness’, see Pinker 1994; more generally, Elman et al. 1995.

of language is organized as a modern academic discipline or discourse.¹⁶ Thus the authors suggest that modern linguistics has long since done away with the sort of experiment performed by Psammetichus, not to mention the conclusions about language reached by the Pharaoh and apparently accepted by Herodotus. The experiment has indeed been rejected in terms of its results and assumptions, its methodology however scientific, and, most damagingly, its ethics.¹⁷ We know today, from a combination of legitimate research and unfortunate cases of parental neglect, that children raised without linguistic input do not develop normal cognition, showing severe impairments in language and other areas.¹⁸ To raise children deliberately in such conditions is not science but abuse: thus the experiment has become contemptible for its cruelty.

But modern rejection cannot conceal how Psammetichus and his children have had a strong hold on both the scientific and popular linguistic imaginations: if “forbidden”, the experiment has, as noted above, also been described as “perhaps the most famous linguistic experiment of all.”¹⁹ Several purported iterations of the

¹⁶ On this sort of “archaeology of knowledge”, see the discussion of Foucault in the Introduction. For some applications to the history of linguistics, see Harpham 2002 and Harris 1980.

¹⁷ Gera 2003 (e.g. 111: “On one level, the experiment was a huge failure. The reasoning underlying the king’s trial is absurd and his alleged results are incredible”); Benardete 1999, 30-33; Vannicelli 1997; Lloyd 1994; Nocentini 1992; Thomason 1991; Salmon 1956. Earlier commentaries to Herodotus, themselves prior to modern historical linguistics, dismissed the results of the experiment on other grounds; e.g. Larcher ad loc.: “[I]f so much care were not taken with children, they would never learn to speak. ... Had not God, after creating man, imparted to him a language, the human race might have passed through many generations with no other means of communication than signs.” For a collection of modern and pre-modern reactions to the experiment, see Borst 1957, vol. iv. 1942 n.191 (“Ursprachen-Experimente an Kleinkindern”).

¹⁸ See e.g. Comrie 2001, 106-108 (“Feral children and related cases”) and 116: “if no [linguistic] input is provided at the crucial age, it seems that language is not created anew.”

¹⁹ “Forbidden experiment”: Nocentini 1992. “Perhaps ... all”: Gera 2003, 68.

experiment are reported, and variations on the basic theme persist in linguistic thought-experiments.²⁰ Moreover many seemingly independent reports of isolated children, ‘wolf children’, and other foundlings or orphans, sometimes referred to euphemistically as ‘experiments in nature’, have all also been made to bear on language origins, language acquisition, and the larger question of innateness.²¹

One reason for this striking persistence is a narrative structure underlying all of these variants: that of the “foundling myth”, in which an exposed child survives the animal wilderness and returns to human society – the outcome varies but the process always reveals essential features of and differences between the normal human world and its marginal or animal counterparts.²² As one scholar has recently written about ancient thought-experiments on a slightly different topic, “[t]hese imaginary animals are good to think with, for they teach us about ourselves, humans.”²³ Replace “animals” with “infants”, and “humans” with “(linguistically fluent) adults”, and this comes close to explaining the success of Psammetichus’ experiment in addressing topics of innateness, the differences and similarities between humans and animals, and the link between language and human nature.

²⁰ Iterations: Gera 2003, 92-106; Danesi 1993, 5-6; Hewes 1992, 5-6; Sulek 1989. Thought-experiments: Sorensen 1992, Thomason 1991.

²¹ Shattuck 1980, Maclean 1977, Lane 1976 (esp. 19-29), Malson 1964.

²² Hansen 2002, Eliade 1989, Binder 1964, Thompson 1955-7. The similarity between this myth and Psammetichus’ experiment is noticed by Gera (2003: 81): “The combination of isolated children, herdsman, and nurturing goats reminds us of various ancient tales of foundlings” including Cyrus and “feral children” (see eadem 95-97).

²³ Gera 2000, 41.

Psammetichus' Experiment: Language Origins and Linguistic Diversity

Because of the apparent popularity of Psammetichus' experiment, modern distaste notwithstanding, it is best to take it on its own terms, in order to see what its underlying assumptions are, how they allow the experiment to function as an experiment, and what light they might shed on ancient thought on language origins generally.²⁴ First, it is assumed that children isolated from linguistic input will nonetheless produce a language spontaneously. In modern terms, language is innate.²⁵ From other evidence in Herodotus about Psammetichus it is possible to specify what about language is innate and what is not. The Pharaoh is reported to have sent Egyptian children to be raised among Greeks to learn the Greek language (2.154); this depends on the converse of the first assumption, a belief that children raised *not* in isolation will not produce language on their own, much less the primeval tongue, but will learn the language of their social setting.²⁶ Thus specific languages do not indicate or depend on

²⁴ For other expositions of the experiment's assumptions, see Gera 2003, 72-74; Benardete 1999, 31-33; and Lloyd 1994 ad loc..

²⁵ On 'innateness' see the sources cited in n.15 above.

²⁶ The assumption of 'innateness' is contested by other ancient accounts of language learning. The 4th century BC *Dissoi Logoi* include a thought experiment in which Greek children shipped to Persia and Persian to Greece each learn the language of their environment; see Gera 2000, 22-30. Similar accounts of societal or communal learning may be found in Plato *Prot.* 327e (virtue is taught by "no one in particular", οὐδεὶς σοὶ φαίνεται) and *Alc.* 1.110d-111a: "[Alc.] But the many are able to teach many things more serious than draughts. [Soc.] Such as? [Alc.] For example I learned to speak Greek from them, and I would not be able to name my teacher, but I attribute it to the very people you say are not serious teachers" ([ΑΛΚ.] ἄλλα γοῦν πολλὰ οἷοί τ' εἰσὶ διδάσκειν σπουδαιότερα τοῦ πεττεῦειν. [ΣΩ.] ποῖα ταῦτα; [ΑΛΚ.] οἷον καὶ τὸ ἐλληνίζειν παρὰ τούτων ἔγωγε ἔμαθον, καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιμι εἰπεῖν ἑμαυτοῦ διδάσκαλον, ἀλλ' εἰς τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἀναφέρω, οὓς σὺ φῆς οὐ σπουδαίους εἶναι διδασκάλους).

something like biological race, a disconnect visible also in the experiment's use of children chosen at random: specific languages are proved by their acquisition to be acquired, not inherited.²⁷ Thus innateness is limited to the capacity for language and, in the artificial and implicitly primitive settings of the experiment, the primeval language; other specific languages, and the general fact of linguistic diversity, require additional explanations (see Chapter Five). The unquestioned truth of innateness is also emphasized by the fact that Psammetichus is concerned with language as a means to an end, namely answering the question of relative antiquity.

Second, it is assumed that the language produced by the isolated children is the oldest language; this of course is the crucial assumption allowing Psammetichus to apply the results of the experiment to the question motivating his inquiry. In modern terms, it is assumed that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny", that is that the development of an individual, usually from birth until maturity, replicates the prehistoric development of its group.²⁸ Language acquisition in children is assumed to follow and thus reveal the same path as the origin of language. This second assumption may imply two things: (1) humankind like infants went through a period of

²⁷ On the absence of biological race in Greek thought, see Tuplin 1999.

²⁸ "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny": Haeckel 1866; see Gould 1977. For application to language origins see McCune 1999 and Aitchison 1996, 93-104; Wind 1992, 32 summarizes modern skepticism: "it does not really work out that readily" (cf. idem 1975 and 1970) but also points out the "interesting" fact that "in human neonates we find the condition present in most other mammals, i.e. a highly positioned larynx" (26); only later in life does the larynx descend caudally. Lloyd 1994 ad loc. alludes to this second assumption as the "theory of environmental determinism ... [which] assumes that if the conditions in which the first men lived are recreated ... they will produce exactly the same language as their forbears." As Lloyd notes this idea was widespread in the "Ionic rationalism" of the fifth century BC and later, first among medical writers and geographers, and then in scholarly and popular "anthropological" thought generally; see Romm 1992, 32-41, and 1989; and Cole 1990, 78-79 and 170-172.

incomprehensible language comprised of “insignificant babbling”,²⁹ (2) humankind, like Psammetichus’ isolated children, got the idea for vocal language, or even the specifics of their first language, not from other humans (since no one yet spoke) *but from animals* – just as the isolated children have been thought to have acquired their first word, *bekos*, from the bleating of their nurse-goats, so too might primitive humankind be imagined as happening upon language through interaction with animals.³⁰ For Psammetichus this means that, to the extent that the children’s isolation mirrors the conditions faced by primitive humankind, the language produced by the children will be identical to that spoken by the first group to have produced language.³¹

Third, it is assumed that the language produced by the isolated children will be recognizable as a language spoken by a contemporary group. In modern terms, language

²⁹ This idea appears explicitly in other authors especially once human language is defined as “articulated”, i.e. dependent on an articulate tongue dividing the voice by means of consonants; see the discussion in Chapter Two.

³⁰ The idea that the children may have imitated the goats is ancient: the Suda expresses “little amazement” that the children would have said “bekos” in imitation of the nanny goat (Suda 1.466.19); and St. Clement of Alexandria writes: “Do not the goats prove the antiquity of the Phrygians?” (*Cohort ad Gentes*, p.6 line 29; cf. *Stromat.* 1.p405.line18). Modern support is also forthcoming: e.g. Gera 2003, 78: “If the children did hear the goats, then it is likely that it is the animals’ bleating which inspired the children’s ‘word’ *bekos*”; Genette 1995, 123 and 367 n.20; Katz 1981, 134-135; and Salmon 1956. So far as I am aware no modern has linked ontogeny and phylogeny by taking the children imitating goats to mean that humankind developed language by imitating animal vocalizations: could the Phrygians themselves be imagined as having first imitated goats? Campbell 2003 thinks that such an onomatopoeic theory may underlie some ancient thinking on language origins, discussing e.g. *Lucr. DRN.* 5.1063-1072 (“sounds made by dogs”) alongside 5.1379-1383 (where singing arises in imitation of birdsong) and Democritus DK 68 B154.

³¹ This sentence is intentionally awkward and precise: the language produced by the children need not even in Psammetichus’ assumptions be that spoken originally by *all humankind*, but simply that spoken by the oldest people: it is conceivable that Psammetichus may be imagining a separate origin for each language in the appropriate group, especially since his experiment depends on linguistic diversity while seeming to deny the effects of language change (see discussion immediately below).

change, if it exists at all, is not deformative enough to alter at least the essential character of a language or, crucially, obscure its deep connection with a named group of speakers: a language like the group of its speakers is apparently a constant.³² This means further that linguistic diversity, a necessity for the experiment, is at least not explained by factors internal to language (moreover the most-cited factor in language change, group contact and interpenetration, is typically described as producing “mixed languages” spoken only by the specific “mixed people”: the source languages remain notionally unchanged).³³

The three assumptions, taken together, mean that the experiment will produce a language and show that the speakers of that language are the oldest of all peoples. Herodotus’ narrative emphasizes the experiment’s legitimacy, and possibly the historian’s own opinion that the report is genuine, by subtly stressing Psammetichus’ care as an experimentalist: the Pharaoh makes sure that the experimental conditions are exactly right for using his assumptions to answer the question at hand.³⁴ The children are chosen at random (ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων; 2.2.) so as to minimize or eliminate the possibility of inherited predispositions to a given language (if any; as noted above, biological predispositions are not a concern, and the Pharaoh’s position on

³² “[D]espite the impression of his discussion of the Pelasgians that the Greek language was born fully-fledged, and despite the success of the surviving Pelasgians in ‘guarding’ their original language, Herodotus knows that language changes” (Harrison 1997).

³³ On ancient perceptions of language change see Uhlfelder 1963. On “mixed languages” and “peoples” see Dubuisson 1984 and the discussion in Chapter Six.

³⁴ Psammetichus was renowned in antiquity as an experimentalist, also attempting to plumb the depths of the Nile (Athen. 8.345e and Hdt. 2.28: it might be noted that Herodotus rejects the veracity of *this* experiment).

cultural predispositions seems to make those a matter not of inheritance but of learning);³⁵ the children are not even of specifically Egyptian descent, as might have been expected of a less 'honest' (one hesitates to say 'ethical') experimentalist seeking to prove the antiquity of his own people. The children are isolated from human speech-sounds, raised in a barn by a shepherd who has been commanded not to speak in their presence. The shepherd is also instructed to ignore the children's "insignificant babbling", and to report only their first fully linguistic utterance.³⁶ Once a word is reported, it is checked against known languages until a match is found. Finally, in further testament to Psammetichus' "intellectual honesty", the Pharaoh immediately accepts the result and its implications for relative antiquity.

The combination of all of these assumptions also raises some questions about language origins whose ancient answers cannot be surely known. How close is the connection between language spoken and the people to which speakers belong? Are the isolated children, by virtue of speaking Phrygian, somehow considered Phrygian themselves? It is unclear just what connection "real" contemporary Phrygians have with their oldest ancestors aside from language. This is of course a connection that the isolated children now share. Moreover, Herodotus is able to say elsewhere that

³⁵ Cf. Lloyd ad loc.: the randomization ensures that "the results have general validity."

³⁶ However the shepherd or indeed anyone is supposed to know the difference is not clear, nor an academic question given ancient tendencies to liken languages other than one's own to animal noises or to the meaningless sounds made by inanimate objects (see Tuplin 1999, 52); Greco-Roman linguistics was not so good at phonology, and even in modern developmental psychology how to measure the exact onset of language is debated (see Nelson 1973). The Greeks are notorious for being disinterested in languages other than Greek, classifying them all into the single category of "barbarian". Herodotus has Psammetichus' Egyptians do the Greeks one better (or worse), classifying all languages other than Egyptian as barbaric (2.158).

belonging to a particular group is, at least in part, a matter of speaking its language (8.144: αὐτίς δὲ τὸ ἑλληνικὸν, ἔὸν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα), and in several passages “associat[es] the character of a language with the perceived characteristics of its speakers.”³⁷ His era, with its investment in ‘Ionic rationalism’, also sees increasingly systematic use of the term βάρβαρος, mostly absent from Homer and other Archaic authors, to mean ‘speaker of a foreign language’, often Persian.³⁸ So are the children by virtue of their language, and despite their experimentally randomized ethnicity, somehow Phrygian?

It is also difficult to understand the experiment’s implications for linguistic diversity. The oldest language may be in the eyes of Herodotus and others merely a default setting for language, without national or ethnic implications. But if the Phrygian language in particular is universal or original enough to show up in just anyone, a particular model may be implied for the subsequent development of other languages and

³⁷ Colvin 1999, 59, citing 4.183 where the “outlandish” Garamantes are describes as having “a language which is similar to no other; rather they twitter like bats”; and 4.106 where the Scythians are “likewise linguistically isolated.” How and Wells ad 8.144 argue that Herodotus’ emphasis on language as opposed to physiognomy is unusual both historically and for him personally (citing 4.23 and Aesch. *Suppl.* 234f); on these and other examples see Chapter Five. Later the association is *de rigueur*; cf. Plato *Men.* 241e6-242a1: “This war was undertaken by the whole city on behalf of both themselves and others speaking the same language against the barbarians” (οὗτος μὲν δὴ πάση τῇ πόλει διηνητλήθη ὁ πόλεμος ὑπὲρ ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοφώνων πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους).

³⁸ βάρβαρος appears in Homer only in the epithet βαρβαροφώνων, referring to the “foreign-voiced” Carians (*Il.* 2.867), and the name of the nymph Ἄβαρβαρή (*Il.* 6.22). Pindar has it at *Isthm.* 6.23-24: οὕτω βάρβαρος οὔτε παλιγγλωσσος πόλις. In contrast Herodotus uses the word often, and is able to supply near-definitions at least for its use by others: e.g. 2.158: “the Egyptians call barbarians everyone who doesn’t speak their language” (βαρβάρους δὲ πάντας οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τοὺς μὴ σφίσι ὁμογλώσσους).

the relationships among them.

Linguistic diversity may be imagined by the experiment as coming about in one of three ways. First, discrete groups could each develop their own language, at least at first independently of outside influence. In this way language would be strongly linked with people, not only to their character within history (as was a common assumption) but to their superhistorical essence. Newborns in such a world would produce the language of their group spontaneously, with or without teaching.

This model is a poor fit with the assumptions underlying Psammetichus' experiment: if any newborns regardless of group affiliation will, in a suitable setting, produce the same original language, then discrete groups are not individually responsible for their languages being different from a primordial time. If each group had a different latent language to be realized, then there would be no reason to expect random newborns to have anything more than a random chance of spontaneously producing the oldest language (as opposed to any other language). This chance would be improved only if language and people were imagined as decoupled, i.e. to the extent that language was independent of people and wholly dependent on environment. Herodotus does link languages and peoples, but, apparently, at least in the context of the experiment not in their origins. For with language and people tied closely together, the experiment would detect not which language was oldest, but to which people the random newborns belonged.

A second model for linguistic diversity may resolve some of these difficulties, but introduces complications of its own. Lloyd, in discussing the possible Greek origin of the Psammetichus story (see below, "An Ancient Audience"), cites as an Ionic and strongly Herodotean context "a linear view of human [cultural] history which often

appears as hyper-diffusionism.” This view imagines a given cultural practice or technology as originated only once, often by a single person, and then by various mechanisms “diffused” or shared out among individuals and groups. This is a common view in Greek anthropology or *Kulturgeschichte*, in which cultural practices are ascribed to single inventors.³⁹ In the Psammetichus story, “hyper-diffusionism” would mean that language was invented once, in one group or by one individual, and then adopted by others. In fact the idea of an individual originator of language, an ὀνομαθέτης or ‘name-giver’, was widespread and important in the fifth century and later.⁴⁰ Its importance is shown also by the frequency and intensity of arguments against it throughout Classical antiquity.⁴¹

The implications of such a hyper-diffusionist theory of the origin of language for the origin of linguistic diversity are less clear. There are two possibilities. The first is that, after Phrygian was invented, the Phrygian language itself was diffused among other groups. In this case, linguistic diversity would come about because of, for example, imprecise instances of diffusion, the distinct requirements of different groups in different places (environmental determinism),⁴² and faulty learning of the language

³⁹ On inventors of culture, see Kleingünther 1933. This model of history lends itself to explanation of cultural practices by aitiology. Lloyd calls this model “linear history” (1964).

⁴⁰ E.g. Pythagoras *apud* Proclus *ad Crat.* Even Cicero, who elsewhere appears to have argued against a single inventor, lists “he who named [sc. words]” as the second wisest of all men (*Tusc.* 1.62, discussed in Chapter Three).

⁴¹ E.g. Cratylus in Plato’s *Cratylus*, and, more famously, Lucretius *DRN* 5.1028-1090. Both the idea of a single inventor and counterarguments are considered more fully in Chapters One and Three.

⁴² On “environmental determinism” see Tuplin 1999, 63-69: “climate and physical environment influence ethical and/or physiological characteristics.” Tuplin argues that this idea among others contributed to a lack of biological or physiological racism in Greek antiquity.

by successive generations with concomitant deformations of phonology, vocabulary, and grammar.

While all of these mechanisms were imagined by the ancients as impacting languages, this first possibility does not correctly represent the image of linguistic diversification presumed by Psammetichus' experiment.⁴³ *pace* Lloyd, it is difficult to believe that Herodotus and his contemporaries thought that "[o]ne language was invented and all others are in some way descended from it."⁴⁴ It is also not correct that "[w]ithout such a theory ... the experiment would have no value." Hyper-diffusionism does not guarantee that the language produced by the children points to the oldest people; all it guarantees is that the people who first invented language spoke the oldest language, a logical tautology. Greco-Roman linguistics could imagine languages as descended from one another or a common origin, in some cases to a fault, taking even common borrowings from a third source or accidental similarities of sound as indicative of shared ancestry.⁴⁵ Moreover, more philosophical discussions of language origins do seem to imagine a single inventor creating a language. But, as discussed in other chapters, the language in question was always their own, usually Greek. Although non-Greek-speaking peoples were at times linked to the Greeks by mythological or prehistorical genealogies, their languages remained distinct, βάρβαροι.

⁴³ The ancients were well aware of phonological change over time and place; see Uhlfelder 1963, and cf. Catull. 84, Suet. *Uesp.* 22, Quintilian *Inst.* 1.1.12 (recommending that children learn Greek first but Latin a close second lest their Latin pronunciation be deformed), and Jerome *Letters* 107.9: *in peregrinum sonum lingua corrumpitur, et externis uitiis sermo patrius sordidatur.*

⁴⁴ Lloyd 1994, 5. Cf. Harrison 1997: "There is nothing, moreover, in the story of Psammetichus' language test that *necessitates* the idea that one language must descend wholesale from another."

⁴⁵ On this idea as it applied to Latin and Greek, see Chapter Six.

If Lloyd were right about Phrygian being the language imagined as first originated and first diffused, the ancient authors or at least Herodotus would derive every language from Phrygian;⁴⁶ on existing evidence this is not the case. Not all languages were imagined as having the same origin, nor were they all in fact considered languages (when considered at all). In the Hellenistic period and later this trend reached its apex, in the possibility of social mobility based primarily on language spoken: being a Greek became a matter, more or less, of speaking Greek. The fact of linguistic diversity even in the Classical period thus actually shows up the fiction of common genealogical descent, in that differences between languages were taken as diagnostic of fundamental differences between peoples, differences more significant than a shared mythological ancestor.

Hyper-diffusionist cultural history allows for a second possible explanation for the linguistic diversity underlying Psammetichus' experiment, more in line with the strong association of languages with peoples and places. This is the third way in which linguistic diversity may have come about according to the operating assumptions of the experiment, mediating between the extremes of (1) single invention followed by pure cultural diffusion and (2) universal invention by all groups independently. Instead of (1) Phrygian itself being diffused among different groups, and instead of (2) each group developing the language on its own, what was diffused or shared was (3) the idea of vocal language at all. Its realization by different groups would thus be decoupled from its original realization as Phrygian, and could be tied directly to the conditions lived by

⁴⁶ This would be especially true if Lloyd were right in seeing the Psammetichus story as a Greek invention; thus it may be argued by contrast that this story as reported by Herodotus is not an invention of Greeks generally or of that author himself.

each group as dictated by environmental determinism.⁴⁷ As a result of different environments and histories, different languages came about. All of this is acknowledged by Psammetichus' experiment's careful design: the isolated children are νεογνά, 'totally unconditioned' by environment or learning, and it is only in an original environment, the setting carefully recreated by Psammetichus, that the language faculty is realized as Phrygian.⁴⁸ In other settings other languages emerged. This explanation for diversity has the virtues of (1) allowing Phrygian to have come first, and further (2) allowing the Phrygians themselves to be the first people because of (3) the strong connection maintained between language and people in environmental determinism; the connection between language and people is not fixed but not arbitrary. All humans have the capacity for language, realized differently in different settings. Phrygian is the default.

This is the best possibility under hyper-diffusionist cultural history for making the experiment's result of Phrygian prove Phrygians *per se* as the oldest people. If the language itself were shared among all groups, and then somehow internalized by them, then its original status proves nothing about the Phrygians as a people. Does Lloyd want us to see Herodotus and Psammetichus as thinking that each group had a latent language it could have developed first if only the Phrygians had not beat them all to the punch? Moreover, if Phrygian were invented first and then diffused, every language would be derivable from it, a notion not supported by ancient evidence. It seems more economical

⁴⁷ This is similar to the ideas put forth by Epicurus *ad Hdt.* 75-76; see further Chapter One.

⁴⁸ As the default setting, Phrygian may be imagined as more onomatopoeic than other languages. But βεκός is a real Phrygian word. Has Psammetichus' experiment stumbled onto some truth? Or has the experimental environment recreated only the original conditions producing Phrygian?

to argue that the Phrygians get pride of place not because they invented Phrygian, but because they invented language (first): thus it was language, not Phrygian, that was then shared out.

Some questions remain. The assumptions about language origins and the origin of linguistic diversity underlying the Psammetichus experiment are clear in outline. But we cannot know, for example, whether Herodotus' report of the experiment claims that the Phrygians literally are the oldest, a fact about which their possession of the first or oldest language is mostly a sign; or whether he implies that their solidification as a people was first made possible by their earliest invention of language. The latter notion, that language makes society possible, is explicit in some later authors, but may only possibly be inferred here.

What is certain about the assumptions about language underlying the story may be summarized as follows. With regard to the origin of language, Psammetichus' experiment makes three assumptions: (1) that ontogeny is the same as phylogeny; (2) that languages after their origin have not changed so much as to become unrecognizable; and (3) that different languages arise in different environments, including both natural and cultural settings. The last assumption links language and people, but perhaps more by accident of history or environment than in essence: a given people speaks a given language which may be taken as part of their identity, but not because it is inherent; rather because that is the language they developed or have come to be associated with. This relates to assumptions about linguistic diversity. Since language is not imagined as changing much (outside of borrowings), diversity is apparently pinned on the historical or accidental fact of different groups living in different places, i.e. environmental determinism. Thus if hyper-diffusion is the historical

model implied, it was not Phrygian in particular but the use of vocal language in general that was shared out as a cultural practice, and then realized differently by discrete groups each in their own setting.⁴⁹

These three assumptions resonate with contemporary Greek ideas about group interaction. The notion that isolated children would produce a language spontaneously may be linked to the notion that language is an essential feature of humankind, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. That the language produced by such isolation, in an environment relatively carefully controlled against linguistic contamination, is thought to be identical to the oldest language links chronology and anthropology, with knowledge of various Others delimiting knowledge of the Self: concentric circles radiating outwards from prototypically civilized civilizations to dramatically and even schematically different cultures are mapped onto history pointing away from primitivism (discussed to some extent in Chapter Three). Finally, the idea that groups and languages have not changed unrecognizably since their origins is in line with the assumptions underlying eponymy and etymology, in both of which the past is always the present renamed: thus contemporary social organization always finds an analogue, and often a justification, in stories about the distant past.

The latter two assumptions and their correlates in Greek thought generally are perhaps the more important for Herodotus, whose ethnographic gaze falls on non-Greeks bordering on and embroiled in the Greek world, and on the mixed cultures

⁴⁹ This distinction may parallel that of *αὐδή*, the capacity for speech, and *φωνή*, literally 'voice' but often a particular use of language; see Chapter Two. Different groups producing different languages independently of each other is reminiscent of Epicurus' ideas on language origins; see Chapters One and Three.

arising as a result. Less concerned with the origin of humankind, or with distinguishing humankind from the other animals, Herodotus sees in stories like that of Psammetichus' experiment a way to explain contemporary social structures and behaviors with reference to the past. Thus the experiment is grounded in and affirms the idea of the prehistoric past as source and normative narrative echo of present practice. The importance and popularity of the last idea in the Greek world may help to explain the apparently widespread appeal of Psammetichus' experiment to Greek audiences, to which we now turn.

An Ancient Audience

As a sort of myth, the Psammetichus story and its permutations may be expected to have been easily recognized and even reproduced by a wide public. Herodotus seems to have been read (or heard) less often or at least less completely than e.g. Homer, perhaps not surprisingly given the latter's unimpeachably seminal and canonical status, and especially given the sheer size of Herodotus' work.⁵⁰ But the historian's ideas are also apparently emblematic of his time, including the association of linguistic peculiarities with the characteristics, psychological and otherwise, of the people who speak them.⁵¹ The ideas and assumptions underlying the experiment were thus not peculiar to it. As reported by Herodotus and apparently others, Psammetichus' experiment was a topic of widespread popularity and debate in the fifth century BC and

⁵⁰ On Herodotus' audience, see Flory 1980 (who argues that the *Histories* were incompletely known, with certain passages better-known and more widely known than others).

⁵¹ On Herodotus' contemporary contexts, see Derow and Parker 2003, and Thomas 2000.

later. Its ideas about the origin of language and linguistic diversity were accepted enough to be taken as common ground for the exploration of other, non-linguistic issues.

Of the assumptions about language underlying Psammetichus' experiment, and of the larger intellectual contexts in which it is embedded by Herodotus, some aspects were shared by contemporaries, others by later authors including both Greco-Romans and Medieval and Renaissance royals who performed similar experiments, while some were ignored or contested. The story of the experiment is not limited to Herodotus but was of widespread interest in Egypt and the Greek East for Greeks and non-Greeks both.⁵² Moreover it has been shown that Herodotus' work resonates with the philosophical, natural philosophical, and persuasive contexts of his time.⁵³ Taken together, these conditions suggest that the ideas about language embedded in the experiment may be rather broadly representative of thought about the origin of language in the Greek world of the fifth century BC.

The story's widespread currency in the fifth century and later is suggested by narrative or contextual clues in Herodotus' presentation of the story, by allusions to and fuller quotations of the Herodotean story in other authors, and by complete versions preserved in other sources similar in outline but different in various details. Although its precise circulation in antiquity is impossible to trace, the range of attestations shows

⁵² Thus Gera 2003, 107 describes the experiment as "well known" and "quite notorious". She argues that all of the known variants from antiquity, especially in the scholia to Aristophanes, derive from Herodotus' report.

⁵³ See Thomas 2000 and below, "*Bekos* between *Sprachwissenschaft* and 'Folk Linguistics'" and "Conclusions".

that the story was not only widespread but also the subject of apparently vigorous debate among literate and more general audiences alike. In light of these permutations the story becomes something more than an obscure ancient episode in the history of linguistic pseudo-science, and more than a popular Western or Near Eastern literary *topos*.⁵⁴ It becomes something more vital and linked with other concerns of its time.⁵⁵

Scholars have tried to find an original source for the story through source criticism or *Quellenforschung* of Herodotus. Such criticism is arguably dubious *a priori* given the sort of circulation of ideas at work in the fifth century BC. The general image is of ideas and stories not spreading linearly, from one published work to the next, but permeating among multiple audiences, both literate and illiterate, through public presentations of works-in-progress, and responding to ideas more or less in the air.⁵⁶ Many authors share similar ideas without explicit knowledge of each other's work. This context makes it difficult to propose a specific original source for the story.⁵⁷ Moreover the historical reality of the episode described is not important for the argument herein. It

⁵⁴ On the story as belonging to a Near Eastern literary genre of mocking royalty, see the interpretations of Lloyd 1994, Knobloch 1985, and Salmon 1956.

⁵⁵ Cf. Longino 2002, 9: given the "provisionality, partiality, and plurality of scientific knowledge. ... scientific knowledge cannot be fully understood apart from its deployments in particular material, intellectual, and social contexts." Recently in Classics *topoi* have been re-read not only sociologically but also from a literary standpoint: see Hinds 1998 *passim*, esp. 40: "[t]he so-called commonplace, despite our name for it, is not an inert category ... but an active one, with as much potential to draw poet and reader into, as away from, engagement with the specificities of its history."

⁵⁶ Thomas 2000, 17-20; she argues against traditional source criticism and for attention to "milieu ... a deliberately vague term" (21). Cf. Benardete 1999, 3, who laments how Herodotus "has been compared with other authors who report [a given] episode; but few have considered how Herodotus understood it."

⁵⁷ This is compounded by the story's formal similarities to and function as myth; see below.

does not matter whether the story was originally Egyptian, only reported as such by Herodotus, or apocryphal, invented by Herodotus or some other Greek out of whole cloth.⁵⁸ What matters is that the story in its basic form and down to some details enjoyed widespread currency in the Greek world.

The fullest source of the story, Herodotus, seems not to have invented it himself. According to him there were ‘many’ Greek versions, but on the same evidence there were also multiple versions told by Egyptians, including the version he preferred, in at least three of their cities including Heliopolis, home to the ‘most trustworthy’ men. The differences between versions seemed to Herodotus substantial enough to demand comparison. But no ancient source seems to have doubted the basic facts of the story; for such doubt we must wait for more recent appraisals including the modern commentaries. Decisive in this connection is what Herodotus sees as open to dispute about the tale: not its basic facts, whose ‘trustworthiness’ he does not seem to question, but some of the details perhaps invented or repeated by overly credulous Greeks.⁵⁹

The contrast with modern reactions to the story is plain. The broad outlines of the experiment are taken for granted by the ancients, with debate limited to its details. Either Herodotus himself was of a mind-set different enough from the modern that

⁵⁸ Most moderns think the story a Greek invention: Vannicelli 1997, 203 (“È convinzione pressoché dei moderni che la storia dell’esperimento di Psammetico sia di origine greca, più precisamente ionica”; with additional sources at n. 7), Erbse 1992, 115 (“Der Spötter ist niemand anderes als Herodot selbst”), How and Wells ad 2.5 (“a Greek invention, a protest against the Egyptian claim to priority”), Lloyd 1964, 10 (“probably Ionic ... [and] certainly Greek” with features that “make an Egyptian origin ... impossible”). The general tone is doubtful: cf. the conspirational tone of Schweckediek’s 1992 commentary to Claudian’s *In Eutropium* 2.251-4: “[S]cheint aber weder Psammetichos noch Herodot aufgefallen zu sein, dass “Bekos” verdächtig den Lauten der Ziegensprache ähnelt – und die Zeigen brauchten ja bei der Aufzucht der Kinder nicht zu schweigen.”

⁵⁹ See above, n. 8.

Psammetichus' experiment did not trouble him and him alone, or the experiment and perhaps Herodotus' telling of it in particular were well-known among a broader population and generally not disputed by it. The latter seems right, in light of the evidence examined so far and explored further below. The Psammetichus story was widespread at least in Egypt and the Greek East in the fifth century BC and later; this speaks volumes about contemporary awareness of ideas about language origins.

After recounting the story, Herodotus goes on to sketch how he learned it, claiming the existence of 'many' (πολλά) other versions. As might be expected from the context, he attributes the versions mostly to Egyptians. The version he recounts is attributed to priests of Hephaestus in Memphis (2.2).⁶⁰ In addition he reports having heard other versions in Memphis, in Thebes, and in Heliopolis; he wished to compare those of the last city in particular with the Memphitean versions because "the Heliopolitans are said to be the most trustworthy [OR: most learned] (λογιώτατοι) of the Egyptians" (3.1).⁶¹ Multiple versions in multiple cities already indicate wide currency for the story, at least in Egypt, and among different levels of society.

Herodotus' presentation also hints at public debate about the story. His attributions suggest popular circulation for the story, in the Greek-speaking world as well as among hieratic Egyptians.⁶² His point in describing his research is to add

⁶⁰ Benardete 1999, 33, suggests that Hephaestus is an appropriate choice because "[a]s the god of building and making, Hephaestus is the source of all human making ... and hence the author as well of imitation," which Benardete thinks underlies Herodotus' understanding of Psammetichus' results.

⁶¹ Lloyd thinks the Heliopolitans Herodotus had in mind are "quite likely ... priests of the House of Life" (Lloyd 1994, 113).

⁶² Lloyd wonders whether Herodotus' informants are actually priests or merely assistants; it makes no difference for this part of my argument.

authority to his version by highlighting his fact-checking; if the Heliopolitans are the most trustworthy source and Herodotus consulted them, then his account must be the most trustworthy as well. This rhetorical maneuver occurs elsewhere in the *Histories*, always over information framed as subject to public debate.⁶³ His use of this rhetoric here implies the existence of other versions of the Psammetichus story known to Herodotus' audience, whom Herodotus evidently expected might dispute his version, at least in its details (see below).

From clues in his text and from corroborative evidence, we know that Herodotus' audience was made up of Greeks, not necessarily specialized scholars but a general public who attended public readings of parts of his work.⁶⁴ 'Many' (πολλά) versions of the Psammetichus story circulated among this more general Greek public as well. In contrast with the Egyptian versions of the story, apparently actively sought out, Herodotus dismisses all of the versions told by Greeks as 'foolish' (μάταια; cf. 2.49). He gives only one example of such foolishness, a detail that Psammetichus had the children's attendants' tongues cut out in order to guarantee their silence (2.5).

Wide circulation for the story in Greek world, among both popular and "hieratic" or educated audiences, is corroborated by other sources. Herodotus' version of the story is alluded to and quoted by other authors. Mention of the experiment may be confirmed by some form of the word *bekos*. For example, the word appears as a root in a mildly insulting vocative in Aristophanes' *Clouds*: "You fool, smelling of the

⁶³ Cf. the historian's discussion of competing ideas about the origins of the Scythians (4.5-12); see Hartog 2001, Jouanna 2001; on multiple versions in Herodotus generally, see Groten 1963.

⁶⁴ See Flory 1980.

Kronioi and [being] moon-bread” (ὦ μῶρε σὺ καὶ Κρονίων ὄζων καὶ βεκκεσέληνε; *Nub.* 398). The meaning depends in part on the context but more directly on βεκκεσέληνε being built on the analogy of προσέληνος, ‘older than the moon’, an adjective sometimes used in the Arcadians’ claim to antiquity and autochthony.⁶⁵ Knowledge of this claim was widespread.⁶⁶ Apollonius Rhodius for example repeats it in his *Argonautica*, 4.264-5: “The Arcadians, who boast of living even before the moon” (Ἄρκαδες, οἱ καὶ πρόσθε σεληναίης ὑδέονται / ζῶειν). A variety of explanations and rationalizations for this statement were offered in antiquity. The scholion to Apollonius, explaining that “the Arcadians think that they came about before the moon” (οἱ Ἄρκαδες δοκοῦσι πρὸ τῆς σελήνης γεγονέναι), cites Eudoxos as agreeing but other fragmentary authors as saying that the Arcadians acquired the name προσέληνοι through historical circumstance, by having a king named Proselenos (Προσέληνος) or by producing a scholar Endymion who “discovered the paths and numbers of the moon” (εὕρηκέναι τὰς περιοδούς καὶ τοὺς ἀριθμούς τῆς σελήνης), perhaps implying πρὸς-σέληνοι.⁶⁷ Aristotle apparently argued that the Arcadians were named thus by barbarians defeated by them “before the rising of the moon” (πρὸ τοῦ ἐπιτεῖλαι τὴν σελήνην; fr. 591 = Schol. A.R. 4.264

⁶⁵ LSJ q.v., “before or older than the moon”, citing Aristotle *fr.* 591, Hippys 2, and Plut. 2.282a. The entry notes that grammarians made the word connote hubris, possibly by confusion with προσελέω, ‘to mistreat’ (of uncertain etymology; Chantraine 1968-1980 q.v.).

⁶⁶ See Piettre 2000.

⁶⁷ Cf. Diod. 3.60.2, 4.27.4ff. Is there a connection here with Psammetichus having practical wisdom and (pseudo-)scientific interests?

p.494).⁶⁸

A connection between Aristophanes' compound word and the story of the Arcadians is also made by scholia to the *Clouds*, one of which writes that "[Aristophanes] said βεκκεσέληνε since the Arcadians were called προσέληνοι. And all told the word means archaic" (εἶπε τὴν λέξιν "βεκκεσέληνε", ἐπεὶ καὶ οἱ Ἄρκάδες προσέληνοι ἐλέγοντο. καὶ ἀπλῶς ἡ λέξις ἀρχαϊσμὸν σημαίνει; Schol. ad Nub. 398c). 398e alludes to the Arcadians as well: "Needing to say "before the moon" he substituted *bek*, which is bread among the Phrygians" (δέον εἰπεῖν "προσέληνε" τὸ βέκ παρέπλεξεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατὰ Φρύγας ἄρτος). A third entry in the scholia comes to the same conclusion about the meaning without mentioning the Arcadians, 398b: "Psammetichus found out and believed that the Phrygians had come first; and for this reason the word [βεκκεσέληνε] means what is old and unthinking" (Ψαμμήτιχον εὔρεῖν καὶ πιστεῦσαι πρώτους γεγονέναι Φρύγας· ἐνταῦθα δὲ ἡ λέξις σημαίνει τὸ "ἀρχαῖε καὶ ἀνόητε"). Other entries make less of the age implied and focus more on the insulting aspect of the compound: 'unthinking' (ἀνόητοι; 398f), 'moonstruck or struck dumb' (σεληνόβλητε καὶ ἀπόπληκτε; 398g), 'lacking perception' (ἀναίσθητε; 398h). These last seem influenced more by the presence of μῶρε.⁶⁹ In any case the compound was understood at least by the later scholiasts to mean something like 'doddering old fool'.

This brief allusion by Aristophanes bears on the larger question of the story's

⁶⁸ Dover thinks Aristotle's explanation the most "rational" (1968, 152). One wonders what sort of "barbarians" would have given Greek enemies a Greek nickname.

⁶⁹ Cf. Hesych. s.v. βεκκεσέληνος: "σεληνόπληκτος", 'moonstruck'.

circulation in the Greek world. For βεκκεσέληνε to score an effective comedic point, the audience would have to be able to decode its meaning. Possible processes of decoding may reveal something about the audience's knowledge, at least as presumed by Aristophanes, of the two known sources for βεκκεσέληνε, (Herodotus' telling of?) the story of Psammetichus' experiment and the claim made by the Arcadians. On the one hand, the decoding process may reveal ignorance. The context and tone of the passage could have been enough for the audience to infer the word's meaning in this line. Even if the members of the audience were unaware of the two sources for βεκκεσέληνε they could have inferred and thus enjoyed its comic force from the collocation with μῶρε and Κρονίων ὄζων, combining 'fool' and 'older than old' (literally 'smelling of the Kronioi') respectively to get 'doddering old fool' (as some of the scholia seem to have done). Aristophanes is notorious for pushing Greek compound-formation to its limits; his audience, or at least his entire audience, cannot have been expected to recognize every allusion in every compound form.⁷⁰ Moreover, even the seemingly non-Greek part of the word, *bekos*, would perhaps not have been completely opaque; for *bekos*, in addition to being identified as Phrygian, seems to have been a good Greek word as well, meaning "bread" in an Ionic dialect.⁷¹ There is thus no reason demanding that the audience knew the story, nor that Aristophanes presumed that they did: it seems that βεκκεσέληνε would have done its job anyway.

On the other hand, the audience may have got the reference. As suggested

⁷⁰ On Aristophanes' style see Willi 2003 and Silk 2000, 98-159.

⁷¹ How-Wells ad loc. Phrygian is closest to Greek among IE languages: Mallory and Adams 1996, s.v. *Phrygian language*; cf. Brixhe 1994 and Neumann 1988. See above, n.3.

above, Herodotus' audience came from a wide cross-section of the Greek-speaking world, and the huge attendance at the festival where the *Clouds* was performed drew on the same population. The *Clouds* was performed at the City Dionysia of 423, written as was Aristophanes' whole oeuvre "for a wide public".⁷² This is in line with Herodotus' statement that there were "many" versions of the story told by Greeks, and belongs to roughly the same time period. Some members of the audience may have known of the story in one version or another.

In contrast with the audience, whose knowledge of the story must remain uncertain, Aristophanes, who provides the first and only recorded instance of βεκκεσέληνος outside the lexicographers, was clearly aware of its two separate sources.⁷³ Here too there is some qualification; to quote Dover's commentary on the *Clouds*: "either *bekke-* alludes to *some version* of the [Psammetichus] story, or we do not know to what it alludes."⁷⁴ Although Aristophanes clearly knew of the story, his allusion need not be to the version told by Herodotus. Other versions were in circulation, and it may be on one of these or no one version in particular that Aristophanes drew in fashioning his compound. Regardless, it must refer to the Psammetichus story, just as its use as the first half of this particular compound with –σέληνος must have in mind the claim made by the Arcadians.

The scholia to this passage in the *Clouds*, quoted above to help with semantics,

⁷² OCD s.v. Aristophanes, 164; the play took the bottom prize, and was apparently different than the version preserved (a revised version from 418-416 (Schol. ad 522)). On the theater-going public cf. the colorful descriptions in Casson 1974, 81 and nn.

⁷³ On Aristophanes' knowledge of Herodotus, see Flory 1980.

⁷⁴ Dover ad loc., emphasis added.

are suggestive of the sorts of versions of the story to which Aristophanes could have had access.⁷⁵ Although late, they provide insight into the variations among versions and, less directly, into the type and tone of the debate surrounding them. The first version of the story quoted by the scholia (398b) is the most similar to Herodotus' version, although it does not name him as a source. The similarity is close enough to include the same two 'variants' as Herodotus about the children's nursing: "(1a) some say that he provided goats for them, whom the children suckled for nourishment; (1b) others, that he provided nurses having cut out their tongues." (1a) is the same as Herodotus' preferred account, while (1b) is the example he dismisses as the sort of "foolish" thing Greeks have said. A minor difference between the two is the scholion replacing Herodotus' shepherd, who tended the children or at least the area in which they were located during the full two years of their isolation, with "one of [Psammetichus'] friends", who apparently does no more than visit the children in their third year to hear their spontaneous speech. It is impossible to decide whether this difference is due to a conscious and argumentative change on the part of the scholiast or some intermediary, or to mistakes or details fudged in the transmission of the story. Several centuries stand between Herodotus and the scholia to Aristophanes, in which any number of details may have been altered by accident.⁷⁶

Two other versions of the story in the scholia name Herodotus as a source, 398d and 398f. 398f is less complete, seeking only to explain βεκκεσέληνε. It offers two explanations, one semantic and the other a historical explanation referring to the

⁷⁵ On the scholia see also the discussion in Vannicelli 1997, 209-212.

⁷⁶ The version in scholion 389b for example has the crucial word spelled βοκός.

Psammetichus story. On the one hand, “Either the two are considered as one, *bekos* and the moon; [because] both are ancient” (ἢ τὰ β’ σύγκειται ὡς ἓν, τὸ βέκος καὶ ἡ σελήνη· ἀρχαῖα δὲ ἀμφοτέρω). On the other hand, the word is argued to have come from the Phrygians or the Lydians, both of whom called bread *bekos* and “were made fun of as unthinking” (διεβάλλοντο δὲ ὡς ἀνόητοι). In the latter case *βεκκεσέληνε* gets its literal meaning from *bekos* and its insulting connotation from already existing opinions about the Phrygians and Lydians. The scholion goes on to attribute the story to Herodotus’ second book. There is little to do here with the Herodotean original as a story about the origin of language; 398f amounts to little more than an extended gloss.

The other version in the scholia to cite Herodotus, 398d, is more interested in the story as a whole. It also shows important differences from the Herodotean version, including signs of having absorbed discussion tangential to that original and relevant to Aristophanes’ later allusion; it is possible that debate about the story shifted focus over time and place among different versions of the story and allusions to it. 398d first describes the Arcadians and their claim to have lived “in times before the moon” (τοὺς προσελήνους χρόνους), possibly adding some invective force by presenting them as uncivilized, living off ‘fallen fruit’ (ἀποπιπτόντων καρπῶν). The scholion goes on to give an abbreviated version of the Psammetichus story, ending with a citation: “This comes from Herodotus in his second book, where he speaks of Psammetichus” (ἔστι δὲ παρ’ Ἡροδότῳ ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ, ἔνθα περὶ Ψαμμητίχου φησὶν). Like 398b, this version is largely similar to Herodotus’, including the version he prefers (1a above; 3a here) with goats and the version he dismisses (1b above; 3b here) with mutilated wet-nurses. But there are some differences. Like 398b, 398d replaces Herodotus’ shepherd with someone less descript, ‘a man’ (ἄνδρα). A more striking difference is the context

in which the experiment takes place. Whereas Herodotus had Psammetichus alone wondering ultimately about the relative antiquity of different peoples, the scholiast in 398d has the Phrygians and the Arcadians, both of whom are not unexpected, along with the Persians, having a debate about their relative antiquity. The debate reaches the point of requiring outside intervention; the three parties involved turn to Psammetichus for a 'decision' (κρίσιον). This broadening of the context may indicate how different participants in the debate about the story itself changed its terms to suit their own historical contexts; although the basic questions remained the same, the interested peoples changed.

The final scholion to be considered, 398c, comes as close as one may hope to confirming this, and to confirming the vitality of the Psammetichus story in the Greek world. It does not name Herodotus as its source. This may mean nothing. The outlines of the story are the same: an Egyptian Pharaoh isolates children and, upon hearing the word *bekos*, discovers which people is the oldest of all. But in 398c two of these elements are changed. The Pharaoh is different, not Psammetichus but Sesogchosis; and it is not the Phrygians to whom *bekos* is attributed, but the Paphlagonians. In the case of the scholia I think that it does no good to write off changes due to fluctuation in oral tradition; although the stories must originally have been told orally, and probably continued to be so throughout antiquity, they were written down beginning at the latest with Herodotus and stretching through the scholia, themselves products of a highly literary culture.

Moreover, the two changes in 398c are not meaningless. The difference between Psammetichus and Sesogchosis is substantial. Confusion between the two names phonetically is impossible. And even in Greek antiquity knowledge of the two Pharaohs

(and others) was developed enough to prevent confusion between the two men historically. Herodotus himself differentiates between the two, describing first Psammetichus in book 2 and later Sesogchosis in book 7. Apollonius of Rhodes in his *Argonautica* has the two Pharaohs in the same historical sequence: first Psammetichus (to whom Apollonius gives the honor of being the experimenter) at 4.257-262 and then Sesogchosis at 4.272-274. Although both men were Pharaohs, their times and actions are distinct; to ascribe the experiment to Sesogchosis is to root it in a recognizably different historical context.⁷⁷

The other change, from the familiar Phrygians to the Paphlagonians, also has a ring of motivation.⁷⁸ It is similar to the introduction of the Persians into 398d: at no time in Greek antiquity were the Phrygians and Paphlagonians confused – although they both occupied western Asia Minor, and Phrygia’s boundaries were ill-defined, they were recognized as distinct peoples, with separate histories, rulers, origins, etc. As such the change to Paphlagonians seems to be deliberate, part of the ongoing debate about the details of the story.⁷⁹

Different versions of the story circulated in the Greek world in the Classical and

⁷⁷ Dover 1968, 152 speculates that the version containing Sesogchosis may have come from Manetho through Alexander Polyhistor, and notes that another scholion has Amasis instead.

⁷⁸ But see Saller 1980, who argues that “all of the elements in [an] anecdote were more or less fluid. A comparison of doublets reveals that the ‘punch-line’ tended to remain stable, while minor details underwent almost constant change.” Saller nevertheless concedes that “anecdotes can be valuable evidence for the attitudes and ideologies of peoples.”

⁷⁹ For other readings of Herodotus see Origen *Contra Celsum* 5.45-46 with Linforth 1926. Benardete 1999, 33 n.6 suggests that “Plato Cratylus 400d6-401a5 ... is like a commentary on Herodotus.” For the *Cratylus* see Chapter One.

Hellenistic periods and remained known to later times.⁸⁰ The basic premise, the experiment itself, seems to have gone unchallenged, but there existed different versions subject ‘to debate’ (φιλονεικεῖν) on their details.⁸¹ Several points of debate continue to appear in the sources. First, the choice between goats or (silenced) wet-nurses is raised again and again, first recorded by Herodotus and then in subsequent authors. Herodotus uses this question as his only example of a difference between versions. From that fact it might be argued that subsequent appearances of the question are not reflections of real debate, but simple repetitions of Herodotus. But Herodotus himself notes that in his time there were “many” versions, and the versions quoted in other authors may not be demonstrated necessarily to have come from his.

A second debated detail is the identities of the parties interested in the experiment. Generally, the experimenter and his helper(s) are Egyptian, and the interested parties are broadly Eastern, mostly from Asia Minor. Within this framework much debate seems to have taken place. I have called the story the “Psammetichus story” due to that Pharaoh being featured in the fullest mainstream account; ancient

⁸⁰ Cf. Claudian *In Eutropium* 2.251-254 (with only one isolated child). Pollicrates’ lexicon s.v. φωναὶ ζώων (5.88) wrongly cites Herodotus as an example of goats making the noise φρίμαγμος. Additional versions with variations are preserved by the twelfth century AD scholar Tzetzes in his commentary to the *Clouds* (*In Nub.* 398); these are interesting, showing some of the same types of variation (and debate about them) as in the more ancient versions, but given Tzetzes’ infamous inaccuracy they are not obviously relevant to the story’s currency BC. Quintilian may have Psammetichus in mind when he writes about language learning: “isolated children, educated by mute nurses on kings’ orders, even if they are said to produce certain words, will nevertheless lack the faculty of speech” (*infantes a mutis nutricibus iussu regum in solitudine educati, etiam si uerba quaedam emisisse traduntur, tamen loquendi facultate caruerunt; Inst.* 10.1.10).

⁸¹ Cf. Cornell’s characterization of the variants in the stories surrounding Romulus and Remus: “a fair degree of unanimity about the main structure, but the sources record endless disputes on matters of detail” (Cornell 1995, 57).

authors also seem to have recognized Psammetichus as the principal. But at least one other experimenter was possible: Sesogchosis, with as we have seen important differences to Psammetichus as an historical personage. Moreover the experimenter's perceived stake in the story could change: in Herodotus the impetus to perform the experiment comes from Psammetichus himself, while in other authors Psammetichus is a sort of arbiter or expert witness (see below on his reputation for cleverness or technical knowledge) to whom others turn to resolve a question of their own (*In Nub.* 398d; cf. Tzetzes 398a).

Third, in Herodotus' version the interested parties are Psammetichus' own Egyptians and, after the result of the experiment is known, the Phrygians, a distinct people of Asia Minor. Like Psammetichus, the Phrygians also seem to have been taken in antiquity as the primary players of this role. But here too there were other options, most strikingly as realized in the scholion to Aristophanes 398d, which has not only the Phrygians but also the Arcadians (not completely surprisingly, given their relation to Aristophanes' crucial word *βεκκεσέληνε*) and the Persians; the Persians are eastern but the Arcadians are good Greeks, their inclusion suggesting a Hellenization of sorts, making the story more relevant to a Greek audience (or in this case making "relative antiquity" the main point, given the Arcadians' position). A third option here is provided by the scholion 398c, which has the Paphlagonians, and a fourth by 398f, with the Lydians (whose direct relationship with Greek history in the northwest Aegean precludes their being confused with the less-known Phrygians or even Paphlagonians; at any rate their connotations are different). Fourth and finally, the identity of the man to whom the isolated children were entrusted also was varied: a shepherd, a friend of the Pharaoh, "a man" (and, in Tzetzes, "guards").

If different answers to this last detail have less impact than those to the other three, they all show the widespread availability, vitality, and mutability of this striking story in the Greek world of the fifth century BC. As a sort of myth, its basic shape and thus its basic ideas (about language origins) became an agreed-upon background, “good to think with” about other types of contemporary concerns.

Βεκός Between *Sprachwissenschaft* and ‘Folk Linguistics’

The story of Psammetichus’ experiment was repeated and apparently debated throughout the Greek world of the fifth century BC and later. It moved at least among Egyptians and Greeks and at the same time jumped genres, from local and more global historical discourse to comedy and popular tales. If clues in Herodotus and later scholia may be pressed, this interest in the story was even more widespread than has been directly preserved, among both literate (recorded) and popular audiences. This affirms the general first conclusion about ancient linguistic thought asserted in the Introduction: the ideas should be interesting in the first place because they were interesting to the ancients. Second, as has just been shown, the ideas were apparently interesting both on their own and as a means of thinking about other things. In this manner the Psammetichus story became associated with relative antiquity and questions of group interorganization.

Philosophical speculation about language origins is not the context normally provided for the story. Instead, as shown above, interest in the experiment and the performance of the experiment itself are connected with a topic perceived as more

popular, the relative antiquity of distinct peoples.⁸² By being limited to this context the story and the experiment are excluded from ‘linguistics’, even ‘ancient linguistics’, written off into ‘folk linguistics’, and thus often disqualified from importance in the area of language. These interpretations are problematic. First, interest in relative antiquity cannot be the only or even primary motivating factor behind the story’s demonstrably wide currency in antiquity. Second, while philosophical or even technical linguistic speculation is apparently not the aim of Psammetichus’ experiment, its method is technical, both figuratively and literally, and may thus be distinguished in part from less deliberate linguistic inquiry.

The experiment does deal with relative antiquity, but not exclusively. Herodotus himself frames the story thus, and some of the later allusions to the story highlight the same concern. Aristophanes’ brief reference in *Clouds* is one example: in the context of its line, the compound βεκκεσέληνε clearly has hoary old age as its principal connotation, derived from both the Psammetichus experiment and the Arcadians’ famous claim to high antiquity (προσέληνοι). The late antique notice by St. Clement is another: “Do not the goats prove the antiquity of the Phrygians?” (*Cohort ad Gentes*, p.6 line 29). The relative antiquity of different peoples clearly is part of what is at stake in the experiment and its retelling.

But relative antiquity cannot be the story’s only motivating force or even its central one. First, the story’s wide circulation was arguably not wholly or even partially

⁸² Lloyd also links the story with what he sees as another popular genre, especially in Egypt, stories making fun of rulers (adding that “[e]ven today, the Egyptians have a marked satirical streak in them”); Lloyd 1994, 11. For Salmon, the intent to make fun is central and conditioned the form and reception of the story (1956, 324 and *passim*). This ludic genre is not linguistic.

dependent on the *answer* it provided to the question of relative antiquity. The answer returned by the experiment seems to have been fixed early on as the Phrygians. This fixed pride of place is difficult to understand. In a cultural context where differentiated claims to antiquity were taken seriously, an inaccurate answer or, more precisely, a useless answer would be discarded, and in any case modified by the group doing the telling.⁸³ Thus Lloyd argues that the Egyptians cannot have invented the story, because its answer does not serve their interests.⁸⁴ As many have noted in this context, the Phrygians are not otherwise considered especially old. Indeed they are almost universally described by the ancient sources as a relatively young people, only recently arrived into the Mediterranean basin.⁸⁵ This description is preserved by, among others, Herodotus himself. Herodotus should not be able to believe both the results of the experiment and the ideas he presents elsewhere. Thus the answer returned by Psammetichus' experiment must be discarded as a feature primarily responsible for

⁸³ Examples of Greek interest in (fictional) claims of descent may be multiplied; e.g. the exchange in *Hipp. Mai.* 285d3-e2: "(Socrates) But what is it they gladly heard from you and praised? Do tell me, since I cannot find out myself. (Hippias) Bloodlines, Socrates, and heroes and men, and foundation stories, who cities were first established, and altogether the sweetest things of archaeology are listened to, with the result that I was compelled by them to recall and concern myself with all such things" ([ΣΩ.] 'Ἀλλὰ τί μὴν ἔστιν ἃ ἠδέως σου ἀκροῶνται καὶ ἐπαινοῦσιν; αὐτός μοι εἰπέ, ἐπειδὴ ἐγὼ οὐχ εὐρίσκω. [ΙΠ.] Περὶ τῶν γενῶν, ὧς Σώκρατες, τῶν τε ἡρώων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ τῶν κατοικήσεων, ὡς τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐκτίσθησαν αἱ πόλεις, καὶ συλλήβδην πάσης τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας ἥδιστα ἀκροῶνται, ὥστ' ἔγωγε δι' αὐτοὺς ἠνάγκασμαι ἐκμεμαθηκέναι τε καὶ ἐκμεμελετηκέναι πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα).

⁸⁴ Lloyd 1964. It has been suggested that the Egyptians may in fact have invented the story, with *bekos* being the ancient Egyptian name for their own country, *B³kt*, but that Herodotus (willfully?) misinterpreted the tale for his own/Greek purposes (Jonathan Hall, private communication; see Gera 2003, 71 n.3 for additional sources). Cf. Erbse 1992.

⁸⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports the opinion that the Phrygians are identical to the Trojans (1.29); I have not had the chance to explore the implications of this suggestion.

sustaining interest in the story. Something other than relative antiquity, and especially other than the putative high antiquity of the Phrygians, underwrote the story's continued appeal. The fact that language is taken as diagnostic and decisive of antiquity in the experiment is not accidental, but depends on popular interest in the origin of language.

The range of ancient approaches to language origins are indicated by the intellectual twists and turns taken by Psammetichus: technical and informal inquiry are only notional poles on a continuum of approaches to linguistic knowledge. One point of the story is that Psammetichus was unable to answer his question by resorting to untested knowledge alone: he was "unable to discover [it] by inquiry (πυνθανόμενος)" (Hdt. 2.2). As a result, he 'devised' (ἐπιτεχνᾶται) the experiment in its recorded form, to discover more scientifically what less scientific intuition or tradition could not.⁸⁶

Details such as the children being chosen from 'people happening by', and being absolute newborns, may be read as markers of serious scientific intent.⁸⁷ Lloyd rightly argues that "the experiment is very carefully controlled ... [a] characteristic it shares with Hippocratic Medicine" and a trait he attributes to Greek "experimental enquiry"

⁸⁶ On the force of ἐπιτεχνᾶται see LSJ s.v. τέχνη III: "an art or craft, i.e. a set of rules, system or method of making or doing". Originally the root referred to physical construction, as seen in τέκτων, and derives from PIE *tek- "fabricator" or "tool for fabricating" (Mallory and Adams 1997, s.v. Ax); the combination of "the notion of 'weaver' with that of 'builder' ... may be explained by the widespread use of wattling in the construction of houses" (Iidem s.v. Craft, Craftsman; cf. Chantraine 1968-1980 s.v. τέχνη). Reflexes include Sanskrit *taksati*, 'to construct', and *taksan*, 'carpenter'; and Latin *texo*, 'to weave', *tela*, 'cloth'. Cf. the discussion of Plato's *Protagoras* in Chapter Three.

⁸⁷ Lloyd 1994, 5-6. Salmon sees the attempt at experimental control as earmarks of a jocular genre, a sort of scientific farce or *inuestigatio ad absurdum*: "Plus Psammethique prendra de précautions pour donner à son expérience toutes les garanties d'objectivité, plus il sera ridicule. C'est la clef de tous les récits qui peuvent s'intituler <<la précaution inutile>>" (1956, 326). As noted in the text, ancient readers of the story already questioned Psammetichus' success at creating objective or neutral conditions for the experiment.

generally.⁸⁸ The first version of the story given by the scholiast to the *Clouds* is similar: “unable to discover the truth on account of so many people arguing about it, he fashioned <something like> the following” (398b=101b 21f), where ‘fashioned’ is μηχανᾶται, whose stem μηχαν- refers to an artificial means for accomplishing something, including the cognate “machine”.⁸⁹ Throughout Greek literature informal knowledge gained by inquiry is contrasted with both systematic knowledge gained through speculation or experimentation and technological or mechanical acumen.⁹⁰

Elsewhere in the tradition Psammetichus himself is associated with just this sort of ‘devising’ and advanced technical knowledge of different types; Lloyd refers thus to “Psammetichus’ mystique.”⁹¹ Roman authors attribute to him the design and construction of labyrinths which they compare favorably with other famous mazes, for example Daedalus’.⁹² Psammetichus is also credited with serious exploration of the sources of the Nile.⁹³ He is thus presented as exceptionally invested in deliberate

⁸⁸ On Herodotus’ connection to the Hippocratic tradition and its modes of reasoning, see Thomas 2000; 21: “the careful attention to the evidence of the senses is shared by both - the reliance on autopsy, experience, sight, rather than on abstract theorizing.”

⁸⁹ LSJ s.v. μηχαν-ή II: “any artificial means *or* contrivance *for doing a thing*”. Possible cognates include Gothic *mag*, ‘to be able’ (with contemporary German *Macht*, ‘power’, a nominal derivative), and Old Church Slavonic *moge* and Russian *mogu* with the same meaning. These suggest a PIE root **magh-*, ‘to be able’ (Mallory and Adams 1997, s.v. *Able*; cf. Chantraine 1968-1980 s.v. μηχανή).

⁹⁰ See Balansard 2001.

⁹¹ Lloyd 1994, 114; cf. 11: “a man whose practical wisdom certainly impressed [Greek circles].”

⁹² Mela 1.56, Pliny *N.H.* 36.84.

⁹³ By Clearchus of Soli fr. 98 Wehrli (=Athen. 8.345e). Cf. the interest in the Nile attributed to the ‘royals’ Artaxerxes (Aristotle *DIL* 6), Nero (Seneca *Ep.* 12.3), and Juba of Mauretania (Pliny *N.H.* 5.10.51); on ancient exploration of the Nile see generally Cary-Warmington 1968, 165-178.

experimentation and techniques for doing things, differentiated from run-of-the-mill knowledge and method.⁹⁴ Thus his move from inquiry to deliberate experimentation may be read as a turn from more popular to more expert knowledge.⁹⁵

But despite Psammetichus' experimental acumen, the results obtained by the experiment in question are not made the basis of philosophical speculation, much less of linguistic science, but are taken as the answer to a more concrete question of demonstrably broad interest in the Archaic and Classical periods. Psammetichus thus uses careful methods, but as a means to an apparently more pragmatic end. Moreover, although experimental linguistics effectively replaces folk knowledge in this instance, the fact that a single person is reported as doing both goes against the typical sharp distinction set up between the two.

Finally, once the data are obtained, they have to be interpreted with recourse to 'inquiry', the same method previously discarded in favor of scientific experimentation: upon hearing βεκός the Pharaoh asks around (πυνθανόμενος) to determine to which language it belongs. In the end, the Psammetichus episode falls somewhere between the two supposedly distinct modes of linguistic inquiry: the insights of folk linguistics yield to experimental method, a pseudo-scientific shift offset by the pragmatic and non-philosophical purpose to which the results are put. Thus 'folk linguistics' and pseudo-

⁹⁴ Cf. his role as judge or "expert witness" in the scholion to Aristophanes' *Clouds* 398d (discussed above).

⁹⁵ Christ 1994, 184-186, argues that Herodotus presents Psammetichus as similar to himself: "Just as Herodotus at several points in his Egyptian *logos* challenges the idea of Hellenic superiority and priority, so too Psammetichus, through his inquiry, challenges the parochial assumptions of his countrymen." Thus here as elsewhere language origins articulate impurities and overlap in group organization and systems of knowledge. Cf. Hunter 1982, 77 n.47, and Cook 1976, 47.

scientific linguistics may be understood less as exclusive categories than as poles on a continuum of linguistic research, as a rule mixed in ancient thought on language. Their combination in practice is emblematic of intellectual activity in the fifth century BC and later: although the fifth century arguably was witness to the victory of Ionic “rationalism” over Archaic mythic explanations of the world, the two continued to operate in parallel and in overlapping structures for centuries.

Conclusions

The story of Psammetichus’ experiment, as reported by Herodotus and others, enjoyed wide currency in its time and may be taken to reflect equally widely-held ideas about language origins. Ideas about the origin of language were used like myths to address non-linguistic concerns. By having a relatively fixed general form, they allowed for easy recognition and creation of permutations by large and varied audiences.

The most basic meaning of these linguistic myths involves interest in group origins and interactions more generally. The story of Psammetichus’ experiment, whether or not correctly representing the Pharaoh’s interests, may be read as an example of *common* Mediterranean interest in origins:

The points of contact between so many accounts [of the origin of culture], ranging over a millennium and a half in their dates of composition, show quite clearly that we are dealing with what must have been, to some degree, the common property of all educated men. ... The evolutionary view of culture with which we are concerned may ... be comparable to certain contract theories of the origin of society whose popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cannot be traced to the influence of any one writer.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Cole 1990, 12, who continues: “On the other hand, it is just as possible that a better analogy is provided by the views widely current today on the subjects of biological evolution and psychoanalysis,

These origins in Herodotus are given an ethnographic twist, his gaze falling on non-Greeks bordering on and embroiled in the Greek world, and on the arguably mixed customs arising as a result. Like other Greek authors, Herodotus sees in these origins a way of explaining contemporary concerns: the prehistoric past is taken as a normative echo of present social organization. He seeks explanations for contemporary Greek practices, for example the names of gods, in more ancient cultures like the Egyptian: compared to Greek history, the roots of Egyptian history are strictly speaking prehistorical.⁹⁷ This reading is necessarily abrupt and no doubt oversimplifying, and depends on detailed demonstrations of these themes in the ancient texts by other scholars (see notes). But it shows how language origins, no less than other more obvious genres, are used to articulate those themes.

One theme is conspicuous mostly for its absence: compared with the Judeo-Christian tradition, Greek thought on language origins reserves scant space for the divine.⁹⁸ As shown in Chapter Two, in Homer the gods are capable of inducing speech in speechless creatures (like Xanthus), but the effect is temporary and does not bridge the identity gap between humans and others. Hesiod is similar: Hephaestus and Hermes may create language in Pandora, but even something as generally anthropogenic as the

views in which it is possible to recognize, simplified and distorted as they often are, doctrines which go back to Darwin and Freud." I am not sure so sharp a distinction may be or even needs to be drawn.

⁹⁷ E.g. Lateiner 1991.

⁹⁸ See the few sources discussed in this connection in Chapter Three: Eur. *Suppl.* 201-204, Diod. Sic. 1.15.9ff, and Macr. *Sat.* 1.7; cf. Allen 1948. Divine origins for language were posited more often by cultures bordering the Greco-Roman world, e.g. Near Eastern cultures: see *Isidis aretologia Cymaea* 31-32: "I [sc. Isis] established dialects for Greeks and barbarians" (ἐγὼ διαλέκτους / Ἑλλησι καὶ βαρβάροις ἔταξα) with Peek 1930, 124.

Myth of Ages, in which humankind is created again and again, says nothing about divine involvement in human language. The trend continues in Herodotus. The absence of the divine is especially striking in contrast both with the abundance of other Near Eastern traditions making local or tutelary deities responsible for the language and/or writing of their worshippers, and with the subsequent history of the founding myth in linguistic thought.⁹⁹

There is a relatively strong link between language and both individual and group identity. Herodotus' interest in ethnography, and thus his comparison of different groups, points at first sight to language as an important component and index of fixed identity. Different groups differ in part because they speak different languages; by the same token, groups of unknown or disputed provenance may be either identified on the basis of linguistic similarity with other groups, or kept isolated due to their unique language (e.g. geographically separate enclaves of Pelasgians; 1.57-58).¹⁰⁰ And it is of course Herodotus who famously first links being Greek with speaking Greek (among

⁹⁹ See Hewes 1992, 9-11; Borst 1957; and Allen 1948, who contrasts the presence of the divine in Indian language-origin tales. Subsequent performers of similar experiments, operating in different cultural contexts, do include the divine as starting-point and/or conclusion (e.g. the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, reported in Salimbene de Adam 510.1-11 Scalia [=355b-c]; King James IV of Scotland [quoted in Crystal 1987, 288]; Akbar the Great in the *Akbarnamah* [trans. Moosvi 1994, 90-1; cf. Beveridge 1939, 581-2]); see Sulek 1989. A Jewish experiment (reported in Gera 2003, 94, citing Lieberman 1980, 319-320 [*non uidi*]) results in Jewish children and a Gentile girl speaking fluent Hebrew while an uncircumcised Gentile boy uses only sign language; Hillel of Verona argued that isolated children would speak Hebrew, while Zerahiah of Barcelona countered that they would bark like dogs (Blumenfeld 1857, 135-136; see Eco 1994, 49-51, and Idel 1989, 14-15). In general on the divine in language origins, especially after antiquity, see Cazal 1998, Rubin 1998, Eco 1994, Olender 1992, and Katz 1981.

¹⁰⁰ Similar logic is used by Dionysius of Halicarnassus to discuss the Etruscans (who he argues are not Lydians for one reason above all, their languages sound nothing alike; 1.27-28) and the Romans (who are Greek although their language is mixed from Greek and barbarian; 1.90.1). See further Chapter Six.

other practices; 8.144). But it is also Herodotus who reports Psammetichus' experiment, and who apparently endorses its underlying ideas. Group identity is supposedly trumped by a larger identity common to all humankind (prehistoric phylogeny wins out over individual ontogeny). As such language is a part of group identity *not* because such identity is inherent, but only to the extent that language like other cultural traits is acquired in specific contexts. These two approaches to identity and group membership, one making identity inherent despite history and the other making it a matter of acquisition within history, exist in an unresolved tension. Language is left as a complex historical and social practice with more general roots in the distinction between prehistory and history, between non-human and human. It has different 'origins' of competing importance: an origin in the usual, prehistorical sense, helping to make humankind human; and multiple historical origins in an ontogenic sense, creating group membership and interaction, and allowing confusion thereof.

All told, Greek ideas about language origins are concerned with a very human universe, in which culture and behavior are increasingly explained by environmental conditioning, itself linked in a feedback cycle to human action, and by group contact.¹⁰¹ Herodotus accepts that language depends on place of origin because of the link between place and people. This connection draws on ideas implicit in earlier Greek texts, and looks ahead to *Kulturgeschichte* and to the Hippocratic doctrine of environmental determinism. But while those late Classical and Hellenistic modes of thought are

¹⁰¹ Group contact as a vector for language change and thus linguistic diversity becomes explicit in the Classical period and later. An early exemplar is Solon, writing of expatriate Athenians whose language is no longer Athenian, "as one would expect of men wandering everywhere" (γλωσσῶσαν οὐκέτ' Ἀττικὴν / ἰέντας ὡς ἂν πολλαχῆ πλανωμένους; 24.11-12); Dionysius of Halicarnassus is even more generalizing (1.29.4).

concerned especially with physiognomy and its determination by environmental conditions, Archaic and early Classical ideas about language origins seem to use place primarily as an index for the more fundamental category of people.¹⁰² Herodotus' acceptance of Psammetichus' experiment highlights the historian's belief in place as an important but not overriding determinant of language and thus identity. Herodotus reflects a Greek world less concerned with the aristocratic claims to *xenia* important in the Archaic period and marked more and more by group interpenetration and thus by definitional difficulties. With one important axis of definition being language, especially differences in language, Herodotus' report of Psammetichus' experiment, along with the latter's underlying assumptions, looks ahead to a Mediterranean world increasingly characterized by multilingualism and thus increasingly aware of linguistic diversity. Although there is no Greek Babel to speak of, diversity in linguistic practice is yet clearly crucial for the perceived organization of human groups and their members. It is to awareness of and reactions to that diversity that we now turn.

¹⁰² On physiognomy in *Kulturgeschichte* and Hippocratic works, Sassi 2001.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE IN GREEK AND ROMAN THOUGHT

VOLUME TWO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMITTEE ON THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2005

*Consider so many sounds of the voice,
so many languages.
- Manilius Astronomicum 4.731-732*

CHAPTER FIVE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

In his *Tusculan Disputations* Cicero paints a gloomy picture of contemporary Greco-Latin bilingualism, making it a single example of the larger linguistic incomprehensibility facing all humankind (5.116):

Our people are almost ignorant of Greek, and the Greeks of Latin. Thus we are deaf in their language, they are deaf in ours, and likewise we are all practically deaf in those languages which we don't understand, which are uncountable.

nostri Graece fere nesciunt, nec Graeci Latine. ergo hi in illorum, et illi in horum sermone surdi, omnesque item nos in iis linguis quas non intellegimus, quae sunt innumerabiles, surdi profecto sumus.¹

The extent to which this young Cicero is right (or honest) about Greco-Latin bilingualism is debatable.² Cicero himself later acknowledges both large numbers of bilinguals and, in the case of many, the high degree of their skills in both languages

¹ On the larger passage, concerned with 'deafness' (*surditas*), see Büchner 1965.

² The question of Greco-Latin bilingualism has produced only conflicting answers and, despite patient and painstaking study by many scholars, remains beset by terminological imprecision. E.g. Biville 2002, 82: "It is usually claimed, a little too hastily, that bilingualism was a universal phenomenon"; with Kaimio (1979, 103), who "would not hesitate to answer in the negative ... whether the Romans did in fact use Greek in their everyday conversations"; and Campanile 1991. *Contra* e.g. Dubuisson 1980; and Pabón 1939, who sees in Greek the language which educated Romans used to express their inmost feelings. See in general the papers in Adams, Janse and Swain 2002; Campanile, Cardona and Lazzeroni 1998; Rochette 1997a and 1996b; Dubuisson 1992, 1985a and b, 1983, and 1981a; Homeyer 1957; and Boyancé 1956. See further the discussion in Chapter Six.

(*eruditus utraque lingua*).³ Many people are described by the ancient sources as exceptionally bilingual, and a great many more must have had working knowledge of both languages.⁴ Cicero himself is a Roman whose knowledge of Greek was intimate and colloquial.⁵

Regardless of his youthful opinion of Greco-Latin bilingualism, Cicero's second point is both accurate and important: a large number of different languages were spoken by the large number of peoples making up the ancient Mediterranean world.⁶ Cicero is not the only Greek or Roman author to notice this fact or to comment on its consequences.⁷ From the earliest available texts on, an important place is given to awareness of linguistic diversity and to the related phenomena of individual and societal

³ Especially in his work *De Oratore*. Cicero is supposed to have been displeased by non-Roman (or non-urban) Latin; see Ramage 1961. On the formula (*eruditus* or *doctus*) *utraque lingua* and its implications, see Holford-Strevens 1993, Dubuisson 1981b, Horsfall 1979, and Kotula 1969.

⁴ This seems especially true of Rome. E.g. Cic. *Comm. pet.* 54: "Rome is a city made up of the gathering of nations" (*Roma est ciuitas ex nationum conuentu constituta*); and the elder Seneca, *Dial.* 12.6.2: "the greatest part of that crowd is away from its homeland. They have flowed together from their *municipia* and their *colonia*, indeed from the entire world" (*maxima pars istius turbae patria caret. Ex municipiis et coloniis suis, ex toto denique orbe terrarum confluerunt*). See further below.

⁵ On Cicero's Greek see Swain 2002, Dubuisson 1992; see also Boldrer 2003.

⁶ Cf. Dubuisson 1983, 203: "Le bilinguisme individuel ou collectif est, dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine, un phénomène omniprésent"; and MacMullen 1966, 1: Greek and Latin "define a civilization without filling it; for 'Greco-Latin' indicates a mixed culture in which, to the very end, a majority of the population must have spoken neither Latin nor Greek in their homes, whatever they spoke of necessity in the courts and market-places. Bilingualism, even trilingualism, was common, then as now."

⁷ Cf. Plato, speaking of barbarians "who are uncountable, do not mix and speak different languages from one another" (ἀπείροισ οὔσι καὶ ἀμείκτοις καὶ ἀσυμφώνοις πρὸς ἄλληλα; *Pol.* 262c-d).

multilingualism.⁸ These were all taken as crucial elements of an obviously multicultural human world, impacting the sensitive areas of individual identity and group organization and affecting the relationships between the two.

Cicero offers a clear example (*De off.* 1.17.53):

The gradations of human society are many. For as one moves away from that unbounded state, it is rather characteristic to be of the same people, nation, and language, by which humans are especially joined together; it is even more internally important to be of the same state.

Gradus autem plures sunt societatis hominum. ut enim ab illa infinita discedatur, proprius est eiusdem gentis, nationis, linguae qua maxime homines coniunguntur; interius etiam est eiusdem esse ciuitatis.

Here, language more than race or ethnicity is indicative if not dispositive of human groups. As other Chapters have shown, the idea is not limited to Cicero nor to Romans, but is an important part of ancient thought on language.⁹

As a result of this widespread feeling, linguistic diversity tended to be valorized by ancient authors for good or for bad. Individual multilingualism could be admired, especially in its extraordinary forms, but need not be and in general seems not to have been openly aspired to. Societal multilingualism and its corollary of ‘mixed languages’, not to mention mixed cultures, were generally deplored as undesired movement away from an ideal of linguistic and ‘national’ purity.¹⁰ Expertise in Greek and/or Latin, as

⁸ By ‘multilingualism’ I mean the copresence of two or more languages. ‘Individual multilingualism’ is the use of more than one linguistic code by a given individual, ‘societal multilingualism’ the use of more than one code in a given society; see Edwards 1996.

⁹ Additional examples are discussed below, “Linguistic Diversity, Multilingualism, and Identity”.

¹⁰ Cf. Dubuisson 1983, 225: “comme si le bilinguisme n’était considéré que dans ses conséquences néfastes sur la pureté de la langue (une langue mixte est une langue corrompue) ou sur la moralité (parler deux langues, c’est avoir deux visages).” On ‘mixed languages’ see further Chapter Six.

the political and literary languages par excellence, was valued by educated Greeks and Romans. By contrast the use of other languages was typically met with indifference if not offense, while the loss of one's native or preferred language, for exile or other reasons, could have serious social and emotional effects.

If awareness of linguistic diversity was thus widespread, and reactions to it varied, explanations for it were apparently much less common.¹¹ There was no Greco-Roman encapsulation of linguistic diversity akin to the Biblical story of Babel.¹² Several features of ancient linguistic thought and practice may have combined to produce this absence. Languages other than Greek and Latin, although spoken throughout the Greco-Roman world, were never part of education.¹³ Greek and Roman linguistic thought was similarly chauvinistic, apparently not interested in foreign languages other than occasionally as sources for etymologically mysterious Greek and

¹¹ Cf. Lejeune 1948, 45: "Grecs et Latins nous paraissent avoir été beaucoup plus curieux de la structure et de l'origine du langage que des changements et de la diversité des langues." Awareness of diversity before explanation of common origin is opposite to what Jouanna argues emerged in Greek thought on the origins of peoples, which began with anthropogony and only later focused on differences between individual groups (Jouanna 2001). Logically anthropogony should include the origin of language if language is central to humankind; this conclusion is often but not always realized in ancient authors (see Chapter Three).

¹² Cf. Gera 2003, 67, concluding that "[t]he Greeks do not bemoan the lack or loss of a universal *human* language ... [but] they look back with longing to an era in which men could speak to gods and beasts" (emphasis added). On the other hand ancient authors did take issue with linguistic diversity; see below. Cf. the similar lack of an overarching explanation for the origin of humankind; see Chapter Three and Hall 2002, 31: the tale of Deucalion and Pyrrha "despite purporting to provide a universal explanation for human origins ... never succeeded in establishing itself as *the* authoritative account of beginnings", citing Luginbühl 1992, 99-262.

¹³ Cf. Lejeune 1948, 59: "[D]eux points déjà signalés restent essentiels: les grammairiens grecs et latins n'ont point écrit la grammaire d'autres langues; les langues étrangères n'avaient point de place dans le système d'éducation."

Latin words.¹⁴ Greek and Roman literatures, including the ostensibly more scientific genres of ethnography and historiography, typically did not take the trouble to represent foreign languages.¹⁵ The sources rarely mention interpreters and translators, although they were obviously often necessary.¹⁶ All told the reality of language contact was given fairly short shrift.¹⁷

Despite this general lack of interest some explanations for linguistic diversity are preserved.¹⁸ A few are explicit: e.g. Epicurus has different languages arising from the peculiar experience of reality by different groups in different places; Aristotle links diversity with language learning; and Posidonius, according to Strabo, derives diversity

¹⁴ Cf. Lejeune 1948, 51: “une curiosité intermittente pour les *mots* étrangers et ... une incuriosité à peu près complète pour les *langues* elles-mêmes” (emphasis in original); and 60: “la curiosité des Anciens ne s’est jamais sérieusement portée vers les langues étrangères comme vers un sujet de réflexions et un objet d’études.” On Roman awareness Opelt 1969, 37: “La coscienza linguistica [romana] che attraverso esse appare, mostra il chiaro sviluppo dalla concezione del latino linguaggio barbaro e povero all’orgoglio del latino, bello, puro, amato.” On foreign elements in Greek and Latin linguistics, see Rochette 1996a.

¹⁵ Speakers of foreign languages were represented by stereotypical linguistic features with no guaranteed connection to actual phonology; see Colvin 1999, Mackie 1996, Lejeune 1948, Coulter 1934.

¹⁶ Seminally, Snellman 1914-1919 and Gehman 1914; recently Rochette 1995. On the reality of interpretation cf. Mosley 1971, 6: “very many communities had interpreters and linguists at their disposal both as a result of, and in order to further, political and economic interests.” Some exceptions to the lack of attention exist, e.g. Xenophon was an “exception to the rule” (Harrison 1997). Caracalla is supposed to have killed his interpreters after their use, so that they could not report on his indiscretions (Sall. *BJ.* 109.4; *CD.* 78.6.2); perhaps the profession did not lend itself to being spoken about.

¹⁷ “What we have is rather two models of thought that alternate: just as in tragedy the ‘stylized literary milieu’ in which all barbarians speak Greek is penetrated by ‘isolated touches of realism’, in Edith Hall’s words, so one attitude of indifference to foreign languages, leading to the characterisation of barbarians as a single monolithic group, alternates with another attitude based on the observation of linguistic differences” (Harrison 1997). Davies 1987 suggests that this may be due to a view of linguistic diversity as merely differences in nomenclature.

¹⁸ All of these examples and others are discussed more fully below.

from 'forethought' (πρόνοια). Some possible explanations are also implicit in discussions of diversity or other aspects of language: Homer and other authors seem to link linguistic diversity with cultural differences depending on place of origin or habitation. Especially relevant are references to linguistic and cultural contact and change, both with regard to particular instances of change and, less often, as an abstraction: authors as varied as Solon, Plato, Aristoxenus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Ovid make language change a consequence of cultural contact. It is an open question whether or not such changes were imagined as resulting in different languages *per se*, i.e. novel languages especially in the historical period. But since diversity is so strongly linked to ideas about language origins and multiculturalism, a common explanation for linguistic and cultural diversity is not impossible.

Thus on several levels ancient thought on linguistic diversity reveals again the mytho-social concerns of ancient linguistic thought in general. Linguistic diversity including mixed languages, and thus cultural diversity including mixed cultures, are striking features of ancient life that deserve close scrutiny. To quote Rochette on Latin culture:

S'il fallait définir un élément qui, plus que tout autre, confère à la civilisation latine l'intérêt d'être étudiée, ce serait, pourrait-on répondre, son caractère d'universalité, d'ouverture vers les cultures étrangères même les plus lointaines, cette subtile alchimie d'éléments nationaux hérités des ancêtres latins et de contaminations étrangères, inévitables dans un monde aux cultures si diverses.¹⁹

Just as the origin of language relates to the origins of humankind, and thus to the origins of different human groups, so too do all three areas relate to the fact of linguistic

¹⁹ Rochette 1993a, 235.

diversity. Acknowledged only grudgingly by the Greeks and Romans, and addressed infrequently and indirectly, these “subtle alchemies” of language and thus culture must nonetheless be appreciated by moderns as fundamental features of the ancient world.

This Chapter treats notices of specific foreign languages and abstractions about diversity generally, but focuses more on the latter.²⁰ A reading of Homeric evidence shows that language change is strongly associated even early on with change of place and thus group contact. This association is developed more fully in later Greek and Roman authors. In Roman authors the focus is on language as a crucial component of individual and group identity; this focus is perhaps inevitable in an increasingly multicultural world in which linguistic diversity is a fact of everyday life. All told, ancient ideas about linguistic diversity, and about individual and societal multilingualism, continue to articulate perennial concerns about group organization and overlap.²¹

Homer: *Iliad* and *Hymn to Apollo*

Early in his *Cratylus*, Plato has Socrates’ principal interlocutor, Hermogenes, ask somewhat incredulously: “And what, Socrates, does Homer say about names, and how?” (καὶ τί λέγει, ὦ Σώκρατες, “Ὅμηρος περὶ ὀνομάτων καὶ ποῦ; 391d2-3).

²⁰ This Chapter is not concerned with the details of multilingualism in practice, but with ideas about it as experienced by ancient authors. For the former, see esp. Adams 2003a, Rochette 1997, Harris 1989, 175-190, and Neumann and Untermann 1980.

²¹ The connection can, however, be overplayed. Toohey for example claims that “[l]inguistic prejudice is, in reality, racial prejudice” (1981: 251). Perhaps within and among modern nation-states; in an ancient world lacking in language policy, the situation must have been subtler. See e.g. Adams 2003b on attitudes towards Latin language and Roman citizenship; and Krostenko 2001, *passim* for not language itself but particular usage allowing for a “social performance of identity through aesthetic means” (1).

Socrates' response is matter-of-fact: about these topics Homer says 'much' (πολλαχοῦ). Socrates and Hermogenes, like Plato, are concerned less with a historical origin of language or words than with their accuracy or capacity to convey truth (ὀρθότης), but Socrates is right to turn to Homer, and to other early authors, for ideas about language. Awareness of linguistic diversity, and thus of language origins, first appears in Homer.²²

In book 2 of the *Iliad*, after the narrator has described the Achaean forces, the messenger-goddess Iris visits the Trojans to impress on them the severity of their situation. She urges Hector to have his own forces mustered in a certain way: "because there are many auxiliaries in the great city of Priam, / and different many-seeded men have different languages, / let each man give a sign to those whom he commands / and, having marshalled his citizens, lead them out" (πολλοὶ γὰρ κατὰ ἄστῦ μέγα Πριάμου ἐπίκουροι, / ἄλλη δ' ἄλλων γλῶσσα πολυσπερέων ἀνθρώπων / τοῖσιν ἕκαστος ἀνὴρ σημαίνετω οἷσί περ ἄρχει, / τῶν δ' ἐξηγείσθω κοσμησάμενος πολιήτας; 2.803-806). Iris' point is that a particular manner of address to the Trojan forces is needed because not all of the troops speak the same language. The passage thus imagines a sort of linguistic chain of command: Hector

²² Cf. Gera 2003, 1: "although Homer does not include in his poems any direct reflections on the origin, development, or use of language, [he] discloses several implicit ideas and assumptions about language held by the early Greeks." He does not however represent foreign languages (eadem 3 n. 12, citing the criticism of Dio Chrysostom (11.22-23) in this regard). Cf. Colvin, who argues rightly that while "different languages *as a fact of life* are [not] ignored in Homer ... they do not intrude into or distract from the narrative": in contrast to Old Comedy, "linguistic realism is wholly alien to the *Iliad* and the *Odyseey*" (1999, 49 and 48; for a useful survey of representations of dialect and foreign language in Greek literature generally, 39-89); and Lejeune 1948, 52: "dans l'épopée, dans la lyrique chorale, dans la tragédie, en Grèce puis à Rome, [régne] cette convention que les différences de langue entre personnages de nations diverses sont négligeables." For foreign languages in comedy see Halliwell 1990, Brixhe 1988, and Schmitt 1984; in tragedy see Hall 1989, 17-21, 76-9, 117-121, and 177-81.

speaks with the leaders of the different groups, and the individual leaders in turn address the men under their command, each group in its own language.

The general picture is clear, but the specific differentiation of languages and linguistic abilities among Hector, the leaders, and the troops is not.²³ Does the chain of command completely follow from the linguistic situation, as Iris' speech suggests, or would Hector have given his orders similarly even to a monoglot army? That is, Hector may be imagined as needing to speak with the leaders either because he himself does not speak all the necessary languages (linguistics determines chain), or, despite his being multilingual, for reasons of noble propriety (chain operates regardless of languages involved), or both.²⁴ Next down the chain, the leaders of given groups would thus be either bilingual (speaking their own and Hector's language), or monoglot (speaking only their own language, in which a necessarily multilingual Hector would address them). Finally, the troops are seemingly imagined as monoglot, for their different languages are the source of Iris' suggestions. The order of elements in her speech makes linguistic diversity the reason (γάρ) for Hector having to "act in this way". At the same time noble propriety or even simple expediency cannot be excluded as an additional reason; in the latter case, Hector may have known all the languages but have been constrained by the severity of the situation to expedite the command process by not addressing a complete muster of the troops (Iris says of the Trojans' enemies: "I have never seen so great and so huge a force" (ἀλλ' οὐ πῶ τοιόνδε τοσσόνδε τε

²³ See Hall 1989, 30, and Rawson 1985, 170-171.

²⁴ But cf. Mithridates (Gell. 17.17; Plin. *NH.* 7.88 and 25.6) and Cleopatra (Plut. *Ant.* 27.3-4), both rulers who were renowned for speaking the languages of their many subject peoples; see further below, "Linguistic Diversity, Multilingualism, and Identity".

λαὸν ὄπωπα; 2.799)). About the specific differentiation of languages imagined among Hector, the leaders, and the troops only speculation is possible.

Despite the lack of specifics, the passage's image of a polyglot army is not inherently problematic. Kirk in his otherwise excellent commentary to the *Iliad* is only able to consider it thus because he misinterprets the crucial line 804. He states ad loc. that "the truth is that the idea of contingents led by officers speaking a different language from their own is quite fantastic."²⁵ This is wrong in two ways. First, as shown above the passage contains no such idea. Each 'contingent' is led by an 'officer' who is able to "marshal his fellow-citizens" (2.806: κοσμησάμενος πολιήτας) precisely because, as a fellow-citizen, he speaks their language. Since this part of the text does not mean what Kirk thinks, his specific objection to the lines recedes to a general one against the very idea of polyglot armies.

But, second, this idea is not inherently problematic. The *Iliad* itself is clear about this, describing the Trojan forces as multilingual, again because of their multiethnicity, also at 4.437-438: "all of them had neither a similar sound nor one voice, / but the language was mixed, and the men were called together from many quarters" (οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἦεν ὁμὸς θρόος οὐδ' ἴα γῆρυς / ἀλλὰ γλῶσσ' ἐμέμικτο, πολύκλητοι δ' ἔσαν ἄνδρες). (See further below.)

The Trojans, and the *Iliad*, are not alone. Many other ancient armies, both literary and historical, were composed of troops speaking different languages, often

²⁵ Kirk cites another author with more extreme views: "Leaf's cure for the anomaly was to excise 803f [sc. -806], but it is probably just due to oral carelessness." In keeping the lines Kirk immediately contradicts his reference to "carelessness" by reading into them a "purpose": "to motivate a catalogue of the contingents." Thus he links it functionally with the preceding division of Achaean troops by tribe and phratry (362f).

with only limited knowledge of the language of their fellow soldiers or commanders. This holds for all of classical antiquity. A few examples must suffice: Greek-speakers served from early on as mercenaries in Eastern armies (e.g. most famously the ten-thousand joined to Cyrus as described by Xen. *An.*);²⁶ in classical Athens, three-hundred Scythian archers were employed as a police auxiliary (Ar. *Eccl.* 143, *Lys.* 184 and 433ff; Aeschin. 2.173); the Carthaginians were regarded as multilingual, and confusingly so, at least by Polybius (1.67.3-11) and presumably by others at Rome;²⁷ and the Roman military was famous even in antiquity for its multilingual and multiethnic forces (e.g. Tac. *Hist.* 2.37: *exercitus linguis moribusque dissonos*; and 3.33: *exercitus uarios linguis moribus*).²⁸

Ancient armies thus dealt routinely with problems of interpretation, both internally among the troops and commanders, and externally with enemies and local non-combatants.²⁹ Although the sources are mostly silent on the day-to-day solutions to these problems, examples may yet be multiplied: in addition to the multilingual commanders suggested by Iris, e.g. Cyrus' omnipresent interpreter for Greek (Xen. *An.* 1.8.12) and the Greeks' for Persian (idem 2.5.35), and the soldiers recourse to sign

²⁶ See Bettalli 1995 and Parke 1933. The Pharaoh Psammetichus employed Greek mercenaries, described in an inscription as ἀλλόγλωσσοσ [sic], 'of different language'[ML 7a.4].

²⁷ This may be related to the widespread image in Roman antiquity of the Carthaginians as paradigms of duplicity; see Rochette 1997b; cf. *bilinguis* meaning 'two-faced', Poccetti 1986.

²⁸ In Tacitus' opinion such multiculturalism bred moral corruption; see Chilver 1979-1985, ad locc. Roman military multilingualism was abetted by the vernacular languages of the Roman empire persisting well into late antiquity; see Brunt 1990, 267-281.

²⁹ See the essays in Müller 1992, Herman 1956, Gehman 1914, and Snellman 1914-1919.

language among themselves (*idem* 4.533). Multilingual armies thus posed logistical problems in antiquity (sometimes serious enough to warrant divine intervention!)³⁰ but not conceptual ones, as Homer already indicates.³¹

The second description of the Trojans and their allies as polyglot, cited above (*Il.* 4.436-438), adds to the Homeric image of linguistic diversity.³² Three terms are used for their animal-like vocal sounds. Both *θρόος*, ‘sound’, and *γῆρυς*, ‘voice’, are hapax, occurring only here in the *Iliad*; together and given the context they mean something other than recognizable speech.³³ The third term, *γλῶσσα*, is more common

³⁰ Cf. the gods’ own turn to Hercules for interpretation of the emperor Claudius’ famously garbled speech (*Sen. Apocol.* 5.2-3; cf. *Suet. Claud.* 4.6 and 30, and *Dio Cass.* 60.2.2).

³¹ As Kirk himself notes, 2.804 “looks like a proverb”. His interpretation may depend on the modern idea of a national army tied to a monoglot nation-state. This is an artifact especially of 19th century social science with no clear application to antiquity, when “the close modern identity of language and nation seems to have been relatively unimportant” (R. Thomas, *OCD*³ s.v. *bilingualism*). Before nationalism it “did not matter that the serfs spoke a different language from that of the rulers, or that the serfs in one region spoke a different language from those in another region” (Eriksen 1993: 104); cf. Campanile 1991, 9-10: “Nulla di simile [to the link between language and political power] s’individua nel mondo antico, ove la diversità linguistica era vissuta come un mero dato di fatto che non implica ostilità nei confronti del potere centrale.” Although the Greeks and Romans viewed language as part of their identity (e.g. *Hdt.* 8.144), with social consequences, this did not lead to language law or policy; see Adams 2003b.

³² Mackie 1996 uses this and similar passages to argue that the *Iliad* contrasts Achaeans and Trojans in terms of their (uses of) languages: the Achaeans with their common language achieve *κόσμος* (and are linked to the *πόλις*, to public language, and to a culture of ‘blame’), while the mutually incomprehensible Trojan forces are characterized by ‘clamor’ (linked to the *οἶκος*, private speech, and a culture of ‘praise’).

³³ The doubled hapax might be read as iconic of the strangely mixed sound. Kirk *ad loc.* stresses the unique combination: “judging by its unformular quality and use of terms not otherwise found in Homer ... [it] was composed for this particular place.” *θρόος* occurs elsewhere in the compound adjective *ἀλλόθροος*, ‘other-sounding’ (e.g. *Od.* 1.183 [*ἀνθρώπους*], 3.302 [*ἀνθρώπους*], 14.43 [*ἀνδρῶν*], and 15.453 [*ἀνθρώπους*]). *γῆρυς* appears in the compound *μελιγῆρυς*, ‘sweet-sounding’, in the Sirens’ description of their singing (*Od.* 12.187: *ἡμῶν μελιγῆρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ[α]*).

in Homer but only when meaning literally ‘tongue’ (e.g. of a sacrificial victim) or the ‘voice’ with reference to its qualities but without specification of language. It means ‘language’ in the full sense three times: here, in the passage discussed above (2.803), and at *Od.* 19.175, where Crete is described as having “a language mixed together from others” (ἄλλη δ’ ἄλλων γλῶσσα μειγμένη).³⁴ Referring to 4.436-438, Kirk writes that “[t]he use of three separate terms for speech or voice ... is simply to emphasize the point being made, which is aetiological, almost learned, in character.” Kirk’s own point is obscure. He dismisses as less likely than aetiology the idea that the terms “might suggest that some attempt is being made to distinguish differences of dialect from those of separate languages”.³⁵ The latter is indeed unlikely, for as noted the terms seem to mean only ‘mutually incomprehensible forms of speech’ without deciding about dialect or language so called. But the distinction is a modern one or at least a later one; a developed technical vocabulary in Greek for such distinctions awaits the Classical and Hellenistic periods.³⁶ What matters is that the Homeric passages indicate, again, awareness of linguistic diversity.

There is some semblance of an explanation for linguistic diversity based on personal or group origin, in particular place of origin. In both passages, both armies comprise forces coming from different regions of the Greek world. The catalog of

³⁴ This interpretation is “très douteuse” according to Lejeune 1948, 56.

³⁵ Cf. Colvin 1999, 43, agreeing with Kirk that ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ are not distinguished here.

³⁶ The difference between ‘dialect’ and ‘language’ is contentious even today: Hock 1991, 380-381. Cf. the quote, apparently unavoidable in this context, that “[a] language is a dialect that has an army and a navy” (attributed by Crystal and Crystal 2000 §10:33 to Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*).

Achaean ships is famous for just this concern with place and local color. In both passages the called-together character of the Trojan army is stressed: the army consists of men who are ἐπίκουροι and πολύκλητοι, ‘auxiliaries summoned from many places’. It is in just these contexts of diverse geographical origins that the text highlights the Trojans’ linguistic diversity. The text links language explicitly with people; through them, language is linked implicitly with place. This may hint at the sort of environmental determinism later elaborated by the Hippocratic tradition and fifth-century Greek anthropology generally, but since Homer does not supply the details of linguistic or dialectal variation, it is impossible to decide in what ways his texts imagine place as conditioning language.

Another appearance of γλῶσσα is at *Il.* 20.248-249: “the tongue of mortals is flexible, and in it are many stories of all kinds, and the field of words is great here and there” (στρεπτή δὲ γλῶσσ’ ἐστὶ βροτῶν, πολέες δ’ ἐνὶ μῦθοι / παντοῖοι, ἐπέων δὲ πολὺς νομὸς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα). In the context of the passage this variation seems to be less linguistic *per se* than rhetorical: the speaker is urging his listener not to waste time talking, and concludes with a verbal version of the Golden Rule (250): “the kind of word you speak is the kind of word you hear” (ὅπποῖόν κ’ εἶπησθα ἔπος, τοῖόν κ’ ἐπακούσῃς).³⁷ This only applies if the speakers understand each other, that is in the absence of linguistic diversity. Thus this appearance of γλῶσσα does not bear on linguistic diversity.³⁸

³⁷ The larger context (244-258) is an injunction against wasting time talking; the passage has often been thought an interpolation. See Edwards 1991 ad loc.

³⁸ For the metaphor cf. Hes. *Op.* 403: ‘the field of words’ (ἐπέων νομός); Hesiod’s narrator duplicates the sentiment as well, in his exhortations against lying. The Homeric passage is quoted by Plutarch as an instance of antithesis (*Ut H.* 74).

There is the barest hint that the variation of language with place is imagined in Homer as centered on differences between cities. If so this would not be surprising, for membership in different *poleis* was correlated early on with other differences; the city-state as origin is one of the earliest formulations of Greek interest in origins generally.³⁹ By contrast, in archaic literature there is as yet no clear differentiation of ‘peoples’ or ‘races’: humankind is essentially unitary, with differences in phenotype, as it were, deriving from place.⁴⁰ Homer implies as much about language as well. In the proverbial 2.804 it is precisely language that varies since men have been ‘seeded in many places’, πολυσπερέων; at 20.249 the metaphor is reiterated, with words having a wide ‘field’, νομός. And the similar 4.438 as noted above makes linguistic diversity depend on the Trojan forces having been ‘summoned from many places’ (πολύκλητοι). Although the text is not explicit, its continued contrasting of Trojans and Achaeans in terms of city-states of origin make the city-state a candidate for the origin of linguistic diversity as well.⁴¹

The connection between language, people, and place seems to go deeper than mere geographical or environmental (or literally political) determinism. Although the Archaic texts do not explain the precise mechanisms relating linguistic variation or change to place, even in these first brief references the connection seems not arbitrary

³⁹ See Jouanna 2001.

⁴⁰ Eadem 24-5. She interprets the Homeric πολυσπέρης as ‘seeded in many places’, citing as parallels *Od.* 11.365 and Hes. *Th.* 365.

⁴¹ Later authors make explicit the connection between (the origin of) language and the emergence of human society; this is especially true for Romans, e.g. Horace *Sat.* 1.3.96-106, for whom society is impossible without language; see further Chapter Three.

but includes a sense of naturalness dependent in part on a strong subjective or experiential component. Language is bound up in identity.

Another Homeric text, the Hymn to Apollo, expands on the subjective aspect of linguistic diversity. Lines 156-164 relate a “great wonder, whose fame will never be destroyed” (μέγα θαῦμα, ὄου κλέος οὔποτ’ ὀλεῖται):

The Delian maidens, servants of Apollo: when they are about to hymn first Apollo, and then both Leto and Artemis, shooter of arrows, mindful of old men and women they sing the hymn, and they charm the groups of humankind. And they know how to imitate both the speech of all humankind and rattling; each man would say that he himself spoke; thus the song has hung together beautifully for them (156-164).

κοῦραι Δηλιάδες Ἐκατηβελέταο θεράπναι / αἶ τ’ ἐπεὶ ἄρ
πρῶτον μὲν Ἀπόλλων’ ὑμνήσωσιν, / αὗτις δ’ αὖ Λητώ τε καὶ
Ἄρτεμιν ἰοχέαιραν, / μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ἠδὲ
γυναικῶν / ὕμνον ἀείδουσιν, θέλγουσι δὲ φῦλ’ ἀνθρώπων. /
πάντων δ’ ἀνθρώπων φωνὰς καὶ κρεμβαλιαστῦν⁴² / μιμῆσθ’
ἴσασιν· φαίη δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἕκαστος / φθέγγεσθ’· οὔτω σφιν καλὴ
συνάρηεν ἀοιδή.

Interpretations of this passage vary, but in general it has to do with producing different patterns of sound, including but not limited to language, that carry a subjective or emotional charge.⁴³ The crucial lines are 162-4 (underlined above). They have been

⁴² According to Allen’s and Halliday’s edition, κρεμβαλιαστῦν L1 P D L3 Q S ed. pr.; v. βαμβαλιαστῦν E T. The latter may relate to βαμβάινω, ‘to chatter with the teeth’; Crudden 2001 takes it to mean “perhaps ‘barbarian’ (i.e. non-Greek)”. The former seems preferable since the sound of teeth chattering would be directly produced and not ‘imitated’ (as would be a rattle and other languages).

⁴³ On the hymn generally see Penglase 1994, 76-125 (parallels with Mesopotamian ‘journeys to power’); Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1966, 440-462 (identifying it with the Lycian hymn of Olen noted by *Hdt.* 4.35); with Calame 1997, Nagy 1996a, Aloni 1992.

taken to mean only an imitation of different Greek dialects.⁴⁴ While it is true that “[d]ialects in antiquity had the dignity of languages”, something different is happening here, paradoxically both artistically broader and linguistically in fact more limited even than dialect. First, the maidens’ ‘accomplishment’ is introduced as a “great wonder, whose fame will never be destroyed”. This seems excessive for imitation only of different dialects. A broader object of imitation is in fact spelled out, the languages of all humankind.

Second, however, the maidens are not represented as knowing how to speak all languages.⁴⁵ Instead, they ‘know how to imitate’ literally the ‘sounds’ of all humankind, with the emphasis falling not on real speech but on imitation of speech and other sounds. This is made clear in the other sound they imitate, that of the rattle (κρεμβαλιστύς). Governed by the same verb plus complementary infinitive, the inanimate ‘rattle’ parallels and thus explains the animate sounds. The maidens do not speak all languages and thus communicate with humankind any more than they ‘speak the rattle’ and thus communicate with instruments. Instead, and literally, they know how to sound like those things. Thus the passage ends “each man [sc. who was present] *would say that he himself spoke*”: the potential optative (φαίη ... κεν) means that the maidens, according to the narrator, do not necessarily speak foreign (or perhaps any?) languages in their hymn. Instead they “charm” the audience into thinking that they do, and it is primarily the reactions of the audience that infer languages from the maidens’

⁴⁴ So Allen and Halliday in their commentary ad loc.: “the accomplishment ascribed to the Deliades is that of singing in dialect.”

⁴⁵ *Contra* Schwabl 1962, 17.

imitative sounds.⁴⁶

Thus the passage is less even about real linguistic diversity than about the semblance thereof as part of the individual ('each man') and affective ('charmed') reactions by members of a linguistically diverse audience to a concatenation of sounds. The sounds are only suggestive, and assigned to different languages and other sources only by a personal response on the part of the audience-member. The experience of the maidens' activity by the linguistically diverse members of the audience links this passage to the Homeric ideas about language explored above. The fact that an individual may hear his or her own language in nonsense sounds underscores the ancient idea that language is a matter of perception closely linked to individual and group identity.

In several ways the ideas about language found in the two Iliadic passages and in the Hymn are more indicative of at least the subsequent course of Greek thought on the subject than their scarcity might suggest. In the first place they presage later developments in anthropological thought (*Kulturgeschichte* will emphasize place as a determinant of individual and group characteristics).⁴⁷ Second, they are at least not incompatible with contemporary (archaic) ideas about origins for things other than language. If in both Iliadic passages Homer was not overly concerned with the complicated logistics involved in a polyglot army, neither apparently was his audience. That shared lack of concern reveals something about the sociology of archaic ideas

⁴⁶ Cf. Wilamowitz-Möllendorf 1966, 450: "die Sangerinnen verstehen aller Menschen Stimmen und κρεμβλιαστύς nachzuahmen, so dass jeder meint, er redete selber." Since real multilingualism is not the point, the passage is only somewhat comparable to the Pentecost.

⁴⁷ E.g. the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*.

about language. As Kirk notes, *Il.* 2.804 “looks like a proverb”; similarly Wilamowitz-Möllendorf argues that the Homeric Hymn to Apollo was “truly popular” and representative of the “thought of the time”.⁴⁸ The idea was thus probably not too “fantastic” for the poem’s audience, coterminous with most of the Greek-speaking world, and referred to proverbial truth rather than to specific historical circumstances.⁴⁹ Third, the idea’s acceptability or wide comprehensibility may also be suggested by the fact that the line receives little comment in the ancient scholia; its ideas seem to have remained generally accepted or unquestioned over time, despite the development of more formal linguistic theory. The other crucial line, *Il.* 4.438, may be read similarly, in that it refers to a similar situation: humankind, spread into different areas or regions, has produced different languages. The passage from the Hymn to Apollo refers apparently to a real religious practice that “took part in several festivals.”⁵⁰ Finally, the Homeric epics are of course seminal texts in Greek thought generally; as such their ideas about language would presumably have met with widespread acceptance.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 1966, 440: “Er ist die einzige homerische Hymnus, der wirklich populär geworden ist ... eine Bezeichnung ... die für die ähnlichen Gedichte seiner [=Thucydides’] Zeit galt.”

⁴⁹ Ancient ‘realism’ is not the same as modern ‘positivism’. See Osborne 1996, 147-160, and Morris 1986.

⁵⁰ Allen and Halliday 1936, 224.

⁵¹ This is not to suggest that (some) ancients could not criticize the Homeric poems among other seminal works. But acceptance of the ideas was probably the norm. Moreover although the Homeric poems represent a time other than the author’s and audience’s own, it is difficult to believe that they would thus imagine a different diversity of languages than for the contemporary world; on past and then-present in Homer generally, Ford 1992.

Language, Place, and Group Contact

Later authors continue the notion that linguistic diversity has to do with place, and make increasingly explicit the argument that language change arises especially from group contact. Two such interpretations of linguistic diversity are preserved in Herodotus' *Histories*. The first, implicit in the historian's account of the famous linguistic experiment performed by Psammetichus, has already been discussed (Chapter Four). As shown, this first explanation may not be Herodotus' own, as it entails conclusions that seem to contradict other statements made by the historian (e.g. the Phrygians being of high antiquity and their language being the source for all languages). This contradiction is confirmed by a second, implicit explanation for linguistic diversity that seems more Herodotus' own: Herodotus seems to link linguistic diversity closely to place in a manner similar to Homer, by making language an index of cultural difference between peoples, and by making those differences depend in part on place of origin.

There is a measure of triviality in Herodotus' references to foreign languages.⁵² Since his interests are broadly ethnographic, he often refers to language among several other criteria to stress the foreign status of a group under discussion. As Hartog and others have shown, Herodotus' representation of non-Greek cultures is highly schematized, not to say artificial, with groups differing from each other and especially from the Greek standard through the presence or absence of features along some few

⁵² In general see Harrison 1997. Such superficiality is of course not unique to Herodotus among ancient authors. Davies 1987 suggests that this apparent superficiality results from different languages being thought to differ only in vocabulary ("language as nomenclature"); see Gera 2003, 45, 53 n.117, 180, and 201; and cf. Plato *Crat.* 392d, where the language of the gods is described as a distinct series of names, and Cicero *N.D.* 1.30.84: *at primum quot hominum linguae tot nomina deorum*.

axes of comparison.⁵³ In addition to language these axes include such categories as physiognomy, dress, and foodways (e.g. nomadism, pastoralism, settled agriculture). The selection of features from these categories is enough for Herodotus to produce both distinct and overlapping groups. Language as a distinguishing feature is not cited most strongly by Herodotus himself, but put into the mouths of the Egyptians, who “call barbarians everyone who doesn’t speak their language” (βαρβάρους δὲ πάντας οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τοὺς μὴ σφίσι ὁμογλώσσους; 2.158.5).

Groups described by Herodotus as actually distinguished by language are numerous. Among the Indians Herodotus notes that there are many peoples distinct by virtue of not speaking the same language (ἔστι δὲ πολλὰ ἔθνεα Ἰνδῶν καὶ οὐκ ὁμόφωνα σφίσι; 3.98.3). The Budini are distinguished from the Geloni by using a different language and set of customs (Βουδῖνοι δὲ οὐ τῇ αὐτῇ γλώσσῃ χρέωνται καὶ Γελωνοί, οὐδὲ δίαιτα ἢ αὐτή; 4.109.1). Language as one criterion of Greekness is famously first (possibly) raised by Herodotus: the Athenians are said to refuse to betray Greece on the basis of shared descent, language, worship, and customs (τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔον ὁμαίμον τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματα τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεα τε ὁμότροπα; 8.144.2).⁵⁴ A similar point is put into the mouth of Mardonius: the Greeks should deal with each other through heralds instead of resorting to war (τοὺς χρῆν ... κήρυξί τε διαχρεωμένους καὶ ἀγγέλοισι καταλαμβάνειν τὰς διαφορὰς καὶ παντὶ μᾶλλον ἢ μάχησι; 7.9.b2) because they have the same

⁵³ Hartog 2001. See also Thomas 2000, Lateiner 1991, Cartledge 1990, and Redfield 1985.

⁵⁴ The value of this statement for finding an early belief in ‘Hellenicity’ has been questioned; see Hall 1997 and 2002a.

language (έόντας όμογλώσσους). Language may even start to distinguish a group from humankind: the Troglodyte Ethiopians speak a language like no other but similar to the sounds made by bats (γλώσσαν δέ ούδεμιή άλλη παρομοίην νενομίκασι, άλλα τετρίγασι κατάπερ αί νυκτερίδες; 4.183.4).⁵⁵

With language only one among several categories defining groups, the line between group difference and group overlap can be exceedingly fine. Eastern Ethiopians differ from other Ethiopians only in terms of ‘voice’ (φωνήν) and hair (7.70.1). Sagartian nomads speak Persian but dress halfway between Persians and Pactyans. (έθνος μέν Περσικόν και φωνή, σκευήν δέ μεταξύ έχουσι πεπονημένην τής τε Περσικής και τής Πακτυικής; 7.85.1). Colchians and Egyptians are similar in ‘language’ (γλώσσα), way of working linen, and indeed their “whole way of life” (λίνον μούνοι ούτοί τε και Αιγύπτιοι εργάζονται και κατά ταύτά, και ή ζόη πᾶσα και ή γλώσσα έμφερης έστι άλλήλοισι; 2.105).⁵⁶ Varying degrees of group overlap seem to have accrued especially to the Scythians, one of Herodotus’ favorite and most schematic subjects, and the groups with which they have contact. The Argippaeans are described as using Scythian clothing but their own language (φωνήν δέ ιδίην ίέντες; 4.23.2). The Scythians themselves are described as resorting to

⁵⁵ On the gradation from human to animal vocalization, see Chapter Two and Gera 2003, 182-212. Herodotus also reports that the Atarantes have no personal names (4.184.1); this example falls somewhere between language and culture (and is probably false; Harrison 1997, citing Alford 1988, 1, notes that “[s]uch a phenomenon has never been recorded of any human society”).

⁵⁶ Lloyd ad 2.25-6 (cf. 1.161-2) rationalizes Herodotus’ claim as “based on nothing more than a similarity of sound between one or two of the few Egyptian and Colchian words that he or his sources knew.” *Contra* Fehling 1989, 132, arguing that Herodotus’ assertion is “merely a secondary consequence of his erroneous theory”, citing the parallel language proofs of Xanthus, *FGrHist* 765 F 15-16 and at D.S. 5.46.3.

interpreters, each of whom speaks seven languages, when dealing with the Argippaeans (δι' ἑπτὰ ἑρμηνέων καὶ δι' ἑπτὰ γλωσσέων διαπρήσσονται; 4.24). Similar to the Argippaeans are the Androphagoi: they are nomads who wear clothes like the Scythians, but have their own language (γλώσσαν δὲ ἰδίην; 4.106). Finally, the Geloni are still Greek despite now speaking a language that is part Scythian and part Greek (εἰσὶ γὰρ οἱ Γελωνοὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖον Ἑλληνες ... καὶ γλώσση τὰ μὲν Σκυθικῇ, τὰ δὲ Ἑλληνικῇ χρέωνται; 4.108.2). It is intriguing that language, although arrayed among other categories to define groups, is a sort of stand-out feature continuing to separate groups that have otherwise started to overlap (in e.g. dress and way of life).⁵⁷

In this connection language change, primarily a function of group contact, may happen by degrees. The mixed Greco-Scythian language of the Geloni has already been mentioned. The Ammonians are described as settlers from Egypt and Ethiopia, “using a language between both” (φωνὴν μεταξὺ ἀμφοτέρων νομίζοντες, 2.42.4). The Ionians speak four “dialects” (χαρακτῆρες γλώσσης); moreover the Ionian cities of Lydia (Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedus, Teos, Clazomenae and Phocaea) speak differently from the mainland cities (αὗται δὲ αἱ πόλεις τῆσι πρότερον λεχθείησι ὁμολογέουσι κατὰ γλώσσαν οὐδέν, σφίσι δὲ ὁμοφωνέουσι; 1.142.3-4). The original language and the language resulting from change may be related unclearly: thus Carian may come from Caunian or *vice versa* (προσκεχωρήκασι δὲ γλώσσαν μὲν

⁵⁷ This may result from language being thought to separate humankind as a whole from the other animals (see Chapter Two); and may itself influence the feeling that to be separated from one's own language, or to have no language at all, is disturbing (see below, “Language and Identity 2: Language Lost – Ovid at Tomis”).

πρὸς τὸ Κάρικον ἔθνος, ἧ οἱ Κᾶρες πρὸς τὸ Καυρικὸν· τοῦτο γὰρ οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως διακρίναι; 1.172.1). Language change may also be avoided despite change of place and group contact: the Eretrians, transported by Darius to the Arabian Gulf, maintained their own language (καὶ μέχρι ἐμέο εἶχον τὴν χώρην ταύτην φυλάσσοντες τὴν ἀρχαίην γλῶσσαν; 6.119.4); this seems exceptional amidst so many examples of contact-induced change. Finally, language change, in the sense of changes internal to a language, may also result from a language being learned imperfectly: the Sauromatae learned Scythian imperfectly from the Amazons (φωνῆ δὲ οἱ Σαυρομάται νομίζουσι Σκυθικῆ σολοικίζοντες αὐτῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀρχαίου, ἐπεὶ οὐ χρηστῶς ἐξέμαθον αὐτὴν αἱ Ἀμαζόνες; 4.117).⁵⁸

Thus change of place, and the group contact that goes along with it, are taken early on as vectors for language change and linguistic diversification. An earlier exemplar than Herodotus is Solon, who writes of expatriate Athenians whose language is no longer Athenian, “as one would expect of men wandering everywhere” (24.11-12: γλῶσσαν οὐκέτ’ Ἀττικὴν / ἰέντας ὡς ἂν πολλαχῆ πλανωμένους).⁵⁹ A similar point is made by Aristoxenus. According to Athenaeus, Aristoxenus made language change a crucial component of the “barbarization” of the Magna Graecian city of Poseidonia (*Deipn.* 14.31.632a).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ I am not sure if anything may be made of Herodotus’ terms: e.g. although he always uses γλῶσση when referring to a form of Greek, it may also refer to non-Greek languages and is thus not clearly distinguished from φωνή.

⁵⁹ There may be something Hesiodic, and there is certainly something poetic, in the phrase γλῶσσαν ἰέντας.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bowersock 1992, 251: “il établit en effet que ce processus de <<barbarisation>> s’accompagnait d’un changement linguistique.”

The connection between group contact and consequent language change is drawn most explicitly by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *Antiquitates Romanae*. At 1.29.4 he outlines in the abstract his position on how language change relates to the origins of peoples. He makes two main points. First, he considers it ‘not logical at all’ (οὐδένα λόγον ἔχει) that members of the same original group, when living near to each other, would not agree somewhat in their language (μηδ’ ὅτιοῦν κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογεῖν). Thus proximity at least maintains a similarity of language underwritten by shared ethnicity: “kinship is the reason for having the same language” (τὸ συγγενές τῆς ὁμοφωνίας αἴτιον; 1.29.3). Conversely and second, Dionysius hints at what he considers the primary mechanism for language change: it “would be logical” (λόγον τιν’ ἂν εἶχε) that members of the same original group would lose similarity of language when living apart from each other and, crucially, when in contact with neighboring groups (διὰ τὰς πρὸς τοὺς πέλας ὁμιλίας).⁶¹ Although language may apparently change on its own (phonological deformation through the loss of ἀκριβεῖα), the most common source of change, and the source of the most serious changes, is extended contact with speakers of other languages. By having mixed languages result in this way most directly from mixed populations, Dionysius links linguistic identity with group identity, and grounds both in place.⁶²

⁶¹ According to Dionysius the Romans are an ‘amazing’ (θαῦμα) exception to the rule of acculturation by contact, having somehow avoided being ‘thoroughly barbarized’ (ἅπαντα ἐξεβαρβάρωθη) by their non-Greek neighbors (1.89.3); see further Chapter Six.

⁶² In the passage in question Dionysius uses these ideas to conclude that the Etruscans are neither Pelasgians nor Lydians, for, as he says, ‘many reasons’ (πολλοῖς τε ἄλλοις), but for one reason ‘above all’ (μάλιστα): their languages (φωναί) sound nothing alike.

The perceived dependence of linguistic diversity on place of cultural origin can take more complex forms. In his work *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle writes that “just as not all men have the same letters, neither do they have the same sounds [OR: languages]” (ὡσπερ οὐδε γράμματα πᾶσι τὰ αὐτά, οὐδὲ φωναὶ αἱ αὐταί; 16a5-6). Aristotle is concerned here with different vocal expressions of common experiences of the spirit (τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα; 16a3-4). To describe the differences in speech he shifts from singular τῇ φωνῇ to plural αἱ φωναί. It is unclear whether he has in mind differences merely in pronunciation among the dialects of a single language (probably Greek), or the more radical differences between different languages (e.g. Greek v. a barbarian language); thus both ‘sounds’ and ‘languages’ are possible. In either case the point is clear: φωναί vary.

Clarification of Aristotle’s thoughts on linguistic diversity may be found in his comparison of human language with birdsong (cf. Chapter Two). Ever the observant biologist, Aristotle argues that birdsong, like human language, is not innate in species but learned from local singers (*Hist An.* 536b14-19):

of the small birds some do not produce the same voice as their parents when they sing, if they are raised away from home and hear other birds singing ... since speech is not the same by nature, nor is voice, but subject to being trained

καὶ τῶν μικρῶν ὀρνίθων ἔνια οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν φωνὴν ἀφιᾶσιν ἐν τῷ ἄδειν τοῖς γεννήσασιν, ἂν ἀπότροφα γένωνται καὶ ἄλλων ἀκούσωσιν ὀρνίθων ἀδόντων. ... ὡς οὐχ ὁμοίας φύσει τῆς διαλέκτου οὔσης καὶ τῆς φωνῆς, ἀλλ’ ἐνδεχόμενον πλάττεσθαι.

Birds are imagined as not only susceptible to learning the ‘speech’ of another species, but also needing to be trained even in their ‘native’ songs. Moreover such instruction is one function to which ‘voice’ is put by birds, not accidentally but as deliberate training.

The learning of bird speech and its local contingency has a corollary crucial to Aristotle's ideas about (human) language origins: at least in its history subsequent to an original creation or emergence, language undergoes diversification and changes due to 'convention'. Aristotle concludes that within bird species, *as among humans*, there is regional variation of dialect, that is linguistic diversity (*Hist An.* 536b8-13):

Both vocal sounds and speech differ according to place. Vocal sound is especially clear in height and depth, while its form hardly differs in the same species; but the kind that is articulated, which one would say is just like speech, differs both between different species and among animals of the same species according to place.

διαφέρουσι δὲ κατὰ τοὺς τόπους καὶ αἱ φωναὶ καὶ αἱ διάλεκτοι.
ἡ μὲν οὖν φωνὴ ὀξύτητι καὶ βαρύτητι μάλιστα ἐπίδηλος, τὸ δ'
εἶδος οὐδὲν διαφέρει τῶν αὐτῶν γενῶν· ἡ δ' ἐν τοῖς ἄρθροις, ἦν
ἄν τις ὡσπερ διάλεκτον εἶπειεν, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων διαφέρει
καὶ τῶν ἐν ταύτῳ γένει ζώων κατὰ τοὺς τόπους.

That is, although the vocal apparatus and thus voice sounds do not vary significantly from one individual to the next in terms of physiology, nonetheless the language used by individuals does differ, because of the contingency of language acquisition. To the extent that linguistic changes thus depend on language learning, the 'origin' of language in each generation is a matter of 'convention' (or at least not a matter of things' natures).⁶³

This first difference due to learning between generations, within a community, is overlaid by differences between communities (linguistic diversity), also ascribed to place. Again Aristotle makes the same point for both animal speech and human

⁶³ The Greeks seem to have imagined language learning as mostly the province of children; e.g. *Hdt.* 1.73.3, 4.78.1; *Hymn to Aphrodite* 113-116; *Plat. Prot.* 325e; *Dissoi Logoi* DK 90 B6, 12. This oversimplifies the demonstrably more complex reality of multilingualism. See below on Ovid's possible characterization of his exile as linguistically a second childhood.

language. Animals' "articulated voice, which one might speak of as if language, differs both between different animals and in animals of the same species according to place" (ἡ δ' ἐν τοῖς ἄρθροις, ἦν ἄν τις ὥσπερ διάλεκτον εἴπειεν, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων διαφέρει καὶ τῶν ἐν ταύτῳ γένει ζώων κατὰ τοὺς τόπους; *Hist. An.* 536b10-12). Thus at least speech diversity occurs between species and because of place, presumably differentiated learning in distinct locales. As above the comparison with humankind, and the conclusion for linguistic diversity proper, is explicit: "Humankind, too, produces the same vocal sound, but not the same speech" from place to place (καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι φωνὴν μὲν τὴν αὐτὴν ἀφιᾶσιν, διάλεκτον δ' οὐ τὴν αὐτήν). That is, while the human voice, φωνή, is recognizably human in all its speakers (allowing for individual variation in pitch and character), at a higher level in Aristotle's taxonomy of language, diversity is the rule: 'speech', διάλεκτος, varies according to place.⁶⁴

A similar emphasis on local variation in words and their uses is found in Epicurus. As shown in Chapter One, Epicurus' chronological scheme of language origins makes room for diversity at two points and in two ways. First, the first words varied 'naturally' from group to group because both groups and individuals experienced and perceived 'nature' in ways peculiar to themselves: "the very natures of humankind, having experiences peculiar to themselves group by group, and perceiving mental images peculiar [sc. to themselves group by group], expelled breath in particular ways, the breath having been produced by each experience and mental image" (αὐτὰς τὰς

⁶⁴ Cf. Arist. *Prob.* 895a: "why does humankind show great variety of voice but other animals have only one, unless they are of different species? Or does even humankind have only one voice but many varieties of speech?" (διὰ τί μᾶλλον ἄνθρωπος πολλὰς φωνὰς ἀφίησιν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα μίαν, ἀδιάφορα ὄντα τῷ εἶδει; ἢ καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μία φωνή, ἀλλὰ διάλεκτοι πολλοί)

φύσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καθ' ἕκαστα ἔθνη ἴδια πασχούσας πάθη καὶ ἴδια λαμβανούσας φαντάσματα ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν στελλόμενον ὑφ' ἑκάστων τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν φαντασμάτων).⁶⁵ The result is that “there is diversity [sc. of language] according to the locations of the groups” (ὡς ἂν ποτε καὶ ἡ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἔθνων διαφορὰ ἦ). Second, words and language were made more diverse from each other by being refined for local needs, that is ‘conventionally’: “Later, the peculiar words were set in common within each group so that explanations to one another would become less confusing and more concise” (ὑστερον δὲ κοινῶς καθ' ἕκαστα ἔθνη τὰ ἴδια τεθῆναι πρὸς τὸ τὰς δηλώσεις ἦττον ἀμφιβόλους γενέσθαι ἀλλήλοις καὶ συντομωτέρας δηλουμένας). Since this second set of changes builds on the first set of already diverse languages, diversity is multiplied. At both points linguistic diversity occurs along geographical and group lines.

Although Epicurus' followers did not reproduce his ideas on language origins in all their complexity, later Epicureans nonetheless also attest to linguistic diversity depending on group organization and location. For Lucretius human linguistic diversity is true *a fortiori* from the observable fact of various vocal sounds made by animals in response to different conditions (5.1056-1061):

What is the least bit surprising in this situation, if humankind, in whom voice and language thrive, should note things with varying sounds depending on their varying sensations, when the mute flocks, when indeed the generations of wild beasts are accustomed to crying out

⁶⁵ Cf. Usener frag. 334: “unlike what the Stoics think, Epicurus teaches [that] words come about by nature, with the first humans having broken off some speech sounds according to things” (διδάσκει Ἐπίκουρος (ἐτέρως ἢ ὡς οἴονται οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς) ὡς φύσει ἐστὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ἀπορρηχάντων τῶν πρώτων ἀνθρώπων τινὰς φωνὰς κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων).

different and varying sounds, when there is fear or pain and when their joy swells?

quid in hac mirabile tantoperest re, / si genus humanum, cui uox et
lingua uigeret, / pro uario sensu uaria res uoce notaret, / cum pecudes
mutae, cum denique saecla ferarum / dissimilis soleant uoces uariasque
ciere, / cum metus aut dolor est et cum iam gaudia gliscunt?

The difference between the two types of activity, human language (*res uoce notare*) and animal vocalization (*uoces ciere*), has been discussed in Chapter Two. Here it suffices to note that Lucretius stresses ‘variety’ in language from the beginning of his account: “Nature compelled [humankind] to utter the various sounds of language” (*uarios linguae sonitus natura subegit / mittere*; 5.1028-1029). That this variety is at the level of languages, as opposed to the level of individual words, is confirmed by other passages; see further Chapter Two.

Romans on Linguistic Diversity

From Lucretius we may turn to more general Roman awareness of linguistic diversity. Such awareness was even more widespread than earlier in a culture marked by “pervasive interest in language” and by an easier acceptance of multiculturalism than obtained in the Greek world.⁶⁶ Already in the Greek sources language is indicative of group and individual identity and thus fraught with subjective sense of self; much more so in multicultural Rome. In this connection foreign language and non-standard deviations within given languages were taken to mark individuals and groups as other,

⁶⁶ “Pervasive interest”: Rawson 1985, 105, 109, 119. On Rome as more openly multicultural than Greece, cf. Dubuisson 1982, 31: Rome was “la cité hétérogène et assimilatrice par essence, le creuset de l’Italie puis du monde”; and Cornell 1995, 119-172. On Greece’s differences see Runciman 1990.

whether simply different or, less neutrally, as targets for ridicule or discrimination. Individual or societal multilingualism could thus be criticized, taken to represent a dissipation of traditional and ideal identities.

The personal experience of multilingualism was unavoidable in the Roman era. Cicero notes the multiculturalism of Rome in particular: “Rome is a city made up of the gathering of nations” (*Roma est ciuitas ex nationum conuentu constituta; Comm. pet.* 54); and Seneca describes the basis of that fact: “the greatest part of that crowd is away from its homeland. They have flowed together from their *municipia* and their *colonia*, indeed from the entire world” (*maxima pars istius turbae patria caret. Ex municipiis et coloniis suis, ex toto denique orbe terrarum confluerunt; Dial.* 12.6.2). Rome, the gathering point of peoples, is of necessity also a mixture of languages.⁶⁷

This situation did not find universal approval. Whether or not Rome had ever been purely Latin-speaking, its status as the multilingual city par excellence could be lamented or lampooned: language change is rarely figured as neutral ‘change’ but often as loss or ‘corruption’, resulting in a city or people that is *degener*. Although in the late third and early second centuries BC Roman authors like the playwright Plautus and the satirist Lucilius were able to pepper the speech of their Roman characters with Greek, evidently to comic effect, others liked such mixed language less.⁶⁸ In the first century

⁶⁷ See Dubuisson 1992 and 1989a; Campanile 1991; Homeyer 1957 on urban centers in bilingualism and language shift: “The history of language development in Italy is inseparable from the history of the towns” (426).

⁶⁸ On Plautus’ Greek see Hough 1934; perhaps the play with the most extended use of Greek is *Poenulus*, esp. 930-1030. For Lucilius see Macrob. *Sat.* 6.4.18: *inseruit [Uergilius] operi suo et Graeca uerba, sed non primus hoc ausus ... Lucilius in primo – porro ‘clinopodas’ ‘lychnos’ que et diximus semnos / ante ‘pedes lecti’ atque ‘lucernas’* (16-17K).

AD Hellenophonic Rome is decried by Juvenal: “I am unable, Quirites, to tolerate a Greek Rome” (*non possum ferre, Quirites, / Graecam urbem*; 3.60-61).

In this despised city women feign Hellenicity, becoming *Graeculae*,⁶⁹ by emoting in Greek (6.187-197):

Everything is in Greek. Although it is more shameful for us not to know Latin, they express fear in that language, anger, joys, concerns, in it they pour out every secret of the heart. What else? They make love in Greek. Nevertheless you will allow this for girls. But you, in your eighty-sixth year, still speaking Greek? This language isn't proper in an old woman.

omnia Graece: / cum sit turpe magis nostris nescire Latine / hoc sermone
pauent, hoc iram, gaudia, curas, / hoc cuncta effundunt animi secreta:
quid ultra? / concumbunt Graece. dones tamen ista puellis: / tunc etiam,
quam sextus et octogesimus annus / pulsat, adhuc Graece? non est hic
sermo pudicus / in uetula.

Juvenal's specific complaint seems not to be that Greek is spoken in Rome (although this bothers him), but that it is used to express “every secret of the heart.”⁷⁰ Foregoing Latin in favor of Greek for this purpose is a challenge to individual and thus societal identity. What does it mean to be Roman if even our elders, from whose behavior younger generations learn *mos*, use Greek? A similar sentiment is expressed by Martial, who lampoons a Roman woman who switches to Greek for terms of endearment (κύριε μου, μέλι μου, ψυχή μου *congeris usque*; 10.68.5).⁷¹

⁶⁹ On *graeculus* and similar terms, see Dubuisson 1989c.

⁷⁰ If Pabón 1939 is right that Greek had long since become the educated Roman's language of emotional expression, then Juvenal may have been irritated quite often.

⁷¹ On these two passages cf. Adams 2003a, 360-261, who concludes: “Martial and Juvenal have in mind different categories of women ... [respectively] the upper-class woman who behaves beneath her status in using Greek terms ... and the *uetula* who behaves beneath her age in doing so.” Add the Grecizing Latin presumably spoken by lower classes, and the use of Greek at Rome seems pervasive indeed.

Other authors evidently did not dislike Greek or even a Greek city as such. Magna Graecia, e.g. Puteoli and Naples, was a popular vacation spot among Romans (Petron. 81 and Tac. *Ann.* 15.33.2). Longer-term residents of the Greek south were of course even more enthusiastic: the epic poet Ennius claims proudly to have spoken three languages, including Greek, while yet maintaining the traditional link between language and identity (the three languages are his ‘three hearts’, *tria corda*; Gell. *N.A.* 17.17.1). And some evidence attests to upper-class Roman appreciation of a Greek accent in educated Latin: Quintilian praises the sweetness of some Greek sounds as opposed to Latin’s harshness (12.10.33);⁷² and from about 150 BC certain classes of Latin speakers started to aspirate in speech and writing both Greek aspirated stops and previously unaspirated stops in native Latin words.⁷³

Greco-Latin bilingualism was ideally a matter of the two languages being arrayed into complementary domains.⁷⁴ Although the desire for communication in Latin was never institutionalized as linguistic policy, it was underwritten by behavioral norms.⁷⁵ For example it was apparently expected that citizens or aspirants to citizenship

⁷² But cf. 1.1.12-14, where he urges that children should quickly be introduced to Latin lest their accents be warped; and 8.1.3, discussed below (“Outside Identity 1: *lingua olet* and Social Synaesthesia at Rome”).

⁷³ Sihler 1995, 142: “The correct pronunciation of the aspirates was so highly esteemed in polite circles ... that aspirated stops were introduced into a number of native Latin words”; Biville 1990-1995, 139. See also Allen (1978: 26-27) who acknowledges “fashionable misapplication[s] of Greek speech-habits” (alongside conservatism in less polite circles; Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.57) but argues for aspiration as “a special but natural environmental development in Latin itself” of unaspirated to aspirated voiceless stops at least during Cicero’s time (*Or.* 160).

⁷⁴ Rochette 1997, 1996b; Dubuisson 1992, 1989a, 1981a.

⁷⁵ Cf. Adams 2003b, 198: “Only in a loose sense did the Romans have linguistic policies, and one will look in vain for any explicit formulations.”

would know Latin, especially in the West (see the passages of Cicero quoted above in the introduction) and even in the East, but there only to the extent of needing to use Latin for birth certificates and wills.⁷⁶ The converse of this expectation is that Roman civic identity could be asserted by those who were not Roman by birth through use of Latin. The emperor Claudius is supposed to have approved of a “barbarian” who knew Latin and Greek: “to a barbarian fluent in Greek and Latin he said, ‘since you are equipped with both of our languages’” (*cuidam barbaro Graece ac Latine disserenti: ‘cum utroque’ inquit ‘sermone nostro sis paratus’*; Suet. *Claud.* 42.1);⁷⁷ and conversely to have “struck a man of distinguished birth, of leading status in the province of Greece, not only from the list of jurors but from the citizenship, since he was ignorant of Latin speech” (*splendidum uirum Graeciaeque prouinciae principem, uerum Latini sermonis ignarum, non modo albo iudicum erasit, sed in peregrinitatem redegit*; *Claud.* 16.2). Cicero makes a similar point: “for it is not so outstanding to know Latin as it is shameful not to, nor does it seem to me a characteristic of the good orator as much as of the Roman citizen” (*non enim tam praeclarum est scire Latine quam turpe nescire, neque tam id mihi oratoris boni quam ciuis Romani proprium uidetur*; *Brut.* 140).⁷⁸

The connection between Latin language and Roman identity held even if one did not normally or even minimally speak the language. Thus it is common for soldiers’ epitaphs across the Empire to include at least their name and rank, and sometimes a

⁷⁶ See Adams 2003b, 186-188.

⁷⁷ Suetonius’ quote of Claudius is sic, grammatically incomplete.

⁷⁸ On these and other examples of language relating to citizenship see further below.

longer text, in Latin.⁷⁹ A striking example comes from Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, three stones showing “a leading centurion receiving a Latin grave monument from his wife and son, the wife herself getting one in Greek from her daughter, and the son getting one in Greek from his sister.”⁸⁰ As Adams notes, “[i]t would ... be true to say that Latin had the potential to symbolize the *Romanitas* of the [military] and its members in appropriate circumstances.”⁸¹

This symbolic or indicative relationship between Latin and Roman identity was also discussed more generally, as a component of Roman imperial ideology.⁸² Pliny the Elder makes the point quite broadly, linking the spread of Latin to the political unification of humankind (*N.H.* 3.5.39):

[Latin] was chosen by the power of the gods to make the heavens themselves more noteworthy, to gather together the scattered population, to make more gentle empire and its customs, and to drag into conversation the discordant and savage languages of so many peoples, and to give humanity to humankind and to make a single homeland for all the nations of the world.

numine deorum electa, quae caelum ipsum clarius faceret, sparsum congregaret imperia ritusque molliret et tot populorum discordes ferasque linguas sermonis commercio contraheret ad colloquia et

⁷⁹ See Levick 1995.

⁸⁰ Discussed by Adams 2003b, 200, and Levick 1995, 400.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² At the same time it is clear that Latin *per se* was not enough: what mattered, for real *Romanitas* inasmuch as it needed real *Latinitas*, was a Latin approximating the ideally educated Latin of the city. Thus Cicero is able to praise Varro, albeit perhaps with some mockery, for his etymological work, i.e. his “reveal[ing] the names of all human and divine things” (*omnium diuinarum humanarumque rerum nomina ... aperuisti; Acad.* 1.9). Without such antiquarianism even Romans “wander and stray like strangers in their own city” (*nos in nostra urbe peregrinantis errantisque tamquam hospites; ibid.*).

humanitatem homini daret breuiterque una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria fieret.

As often in Roman sources, the purpose of language is society, *sermonis commercio*, with distinctly political consequences.⁸³ Although there seems to have been no explicit language policy, it was expected that interaction with and among Romans would take place in Latin. The first reported address to Greeks by a Roman speaking Latin was by Cato the Censor: according to Plutarch, who cites Cato himself, Cato insisted on speaking through an interpreter although he could have spoken in Greek (*Cato* 12.4).⁸⁴ As Gruen argues, Cato “plainly orchestrated the whole event – with the precise objective of drawing the contrast” between sincere Roman brevity and rhetorical Greek verbosity.⁸⁵ Cato’s transformation of this daily practice into an ideological point is followed by Valerius Maximus (2.2.2), who considers it a matter of ancestral practice: “one can see how carefully the magistrates of old conducted themselves to maintain their majesty and that of the Roman people” (*magistratus uero prisca quantopere sui populi Romani maiestatem retinentes se gesserint hinc cognosci potest*) in that “they made sure never to respond to Greeks unless in Latin” (*ne Graecis unquam nisi Latine*

⁸³ See Fuchs 1926 and the discussion in Chapter Three.

⁸⁴ Cato is supposed to have mocked Postumius Albinus, who had composed a history in Greek and then apologized for the poor quality of his Greek (12.5); the passage concludes with Cato disparaging the false eloquence of the Greeks and praising the plain-spoken sincerity of the Romans. See Gruen 1992, 64–65; on Cato’s knowledge of Greek, Val. Max. 8.7.1, whose phrase *Graecis litteris erudiri concupuit – quam sero inde aestimemus quod etiam Latinas paene iam senex didicit* implies a late learning of Greek literature, not language; cf. Cic. *Rep.* 5.2, *Acad.* 2.5, *De sen.* 3 and 26; Nepos *Cat.* 3.2; Quint. 12.11.13; Plin. *N.H.* 29.14; Plut. *Cat.* 12.4 (Cato could have spoken Greek in Athens in 191 BC but chose not to); with Astin 1978, 157–181 esp. 159–160.

⁸⁵ Gruen 1992, 64; cf. 64–65: “The purpose was not so much to denounce Hellenic oratory as to exhibit its inferiority to Roman practice”; and 69: Cato “declared that Roman ascendancy carried over from the military sphere to the realm of high culture.”

responsa darent). The purpose was to spread “the honor of the Latin language more venerably through all nations” (*quo scilicet Latinae uocis honos per omnes gentes uenerabilior diffunderetur*).⁸⁶ Valerius no doubt exaggerates, and Cato’s position on Greek is not black-and-white, but Romans do seem to have expected to be addressed in Latin.

Language and Identity 1: The Scent of Language and Social Synaesthesia at Rome

Statements like Pliny’s, Cato’s, and Valerius’, idealized and even purposefully ideological, no doubt exaggerate the extent to which Romans could rely on non-Romans to speak Latin or speak it well.⁸⁷ The displeasure which educated Romans could feel at hearing flawed Latin or foreign languages could be captured by Latin in a surprising way. Foreign languages, and both foreign and rustic accents in Latin, may be said ‘to smell’ (*olere*) displeasingly different from the ideally educated and properly pronounced Latin of the city. The scent of language, ‘language smells and (thus) reveals’, is part of a larger Roman conception of the nose and nostrils as socially knowing and of scent as socially and physically revealing.⁸⁸

The verb used in the construction, *olere*, may mean either ‘(give off) smell’ (OLD s.v. 1) or ‘reveal one’s presence’ (s.v. 3). In the latter meaning the verb is often

⁸⁶ See Dubuisson 1982.

⁸⁷ This section has benefited from the comments from one of *Classical Antiquity*’s anonymous readers.

⁸⁸ In general, “[o]dours were not simply a matter of aesthetic preference in the ancient world, but also a means by which different classes of people were categorized” (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1995, 33; generally 33-38).

used of people. When *olere* is used of language the first meaning seems to be strongly felt. Cicero writes that there is “a certain speech belonging to the Roman people and the city of Rome, in which nothing offends, nothing displeases, nothing stands out, and in which there is no foreign sound or odor” (*quaedam certa uox Romani generis urbisque propria, in qua nihil offendi, nihil displicere, nihil animaduerti possit, nihil sonare aut olere peregrinum; De Orat. 3.44*).⁸⁹ On the one hand, ‘odor’, *olere*, comes at the end of a list of more abstract actions; this might drain it of its original force for, as noted, the verb can mean ‘reveal’ and thus be nearly synonymous with Cicero’s *animaduerti*, ‘be noticed’. On the other hand, in this example it is paired with the more concrete ‘sound’, *sonare*. It may thus be inferred that *olere*, like *sonare*, refers to an activity that registers on the senses, namely ‘(giving off) an odor.’⁹⁰

Cicero approves of this Roman Latin because it lacks, among other things, a ‘foreign odor’. The implied contrast is with non-Roman and extra-urban Latin, and with languages other than Latin, all of which are malodorous. These other accents and languages are not simply scented but displeasingly so (*displicere*); thus they draw unfavorable attention (*animaduerti*), to themselves and to their speakers, and cause offense (*offendi*) to Roman listeners. The phenomenology of this contrast is discussed below.

Cicero’s example imagines Roman Latin as lacking the scent attached to extra-

⁸⁹ See generally Leeman and Pinkster 1981-.

⁹⁰ *Contra* Catrein, who thinks that a merely “zwanglose Verknüpfung” joins *sonare* and *olere*, “das eine wörtlich, das andere metaphorisch zu verstehen”; Latin *olere*, like “‘riechen’ und verwandte Ausdrücke in vielen Sprachchen als Metaphern für subjektive Beurteilung Verwendung finden” (2003: 98). Catrein does not argue this point, but quotes the TLL: “perceptio fit sola mente” (9.543.72-73).

urban accents and to foreign dialects. But the image may also be reversed, with urban Latin possessing a characteristic odor. Quintilian recommends that, “if possible, all the words, and the voice that nourishes the city, smell such that speech seem clearly Roman, as if citizenship were inherent and not received” (*si fieri potest, et uerba omnia et uox huius alumnus urbis oleant, ut oratio Romana plane uideatur, non ciuitate donata; Inst.* 8.1.3). In contrast with the ‘foreign odor’ attached to rustic accents and foreign languages, the scent of Roman words and speech is presumably pleasing and indicates *Romanitas*.

The two examples provided by Cicero and Quintilian are complementary: both contrast Roman Latin with extra-urban Latin and foreign language, but the first does so by making the latter smell (and sound) bad, while the second makes the former smell good. In neither example, however, is the odor itself described. Cicero elsewhere describes his beloved urban Latin as ‘sweet’, having *suauitas* as did, probably not coincidentally, Classical Attic (*De inu.* 3.42).⁹¹ But nowhere does he explicitly describe urban Latin as e.g. ‘sweet-smelling’.⁹² Nor does either author turn to simile or metonymy, the usual recourses for describing odors.

Instead, Cicero and Quintilian link the unspecified scents to language’s other perceptible qualities and, crucially, to social judgments about the people who speak them. These features of scented language may be closely interconnected. According to

⁹¹ Cf. the recommendation for purging both languages of corruptive foreign influence at *Brut.* 258.

⁹² At one point he does refer to a ‘scent of urbanity’, *odor urbanitatis* (*Orat.* 3.161). Cf. his description of Q. Granius besting a rustic Latin, T. Tinca of Placentia, because of the *sapor uernaculus*, ‘native-born flavor’, of his speech (*Brut.* 169-172).

Cicero, Roman Latin lacks both ‘rustic roughness’ (*rusticam asperitatem*) and ‘foreign unaccustomedness’ (*peregrinam insolentiam*). The first term implies that urban Latin is smoother in sound than that spoken outside the city.⁹³ Such smoothness is specified by contrast when Cicero (at *De Orat.* 3.45-46) describes rustic Latin as having *grauitas*, perhaps ‘slowness’, and as being spoken both *uaste*, ‘flatly’, that is with lowered vowels (e.g. *e* for *i*; cf. Varro *R.R.* 1.2.14), and *hiulce*, with a ‘disagreeable hiatus’ or *concursum hiulcus* (cf. *De Orat.* 3.171).⁹⁴ To this list of rustic qualities may be added excessive aspiration (e.g. Varro *L.L.* 5.97: *hedus* instead of *aedus*; P. Nigidius Figulus ap. Gell. *N.A.* 13.6.3: *rusticus fit sermo si adspires perperam*).⁹⁵ Truly foreign (*peregrinum*) accents or ways of speech are described more vaguely: *insolentia* means only ‘in a way not according to [our] custom’. Elsewhere Cicero describes a particular foreign pronunciation of Latin as *pingue*, perhaps ‘thick’ (*Pro Arch.* 26, referring to recitation of Latin by poets from Corduba).

Whatever their precise meanings in terms of sound, both of the qualities referred to by Cicero also embed language in an evaluative social web. The scent of language serves broadly to indicate a speaker’s origins or place in society, in which *urbanus* is better than *rusticus* and/or *peregrinus*. Language indicates a speaker’s place on this social axis elsewhere in both Cicero and Quintilian, both of whose persistent recommendations for proper Latin speech and writing imply strong disapproval of

⁹³ Cicero implies that this difference registers mostly phonetically, for even a cultured vocabulary due to careful reading of literature will not mask rustic pronunciation (*De Orat.* 3.42).

⁹⁴ On *hiulce* see Wilkins 1892 ad loc.

⁹⁵ Cf. Catullus’ mockery of a man, (H)Arrius, who affects just this sort of aspiration (84); see Ramage 1961, 484-486.

extra-urban Latin, as well as in other authors.⁹⁶

Throughout the language, the seat of social awareness is the nose and the nostrils. Plautus makes the point by having Pyrgopolynices say of the courtesan Acroteleutium that she “sees more with her nose than with her eyes” (*naso ... plus uidet quam oculis; Mil. 1259*).⁹⁷ For Pyrgopolynices the strength of Acroteleutium’s olfactory perception is almost divinatory (1260). But olfactory social perception in general is not unusual. In the same play Plautus uses a compound of *olere, subolere*, to mean ‘to have a presentiment’ (211): the nose knows, at least before the eyes do.⁹⁸

The idea reappears with more precision in Horace, who locates social judgment in the nostrils (*nares*).⁹⁹ In *Sat. 1.3* he describes “a man so good as to have no betters” (*est bonus, ut melior uir / non alius quisquam; 32-33*) but whose appearance and manners are such that he is “less suited to the keen nostrils of [aristocrats]” (*minus aptus acutis / naribus horum hominum; 29-30*). This sort of man’s inappropriateness, even though partly visual (including a shabby toga and badly-tied shoes; 30-31), offends especially the noses of his seeming social betters.

The image drawn by Horace is one of social *misperception*, with noses pointing pretentiously up into the air and their owners mistaking appearance for essence. But the use of the nose and the nostrils for such perception is widespread. The nostrils may be

⁹⁶ See generally Adams 2003b and Ramage 1960.

⁹⁷ Cf. 73, 115; and *Curc.* 1106.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Cas.* 814: *iam oboluit Casinus procul*; with Connors 1997.

⁹⁹ See Lilja 1972a, 212-213.

acutae, ‘keen’, implying a sharp mind, or *obesae*, ‘dull’ or ‘thick’: lacking a sharp sense of smell means missing out on meaning (e.g. Hor. *Ep.* 12.2-3: “I [am] neither a strong young man nor of dull perceptions”; *mihi ... nec firmo iuueni neque naris obesae*). The close connection between the physical nose and social perception is drawn out in the double use of *emungere* to mean ‘to wipe the mucus from (the nose etc.)’ (OLD s.v. 1a) and ‘having delicate or refined tastes’ (1b): thus Horace describes Lucilius as *facetus* and *emunctae naris* in parallel, the hendiadys marking him ‘clever and shrewd’ (*Sat.* 1.4.8).

At an even more general level, scent is literally at the root of intelligence in Latin.¹⁰⁰ *Sagax*, usually ‘perceptive’ (OLD 2), is a metaphorical extension of a root meaning ‘keen-sensed’ (OLD 1a). Thus Cicero writes that dogs may be called *sagaces* because the meaning of *sagire*, sharing the same root as *sagax*, ‘is to sense keenly’ (*sagire ... sentire acute est; ex quo ... sagaces dicti canes; Diu.* 1.65). In this connection *odor* may itself be metaphorical, meaning ‘whiff, hint, suggestion’ (OLD 1b; e.g. Cic. *Att.* 4.18.3: “there is a whiff of dictatorship”, *est nonnullus odor dictaturae*). Scented language is thus of a piece with Latin usage grounding social perception in scent-perception.

It is also no mere metaphor. In the first place it is not apologized for as unusual metaphors often are in Latin (e.g. with *ut dicunt*). Moreover, Cicero’s own discussion of the origins and types of metaphor (*De Orat.* 3.40-42) makes clear that catachretic metaphors are not emptied of their original perceptible contents. Both ‘scent’, *odor*, and

¹⁰⁰ For a similar grounding of intelligence in sense-perception in English, see Classen 1993, 50-76.

‘speech’, *oratio*, appear in this discussion. A first example is *odor urbanitatis*, ‘a whiff of urbanity’.¹⁰¹ Cicero explains the lasting appeal of metaphors like this as due to four reasons, including because “all metaphor, or at least that chosen by reason, appeals to the senses themselves” (*omnis translatio quae quidem sumpta ratione est ad sensus ipsos admouetur*; *De Orat.* 3.40). Thus Cicero acknowledges the metaphorical force of *odor* applied to *urbanitas*. In the same passage he offers as a second example *dulcedo orationis*, ‘sweetness of speech’. The two examples together might imply that *odor*, like *dulcedo*, would be understood metaphorically when applied to speech. But such metaphor is doubly motivated, not just ‘rational’, i.e. ‘chosen by reason’, but also retaining an ‘appeal to the senses’. The metaphorical term is not empty: *odor* retains some of its appeal to the sense of smell. Thus Cicero at least seems to conceive of language as appealing to the sense of smell.

This scent of language also does not refer to what moderns might perceive as an ‘actually’ scented phenomenon, i.e. bad breath. There are of course examples of Roman authors referring to bad breath, certain poets making much hay of certain others’ halitosis. But there are also examples of sweet-talk and sweet-smelling language: Martial famously extols the fragrant virtues of delightful kisses by comparing their scent or taste to that of apples and other fruits (3.65, 11.8).¹⁰² It is neither native biology

¹⁰¹ According to Stanford this is “normal catachresis[i]s from physical to abstract.” (1936: 42). For Cicero carachresis is the origin of metaphor: “necessity gave birth to it, compelled by poverty and difficulties” (*necessitas genuit inopia coacta et angustiis*; *De Orat.* 3.38). Metaphor is then refined by ‘sweetness and enjoyment’ (*iucunditas delectatioque*); the passage with its move from necessity to aesthetic considerations is reminiscent of the origin of cultural items and practices, including language, in the Golden Age; see Campbell 2003.

¹⁰² Cf. the polyglot described by Plutarch *Mor.* 421b: “while he spoke a pleasant odor from his sweet-smelling mouth filled the place” (φθεγγομένου δὲ τὸν τόπον εὐωδία κατέιχε τοῦ στόματος ἡδιστον ἀποπνέοντος).

nor eating habits that produce bad or good breath, but social activity that is reflected in speech-scent and smelled in spoken language.

Another example from Cicero strengthens the notion that these examples go beyond metaphor to connote a perception of spoken language and its components as having scent. This perceived odor is separate from the breath of its speakers. Writing about the postponement of *cum* with the personal pronouns, Cicero asks (*Orat.* 154):

does this not *olet* where it comes from, namely that we say ‘*cum illis*’, whereas we don’t say ‘*cum nobis*’ but ‘*nobiscum*’? Since if it were said the first way, the letters would run together rather obscenely, as they would have if I hadn’t left a space between them.

illud non olet unde sit, quod dicitur cum illis, cum autem nobis non dicitur, sed nobiscum? quia si ita diceretur, obscensius concurrerent litterae, ut etiam modo, nisi autem interposuissem, concurrissent.

This is Cicero’s famous explanation for the postposition of *cum*: because of the weak pronunciation of word-final *m* as nasalization of preceding vowel (mytacticism), as for example in echthlipsis (word-final *m* not preventing elision in poetry), *cum nobis* sounded too much to proprietous Roman ears like the vulgar word *cunnius*.¹⁰³ *cunnius* was apparently offensive for reasons not dissimilar to those still making its English cognate taboo today.¹⁰⁴ But Cicero’s use of *olet* adds an intriguing wrinkle: *cum nobis* may have offended not only Roman sensibilities but also the strongly synaesthetic

¹⁰³ See Sihler 1995 §237.1: word-final *-m* seems to have been “a nasalized [w] in careful speech, which in poetry behaved like a final glide and in casual speech styles seems to have dropped altogether.”

¹⁰⁴ Thus the word could also be used for effect in poetry (e.g. Catull. 97.8; Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.36, 1.2.70, 1.3.107; Mart. 1.77.6, 2.34.3, 10.90.1) and “mainly in graffiti and epigram” (see Adams 1982, 80-81). Cf. *Fam.* 9.22, where Cicero uses the same near-homonym avoided at *Orat.* 154, *cum nos*, to allude to *cunnius*.

Roman nose as well, smelling of rude rusticity, of foreigners, or of women: the scent perceived as attached to *cum nobis* might have been quite specific.

Moreover, Cicero clearly does not identify this malodor with the *breath* of speakers who say *cum nobis*. Rather it is the sound or shape of the words that causes the scent to be perceived. *Cum nobis* apparently carries enough traces of its homophonous malodorant to stop Cicero from even writing the two words together in that order; instead he separates them by the postpositive *autem* – since this must come after the first element in a phrase, Cicero thus emphasizes that even his written collocation of *cum* and *nobis* is not close enough to resemble *cunnus*.

Two other, related contexts making a purely metaphorical reading of language odors unlikely are, on the one hand, ancient understanding of the tongue in both language and sense-perception; and, on the other hand, atomistic or materialistic explanations for odor and taste. Already in Aristotle the tongue combines language and sense-perception (*Part An.* 660a20, quoted and discussed in Chapter Two). Activities that could be considered distinct, language and the perception of flavors, are linked by the physiology of the tongue. Although the ‘language’ in question is not perception thereof but speech *production*, even in this early evidence speech, although auditory, is thus linked with a different sense modality.

The second context is basic theorizing of odors and flavors, in particular the shapes of their component particles. Ancient classification of odors was all but limited to two categories, ‘pleasant’ and ‘unpleasant’.¹⁰⁵ These two categories may reflect even

¹⁰⁵ Plato *Tim.* 50e and 67a (“the only clear distinction we can draw here [is] that between the pleasant and the offensive”; ἀλλὰ διχῆ τὸ θ’ ἤδὲ καὶ τὸ λυπηρὸν αὐτόθι μόνω διαφανῆ λέγεσθον); Theophrastus *De Odor.* 1 (τὰ μὲν εὖοσμα τὰ δὲ κάκοσμα) with Sedley 1985, Sharples 1988, and Wörhte 1988. See Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1995, 13-50; Pillivuyt 1988, 41-56 and 73-90;

more fundamental physical properties of odors and flavors. Plato in the *Timaeus* offers a classification of flavors based on the underlying proportions of elements and their actions on the tongue (65b-66c). However, although combinations of elements may thus produce such tastes as sour, tangy, bitter, salty, and pungent, all of these are reduced to two basic physical qualities: “these tongue-related properties [i.e., tastes] seem rather more than any of the others to involve roughness and smoothness” (πρὸς δὲ αὐταῖς κεχρηῆσθαι μᾶλλον τι τῶν ἄλλων τραχύτησί τε καὶ λειότησιν; 65c). At an atomic level, roughness is defined as ‘the combination of hardness with non-uniformity’, while smoothness is the complement, ‘uniformity’s contribution to density’ (63e). Thus for example “earth-like parts” are tasted as sour “when they tend to be rather rough” and tangy “when less rough”.

After discussing tastes, Plato turns to scents. Although the *Timaeus* does not explicitly root ‘unpleasant’ and ‘pleasant’ in ‘rough’ and ‘smooth’, this omission seems to be due to the *Timaeus*’ focus on *elements*, which do not have odor. Other substances do of course have odors, and release them when transitioning from one form to another. It seems reasonable that the same properties of roughness and smoothness would apply to the odoriferous vapors thus released. Plato concludes with the observation that odor may be filtered out of air, or rather, to use his term, ‘breath’. If there is an odor attached to speech, it is, again, not necessarily bad breath.

Both of Aristotle’s and Plato’s ideas, i.e. the tongue combining language and sense-perception and a basic distinction in the senses between ‘rough’ and ‘smooth’, are taken up by authors closer in time to the appearances of *lingua olet*. Lucretius, in a long

Faure 1987; Archer-Hind 1973, 243-247; Lilja 1972a, 10-13; Miller 1969; Andrews 1961; and cf. Barker 2002 for “attributes of sounds”, i.e. adjectives used to describe sounds.

passage explaining certain kinds of sense-perception (4.522-721), closely connects the tongue, flavors and the sense of taste, and odors and the sense of smell.¹⁰⁶ In the first place, all sensations are grounded in an Epicurean understanding of the world as composed of differently-shaped atoms: the size and shape of an atom limits the senses on which it may register and also affects the quality of the sensation.¹⁰⁷ Not every phenomenon registers on every sense: “each sense feels its proper thing” (*alii sensus ... quisque suam rem / sentiat*; 4.522-523); this depends on the size of the atoms relative to the size of the sense-organ and its channels. Despite this variety, a basic distinction may be made between ‘rough’ and ‘smooth’ atoms. As in Plato, ‘rough’ atoms irritate and abrade the parts of the body with which they come into contact and are thus unpleasant, while ‘smooth’ atoms are soothing and pleasant.

Sensations differ in the affective response they produce in different species, as much for color and appearance as, with more dramatic results, for smells and tastes (4.706-709). This difference is due to ‘different shapes’ (*dissimilis propter formas*; 4.678) leading different creatures each to its own food source and driving them away from poison in order to propagate the species (*sic aliis alius nidor datus ad sua quemque / pabula ducit et a taetro resilire ueneno / cogit, eoque modo seruantur saecla ferarum*; 4.684-686).¹⁰⁸ On the face of it this distinction is that between pleasant and

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Epicurus 1.52-53. Lucretius also treats the other senses, but they do not bear on this argument.

¹⁰⁷ The physical form of the sensation also affects such traits as its intelligibility (e.g. sounds are literally garbled when passing through much air [4.557-561]) and is used by Lucretius to rationalize phenomena previously or traditionally explained as the work of mythical creatures (e.g. echo [4.577-589]).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 2.414-417.

unpleasant which, as has been shown, for Lucretius depends on the shapes of elements and in particular the physical distinction between smooth and rough atoms.

The same materialism underlies sound and speech. Different sounds are composed of different elements (4.544-548). The fact that speech can physically irritate the throat is also taken to indicate that voice is corporeal and, implicitly, that the primordial components can be rough: “often the voice tears at the throat, and a shout makes the arteries rougher on its way out” (*radit uox fauces saepe facitque / asperiora foras gradiens arteria clamor*; 4.528-529). Slightly further on Lucretius makes the point explicitly: “roughness of the voice comes from the roughness of its elements, and likewise its smoothness is created by their smoothness” (*asperitas autem uocis fit ab asperitate / principiorum et item leuor leuore creatur*; 4.542-543).¹⁰⁹ It may thus be asked, since the voice is corporeal, and since bodies may have odors, whether the voice itself has an odor; that is, whether *lingua olet* because *uox olet*.

Lucretius’ answer must be “no”. In the first place, Lucretius consistently distinguishes *lingua*, roughly ‘human language’, from *uox*, ‘vocal sound’ including that of non-human animals (see discussion in Chapter Two). Secondly, to the extent that *lingua* does depend on *uox* as its medium, it cannot have an odor because *uox* cannot. *odor* is material emanated from deep within a thing (4.694-695). *uox*, as a material thing, could in theory have odor, but Lucretius stresses that odor “is created from bigger atoms than voice is” (*maioribus esse creatum / principiis quam uox*; 4.698-699), as proof of which he notes how voice can travel through rocky walls while scent cannot

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Leonard’s and Smith’s comment ad loc.: “smoothness in sound from smoothness in component atoms.”

(*per saxea saepta / non penetrat, qua uox uulgo sonitusque feruntur*; 4.699-700).¹¹⁰

Again, but for different reasons than for Cicero, for Lucretius it is not the voice that produces odor, even if both voice and odor may be similarly rough. This strengthens the suggestion already made that it is less a physical odor than a sense of social displeasure that makes language produce scent.

At the same time, it is intriguing that the terms used by Cicero and others for disparaging non-standard Latin are the same as those used by Lucretius, with the Hellenistic tradition behind him, for sense-perception generally. The ‘rustic roughness’, *rusticam asperitatem*, found by Cicero in non-urban Latin is analogous to the ‘rough’ elements composing the voice in Lucretius. This suggestion is in line with Lucretius’ statement that odor emanates from deep within things: scent “is scarcely emitted from the outside of a thing, for odors flow and recede from deep within things” (*ex alto primum quia uix emittitur ex re: / nam penitus fluere atque recedere rebus odores*; 4.694-695); as proof of this he observes that things are more odorous when broken open, rubbed, or burnt (696-697).

It should not be surprising that language is one axis of identity, perhaps the most important one. For language to indicate identity through its odor is surprising at first glance, but of a piece with a wider Roman concept of social intelligence operating through the sense of smell. Scented language has meaningful roots deeply embedded not only in metaphor but in Roman and Greek ways of thinking about language and its connection to group and individual identity.

¹¹⁰ Cf. 4.689-693, where odors are described as unable to travel as far or as directly as sound and sight for the same physical reasons.

Language and Identity 2: Language Lost – Ovid at Tomis

The result of the importance accorded Latin in constructions of Roman identity could be not just displeasure but also discomfiture, if and when that language was absent. If language and place seemed to vary together, the loss of the former could yet be more disturbing than change of the latter. Just how important to identity was language is made clear by Ovid in a late series of poems written from exile in the Black Sea city of Tomis.¹¹¹ Adams argues that “Ovid’s linguistic assertions ... may be based on pure fantasy or fabrication ... but they do reveal a Roman’s attitudes to the problems of communication in a foreign place and to the possibility of second-language learning.”¹¹² While the poems may not accurately depict either the linguistic situation at Tomis or Ovid’s own claimed multilingualism, they offer valuable evidence of the poet’s ideas about individual and societal multilingualism and their impact on individual participation in society.¹¹³

As in other authors so in Ovid is language a function of place: “if any of my words seem not Latin in form, the land in which I wrote was a barbaric one” (*siqua uidebuntur casu non dicta Latine, / in qua scribebat, barbara terra fuit*; Tr. 3.1.17). In his own case the link is unfortunate: exiled to the Black Sea city of Tomis in AD 8,

¹¹¹ On the linguistic aspects of Ovid’s exile see Davis 2002; Rochette 1997a, 54-55 with nn. 29-31, and 84 n.142; Doblhoff 1986; Dubuisson 1985a, 127-128; Nagle 1980; Della Corte 1976; Gandeva 1969; Lozovan 1961 and 1958; Herescu 1959 and 1958; Favez 1951; and Gehman 1915.

¹¹² Adams 2003, 18. Adams perceives in the poems a “construct of the stages in second-language acquisition”, ranging from “communication by gestures” through “fluent bilingualism”.

¹¹³ Idem 106: “The poems are of more interest for the linguistic concepts that they present than for their particular linguistic assertions.” Cf. Syme 1978, 164.

Ovid finds himself at first unable to communicate in an unfamiliar tongue.¹¹⁴ His new neighbors, including both local natives and people of Greek extraction, “communicate in their shared language; but I have to point things out by gesture. Here, I am a barbarian who is understood by no-one, and the stupid Getae laugh at my Latin words” (*exercent illi sociae commercia linguae: / per gestum res est significanda mihi. / barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegor ulli, / et rident stolidi uerba Latina Getae*; Tr. 5.10.35-38). He likens himself to a “barbarian”, stressing for drama or pathos the paradox of an urban(e) Roman being *barbarus*: the loss of proper identity is palpable.¹¹⁵ But his phrasing, reminiscent of other authors’ descriptions of language origins and language learning, make him less of a barbarian *per se* than a social outsider and, strikingly, an infant.¹¹⁶

By being unable to communicate Ovid is unable to take part in society (*sociae commercia linguae*), for the Romans especially the principal purpose of language.¹¹⁷ Thus although the urbane Roman poet might scoff at the notion of Getic society, the

¹¹⁴ On the vexed problem of why Ovid was exiled (his *carmen et error*; Tr. 2.207), see Evans 1983, Syme 1978, 215-222, and Thibault 1964.

¹¹⁵ Cf. the question of the origin of Latin, whether ‘barbaric’ or a dialect of Greek (Chapter Six).

¹¹⁶ Ovid of course presents his exile in manifold ways. Delcourt sees a link drawn between Ovid’s own exile and the exile of Evander in Italy: “Il est manifeste qu’Ovide exprime à travers Évandre sa propre douleur d’exilé, sa nostalgie de la patrie, l’injustice dont il se sent victime” (2001: 851).

¹¹⁷ See Chapter Three; cf. the pointed formulation of Cicero’s from his own exile: “I am still now lying in that place, without any conversation, without a thought in my head” (*ego etiam nunc eodem in loco iaceo sine sermone ullo, sine cogitatione ulla*; *Ad Att.* 3.12.3) with Beard 2002, 133: “Cicero insisted on the centrality of *sermo* to full civic life (its absence signifying social death)” and 129: “The exile is, by definition, completely at the mercy of the shifting temporalities that govern letters and letter-exchange – his life being passed in ‘letter time’, radically unsynchronised with the political life of ‘real-time’ Rome, from which he was forcibly excluded.”

lack of participation in any society, a direct result of not knowing the language, is clearly strongly felt. At *Tr.* 5.7.51-54 Ovid laments the absence of both of the languages dear to Romans like himself, Greek and Latin: “in a few people traces of Greek remain, but these also have been barbarized already by the Getic sound. There is not one person among these people who could say a single word of Latin” (*in paucis remanent Graecae uestigia linguae, / haec quoque iam Getico barbara facta sono. / unus in hoc nemo est populo, qui forte Latine / quaelibet e medio reddere uerba queat*).¹¹⁸

Elsewhere he emphasizes the barbarization of Greek by local sounds: “Greek speech, too, has been conquered by Getic sound” (*Graecaque quod Getico / uicta loquela sono est*; 5.2.67-68). Ovid is cut off from both languages, *utraque lingua*, at least in their familiar or properly elevated forms.¹¹⁹

By having to resort to gesture (*per gestum res est significanda mihi*; *Tr.* 5.10.36) Ovid presents his social aphasia as a sort of second infancy. Infants, in Latin literally those ‘unable to speak’, are regularly characterized as resorting to gesture.¹²⁰ Lucretius

¹¹⁸ Cf. Philoctetes’ relief at hearing Greek after years of isolation: “Oh well-loved language, can it be that I understand the speech of such a man addressing me after so long a time!” (ὦ φίλτατον φώνημα· φεῦ τὸ καὶ λαβεῖν / πρόσφθεγμα τοιοῦ δ’ ἀνδρὸς ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ; *Soph. Philoc.* 234-235).

¹¹⁹ Elsewhere Ovid is amazed that Greeks ever came to his new part of the world: “So there were Greek cities here, too (who would believe it?), among the names of inhuman barbarity?” (*hic quoque sunt igitur Graiae (quis crederet?) urbes / inter inhumanae nomina barbariae?*; *Tr.* 3.9.1-2; the poem ends with an etymology of Tomis, linking it with Medea’s ‘cutting up’ (Gk. root τεμ-) of her brother. If Pabón 1939 is right in identifying Greek as the language of Romans’ emotional lives, the barbarization of Greek would have been just as hard felt as the absence of Latin.

¹²⁰ Gesture is also characteristic of outsiders and other marginal peoples. E.g. Aesch. *Agam.* 1050-1051 (Cassandra as characterized by Clytaemnestra) and the ‘dog-headed’ people of India described by Ctesias (see Chapter Two).

for example writes that “the inability to speak seems to lead children to gestures, when it makes them point out what is present with their finger” (*ipsa uidetur / protrahere ad gestum pueros infantia linguae, / cum facit ut digito quae sint praesentia monstrent*; 5.1030-1032). In Lucretius these gestures are taken as natural precursors to full-fledged language and thus participation in society: like the young of other animals with their natural capacities, the human child knows about signification, and is thus able to point things out, long before it can produce language as such. Of course it is not desirable to remain limited to gesture, since there is more to society, and more meaningful things, than can simply be pointed out: Cicero for example writes at *Rep.* 8.26: “this is not an image that can be pointed out by a finger” (*non ea figura quae digito demonstrari potest*).¹²¹

The reading of Ovid-as-child, potentially but not yet competent linguistically, is strengthened by the poet’s claims eventually to have learned the local languages, Getic and Sarmatian (*nam didici Getice Sarmaticeque loqui*; *Ex Ponto* 3.2.40). He states without pride that his new skill is such as to include poetry: “To my shame, I have written a little book in the Getic language, and the barbaric words have been arranged in our meters” (*a, pudet, et Getico scripsi sermone libellum, / structaque sunt nostris barbara uerba modis*; *Ex Ponto* 4.13.19-20). The sense of ‘shame’ may have to do with the oxymoron of Getic poetry, that is the perceived impossibility of poetry in a language other than Latin or Greek. Nagle suggests that Ovid’s calling himself a ‘Getic poet’

¹²¹ Some authors apparently believed that a language of gesture was universally available (Quint. 11.3.87: *omnium hominum communis sermo*) and comparable to spoken languages in expressive power (see Gera 2003, 189 and 196-197; and Corbeill 2003, Lateiner 1995, Graf 1991, Arnould 1990, and Sittl 1890).

(*paene poeta Getes; Ex Ponto* 4.13.18) is tantamount to calling himself ‘no poet at all’: the passage “seems to be an only slightly indirect way of saying a Getic poet is a bad poet.”¹²² The shame may also have to do, more strikingly, with the sheer fact of having to learn a new language: more usually Romans rather relied on locals to learn Latin.¹²³ His new language(s), like his new location, thus entails an unwanted and embarrassing loss of his old public and civic identity.

For at the same time as Ovid gains spoken and written Getic, and indeed as a direct result, he fears losing his spoken and written Latin: “It shames me even to speak, for already from long disuse the Latin words are scarcely available to me” (*en pudet et fateor, iam desuetudine longa / uix subeunt ipsi uerba Latina mihi; Tr.* 5.7.57-58). In several places Ovid links his loss of Latin directly to his learning of the local languages: “I seem to myself to have unlearned Latin: for I have learned to speak Getic and Sarmatian” (*ipse mihi uideor iam dedicisse Latine: / nam didici Getice Sarmaticeque loqui; Tr.* 5.12.55-56). At *Tr.* 3.14.45-50, Ovid worries that he is experiencing not simply replacement of Latin by Getic, already shameful, but contamination of the former by the latter:

Often when I am trying to say something (it’s shameful to speak about),
the words desert me and I forget how to speak. I am almost surrounded
by Thracian and Scythian speech, and I seem to be able to write in Getic
meter. I tell you, I am afraid that mixed in with my Latin and my writing
you will read Pontic words.

¹²² Nagle 1980, 138; generally 133-140 and 167; *contra* Herescu 1959. Ovid repeatedly apologizes for the quality of his exilic Latin poetry, lamenting its monotony among other flaws (e.g. *Ex Ponto* 3.9).

¹²³ Cf. Rochette 1997a, 54: “Pour un Romain, qui n’accorde pas plus que le Grec de statut aux langues étrangères qu’ils appellent l’un et l’autre <<barbares>>, une telle décision est lourde de conséquences.”

dicere saepe aliquid conanti (turpe fateri) / uerba mihi desunt dididicique
loqui. / Threicio Scythicoque fere circumsonor ore, / et uideor Geticis
scribere posse modis. / crede mihi, timeo ne sint inmixta Latinis / inque
meis scriptis Pontica uerba legas.

This is reminiscent of other authors' ideas about language change. Solon for example describes fellow citizens who have been exiled and thus could no longer speak Attic: "some [Athenians] fled by dire necessity and no longer speak the Attic language, as may often happen among wanderers" (τοὺς δ' ἀναγκαίης ὑπό / χρείους φυγόντας γλῶσσαν οὐκέτ' Ἀττικὴν / ἰέντας, ὡς ἂν πολλαχῆ πλανωμένους; 24.10-12). Dionysius of Halicarnassus offers more elaborate theories of phonological change, but in all these authors language change is imagined as resulting from group contact and involves an unwanted intermingling of group identity. I thus disagree with Nagle, who asserts that "Ovid's insistence on this point should not be interpreted as reflecting any ancient theory of linguistic interference", and who prefers a strategic poetic motivation.¹²⁴ While the latter is not absent, and while Ovid need not have a particular linguistic theory in mind, his statements accord well with prevailing ideas on language change.¹²⁵

Negative attitudes towards linguistic diversity find their complement in the more general idea that language is dispositive of human identity and thus of participation in human society. In addition to being a commonly cited consequence of exile, loss of language is also put forward as a characteristic of marginal peoples and semi-human populations (see Chapters Two and Three) and, in the Hippocratic corpora, as a

¹²⁴ 1980, 133.

¹²⁵ Cf. Jerome *Epist.* 29.7: learning Hebrew caused his Latin to decline. Faulty language learning may also result in language change (e.g. the Amazons teaching Scythian poorly).

symptom of terminal disease.¹²⁶ Loss of voice indicates loss of intellect, and thus loss of the most defining human characteristic of them all. Lament over losing one's voice is a common trope in elegy, and makes its way thus into other poeties.¹²⁷ It is telling that no less a person than Cratylus, whose argument for 'naturalism' is paradigmatic of that philosophical position, decided later in life to give up entirely on language.¹²⁸ By contrast, Aesop became human only after acquiring language.

Examples of Individual Multilingualism

On the other hand, other Roman authors, especially those not facing an exile like Ovid's or loss of voice like the heroines' in that poet's *Heroides*, could be more sanguine about the pervasive multilingualism of the Greco-Roman world. As noted above, the ancient sources are notoriously laconic on the practical matters of interpretation and translation; some few examples have been preserved. In Dioscurias, across the Black Sea from Ovid's place of exile, the Roman authorities are supposed to have had one hundred and thirty interpreters, for dealing with the Caucasian tribes and Pontic traders (Plin. *N.H.* 6.5.15). The same author remarks on the huge number of languages reportedly spoken in India, drawing the general conclusion that linguistic diversity is so prevalent as to make the speaker of one language seem scarcely human to

¹²⁶ See Montiglio 2000, 213-251, esp. 228-233: "[*aphonie*] is the phenomenon that marks the transition from being "ill" to being "dying." ... [it] appears to [Hippocratic] as the most telling sign of death as well as of a pathological disturbance of the mind" (229).

¹²⁷ It is no coincidence that Ovid prior to his exile invented and mastered a genre of epistolary poetry, the *Heroides*, that features loss of voice as a common complaint.

¹²⁸ See Gera 2003, 202.

a speaker of another (7.1.7).¹²⁹

Moreover some examples of individual multilingualism were justly famous and repeated by various authors with no hint of disparagement.¹³⁰ At the same time, it may be important that most of these examples, or at least the most extreme among them, are not Greeks or Romans as such but others. It seems from the evidence that multilingualism aside from Greco-Latin bilingualism was not a big part of Greco-Roman identity as practiced, at least not as theorized or idealized.¹³¹

Mithridates, king of Pontus, was credited with multilingualism of such extraordinary quality and quantity that his name later became a byword for comparative dictionaries.¹³² He is supposed to have spoken all twenty-two or twenty-five languages of his subject peoples. Pliny reports that “Mithridates, the king of twenty-two peoples, pronounced laws in as many languages, speaking each one individually before an assembly without an interpreter” (*Mithridates duarum et uiginti gentium rex totidem linguis iura dixit, pro contione singulas sine interprete adfatus*; Pliny NH. 7.88). At another point he writes that Mithridates “alone among mortals is known to have spoken twelve languages, and to have never used an interpreter to call a single man from his

¹²⁹ Cf. the judgment of St. Augustine, quoted below at the conclusion.

¹³⁰ See Lochner von Hüttenbach 1971.

¹³¹ It is an open question whether these examples are imagined as examples of prodigious memory generally or of language-learning in particular. If Ovid’s ideas are any indication, language as experienced was not perceived as simple sets of words to be memorized, but as a practice bound up in social life.

¹³² Cf. the 1555 work of Conrad Gesner entitled *Mithridates de differentiis linguarum*; and the 1806 work of Jean-Christophe Adelung entitled *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde*. In general Reinach 1890, 281-282.

subject peoples in the fifty-six years in which he reigned" (*illum solum mortalium certum est XII [sic] linguis locutum, nec e subiectis gentibus ullum hominem per interpretem appellatum ab eo annis LVI quibus regnavit; 25.6*).

A description with similar details is preserved by Gellius (*N.A.* 17.17.1):

Mithridates, the famous king of Pontus and Bithynia ... acquired a good knowledge of the languages of the twenty-five peoples whom he had under his power. He hardly ever spoke with the men of all those peoples through an interpreter, but when it was necessary that a man be summoned by him, he spoke using the language and speech of that man no less knowledgeably than if he were of the same people.

Mitridates autem, Ponti et Bithyniae rex inclutus ... quinque et uiginti gentium, quas sub dicione habuit, linguas percalluit earumque omnium gentium uiris haut umquam per interpretem conlectus est, sed ut quemque ab eo appellari usus fuit, proinde lingua et oratione ipsius non minus scite, quam si gentilis eius esset, locutus est.

Gellius is unusual among the sources in comparing Mithridates with another polyglot, the Latin poet Ennius, whose boast of trilingualism is quoted above.¹³³ Mithridates is also compared elsewhere with Themistocles, a comparison hardly motivated by the latter's knowledge of a mere two languages (Greek and Persian; cf. *Thuc.* 1.138 and *Plut. Them.* 29). The gross incommensurability of the two examples from a linguistic standpoint is striking; Rochette thinks that it "montre combien les Anciens étaient frappés par la connaissance d'une langue étrangère."¹³⁴

¹³³ On Ennius cf. Suetonius *Gramm.* 1, naming the poet and Liuius Andronicus *semigraeci*, i.e. 'speaking both Latin and Greek': *siquidem antiquissimi doctorum qui idem et poetae et semigraeci erant Liuium et Ennium dico quos utraque lingua domi forisque docuisse adnotatum est*; and the commentary in Skutsch 1975, 749-750. Classen argues that Ennius' multilingualism allowed him to enrich Latin's poetic language (1962).

¹³⁴ Rochette 1993a, 223 n.20. It may be that the comparison comes from an attempt by Mithridates to present himself as a protector of Greece against foreign aggression (Jonathan Hall, personal communication).

More often, however, and helping to make the comparison less jarring, Mithridates' multilingualism is framed as an example of prodigious memory. Themistocles' knowledge of two languages is not unusual (although the second language being Persian might be), but the sources stress the quality of his achievement: he learned his second language well despite learning it quickly and under duress, as prisoner of the Persians for (only) a year. Thus Quintilian (*Inst.* 11.2.50), who compares Themistocles' retention of Persian, Mithridates' 'twenty-two languages', Crassus' competence in 'five kinds of Greek speech' (presumably dialects), and Cyrus' knowledge of the name of each of his soldiers.¹³⁵

Cleopatra is supposed to have been similarly gifted, speaking a great many languages from among her peoples: "she easily turned her tongue, like a many-stringed instrument, to whichever dialect she liked, such that she engaged with very few barbarians through an interpreter, but for the majority gave answers herself" (καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν, ὡσπερ ὄργανόν τι πολύχορδον, εὐπετῶς τρέπουσα καθ' ἣν βούλοιτο διάλεκτον ὀλίγοις παντάπασι δι' ἑρμηνέως ἐνετύγχανε βαρβάροις, τοῖς δὲ πλείστοις αὐτὴ δι' αὐτῆς ἀπεδίδου τὰς ἀποκρίσεις; *Plut. Ant.* 27.3-4). In addition to knowing such odd languages as Troglodytic Ethiopian (likened by Herodotus to the squeaking of bats; 4.183.4), she is supposed in the same passage to have been the first Pharaoh in centuries to have learned to read hieroglyphics.

Cleombrotus is reported to have discovered a polyglot in the Arabian gulf who was able to "use many languages, but who spoke [with Cleombrotus] for the most part a

¹³⁵ On this passage of Quintilian see Kakridis 1969, 8. Cf. Val. Max. 8.7.6: *P. Crassus ... tanta cura Graecae linguae notitiam animo comprehendit ut eam in quinque diuisam genera per omnes partes ac numeros penitus cognosceret.*

Doric that was almost singing” (γλώσσαις δὲ πολλαῖς ἤσκητο χρῆσθαι, πρὸς δ’ ἐμὲ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐδώριζεν οὐ πόρρω μελῶν; Plut. *Mor.* 421b).

The Carthaginians were regarded by Roman authors as suspiciously gifted linguists.¹³⁶ A bare example of bilingualism is Livy 28.46.16, where Hannibal sets up an inscription *Punicis Graecisque litteris*, ‘in the Persian and Greek languages’.¹³⁷ This multilingualism seems to have been taken as indicative of the Carthaginians’ purportedly deceitful character. For example Livy 26.6.11, where “men were sent by Hannibal who, dressed in the Italian manner and knowing the Latin language, were to try to order in the words of the consul the Roman soldiers to flee for their own safety into the nearby mountains, since the camp had been lost” (*immissis ab Hannibale qui habitu Italico gnari Latinae linguae iuberent consulum uerbis quoniam amissa castra essent pro se quemque militum in proximos montes fugere*).¹³⁸ The character Hanno in Plautus’ *Poenulus* is described as knowing all languages but able to conceal that knowledge (*omnis linguas scit, sed dissimulat sciens / se scire*): from the combination he is ‘clearly a Carthaginian’ (*Poenus plane est*; 112-113). Later in the play Hanno’s easy command of Latin (*nunc dehinc latine iam loquar*; 1029) is expressly linked with his deceitful, distasteful character: “a sycophantic and deceitful man ... with a forked tongue like a serpentine beast” (*sycophantam et subdolum ... bisulci lingua quasi*

¹³⁶ See in general Rochette 1997b.

¹³⁷ Discussed by Adams 2003, 329 with n.61.

¹³⁸ Idem 157. A similar strategy, in this case involving written Latin, is feared at Livy 27.28.4.

proserpens bestia; 1032-1034).¹³⁹

Romans are credited with multilingualism more rarely; most often it predictably involves Latin and Greek, *utraque lingua*.¹⁴⁰ I note briefly here only those instances involving a different language; these relatively famous polyglots must be understood to be in addition to the vastly more numerous but socially less elevated translators and interpreters whose existence is guaranteed by necessity but not often attested by the ancient evidence. One language of interest during the Republic was Punic. The senator Q. Terentius Culleo may have learned Punic while a prisoner of Carthage during the Second Punic War (*RE* 43). D. Iunius Silanus presided over the translation of Mago's treatise on agriculture from Punic into Latin (Pliny *NH.* 18.22, Columella 1.1.13: *ex senatus consulto in Latinum sermonem conversa sunt*); it is unclear whether Silanus knew Punic himself or merely supervised other translators. Later, Cassius Dionysius of Utica made a new translation of the same text into Greek (Varro *RR.* 1.1.10, 2.1.10, 2.1.27, 3.2.13); Dionysius' birthplace of Utica makes his knowledge of Punic perhaps more certain.¹⁴¹ Finally, D. Brutus learned Celtic (Appian *BC.* 3.97.404-407).¹⁴²

¹³⁹ On the *Poneulus* see Babic 2003. The terms possibly, and the sentiment certainly, relates to the figurative use of *bilinguis* to mean 'two-faced', that is deceitful. Cf. Harrison 1997: "might Mithridates' and Cleopatra's knowledge of foreign languages have been [a] function of their status as the dangerous enemies of Rome?" For split or doubled tongues cf. the 'double-tongued islanders' reported by Iambulus as able to carry on two conversations at once (Diod. Sic. 2.55-60). See the Conclusions, below, for more general negative comments by ancient authors on multilingualism.

¹⁴⁰ On the phrase see the sources cited in n. 3, above. More Romans are known to have known Greek than *vice versa*. This does not mean that Latin was not used in the Greek world: Rochette (1997a: 211-256) gives a prosopographical study of Greeks who knew Latin; while Adams offers a useful general corrective to the anecdotal evidence preserved in literature, and concludes that "[p]rimary evidence richly documents Greeks using Latin", whatever the upper limit of their fluency (2003a: 16). Adams also discusses in full multilingualism involving Latin and a language other than Greek (2003a: 111-296).

¹⁴¹ On Mago's treatise see Heurgon 1975, Martin 1971, 43-52, and Bardon 1952, 83.

Ancient Explanations for Linguistic Diversity?

Such examples of individual multilingualism point to an awareness of linguistic diversity in the Roman era that is inevitably widespread. These examples appear more often in the Roman sources than do more general or abstract descriptions of the fact of linguistic diversity. Explanations for linguistic diversity are extremely uncommon. In addition to Cicero's general remarks, quoted above in the introduction, some few others may be discussed.

In his *Astronomicon*, the poet Manilius draws attention to the variety of human cultures, as evidenced by rituals, customs, and, of course, languages, all varying by place (4.731-732): "consider the many sounds of the voice, consider so many languages, customs right by allotment, and the rituals of places" (*adde sonos totidem uocum, totidem insere linguas / et mores pro sorte pares ritosque locorum*). This summary of cultural diversity is part of a larger excursus on the observable diversity of *Kulturgeschichte*: "humankind is arranged into a variety of languages and appearances" (*idcirco in uarias linguas uariasque figuras / dispositum genus est hominum*; 4.711-712). Linguistic diversity seems here little more than an aspect of cultural diversity.

In the same work Manilius also mentions briefly the origin of language: "next the barbaric tongue received its laws" (*tunc et lingua suas accepit barbara leges*; 1.85). The terms are only suggestive: it is impossible to decide if the line refers to articulation as such (with *lingua* meaning the physical 'tongue' and the 'laws' meaning something like phonology), or merely to a more general ordering of language from non-language

¹⁴² See van Burchem 1966.

(with *lingua* meaning 'language'). The line may imply name-giving and thus a 'conventional' origin for language, if there is etymological wordplay here between *leges*, 'laws', and the Greek for 'name-giver', ὀνομαθέτης, close to and indeed often replaced by 'law-giver', νομοθέτης. But the subject being *lingua* allows for no clear answer. Shortly after this origin of language, Manilius has humankind developing divination, by "learning the languages of birds, and learning how to consult entrails and break snakes with their voices" (*linguas didicere uolucrum, / consultare fibras et rumpere uocibus angues*; 1.91-2).¹⁴³ This is reminiscent of the frequent notice of bird's linguistic abilities, and the fact that human interpretation is required for animal utterances to be meaningful.

Another Augustan author, Vitruvius, also seems to be aware of linguistic diversity: "the sound of the voice has different and various qualities in different nations" (*sonus uocis in generibus gentium dispares et uarias habet qualitates*; 6.1.5). Because of the vague reference to 'qualities', it is unclear whether Vitruvius means that literally only the sound is different, or that languages themselves differ. But the distinction between *dispares* and *uarias* may combine a sense of mutual incomprehensibility with stereotypical phonetic differences.

Evidence from two of Vitruvius' near-contemporaries, Cicero and Varro, may provide a context in which *qualitates* assumes a more specific meaning. As for many authors, for Cicero and Varro linguistic diversity is at least presented as a matter of different languages consisting of different words for (the same?) things. Thus Cicero

¹⁴³ For *rumpere uocibus angues* cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 8.72: *cantando rumpitur anguis*; Tibull. 1.8.20; Ov. *Met.* 7.203 and *Am.* 2.1.25. For language origins and divination cf. Eur. *Suppl.* 201-213, discussed in Chapter Three.

writes that “first of all, there are as many names for the gods as there are languages of men” (*N.D.* 1.30.84: *at primum quot hominum linguae tot nomina deorum*). The idea that each god has many names is of course quite ancient, appearing already in Homer.¹⁴⁴ The more important underlying assumption, that different languages are distinct sets of names for the objects of the world, may put Cicero in surprising company: for this assumption also finds expression in Epicurean thought. Varro’s take on the same underlying idea is fuller (*L.L.* 9.34):

they say that there are regularities in the parts of men, because nature made them, but in words there are not, because human beings fashion them each to his own will, and accordingly for the same things different words are had by the Greeks, the Syrians, and the Latins.

in hominum partibus esse analogias dicunt, quod eas natura faciat, in uerbis non esse, quod ea homines ad suam quisque uoluntatem fingat, itaque de eisdem rebus alia uerba habere Graecos, alia Syrios, alia Latinos.

Here the idea is the same as that attested by the Epicureans, in which the ‘same things’ (*eisdem rebus*) have different names among different peoples, each characterized by its language. The idea does not entail ‘naturalism’: Varro is clear that he has in mind a ‘conventional’ origin for these names, while Cicero presumably would likewise disagree, as usual, with Epicureanism. The specificity of which both Varro and Cicero are capable, despite writing texts of different purposes and brevity, suggests that Vitruvius’ use of *qualitates* probably does not refer to differences in lexicons, but to differences in sound.

The Augustan-era geographer Strabo is almost unique in offering an explanation

¹⁴⁴ Cf. the idea that the gods have their own names for things; see Lau 2003 and Clay 1972.

for linguistic diversity, when he argues against Posidonius' explanation of climatic variation: "such a distribution [of climates] did not come about from forethought, just as neither did differences of race or language, but from accident and chance" (αἱ γὰρ τοιαῦται διατάξεις οὐκ ἐκ προνοίας γίνονται, καθάπερ οὐδὲ αἱ κατὰ τὰ ἔθνη διαφοραί, οὐδὲ αἱ διάλεκτοι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐπίπτωσιν καὶ συντυχίαν; 2.3.7).

Whereas Posidonius is reported to ground at least the distribution of climatic zones in 'forethought' or 'design' (προνοίας), Strabo disagrees, citing linguistic diversity and ethnicity as counterexamples.¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere Strabo adds an element of 'conventionalism' to language change, explaining that the names of people and places have been changed away from a more etymologically transparent original for reasons of euphony: e.g. Sicily's ancient name of Trinacria was changed to Thrinacia 'for euphony' (μετονομασθεῖσα εὐφωνότερον; 6.2.1).¹⁴⁶

It remains an open question whether Posidonius' reported citing of πρόνοια should be taken as applying to language and not just climate. If so this would be an unusual application, apparently not to the origin of words or language in general but specifically to the origin of 'dialects', that is to linguistic variation. Why should linguistic diversity be founded on 'forethought'? And whose? It is possible that Posidonius' 'forethought' refers to a long-standing source for language generally, Prometheus, whose name means a similar sort of 'forethought'.¹⁴⁷ Posidonius' idea, if

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*: οὐ γὰρ φύσει Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν φιλόλογοι ... ἀλλ' ἀσκήσει καὶ ἔθει.

¹⁴⁶ Additional name changes are mentioned throughout; e.g. 5.4.2 and 6.1.4.

¹⁴⁷ For Prometheus as 'forethought' see Gera 2003, 122, discussing Aesch. *PV* 506: "from the late fifth century onwards, Prometheus often serves as a symbol of human intelligence, inventiveness, and ingenuity" (citing Conacher 1980, 49-51).

correctly reported by Strabo and if relevant to linguistic diversity, may thus represent a late rationalization of a 5th-century BC Greek myth of language origins more generally, with intellect or reason taking the place of the divine.¹⁴⁸

Conclusions

The rarity of references to Greek and Roman multilingualism seems to support the common notion that Greeks and Romans were relatively disinterested in learning other languages. Despite this Greek and Roman authors were well aware of linguistic diversity and its implications outside of language. Although in theory such diversity was frequently imagined to consist only of differences in vocabulary between languages, in practice its consequences were farther-reaching, both linguistically and, perhaps not surprisingly, socially, psychologically, and personally. Greeks and Romans understood diversity to be a qualitative affair of major import. Differences in speech habits attested to one's origins and contemporary social position; different languages more than most other behaviors marked the boundaries between ideally distinct groups. Because of the prototypes and even hierarchies implied, just as the possession of (right) language indicated not only humanity but e.g. *Romanitas*, i.e. the right to participate in normal life, so too did the loss of (right) language coincide with absence, exclusion, and even death. There is an intriguing parallel between esoteric philosophical approaches to 'right' language and the exoteric, public, even quotidian appraisal of language on the part of those who lived its diversity: neither approach is concerned very much with an

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Diodorus Siculus' report of an allegedly Egyptian origin for language (1.15.9-1.16.1): although nominally divine, with language granted by Hermes, the origin makes language rationally articulated and dependent on 'intellect', ἐπίνοια; see the discussion in Chapter Three.

actual, historical origin for language, but both groups make the link between words and things a locus of social truth.

The general lesson for the Roman period is pointedly drawn by Josephus, writing in the first century AD: “we do not favor those men who have learned the language of many nations” (ἡμῖν γὰρ οὐκ ἐκείνους ἀποδέχονται τοὺς πολλῶν ἔθνων διάλεκτον ἐκμαθόντας; *A.J.* 20.264).¹⁴⁹ The reason is perhaps that such men seem to belong to their original groups with insufficient exclusivity or intensity or patriotism. In a world of exceedingly public discourse, to speak many languages is potentially to seem to be speaking for a ‘wrong’ group. A similar sentiment, with intriguing hints about the basic function of language in separating humankind from the non-human animals, is found in St. Augustine: “the diversity of languages alienates men from each other ... such that a man is freer with his dog than with another man” (*linguarum diversitas hominem alienat ab homine ... ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno*; *Urbs* 19). If these authors are right, linguistic diversity also must unify those who experience it around a central question: what is the explanation of this pervasive and divisive fact? For outside of learned and literary examples, linguistic diversity was obviously a part of daily life for many because of the multiculturalism that prevailed in antiquity. In this context, the origin of language must have been of more than esoteric interest.

¹⁴⁹ See Sevenster 1968, 65-71.

A language mixed from both.
- Dionysius of Halicarnassus *A.R.* 1.90.1

CHAPTER SIX

AEOLISM: THE ORIGIN OF LATIN

The previous Chapter showed that general ideas on language origins led only indirectly, when at all, to explanations for linguistic diversity. By contrast, ideas about diversity and language change directly informed the imagined origins of individual languages. Only a few individual languages are given such origins in the ancient sources, and no dedicated or even sustained treatment has survived. But the few specific origins that have been preserved all depend on and reflect an underlying image of language change as rooted in group contact, overlap, and interpenetration. 'Mixed' cultures, to use the most common ancient term, produced mixed languages.¹

If the mixing of cultures often led to mixed languages that were not nominally different from their source languages,² in at least two cases a nominally and conceptually different language was produced. The cases are striking for their historical, social, and linguistic importance: Attic, the Greek dialect of Athens, and Latin, the

¹ Dubuisson 1982, 11, points out that *mixellenes* are Hellenized non-Greeks (e.g. Hellan. 71a J., Polyb. 1.67.7), while *mixobarbaroi* are people of mixed descent (e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 138, Plat. *Men.* 245d). Cf. Hall 2002, 196; and Tuplin 1999, 57 n.31 with ancient sources cited there.

² E.g. Greek 'barbarized' by language contact was still called Greek; for additional examples of 'mixed languages' from mixed cultures, see Hdt. 8.73, Thuc. 2.68 and 6.5, Livy 5.33.11, and Strabo 448.

language of Rome.³ Regardless of how pure their proponents desired them to be in principle, both languages were acknowledged in fact as mixtures from a variety of sources.⁴ This seeming similarity at the level of linguistic thought conceals important differences at the levels of society and culture. The mixed status of Attic, not to say of Athenian society, seems to have been generally deplored. This attitude is of a piece with the essentially closed nature of Athens, with its emphasis on autochthony, and of the Greek *poleis* in general.⁵ By contrast, while some Roman authors also longed for a 'pure' Latin and/or disliked the related multiculturalism of Rome, others were more neutral about both or even appreciative of Rome's capacity for absorbing other peoples and cultures.⁶ The differences between attitudes towards the origins of the two languages, and towards their distinct underlying historical explanations, thus reflect different images and evaluations of real and ideal group organization. Like ideas about

³ "The language of Rome" may be misleading: Classical Latin seems not to have been spoken in the streets of the city itself, yielding to so-called "vulgar Latin" (Herman 2000) and, if the sources are to be believed, to Greek. But Latin was undeniably one of two prestige languages in 'Rome' broadly understood. The situation and the terms needed become more complicated during the Second Sophistic, when Roman authors embraced an Atticizing Greek literary culture; see esp. Swain 1996.

⁴ On some aspects of linguistic purism in antiquity see Adams 2003b, Said 1991, and Kraus, Primmer, and Schwabl 1977; in general Eco 1994. Herodotus for example twice mentions people trying to keep their language pure of foreign influence (1.57.3, 6.119.4); and Cicero, Quintilian, and other authors writing on rhetoric are full of recommendations for maintaining *latinitas* (see generally Bloomer 1991).

⁵ On autochthony at Athens see Loraux 1993. On the closed *polis* see Runciman 1990.

⁶ Cf. the speech of Canuleius, preserved at Livy 4.3.2-4.5.6, on allowing foreigners into the city; and the speech of Emperor Claudius on admitting Gauls into the Senate (Tac. *Ann.* 4.65 and *ILS* 212). This is not to say that all Romans enjoyed their city's and their empire's multiculturalism; see the laments against multiculturalism and multilingualism discussed in Chapter Five. Appreciation for Rome's de facto multiculturalism comes mostly, and perhaps not unexpectedly, from non-natives, e.g. Polybius 6.25 and Aelius Aristides 26.63-65 and 12.

language origins generally, these origins for individual languages help their thinkers to come to grips with the complexities of lived experience in a multilingual, multicultural world.

It is not surprising that Attic and Latin are the two languages to have received the most attention in terms of their origins (even if it is disappointing that, in this area of language, too, Greco-Roman thought is chauvinistic).⁷ In the Greek and then the Greco-Roman worlds, Attic and, later and somewhat grudgingly, Latin were *the* languages, just as Greek and Roman were *the* cultures, pure and simple.⁸ Both were at least in theory the dialects of their respective cities, associated strongly with the material and cultural accomplishments of those polities.⁹ In this connection the languages were comparable, at least by a strong proponent of Latin like Cicero: “but I mean that sweetness, which comes from the mouth: just as among the Greeks it is peculiar to Athenians, so in Latin speech is it most peculiar to this city” (*sed hanc dico suavitatem, quae exit ex ore; quae quidem ut apud Graecos Atticorum, sic in Latino sermone huius est urbis maxime propria; De orat.* 3.42). Even among less boosterist Roman authors, the two languages were just that, ‘the two languages’, in Latin *utraque lingua*.¹⁰ Not

⁷ On Greco-Roman (dis)interest in foreign languages, see Rochette 1996a, Werner 1992 and 1983, Mosley 1971, Kakridis 1969, Opelt 1969, Lejeune 1948.

⁸ Cf. Rochette 2000, 549: “Au-delà de la diversité des langues répandues à travers le monde, l’homme antique n’accorde de véritable statut qu’à deux langues: le grec et le latin.” The literature on ‘Greco-Roman’ culture is voluminous; sources are cited as needed throughout. A typical summary is Palm’s: “Imperium war politisch römisch, kulturell aber griechisch” (1959:133).

⁹ On Latin as the ‘city language’ or not, see Adams 2003b.

¹⁰ On *utraque lingua* see Holford-Strevens 1993, Dubuisson 1981b, Horsfall 1979, and Kotula 1969; cf. Biville 2002, 92-102. The phrase often connotes education; thus the Greek imagined may be the Attic literary dialect more than the commonly spoken Attic-Ionic *koiné*. Varro offers another exception:

just 'the two languages', but, in contrast with other languages, 'our two languages' (Suet. *Claud.* 42.1). Continuing the contrast, competency involving other languages, whether or not in conjunction with Greek and/or Latin, was always described by *bilinguis*.¹¹

This alignment of Greek and Latin as against 'barbarian' languages, striking in the face of literary Greek disinterest in other languages, has been eloquently summarized by Rochette as being:

une profonde modification du statut de l'idiome romain par rapport au grec. Alors que durant toute l'époque hellénistique le grec n'avait devant lui qu'un seul groupe de langues, les *linguae barbarae* ... le lien que ces grammairiens vont établir entre le latin et le grec va modifier radicalement le statut des langues. Le grec et le latin formeront désormais un seul groupe (*utraque lingua*) qui constituera un ensemble en face de l'autre domaine linguistique, celui des parlers barbares.¹²

The two languages were thought to have a shared history beyond their known historical interactions.¹³ They had obvious commonalities of vocabulary, morphology, and

ever aware of Latin's multiple sources, he uses *utraque lingua* to refer to Latin and 'Sabine' (cf. Collart 1954, 111 and 229).

¹¹ On *bilinguis* see Poccetti 1986 and Dubuisson 1983. A similar range of meanings attach to Roman terms for acting or being Greek: *Graecus*, 'Greek', is normally a neutral statement of fact; *semigraecus*, 'half-Greek', refers especially to the first 'Roman' poets (thus to Livius Andronicus and Ennius by Suetonius *Gramm.* 1) usually in contexts praising their contributions to literature; while *Graeculus* is a pejorative diminutive, 'Greekie fellow' (see Dubuisson 1989c). It would be interesting to investigate how these Roman terms for Greek-ness compare with Roman terms for different degrees and kinds of Roman-ness (e.g. *Romanus*, *civis*, *socius*).

¹² 1997a, 229. Cf. Maltby 1993, 47: "[I]t is not until the first century BC, perhaps as a result of a new influx of Greek grammarians captured in the wars with Mithridates, that we hear of any serious speculation concerning the relationship of the Latin language to Greek."

¹³ See Sihler 1995 and Jucquois 1992 and 1991.

syntax.¹⁴ In antiquity these were not, of course, hearkened back to a common source à la Proto-Indo-European. Instead, and in line with ancient ideas on language origins and language change, an origin was posited in the member of the pair with historical and cultural preeminence, Greek.¹⁵ The cooperation of Greek and Latin in Greco-Roman literary culture resulted in the latter language being modified to reflect aspects of the former.¹⁶ This tendency found its final expression, and the contemporary pairing of the two languages as *utraque lingua* perhaps found its ultimate explanation or justification, in what may be called Aeolism: the idea that Latin was a dialect of Greek, closely related to the ‘Aeolic’ dialect.¹⁷ More than any other single idea considered in this

¹⁴ Cf. Dubuisson 1989a, 100-1: “Si haut que l’on remonte, les textes que nous possédons ont déjà subi une importante influence grecque; le latin le plus archaïque est déjà une langue très hellénisée – à la limite de la langue mixte.” As an example Dubuisson unfortunately cites the Praenestine fibula, a proven forgery (Guarducci 1980). But his phrasing, “la langue mixte”, points to better evidence, Dionysius’ important description of the Roman language (1.90.1), discussed below. For Greek borrowings in Latin see Weise 1882. For Latin in Greek see Biville 1990-1995.

¹⁵ On Greek cultural preeminence as impacting Roman literature, tempered by the idea(l) of *aemulatio*, ‘competitive imitation and adaptation’, see e.g. Döpp 2001, Hinds 1998, and Williams 1968. Cf. Lewis 1986, 170: “Modern critics can argue that borrowing from other Latin works and translating Greek works are two separate things, but Latin *testimonia* demonstrate consistently that the two processes are intricately related” and 173: “there seems to be no dividing line between interlingual or intralingual composition.”

¹⁶ On the prominent place of Greek in Roman education, see Cic. *De Orat.* 1.83, Plin. *Ep.* 2.14.2, Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.12-14, Plut. *Aem Paul.* 6.8-10; cf. Marrou 1965, 374-388, and Kaimio 1979, 322-323. Earlier in Roman history a similar place may have been occupied by Etruscan (Livy 9.36).

¹⁷ The term ‘Aeolism’ is a modern one which I adopt for convenience, despite it being often unclear what exactly a modern or ancient author means by it: “[b]y Aeolic ... the ancients meant any Greek dialect that was not Attic, Ionic or Doric” (Maltby 1993: 49; cf. on Greek dialectology Davies 1987, Collinge 1973, Hainsworth 1967, 76: “the traditional and persistent divisions ... have no validity as basic assumptions”; Coleman 1963, 91-101; and Buck 1955). Strabo 8.1.2 has Aeolic spoken in the Peloponnese by Arcadians (usefully for the role of Arcadian Evander in bringing Aeolic to Italy) and Eleians, and in continental Greece by everyone aside from the Megarians, the Athenians, and the Dorians; Strabo preserves “quite the most systematic piece of dialect study that has come down from antiquity” (Hainsworth 1967, 67-68), identifying contemporary Ionic with ‘old Attic’ (τὴν μὲν Ἰάδα τῆ παλαιᾶ Ἀτθίδι τὴν αὐτὴν φασίν; 8.2), an identification followed by Byzantine grammarians (Gram. Leidensis

dissertation, this striking origin for Latin shows how ideas about language origins could articulate concerns about contemporary group interaction and overlap.¹⁸

Latin as a Dialect of Greek: Aeolism

The first language other than Greek that ancient linguistic thought took any serious interest in was Latin. The two languages shared a long history. The striking historical commonalities attested by the literary sources, in vocabulary and, especially for Latin but also in some cases for Greek, in generic, stylistic, and even syntactic adoptions, are due to sustained and increasingly intense interaction between speakers of the two languages in the first millennium BC.¹⁹ Such interaction began with infrequent contacts between the Greek colonies of southern Italy (Magna Graecia) and speakers of Italic languages farther to the north;²⁰ this included intermediation by groups speaking

Ion. 1 = Philoponus A 235a; Philoponus B 241a; I owe these references to Hainsworth *ibid.*). On self-conscious Aeolian identity see Hall 2002, 71-74, esp. 74: "it may well be that it was this contestation over the city of Smyrna that was initially responsible for the crystallization of both Aiolian and Ionian identities." Cf. Hall 1995, 88: "Greek ethnic groups were not determined primarily by the dialects they spoke"; rather perceived differences of language were taken as *indicia* of fundamentally ethnic and, later, cultural difference.

¹⁸ In this Chapter I focus on Aeolism, considering the slimmer evidence on the origin of Attic when appropriate thematically.

¹⁹ Peruzzi argues iconoclastically for even earlier contacts, between Rome and Greek-speaking traders of the Mycenaean kingdoms (1978). The evidence for the specifics of even Greco-Latin bilingualism, much less of ancient Italian bilingualism in general, is not great; cf. Homeyer 1957, 440: "The sources yielding material for the linguist do not become more plentiful until the middle of the 2nd century. But the social upheaval caused in Italy by the unending stream of foreign elements during the 2nd century makes it impossible to give even an approximate survey of language distribution at this or at a later time."

²⁰ On Magna Graecia and Greek-Italic contact, see Boardman 1999, 161-189, de Juliis 1996, Dench 1995, 46-50, Robinson 1990, Whitehouse and Wilkins 1989, Malkin 1987, de la Genière 1979, and Dunbabin 1948; cf. Campanile 1991, 15. On the spread of Latin and Greek in Italy, e.g. Bonner 1929.

other languages, especially Etruscan in the north and Oscan in the south.²¹ It continued through the following centuries as Rome's political and military influence extended beyond Italy's borders and into the Mediterranean basin generally, reaching a first apex of sorts by the second century BC at the latest with Roman dominance of the culturally Greek Mediterranean world.²² In Horace's famous phrase, *Graecia capta* captured her captor in turn, and Latin literature was born as a literature translated from the Greek.²³ Linguistic interaction continued apace as Roman government spread Greek culture more effectively than the fragmented Greek city-states or even Alexander had ever done, forming a truly Greco-Roman world.

From a modern standpoint, all of this interaction, and the resulting similarities between the two languages, was accidental. Aside from common Indo-European inheritance, Latin and Greek are mostly similar from cultural contact and 'borrowed' vocabulary. One recent survey of the two languages' shared features goes so far as to argue that comparative study of the two can have results of only limited linguistic value and could with little adverse effect be abandoned.²⁴

²¹ On Etruscan terms in Latin see Ernout 1930.

²² See generally Green 1990 and Gruen 1984. Cf. Campanile 1991, 15: "solo a partire dal sec. II si hanno le premesse storiche per il costituirsi di un bilinguismo."

²³ Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.156-157: *Graecia capta ferum uictorem cepit et artes / intulit agresti Latio*. It is not often stressed that part of Horace's point here is that Greek culture arrived *too late* to eliminate entirely Latium's rough *rusticitas*: *sed in longum tamen aeuum / manserunt hodieque manent uestigia ruris* (159-160). Even in Horace the result of Rome's Hellenization is thus something mixed, and parallels the notion repeated since the Archaic period that identity is a matter not of essence but of practice. Pasquali sees an earlier date for Greek inspiration of Roman literature, with Greek Cumae making possible Roman Saturnian verse (Pasquali 1936).

²⁴ See Jucquois 1991 and 1992.

The ancient appraisal of the situation was different. Behind surface similarities, it was argued, there must lie more fundamental similarities of essence and thus origin. This follows from the Hellenistic tradition of *aitia*, explanations for observed phenomena based often on their formal similarity with other known or imagined things, and from more general ideas about origins, in which formal similarity indicates similarity of essence grounded in prehistoric identity; the latter mode finds its chief expressions in the linked practices of etymology and eponymy (see further below). In the apparent absence of theories of divergent descent from a single language, explanations for commonalities often took the form of borrowing.²⁵ Given the historical and cultural priority of Greek, most but not all such borrowings were imagined as being from Greek into Latin. Given, further, existing ideas about language change, including phonological deformation and drift, and moreover the model explaining the emergence of the historical Greek dialects, a more radical explanation for similarity was possible: one language could be derived entirely from the other.²⁶ This extreme logical possibility was actually realized in Aeolism, the idea that Latin was a dialect of Greek.

Aeolism has been treated rarely and mostly with unsatisfactory results. Modern interpretations tend towards reductionism and cultural psychologizing, making the idea at once of limited importance in antiquity and, paradoxically, a reflex of psychological states thought to be widespread and deep-seated in one or the other ancient culture as a

²⁵ Not all words needed explanation in this manner; many ancient etymologies derive words from other words in the same language or from 'roots' imagined therein. See Rochette 1996a and Fresina 1991. Language change was also recognized as producing different languages.

²⁶ On Roman ideas on language change see Uhlfelder 1963. On the Greek dialects see Colvin 1999, Morpurgo-Davies 1987, and Buck 1955.

whole. Such interpretations invite objections on theoretical and methodological grounds. The application to an ancient culture of Freudian psychoanalytic terms, presuming in the first place a unitary culture to analyze, is questionable in light of developments in psychoanalytic and post-colonial theory and given recent reappraisals of the nature of group interaction in the ancient world. Moreover the full extent of ancient awareness of Aeolism has not been studied, and is wider than is normally allowed.

By discarding inappropriate theory and taking stock of Aeolism's multiple historical contexts we may free it from a *communis opinio* that is both overly broad and limiting. In general the idea reflects a widespread perception of ancient society as marked by group overlap and interpenetration. For a diverse group of foreign-born scholars living and working at Rome, thought on the origin of Latin became an indirect intellectual rejoinder to the physical, social, and psychological displacements caused by empire.²⁷

Aeolism: Fragmentary Evidence

Aeolism reached an apex of interest in the first century BC at Rome. Evidently never fixed or given doctrinal form, it was a subject of debate, with different authors

²⁷ Cf. Eriksen's argument that "nationalism" was a solution to the problems posed by modernism and industrialization: its point is "to transcend that alienation or rupture between individual and society that modernity has brought about" (Eriksen 1993, 105). "One may perhaps go so far as to say that urbanisation and individualism create a social and cultural vacuum in human lives in so far as kinship loses much of its importance. Nationalism promises to satisfy some of the same needs that kinship was formerly responsible for" (108). Aeolism among other ideas and practices (like patronage) solved similar problems in a Roman world swiftly and increasingly removed from face-to-face kinship societies. One wonders what ideology purports to solve the new problems posed by postmodernity; Harpham 2002 argues that thinkers have been looking mostly to 'language', with mixed results.

arguing for different versions and degrees of dependence between Latin and its putative source-language.²⁸ Aeolism may thus be imagined as a continuum of ideas about one class of relationships between Greek and Latin. At one notional pole is the full claim that Latin as a whole is derived from Greek (through whatever processes of linguistic derivation were thought possible, mostly contact with non-Greek populations and, to a lesser extent, phonological drift); this full linguistic claim is often linked to the historical claim that Romans as a people derive from Greeks, usually the Arcadian Greeks under Evander.²⁹ At the other pole is a less dramatic claim in line with ancient etymology more generally, that individual words or groups of words were borrowed from Greek into Latin, and that grammatical and stylistic structures of the former were imitated by authors writing in the latter; this less dramatic claim includes both accidental and deliberate borrowings.³⁰ In between the two extremes lie combinations

²⁸ *Pace* Collart 1954, who sees an “official doctrine” of Aeolism in Quintilian and Priscian.

²⁹ Cf. Briquel 1984, 449: “Les bases de la théorie sur l’éolisme du latin ne sont certes pas linguistiques. Elle se fonde sur la tradition de la venue des Arcadiens d’Evandre dans le Latium.” Behind the frequent mention of Evander and other Greeks (including e.g. Odysseus: Hes. *Th.* 1011-1016, DH 1.72.5=FGrHist 240 F 29, Serv. *ad Aen.* 8.838; see Wiseman 1995, 45-50) lies the question of why Aeneas or other Trojans, many of whom traditionally populated parts of Italy, were never considered responsible for any part of the language (but cf. Verg. *Aen.* 12.825-828, where the absence is explained as Juno beseeching Juppiter to let the Latins keep their own name, language, and dress, while the Trojan name dies: *neu Troas fieri iubeas Teucrosque uocari / aut uocem mutare uiros aut uertere uestem ... occideritque sinas cum nomine Troia*); see Erskine 2002, 131-156, who argues that the Trojan legend, in contrast with the 2nd-century prominence of Evander, “did not play a central role within the state itself or in the Roman self-image until Caesar gave it one” (148); cf. Williams *ad loc.* for Virgil possibly having in mind rumors of Caesar or Augustus intending “to transfer the capital from Rome to Troy or Alexandria” (1973: 497).

³⁰ If Davies 1987 is right in seeing differences in “nomenclature” underlying ancient ideas on linguistic diversity, the two poles are closer than not; see the discussion in Chapter Five.

of both.³¹

A first question to be raised throughout is thus what should count as Aeolism. In a cultural setting marked by “pervasive interest in language”, there is unavoidable slippage from one notional pole to the other, as exponents of fuller forms of Aeolism give way to linguists comparing the two languages and to etymologists deriving only some Latin words from Greek.³² Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence even individual authors cannot be required to appear self-consistent. Should the rubric be limited to those claims linking not just the languages but, in line with more ancient notions, the people as well (especially the idea that Rome was founded by Arcadian Greeks under Evander)? Or should more limited sets of etymologies also be included, given that in antiquity historical linguistics consisted for the most part in etymology alone? Does even the full claim truly imagine, as modern translations and interpretations seem to imply, Latin as a ‘dialect’ of Greek, akin to e.g. Doric? What limits are to be set between conscious borrowing and natural derivation as diagnostic of true dependence?

Despite these definitional problems, it seems clear that there is something like Aeolism to be identified, localized, and interpreted. I collect here examples of Aeolism, from the earliest authors to whom it may be attributed, through its apparent popularity in the first century BC, and finally to its rapid move into obscurity in the first century

³¹ If Aeolism broadly construed is Latin linguistic dependence on Greek, then it is subsumed by a larger category denoting relations between the two languages in either direction. There is evidence of occasional ideas that Greek was dependent on Latin (e.g. Santra, Seleucus). Cf. the striking idea that Homer was a Roman (maintained by Aristodemus of Nysa (RE 30), the tutor of Pompey’s children; see Dubuisson 1987).

³² “Pervasive interest”: Rawson 1985, 105, 109, 119

AD, after which it is taken up again only by those professional peddlers of the obscure, the grammarians. From this historical perspective it is clear that the idea is never fixed, but a changing constellation of notions made possible by preexisting linguistic and historical knowledge (especially the practice of etymology, popular and important since the fifth century BC at least; and the idea that Rome was founded by Arcadian Greeks under Evander).³³ Aeolism depends on these and other contexts for its appearance, and in them assumes specific social and cultural meanings.

The earliest author to whom an idea like Aeolism is attributed is Cato the Elder (Varro fr. 295 Funaioli=Lydus *De mag.* R.1.5). Lydus cites Cato as writing “in his book on Roman antiquity” (έν τῷ περὶ Ῥωμαϊκῶν ἀρχαιότητος) that:

Romulus or the men with him displayed at that time the Greek language, that is Aeolic ... because Evander and the other Arcadians had come to Italy at some point and seeded Aeolic among the barbarians.

ὁ Ρωμύλος, ἢ οἱ κατὰ αὐτόν, δείκνυται κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ τὴν Ἑλλάδα φωνήν, τὴν Αἰολίδα λέγω ... Εὐάνδρου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ἀρκάδων εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἐλθόντων ποτὲ καὶ τὴν Αἰολίδα τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐνσπειράντων φωνήν.

In line with recent reinterpretations of Cato as less anti-hellenic than traditionally imagined this attribution, although late, is not impossible. It is clear for example that Cato did not wait, as he may have claimed, until old age to learn Greek.³⁴ Moreover in

³³ The history of Evander and his Arcadians at Rome functions in a manner similar to that of Aeolism, as myth: “le récit des origines arcadiennes de Rome, malléable à l’infini, permet à chacun des auteurs qui le consignent de mettre en scène une vision personnelle de la protohistoire romaine” (Delcourt 2001, 829).

³⁴ Val. Max. 8.7.1, whose phrase *Graecis litteris erudiri concupuit – quam sero inde aestimemus quod etiam Latinas paene iam senex didicit* implies a late learning of Greek literature, not language; cf. Cic. *Rep.* 5.2, *Acad.* 2.5, *De sen.* 3 and 26; *Nepos Cat.* 3.2; *Quint.* 12.11.13; *Plin. N.H.* 29.14; *Plut. Cat.* 12.4 (Cato could have spoken Greek in Athens in 191 BC but chose not to); with Astin 1978, 157-181 esp. 159-160.

his works on Italic prehistory he is supposed to have shown an interest in dialectology. In these attitudes and interests Cato is not different from his time, in which other high-ranking Romans, despite their chauvinism, drew on Greek cultural products for literary inspiration and for explanations of Roman history. All of this lends credence to the idea that Cato may have subscribed to a lesser version of Aeolism, deriving at least some Latin words from Greek roots.

Cato may thus also have been partially responsible for popularizing the idea, to become crucial in the history of Aeolism, that Rome was founded by Evander and his Arcadians. Gabba argues that it is from him that the idea became known to Gellius (Funaioli 120), Cincius and Fabius Pictor (Funaioli 2), and perhaps the emperor Claudius.³⁵ These emerging interpersonal connections hint at the degree to which Aeolism becomes implicated in intellectual society at Rome.

This identification of Aeolism in the work of Cato the Elder begs the question, already asked, of just how little derivation of Latin to Greek should still count as 'Aeolism' so called. Below a certain threshold of derivations from Greek to Latin, it might be argued, there is only borrowing and not wholesale descent. Indeed, as noted, the idea of linguistic descent, in particular from a common ancestor language, does not seem to have occurred to the ancients. In this connection it has been argued that the ancient idea of universal grammar, that is of a single grammar common to all languages, should have made similarities between languages unremarkable while highlighting differences.³⁶ This seems confirmed by such examples as the attention paid by Latin

³⁵ Gabba 1963, 191.

³⁶ Dubuisson 1984, 63-64 and n. 82.

grammarians to the ablative, a case present in Latin but absent from Greek, and the dual. But there is still room for a claim like Aeolism, and such a claim is still dramatic: for universal grammar guarantees only that languages are similar because they are languages; while a claim like Aeolism asserts in addition that two languages are directly related, with concomitant claims of relation and dependence between the peoples who speak those languages. Universal grammar explains similarities as a matter of fixed linguistic essence, while Aeolism claims that two languages are similar because of the historical emergence of one people from another.

After Cato, Aeolism is not securely attested until its heyday in the middle of the first century BC. There is thus debate about the extent to which the earliest authors subscribed to some form of Aeolism. Some early authors have been credited with forms of the idea, or have been cited as part of the intellectual context in which the idea took root. L. Aelius Stilo, active late in the second century BC and into the first, is chided by Varro, his student, for making too many Latin words derive from Latin roots; the implication, explored further below, is that Varro himself subscribed to a fuller version of Aeolism than did his teacher. For Aelius there is only this negative evidence.³⁷

More widely debated is Hypsicrates of Amisus, active during the time of Sulla (FGrHist 2 B 925 (6-7) and Funaioli 107-8). A fragmentary reference in Gellius mentions “a certain grammarian Hypsicrates, whose books are certainly noble concerning those [words] that have been accepted from Greek” (*Hypsicraten quempiam*

³⁷ Rawson concludes that it is not clear that the theory was established by Aelius' time in the 80s BC (1985: 120). Dubuisson notes only that Aelius is responsible for “occasional” etymologies from Greek into Latin (1984: 62). *Contra* Opelt 1969, 33: “La generazione di Elio non ha ancora riconosciuto l'autonomia del latino; vuole, tacitamente, togliergli l'odiosità di essere un idioma barbaro.”

grammaticum, cuius libri sane nobiles sunt super his quae a Graeca accepta sunt; N.A. 16.12.5-6). Reactions to this author's role in Aeolism have been mixed, ranging from the careful hedging that his role is "not explicit" or "not secure", to the more confident statement that Hypsicrates "elaborated the doctrine" with others, and thus has been "considered to have been the first" to do a sort of Aeolism.³⁸ Jacoby thinks that Hypsicrates "folgte gewiss den Spuren seines Landmannes Tyrannio" (see below).³⁹ Explanations for his position on Latin etymology have been equally diverse, including a perceived motivation of "flattery" or "self-pity", psychological terms that, here at least, have the advantage of specificity to an individual.⁴⁰ Whatever his reasons, Hypsicrates' position in the tradition is at least more secure than Cato's, and he must be included.⁴¹

More secure ground is reached under the linguist Philoxenus of Alexandria.⁴² Living at Rome in the middle of the first century BC, Philoxenus is credited with having devised a new etymological method, based less than was usual on speculation or invention of similar-sounding roots, and grounded in the comparison of different dialects. His work may thus be linked in form to Cato's dialectology, and in general to a

³⁸ "Not explicit": Werner 1992, 325 (cf. 327: "vielleicht"); "not secure": Gabba 1963, 289; "elaborated the doctrine": Rawson 1985, 55; "considered to have been the first": Kaimio 1979, 259, with Rochette 1997a, 221.

³⁹ Ad FGrHist 2 B925 6, capitalization sic.

⁴⁰ "Flattery" and "self-pity": Rawson 1985, 55.

⁴¹ Rochette 1997a, 222 n.52 argues, against Reichmann 1943, 7, that the evidence does not allow an identification of Aeolic as the particular dialect said by Hypsicrates to produce Latin.

⁴² Treated most fully by Giomini 1953.

“well-attested scholarly tradition” on dialects.⁴³ His considered method and its reception in antiquity puts him at the “high point of etymological science”. With regard to Aeolism, Philoxenus is said to have written a work entitled *περὶ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν διαλέκτου*, in which he derived the Roman people from the Aeolians (Mazzarino 396=Theodorides 240 (323)); the Roman language similarly was not “born on its own”, *αὐθιγενής*. These facts all but guarantee an endorsement of Aeolism. Thus Gabba concludes that at this time the “Aeolic theory [was] taken up”, and Dubuisson has Philoxenus as the first to embrace or produce Aeolism.⁴⁴ If Philoxenus was as influential a linguist as normally thought, his Aeolism must have been “taken up” by others.⁴⁵ He is also attested as being interested in the dual, a formation increasingly observed in the first century as common to Aeolic and Latin.

Another scholar linked with Aeolism is one Tyrannio, author of a work “*περὶ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν διάλεκτου, ὅτι ἐκ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ἐστίν*” (Haas 176).⁴⁶ It is not clear whether this should be the elder, of Amisus, or the younger, a Phoenician. The elder has the better scholarly pedigree: a pupil of the grammarian Dionysius Thrax, he was brought to Rome by Lucullus, freed by Pompey, and ended up teaching Strabo and,

⁴³ Rawson 1985, 55.

⁴⁴ Gabba 1963, 190 and n.11; Dubuisson 1984, 60. Cf. Rochette 1997a, 225: “Autant que l’on puisse en juger, Philoxène enseignait que la langue latine ... est en fait une variante du grec”; Giomini 1953; Werner 1992, 324 and n.9; and Rawson 1985, 68: like Hypsicrates, Philoxenus was “interested in the Greek dialects and Latin as one of them.”

⁴⁵ Werner 1992, 325 has Philoxenus influencing Herodian 2.661.2 and An. Ox. 174.6. Contemporary influence is explored below, “An Ancient Audience”.

⁴⁶ Suet. *Gramm.* 14.1.3; Quint. 2.4.2; Plut. *Luc.* 19.7, *Sull.* 26.

as it happens, the younger Tyrannio. Adding to the confusion is the fact that both elder and younger are closely associated by the sources with the family of Cicero (the elder a friend of the orator, the younger freed by Cicero's wife, Terentia).⁴⁷ Modern endorsement has been mixed. Gabba thinks that it was the elder Tyrannio who "certainly systematized" Aeolism;⁴⁸ he argues against Wendel who favors the younger, as do Christes and Dubuisson.⁴⁹ More recent authors have avoided (or added to?) the problem by not always declaring which Tyrannio they have in mind.⁵⁰ The elder seems to have the slightly stronger case. In either case, a connection with Aeolism is certain.⁵¹

Contemporary with either Tyrannio is Varro, whose ideas about the origin of Latin may be regarded as either a complicated form of Aeolic or as itself encompassing that idea in a more complex mixture. Varro is supposed to have written a work *De origine linguae latinae*; it has not survived, but his ideas especially on Latin etymology are contained in the surviving second half of his *De lingua latina*. Like other authors in this survey, Varro subscribed to the notion that Rome had been founded in part by

⁴⁷ See *Att.* 2.6.1, 4.4a.1, 4.8.2, 12.2.2, 12.6.2 (Tyrannio credited with a work on accents for Atticus; cf. Rawson 1985, 52 n.67); *Frat.* 3.4.5, 3.6.

⁴⁸ Gabba 1963, 189. Kaimio agrees with him that it was "probably the elder" (1979: 259 and n.277, citing Funaioli 1.22-23); as does Jacoby ad FGrHist 2 B925 6.

⁴⁹ Wendel PW 1820a; Christes 1979; Dubuisson 1984; Rochette 1997a, 224 also favors the younger: "Il montre que la langue latine, dérivée du grec, n'est pas αὐθιγενής."

⁵⁰ Werner 1992, 324 n.10 states only that Tyrannio like Philoxenus was interested in Aeolism; Rawson 1985, 69 n.14 is similar: it "may be he who wrote like Philoxenos on Aeolian origins".

⁵¹ This may be reflected by the otherwise lacunose OCD, for only in connection with Tyrannio is Aeolism mentioned at all therein: he was "interested in the Latin language, which he regarded as derived from an Aeolic Greek dialect" (s.v. Tyrannio (1); the authors are Peter Forbes, Robert Browning, and Nigel Wilson); cf. PW Wendel 1820a on Aeolism.

Evander and his Arcadian Greeks; as a result the language retained an Aeolic component, as evidence for which Varro cites the similarity between Latin's *u* and Aeolic's preserved digamma.⁵² Lydus cites Varro alongside Cato as stating, "in the proem to his writings to Pompey" (ἐν προοιμίῳ τῶν πρὸς Πομπηῖον αὐτῷ γεγραμμένων), that Romulus and his contemporaries spoke Aeolic (Varro fr. 295 Funaioli=Lydus *De mag.* R.1.5; quoted above).⁵³ Lydus also has Varro discussing "which [Latin] words are Aeolic and which are Gallic" (ποῖα μὲν τις λέξις ἐξ Αἰολίδα, ποῖα δὲ Γαλλικῆ); the text is corrupt at the point of attributing the discussion to Varro's 'fifth book' (πέμπτῳ).

The origin of Latin in Varro is not limited to Aeolic. In addition to the Latin and Aeolic components, Varro notes contributions made to Latin by Etruscan, Sabine, and even Gallic sources.⁵⁴ Thus Latin is a 'hybrid language', including a primitive or Romulean heritage affected by subsequent Greek borrowings that came in stages: from the Aeolic brought by Evander, and from more intensive contact given widespread Hellenism. In his preserved etymologies for Latin words Varro does not stress derivation from Greek roots.⁵⁵ Thus although for Varro Greek played a role in

⁵² See the discussion in Collart 1954.

⁵³ This fragment is usually assigned to Varro's lost *De origine linguae latinae*; see *RE* Suppl. VI c. 1219-1220.

⁵⁴ See Schöpsdau 1992; and Bloomer 1991, 55-62, esp. 57: "The origins he imagines for Rome itself guide his choice of language [in etymology]. Etiology and etymology are one and the same: transplanted Greek, aboriginal Italic, natural Sheep are the potential sources for the Latin word."

⁵⁵ Cf. Maltby 1993, 50-1: "It is clear from Varro's practice, then, that he was not a strong adherent of the view that Latin was derived largely from Greek. ... There is [moreover] no evidence for Greek having in Varro a special position among foreign languages as the ultimate source of the Latin language." But Varro is supposed to have chided his teacher, L. Aelius Stilo, for deriving too many Latin

supplying Latin with some of its forms, it is difficult to share the enthusiasm of Dubuisson, for whom it was “above all Varro who multiplied etymologies and systematized Aeolic theory.”⁵⁶

Varro’s particular take on the origin of Latin illustrates again the variety of ancient ideas that may be gathered under the rubric of Aeolism, and the complexity both of their interaction and of the interactions of their exponents. Rawson observes for example that Varro quotes Hypsicrates and Tyrannio, two arguable Aeolists, respectfully, but does not do the same for Philoxenus, the grammarian whose belief in Aeolism is perhaps clearest.⁵⁷ Thus Varro raises the same questions as does Cato: what counts as Aeolism? When in the imagined history of Latin does Greek need to have appeared, and to what extent, in order for that history to be ‘Aeolic’?

The questions have even less clear answers in the case of Strabo. He does not mention linguistic evidence. He does mention but may discount a frequent component of Aeolism, an Arcadian origin of Rome under Evander, calling it ‘legendary’ (μυθώδης; 5.3.3); he follows Polybius, Pictor and others in seeing Rome as a

words from Latin roots at the expense of Greek (Gell. *N.A.* 1.18: *M. Varro doctissimum tunc ciuitatis hominem L. Aelium errasse ostendit, quod uocabulum Graecum uetus trductum in linguam Romanam, proinde atque si primitus Latine fictum esset, resolverit in uoces Latinas ratione etymologica falsa*).

⁵⁶ Dubuisson 1984, 62. cf. Gabba 1963, 189-90. It is equally difficult to endorse Collart’s belief that Varro deliberately opposed the “hybrid” hypothesis to an “official doctrine” of Aeolism; for the latter Collart cites only Quintilian and Priscian, whose late dates puts them well past the idea’s heyday in the first century BC (1954: 218).

⁵⁷ Rawson 1985, 125 n.35. Rawson points out that Varro is further distinguished from Philoxenus as an etymologist in having fewer verbal derivatives (n.44). *Contra* Briquel 1984, 452-3, who thinks it possible that “Varron ait également trouvé chez Philoxène la théorie éolienne du latin.” Briquel agrees that “[l]’utilisation de Tyrannion l’Ancient par Varron est assurée” (1984: 453 n.63); cf. Lehmann 1999, 118-129.

foundation of Aeneas' Trojans later altered by local populations.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Strabo also makes the Romans Pelasgians (5.2.4), and mentions, without dismissal, the argument of Ephorus that the Pelasgians originated in Arcadia, Evander's home.⁵⁹ Thus while Strabo may not think that the Romans are or were Arcadians, he may yet be suggesting a connection with Greece, even the traditional Arcadian Greece, in that the Pelasgians are precursors not just of Rome but of various Greek peoples as well.

This is intriguing as Strabo addresses himself to the same problem as his contemporary Dionysius of Halicarnassus: how to account for the rise of Rome (e.g. 5.1.1, summary 6.4.1-2). Whereas Dionysius makes Roman dominance depend explicitly on their origin as Greeks and on their unusual preservation of Greek culture, Strabo is less clear. As a geographer he stresses the natural resources of Latium and Italy, and also a fundamental difference between Greek and Roman behavior (the Greeks make aesthetic choices, the Romans pragmatic ones; 5.3.8). But as shown he also derives the Romans from the same group, the Pelasgians, ancestral to many Greek groups. Thus there is both similarity and difference, a situation similar to that presented by a clear exponent of Aeolism as such, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (treated separately below). Owing to the mixture Strabo may have endorsed a form of Aeolism, but the evidence is not clear.

The next authors reported to have worked on Aeolism lived after its apparent apex, in the first century AD. These are Claudius Didymus and his student Apion.

⁵⁸ The "others" may include Posidonius; see Mora 1995, 128 and 135.

⁵⁹ Ephorus is made to cite a fragment of Hesiod: "they were born the children of Lycaon, who was taken for a god and who was birthed by Pelasgos" (υἱεῖς ἐξεγένοντο Λυκάονος ἀντιθέοιο, / ὅν ποτε τίκτη Πελασγός; fr. 44 Rzach=Strabo 5.221).

Didymus is credited with a work entitled *περὶ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαικῶν ἀναλογίας*. While the title is not as immediately suggestive of Aeolism as for example was that of Philoxenus' work, its reported content meshes well with the idea. Didymus is supposed to have argued not only about or for analogy in Latin, but that the "Romans followed the Greeks in all analogy and construction" (Prisc. 3.408.5ff; Funaioli 447). He cites in particular the equivalence of the Latin perfect stem in *-s* with the Greek sigmatic aorist, and, with special significance for Aeolism, the equivalence of Latin *u* with Greek digamma, perceived by the ancients as characteristic of Aeolic but lost from the other principal dialects (mainly Attic-Ionic and Doric).⁶⁰ From this evidence Dubuisson, following Haas, concludes that Didymus was "faithful to Aeolic theory".⁶¹ It is an open question, however, whether Didymus' use of 'followed' imagines Latin deriving historically from Greek, or rather has Romans consciously imitating aspects of the Greek language.

Also open is the degree to which Didymus' student Apion subscribed to Aeolism. Only the title of his work survives (*περὶ τῆς Ῥωμαικῆς διαλέκτου*, Athenaius 15.680d; this is attacked by Josephus). On this slim evidence Werner thinks Apion's Aeolism is "possible".⁶² Dubuisson is characteristically more optimistic, concluding that Apion imagines Latin as a "temoin d'un état ancien du grec"; for

⁶⁰ Digamma does not appear in inscriptions in Attic, Ionic, and Lesbian. In general see Sihler 1995 §§187-189.

⁶¹ Dubuisson 1984, 61, seeing a link between Didymus and Priscian, who cites the same evidence; cf. Rochette 1997a, 238: Didymus was a "[p]artisan de l'origine éolienne du latin"; and Haas 1977, 177. Werner is less certain, noting that Didymus' position is "not explicit" (1992: 325)

⁶² Werner 1992, 325: "vielleicht".

corroboration he cites Eustathius' commentary to the *Odyssey* (115).⁶³ Both Didymus and Apion may thus have held some form of Aeolism. Although they lived after the idea's apparent apex, their possible involvement is strengthened by the fact that Aeolism nonetheless continues to be reported and perhaps believed even after their time.

Around the turn of the first and second centuries AD, Quintilian in his *Instituto Oratoria* makes explicit reference to a form of the idea (1.6.31).⁶⁴ He states that much of Latin etymology comes from Greek, and especially from Aeolic. As above, this must raise the questions of whether simple transmission of words, even in large quantities, counts as Aeolism; and whether actual derivation as from a parent language or borrowing, deliberate or not, is imagined (the latter seeming less like the full claim). Quintilian cites as proofs the similarity of Latin *u* and Aeolic digamma, and Aeolic *a* parallel to Latin *a* in e.g. *mater*.

Much later, in the sixth century AD, Priscian repeats some of the specific examples cited by authors already noted showing Latin's similarity to Aeolic; above all is the perceived identity of Latin *u* with Aeolic digamma (1.4.20). Priscian like other grammarians wrote within a fairly fixed tradition, in which examples, terminology, and even phrasings were copied from one work to the next; his work draws in particular on Apollonius Dyscolos, a grammarian of Greek.⁶⁵ Thus other grammarians in the second

⁶³ Dubuisson 1984, 61 n.50.

⁶⁴ Idem 63 calls Quintilian's reference an "allusion".

⁶⁵ Matthews 1994, 5: "The scope and material of grammars in this tradition show a strong family resemblance." Possibly Apollonius should not be imagined as an Aeolist; as Matthews notes his ideas are "often invalidated even by Latin ... [and] there is no reason to suppose that Apollonius even knew Latin" (1994: 8).

through fifth centuries AD may also have represented Aeolism. There may be an echo of the idea in Isidore of Seville's schema of the history of Latin into four stages: *prisca, Latina, Romana, mixta* (*Etym.* 9.1.6-7). On the face of it this passage seems to make Latin's mixed status not a function of its origin or essence but of its historical interactions.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

The fullest exponent of Aeolism is Dionysius of Halicarnassus. His account of the origin of Latin repays close reading and contextualization both by the outline of his life and by the ideas recurrent in his works. While his exact dates are unknown, he came to Rome "when Augustus put an end to civil war" (ἅμα τῷ καταλυθῆναι τὸν ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον ὑπὸ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ Καίσαρος; 1.7.2), and he stayed there for at least twenty-two years, more than could be said of many so-called Romans. In the same passage Dionysius also prides himself at "having learned the Roman tongue" (διάλεκτόν τε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν ἐκμαθῶν), a boast borne out by his use of Latin terms (if not Latinate syntax as well),⁶⁶ and at "having acquired knowledge of local writings" (γραμματῶν τῶν ἐπιχωρίων λαβῶν ἐπιστήμην; 1.7.2), shown in his detailed knowledge of Roman institutions. In all of these ways and despite his origin and literary language he takes part in the Rome of his day. Thus in preparing to find linguistic overlap in his text we see social overlap already in the author, a Greek from Asia Minor who lived at Rome under Augustus.

⁶⁶ On Dionysius' Latin see Marin 1969. Dionysius' knowledge of Latin, and that language's appearance in his own usage, is emblematic of contemporary Greek literature and language; see e.g. Garcia Domingo 1979.

Dionysius' work *Antiquitates Romanae* is concerned with the consolidation of Roman rule and thus with group contact and interpenetration. In this it is like much of Greek-language historiography about Rome.⁶⁷ For Dionysius, Roman history depends on a continuous process of acculturation, between a few indigenous peoples and a more populous and more significant series of Greek arrivals.⁶⁸ In line with ancient modes of explaining the present in terms of the past, Dionysius refers the resultant mixture of contemporary groups back to a prehistoric past also imagined as mixed: groups like Greek and Roman actually overlap in history because in prehistory they overlapped in essence or origin. With group boundaries imagined as always already overlapping, the situation is one of permanent impermanence.⁶⁹ In this context Dionysius uses Aeolism as perhaps the most important proof among others of the mixed nature of group interactions in his own day, and especially of the overlap of Romans and Greeks.⁷⁰ Aeolism provides a sort of etymology for contemporary Romans: their true or ideal

⁶⁷ Firstly Timaeus, unfortunately only in fragments. Most completely Polybius, explaining how "almost the whole of the known world was conquered and fell under the single rule of the Romans in a space of not quite 53 years" (ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν οὐχ ὄλοις πεντήκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν ὑπὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἔπεσε τὴν Ῥωμαίων; 1.1.5); see e.g. Walbank 1972. Later e.g. Strabo; "it is now clear ... that he is speaking from and about the centre of imperial power" (OCD s.v. *Strabo*); e.g. Nicolet 1991 and cf. the brief comparison with Dionysius below. On Greek historiography of Rome generally Clarke 1999, Pearson 1987.

⁶⁸ Five waves are imagined: the Aborigines, the Pelasgians, the Arcadians (whose leader Evander is responsible for introducing the alphabet to Italy, 1.33.4; cf. Livy 1.7, Tac. *Ann.* 9.143), Hercules with various Greeks, and Aeneas with his Trojans (summaries at 1.60.3, 1.89.1-2, and 2.1.1-4).

⁶⁹ Dionysius seems to allow the possibility that some group overlap is only imagined; e.g. all Italic peoples were once called 'Tyrrhenian' by Greeks despite their differences because at their distance from Greece they all seemed the same (1.29.2). But overlap may also be real and provable.

⁷⁰ Language elsewhere appears as the most important proof of a contested group's actual identity (1.29; see below). Other kinds of proofs 7.70ff.

meaning, framed as their original prehistoric meaning, is discovered in the proper reading of present forms.⁷¹

The central passage is *Antiquitates Romanae*, 1.90.1:

[In contrast with some other Greeks] the Romans speak a language neither completely barbaric nor wholly Greek, but one mixed from both, of which the greater part is Aeolic; the only consequence of their frequent interminglings [with barbarians] is that they don't make all the sounds correctly.

Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ φωνὴν μὲν οὐτ' ἄκρως βάρβαρον οὐτ'
ἀπηρτισμένως Ἑλλάδα φθέγγονται, μικτὴν δὲ τινα ἐξ ἀμφοῖν,
ἧς ἐστὶν ἡ πλείων Αἰολίς, τοῦτο μόνον ἀπολαύσαντες ἐκ τῶν
πολλῶν ἐπιμιξιῶν, τὸ μὴ πᾶσι τοῖς φθόγγοις ὀρθοεπεῖν.

This expression of Aeolism is the fullest preserved, linking the derivation of the language with the origin of its speakers: language and people follow the same path. Moreover while Dionysius like Varro imagines more than just Greek as ultimately producing Latin, for him the Greek component is central because original.⁷² Like the true meaning (ἔτυμος) of a word made clear by etymology, the true character of both the Latin language and the people who speak it (presumably as a native tongue) is revealed by careful study of origins. Thus this short statement of Aeolism plays a central role in Dionysius' long work, the express purpose of which is to correct erroneous Greek impressions of Roman history, and above all to show that the Romans

⁷¹ The results returned by etymology, of peoples or of words, are strictly prehistorical, in that they refer to an essential state prior to history and informing it. "Ancient etymology was not intended to be historical ... [but] was an attempt to discover the true relation ... between an expression and its content" (Matthews 1994, 25). See further Chapter One for 'ideal' or prescriptive and 'historical' or descriptive origins for language in Classical and Hellenistic philosophy.

⁷² Cf. Rochette 1997a, 232: "Cette manière de concevoir l'origine du latin correspond à celle de Varron, pour qui l'éolien ne représente qu'un seul élément constitutif de la langue de Rome"; with his n.87.

have achieved universal power because they were originally and are still essentially Greeks (1.5.1).⁷³

Two terms have special importance: the word used here for ‘language’, φωνή, and the phrase translated as ‘one mixed from both’, μικτήν δέ τινα ἐξ ἀμφοῖν. Taken together, these two terms situate the idea deriving Latin from Greek squarely within the imaginary of Dionysius’ time, and sketch out the image of group interpenetration found therein.

First, φωνή. For φωνή to mean ‘language’ in Dionysius is both unusual and specific. The word appears forty-five times in the *Antiquitates*, but thirty-seven instances (more than 80%) refer either to the actual sounds produced by a vocal apparatus (human, animal, and supernatural), or less frequently and more

⁷³ See e.g. Gabba 1991, 109: “The conclusion reached ... [is] the original Greekness of Rome”. Gabba argues that Dionysius’ demonstration is most successful on the political or constitutional level (110, 117-118). Cf. Hartog 1991, 149: “Telle est la simple et singulière thèse posée, répétée, démontrée à grands renforts de généalogies et d’étymologies, de citations et de témoignages par Denys d’Halicarnasse”; and 167, where he paraphrases this “thesis”: “vous [Romains] n’êtes évidemment pas Étrusques puisque vous êtes des Grecs, fils de Grecs, et si vous êtes Troyens, vous êtes encore, ou vous étiez déjà des Grecs.” Hartog’s conclusion is particularly telling, phrased as a rebuttal to other scholars who would have Dionysius ‘shattering’ (*éclater*) “le binôme Grec/Barbare par l’introduction d’un troisième terme” (160). This is a form of ‘subversion’ (*subvert*) which Hartog allows Cato the Elder (155), but refuses Dionysius on the strange grounds that the opposition between Greek and barbarian had long since lost its force by the Augustan Age, with the result that “plus aucun Grec ne doit penser ... que les Romains sont purement et simplement à ranger du côté des Barbares”! I do not understand why for Dionysius the Romans must be Greeks, or indeed how they can be Greeks, *by virtue of not being barbarian* if the opposition between Greek and barbarian is *already* obsolete. This misreads Dionysius, who imagines Romans as good Greeks precisely to the extent that they are not ‘barbarized’ (ἐξεβαρβαρώθη). Cf. Bowersock 1992, who argues that Strabo’s use of that term depends on the mores of his third- and second-century sources, not on the perceptions of his own time: “Il semble donc qu’à l’époque d’Auguste ... la symbiose des cultures grecques et romaine avait déjà atteint un stade avancé de maturité” (252).

metaphorically to an expressed opinion, 'the voice of the people'.⁷⁴ Only eight times (less than 20%) does φωνή mean 'language'. Five of these eight examples refer to languages spoken by peoples whose origins and relationships Dionysius presents as uncertain and as a matter of active debate among earlier and contemporary authors.⁷⁵ He uses φωνή to mean 'language' precisely when taking part in those debates, perhaps because of the residual connotation of speech sound, i.e. the vagaries of speech especially in a 'mixed' or uncertain language.⁷⁶

For example, φωνή appears when Dionysius weighs in on the origins of that most-debated people, the Etruscans (1.26.2-1.30). He concludes that the Etruscans are neither Pelasgians nor Lydians, for 'many reasons' (πολλοῖς τε αλλοῖς) but for one reason 'above all' (μάλιστα): their languages (φωναί) sound nothing alike (1.29.2). Even clearer on the explanatory power of language is the passage immediately preceding (1.29.4). Here, Dionysius outlines in the abstract his position on how language change relates to the origins of peoples. He makes two main points. First, he considers it 'not logical at all' (οὐδένα λόγον ἔχει) that members of the same original group, when living near to each other, would not agree somewhat in their language

⁷⁴ In other cases, φωνή refers to a miraculous 'voice' heard from an inanimate object, often a statue, revealing information about the future; in these cases as in the majority, it is clearly the audible aspects, the speech sounds themselves, which are stressed.

⁷⁵ 1.29.2 (Etruscan and Lydian), 1.29.4 (a statement of theory), 1.30.1 (Etruscan), 1.31.1 (Greek), 1.34.1 (Greek), 1.35.2 (πάτριος), 1.89.4 (barbarized Greek), 1.90.1 ('Roman language'). This use of φωνή is not limited to Dionysius, appearing as early as Herodotus: when the latter reports Pсамметихος' experiment attempting to determine the oldest 'language', the word used is φωνή (2.2).

⁷⁶ The use of φωνή to mean 'speech', i.e. language including 'vocal sound', is found outside the *Antiquitates*, e.g. *Thuc.* 5.24 and *Comp.* 12.19 and 18.9; see Pritchett 1975.

(μηδ' ὅτιοῦν κατὰ τὴν φωνήν ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογεῖν). Conversely, he hints at what he considers the primary mechanism for language change: it 'would be logical' (λόγον τιν' ἄν εἶχε) that members of the same original group would lose similarity of language when living apart from each other and, crucially, when in contact with other groups.⁷⁷

Although language may apparently change on its own (through the loss of ἀκριβεῖα, meaning something like 'consistency of pronunciation over time'), the most common source of change, and the source of the most serious changes, is extended contact with speakers of other languages. By having mixed languages result in this way most directly from mixed populations, Dionysius links linguistic identity with group identity (hearkening back all the way to Homer). He uses φωνή precisely when those identities are not certain or simple, but compromised and overlapping, sources of ongoing debate.

In this context, the use of φωνή in 1.90.1 implies that the identity of the Roman language is somehow not certain, and, because of the link between language and people, that neither is the identity of its speakers, the Romans themselves. This is emphasized by the indefinite pronoun τινα: the language in question is not 'a specific mixture' but rather 'some kind of mixed speech' (μικτὴν δέ τινα [φωνήν]). Dionysius' description of the language is thus motivated by the debate surrounding the language and its speakers.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Cf. Livy 5.33.11 on the Alpini and "in particular the Raeti, whom their very locations have made savage, such that they retain nothing of their ancestral practice aside from the sound of their language, itself corrupted" (*Alpinis ... maxime Raetis, quos loca ipsa effecerunt ne quid ex antiquo praeter sonum linguae nec eum incorruptum retinerent*); and Strabo 8.3, preserving an account of language change which unusually cites not contact but *isolation* as causing the change.

⁷⁸ φωνή does more than signal uncertainty, of course connotating speech itself, that is speech sounds; in this sense it ties in with Dionysius' statement that the Romans sound funny. I hope to explore this further in future work. On accents in Latin and Greek see e.g. Adams 2003b, Willi 2003, Rochette 2000, Colvin 1999, Brixhe 1988, and Kent 1922.

The ways in which their identities are in doubt are built into the second important term in this passage, μικτήν ἐξ ἀμφοῖν. The particular force of this second phrase makes clear the content of Dionysius' Roman-era imaginary, hinted at already: an image of group organization tending above all to interpenetration and overlap. μικτήν ἐξ ἀμφοῖν has numerous close and exact parallels in both the *Antiquitates* and Dionysius' other work, including both μικτός with or without a prepositional genitive phrase and compound adjectives based on the root μιγ-. These are used to describe things as diverse as the verbal balance of vocabulary, syntax, and clause structure achieved in oratory by Demosthenes, but allegedly avoided by Thucydides in his *History*;⁷⁹ the phonetic value of the Greek double consonants (i.e. ζ, ξ, ψ);⁸⁰ the goals and aims of Dionysius' own historiography;⁸¹ the make-up of governments;⁸² and the composition of ethnically mixed populations.⁸³ What these varied uses have in common is that in each case the thing being described is presented as the irreducible combination

⁷⁹ Demosthenes: e.g. *De Dem.* 42: τὴν μέσην τε καὶ μικτὴν ἀρμονίαν ἐπετήδευσεν ὁ Δημοσθένης; cf. 3, 8, 36, 37, 41, 43, and 44. Thucydides: *De Thuc.* 2: he wrote a prose οὔτε πεζὸν αὐτοτελῶς οὔτ' ἕμμετρον ἀπηροτισμένως, κοινὸν δέ τι καὶ μικτὸν ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἐργασάμενος.

⁸⁰ *De Comp.* 14: τρία δὲ τὰ λοιπὰ ἡμίφωνα μικτὸν λαμβάνει τὸν ψόφον, ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν τῶν ἡμιφώνων τοῦ <σ>, τριῶν δὲ ἀφώνων τοῦ τε <δ> καὶ τοῦ <κ> καὶ τοῦ <π>.

⁸¹ *A.R.* 1.8.3: ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀπάσης ιδέας μικτὸν ἐναγωνίου τε καὶ θεωρητικῆς. This description has struck moderns as variously inappropriate or inaccurate, and possibly corrupt. See e.g. Fromentin, 1998; Gabba 1991, 71 and 71 n.14; the first to offer an emendation was H. Estienne, in the margins of one of the codices (cited by Fromentin 1998, 178-179).

⁸² *A.R.* 7.55.4, 8.5.2; these passages are discussed in the text.

⁸³ E.g. *A.R.* 2.2.2; cf. 1.34.2, 1.60.3.

of two or more things which are themselves more regular or expected; that is, a combination whose nature cannot be understood by choosing between two opposite elements composing it, but is best understood by a fuzzier logic of choosing not to choose.⁸⁴

For example, the Greek double consonants (ζ, ξ, ψ) are explained as combinations of certain of the more numerous and more typical single consonants (σ plus, respectively, δ, κ, and π).⁸⁵ But this explanation is partially at odds with a series of technical terms available in Greek phonetics and employed in this context by Dionysius: φῶνα, ‘sounds’ (e.g. α), ἡμίφωνα, ‘half-sounds’ (e.g. σ), and ἄφωνα, ‘non-sounds’ (e.g. τ). These correspond roughly to ‘vowels’, ‘sibilants and liquids’, and ‘obstruents’.⁸⁶ None of the Greek terms is exactly right for the double consonants. φῶνα is incorrect; ἄφωνα is only half-right; and while Dionysius does call the double consonants ἡμίφωνα, it is clear that even for him this too is not enough. To attempt to reduce these consonants to only one of their components would be an artificial limitation, good for the economy of the descriptive system but bad for complete

⁸⁴ This is strengthened by, first, the frequent association with μικτός of words meaning ‘combination’, ‘joining’ and the like, e.g. σύνθεσις (*De Dem.* 3, 36, 43) and (συ)ζυγία (*De Dem.* 43); and, second, by the structure of the passage clearly contrasting the expected or fundamental items with the atypical items being described. In this last capacity a form of οὐκ ... ἀλλά is frequent (*A.R.* 1.8.3, 7.55.2; *De Dem.* 37, 41, 43; *De Thuc.* 2).

⁸⁵ *De Comp.* 14.

⁸⁶ Occurring in part as early as Plato (*Crat.* 393c and 424c), these terms were further systematized by or under Aristotle (*Poet.* 29. 1456b25), and “[i]n the grammarians ... are part of a settled taxonomy” (Matthews 1994, 10-11; on Dionysius’ use of the terms *idem* 30 with nn.). These ancient descriptions are used to reconstruct the pronunciation of the ancient language (Allen 1974, esp. 145-51; and 1978, esp. 95-101).

understanding. Dionysius is thus compelled to explain in addition how ζ, ξ, and ψ are all *both* ἡμίφωνα *and* ἄφωνα: he “chooses not to choose” between those constituents, and for this suspension of binary logic he uses the term μικτός.

μικτός means precisely this, “choosing not to choose” between nominal polar opposites, in the other passages and in 1.90.1. The crucial phrase μικτῆν δέ τινα ἐξ ἀμφοῖν thus imagines a Roman language composed of both barbarian and Greek elements, but not explicable as only one of those elements alone (even originally?).⁸⁷ Because of the link between language and people, the same can be said of the Romans themselves: they are neither one of those ancient opposites, but an indissoluble mix of the two, a *tertium quid*. Dionysius emphasizes this point by noting how ‘amazing’ (θαῦμα) it is that the Romans, despite extended contact with barbarians, were ‘not thoroughly barbarized’ (ἅπασα ἐξεβαρβαρώθη) like other Greeks in similar contact situations but retained their essentially Greek character (1.89.3). He notes that the only linguistic side effect of Roman-barbarian contact is that the Roman language sounds a little funny. This is not as serious an effect as his own logic would predict, and thus an indication that something unusual and significant is at work.

Although Dionysius’ use of μικτός is thus explicable wholly in the terms established by his own usage, there are precedents and parallels for his usage in other authors.⁸⁸ Since language is a marker of group membership, mixed languages indicated

⁸⁷ Cf. Biville 2002, 93: “Latin gained an equal footing with Greek, to the extent that it was sometimes thought of as a Greek dialect ... a hybrid emerged which was neither Greek nor Latin, but Graeco-Latin in character.” Briquel 1984, 453 n.65 sees the influence of Varro: “Si un tel défenseur de l’origine grecque de Rome [comme Dionysius] ne parle pas d’un véritable dialecte hellénique, mais d’une langue mixte, c’est assurément sous l’influence de Varron.”

⁸⁸ See Biville 1997.

mixed groups, and are imagined as deriving in part from just those historical or prehistorical interactions.⁸⁹ Homer describes Crete as having “a language mixed together from others” (ἄλλη δ’ ἄλλων γλῶσσα μεμιγμένη; *Od.* 19.175).⁹⁰ Another parallel is Thucydides’ remark on the language of Himera in Sicily, a “language between that of the Chalcideans and Doric” (φωνή μὲν μεταξὺ τῆς τε Χαλκιδέων καὶ Δωρίδος; 6.5.1).⁹¹

A more intriguing example is the *Constitution of the Athenians* attributed to Xenophon. It includes a discussion of how Athenian naval power led to Athenians intermingling with various peoples and adopting various forms of luxury (τρόπους εὐωχίων). Furthermore:

hearing all languages they selected a bit from this one, a bit from that one; and while some Greeks use rather their own language and way of life and dress, the Athenians use a mixture from all Greeks and barbarians (2.7-8).

φωνὴν πᾶσαν ἀκούοντες ἐξελέξαντο τοῦτο μὲν ἐκ τῆς, τοῦτο δὲ ἐκ τῆς· καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἕλληνες ἰδίᾳ μᾶλλον καὶ φωνῆ καὶ διαίτη καὶ σχήματι χρώνται, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ κεκραμένη ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων.

These Athenians are a bit like Dionysius’ Romans, a people relatively more mixed than other Greeks. The mixing involves both Greek and non-Greek (barbarian) elements, and

⁸⁹ Cf. Colvin 1999, 36: “It is clear ... that for the Athenians at any rate the link between language variety and ethnic group was a part of their conception of language and dialect.”

⁹⁰ This is “très douteuse” according to Lejeune 1948, 56.

⁹¹ Cf. Scholia in Dion. Thrax. 117.18.

thus looks back to earlier definitions of people by, in part, their language.⁹² The general idea dates at least to Herodotus, with Ps.-Xenophon seeming to continue that historian's claim that to be Greek is in part to speak Greek (*Hdt.* 8.144).⁹³

On the other hand, Ps.-Xenophon's usage may indicate a more positive appraisal than is usually given to mixed populations. His term for 'mixed' is not the neutral μικτός but the more loaded κεκραμένη. This adjective appears only here in the *Constitution*, but it carries interesting connotations from its use in other authors. κεκράμενος seems generally positive, indicating not just 'mixed' but 'mixed appropriately', 'tempered', or 'balanced': e.g. wine mixed with the appropriate amount of water, water at an agreeable temperature, and the 'most temperate seasons' (ᾠραι μάλιστα κεκράμεναι).⁹⁴ The first and last especially connote desirable or livable conditions peculiar to Classical Hellenic or Hellenistic culture, as opposed to the barbarian practices of drinking wine straight and living in zones of extreme heat or cold. The implication may thus be that a φωνή κεκραμένη is desirable and even civilized. This may be at odds with Ps.-Xenophon's evident dislike of Athenian practice: is he

⁹² Thucydides has Nicias praise those men "who, considered Athenian although not of us because of [their] knowledge of our language and [their] imitation of our customs, are wondered at throughout Greece" (οἱ τέως Ἀθηναῖοι νομιζόμενοι καὶ μὴ ὄντες ἡμῶν τῆς τε φωνῆς τῆ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ τῶν τρόπων τῆ μιμήσει ἐθανμάζεσθε κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα; 7.63.3). Cf. Colvin 1999, 74, summarizing the ideas of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon: "Language, irrespective of dialect, was something which identified Greeks as Greeks and marked them off from foreigners."

⁹³ For the general idea cf. *Anth. Pal.* 7.419, where being Greek (σύ ... Ἕλλην) means speaking Greek (in this case instanced by Χαῖρε ... φρασόν). Herodotus describes the Athenians as originally Pelasgian: only upon their adoption of the Attic language did they become Greek (1.57.3); cf. 2.51.1-2 with McNeal 1985; on Athenian-Pelasgians see Laird 1993; on Pelasgians generally Hall 2002, 33-34, Sakellariou 1977, Biancardi 1961, and von Hüttenbach 1960.

⁹⁴ Examples from LSJ. Cf. Horat. *Sat.* 1.10.20-24, discussed below ("An Ancient Audience").

quietly approving the Athenians' mixed nature, and thus acknowledging a contemporary shift away from starkly binary oppositions of Greek and barbarian?⁹⁵

Dionysius is unique among the surviving sources in his presentation of Aeolism and the importance he assigns to it. He is also a striking confirmation of the tendencies, both linguistic and socio-cultural, that marked the first century B.C. at Rome.⁹⁶ He is a true Greco-Roman, born in the Greek East but living and working in Rome alongside others with similar trajectories and patronage; he wrote in Greek for an elite audience of educated Roman citizens; and his work on Roman antiquities was concerned with origins of people and practices, while his other works, rhetorical and critical, are similarly preoccupied with the appropriate balance of disparate elements from mixed sources.

Problems and Possibilities: Towards a Reinterpretation of Aeolism

How should Aeolism be interpreted? Typically it has been viewed through a broad psychological lens, with whole cultures assigned psychological traits and even pathologies. The standard handbooks, encyclopedias, and surveys of ancient linguistics have little to say about Aeolism, but in passages on related topics often replicate the

⁹⁵ Hornblower (2000) argues that the text is sympotic; it could thus include democratic sympathies. The term 'barbaric', βάρβαρος, was not limited to non-Greek language, people, and culture. E.g. Plato *Prot.* 341c: "Simonides took issue with Pittacus being unable to choose the words rightly, since he was Lesbian and had been raised in a barbaric language" (Σιμωνίδην ... ὀνειδίζειν τῷ Πιττακῷ ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματα οὐκ ἠπίστατο ὀρθῶς διαίρειν ἅτε Λέσβιος ὢν καὶ ἐν φωνῇ βαρβάρῳ τετραμμένος); see Werner 1991. The binary opposition, itself a product of the fifth century BC (Hall 2002, 172-228), is of course later modified to include the Romans alongside the Greeks; thus Aeolism and *utraque lingua*; see below.

⁹⁶ Thus Delcourt 2001, 859: "Quant à Denys d'Halicarnasse, il partage en partie seulement l'opinion générale de ses contemporains."

assumptions underlying the most-repeated modern interpretations. The OCD for example mentions the idea only once (s.v. Tyrannio; see above), but s.v. linguistics, ancient §6 attests to the persistence of a view of Greek and Roman cultures that is reifying, dichotomizing, and psychologizing: “Greek grammarians declared that the framework of Greek grammar would perfectly well fit the Latin language. *In their recognition of Greek superiority in intellectual matters, this was what the Romans wanted to hear*” (emphasis added). The terms used are telling. Unspecified ‘Greek’ linguists produce a grammar that dovetails with the inferiority felt by unspecified (but apparently all) ‘Romans’. There is no overlap imagined between the two groups, and what is at stake is psychological states experienced by large unitary cultures. The same divisions and emotions, along with the absence of particular historical and social contexts, form the typical interpretive context for Aeolism.

In a recent work on *Latin Language and Culture*, Joseph Farrell rightly notes that Aeolism, “the idea [making Latin a dialect of Greek,] ... deserves more recognition and consideration than it commonly receives.”⁹⁷ His own brief treatment proves the point: he devotes less than a page to the idea, naming only one ancient source (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, whom he neither quotes nor cites) and citing only one modern treatment (Gabba 1991).⁹⁸ He suggests somewhat apologetically that “the idea

⁹⁷ Farrell 2001, 38.

⁹⁸ Gabba is concerned with Dionysius’ understanding of archaic Rome. He attributes Aeolism to “learned men of the 1st century [BC]”, who looked back to Polybius (who is otherwise unmentioned in connection with Aeolism) and to the idea of Arcadian Rome (whose creator Gabba takes to be Fabius Pictor); cf. Gabba 1963, reaching similar conclusions. Aside from being cited by Farrell this brief discussion of Aeolism has gone all but unnoticed (it is cited by Erskine 2002, 197, whose discussion of Aeolism is limited to a single sentence).

was probably never very widespread” in antiquity: “[i]t is not clear that many Romans or Greeks subscribed to or indeed cared very much one way or the other about this theory.” Paradoxically, although Farrell thus stresses an apparent lack of ancient evidence for Aeolism, he still interprets the idea as meaningful on a very large scale: the idea that Latin is a dialect of Greek is “a reflex of Greek hope”.⁹⁹ He thus moves without explicit argument from doubting the idea’s ancient impact to taking it as indicating the psychology of an entire culture.¹⁰⁰

Both of these features of Farrell’s account, on the one hand its brevity and paucity, on the other and more importantly its broad psychologizing conclusions, are representative of modern research into Aeolism. There are two main problems.¹⁰¹

First, there is a tendency to reductionism, and to corresponding oversimplification of the historical, social, and cultural contexts for Aeolism. In order to explain a given ancient author’s position on Aeolism, most treatments consider his identity as Greek or Roman as the most or even only salient extra-linguistic variable. In this manner Aeolism is represented as having been produced and maintained by either Greeks or Romans unilaterally.¹⁰² To refute this it should be enough to refer first to the

⁹⁹ *Idem* 39.

¹⁰⁰ For a generally negative review of Farrell 2001 see Mayer 2002.

¹⁰¹ A valuable exception to the problems facing modern interpretations of Aeolism is Gabba 1963, tracing Aeolism to the theory of Rome’s Arcadian origins under Evander and thus avoiding psychology in favor of sociological analysis. Other studies may be even more detailed sociologically but still reliant on psychoanalytical terms and thus reaching overdrawn conclusions.

¹⁰² But see Hall 2002a, 36, whose brief notice (“Ever since antiquity there had been suggestions that the Latin language was not only related to, but actually derived from, Greek”; prefatory to a discussion of Indo-European scholarship on Greek origins) carefully does not locate agency at all.

idea's diversity of attestation: the authors supporting it include Greeks and Romans, as well as Phoenicians, Syrians and others (however these groups are to be defined and despite, of course, their participation in 'Greco-Roman culture'). Moreover some proponents cannot be securely identified, and their 'ethnicity' may remain a matter of active debate;¹⁰³ whether or not a category like 'ethnicity', with its overtones of 19th-century nationalistic discourse, is applicable to the ancient world is also debatable.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, although this is to argue from silence, not even all those authors identifiable as Greek or Roman and interested in linguistics either support Aeolism or mention it at all: although this is likely due in part to the accidents of preservation, it must be true that some linguistically-minded Greeks and Romans did not mention Aeolism because they did not think about it. Finally, since many Aeolists were teachers of language, it is possible that some among their students may have been familiar with the idea (see below, "An Ancient Audience"). At the least, the maintenance of forms of Aeolism by different authors over time and place cannot be due to reasons which are either simply Roman or simply Greek.¹⁰⁵

This appeal to attestation is not enough, however, to solve the larger problem of

¹⁰³ E.g. L. Ateius Praetextatus, to whose uncertain ethnicity Werner draws attention (1992, 328 n.29); and Verrius Flaccus, whose status as *uerna* is discussed by Christes 1979, 84-85.

¹⁰⁴ See Hall 2002a and 1997. Eriksen 1993 argues that categories like 'ethnicity' and 'nation-state' emerge to solve contingent social and cultural problems, e.g. those raised by industrialism; this contingency makes their application to the contingent problems of other historical periods at least in need of justification if not dubious *a priori*.

¹⁰⁵ This is true of a frequent component of Aeolism, the imagined Arcadian origins of Rome: "On voit à travers elle comment les Grecs se sont inscrits dans l'histoire du Latium en y installant leurs propres héros, et comment en retour les Romains ont utilisé ces héros dans la construction de leur identité" (Delcourt 2001, 833).

reductionism, because that first problem depends on a set of assumptions more widespread in classical studies.¹⁰⁶ The very categories of ‘Greek’, ‘Roman’, and others are normally not defined even for specific time periods, but taken for granted as clear, mutually exclusive, and permanent. Instead of being explained, categories like these are used in interpretations of Aeolism as “autonomous variables”, themselves infused with explanatory power because thought to be “independent of social context” and thus to have “consequences for society ... deriv[able from their] intrinsic character” alone.¹⁰⁷

All of this is problematized if not contradicted outright by the demonstrably contingent nature of group interaction in the ancient world. Recent work has challenged traditional oppositions, moving away from imagining “a dichotomy of acceptance and resistance” between distinct groups, and stressing instead “the complexity and evolution of identity” within overlapping groups continually redefined by their partial mutual participation in shared social practice.¹⁰⁸ For an individual to be usefully considered Greek or Roman, for example, can no longer be a matter of simple naming, nor even of appeal to seemingly decisive features like language spoken or how his ethnicity is

¹⁰⁶ The problem of oversimplification of context is also related to the modern distinction between scientific and non-scientific knowledge, or ‘knowledge’ on the one hand and ‘belief’ on the other, as discussed in the Introduction.

¹⁰⁷ Roberts and Street 1997, 171; cf. Street 1984.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Woolf 1998; Jones 1997; Cornell 1995, 78-9; and Gruen 1992, esp. 223-271; quoted material from Laurence 1998, 105 and 109; cf. Shennan 1989. This sort of approach has gained renewed impetus from recent digestion of the social theoretical work of Bourdieu (e.g. 1977), but has a long history in ancient studies: e.g. Bowersock 1965, 132 was able to write about a “fusion of cultures which characterized the Graeco-Roman world”, and cf. Marrou 1964.

defined by contemporaries.¹⁰⁹ Instead, an individual's identity is a complex matter of participation in historically specific social and cultural contexts, all of which changed over time. In this light, understanding Aeolism requires considering each of its authors in just those contexts – with an eye to his historicity.¹¹⁰

The reification and opposition of groups like Greek and Roman is built into and compounded by the second problem in modern interpretations of Aeolism. In order to explain why that idea should have been produced or maintained at all, most treatments subject the Greeks or Romans generally to a sort of psychological analysis: whichever culture is thought to have produced Aeolism is taken as a whole, and its intellectual ideas are explained in terms of psychological motivations apparently universal in the culture in question. In this manner Aeolism is most commonly considered an expression of Greek or Roman “pride”, of a Roman “inferiority complex”, or, in one case, of Greek “hope”.¹¹¹

One likely source of this psychoanalytical turn is Dubuisson 1984: “Latin est-il

¹⁰⁹ Recent studies of diverse ancient topics have started to stress that identity is not fixed but relational, a result of practice. E.g. Davis 2002 calls attention to Ovid's changing (public) identity following his exile to Tomis (cf. esp. *Tristia* 5.10.35-38: *exercent illi sociae commercia lingua: / per gestum res est significanda mihi. / barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegor ulli, / et rident stolidi uerba Latina Getae*; even an apparently fundamental category like ‘barbarian’ results from practice; see Chapter Five); cf. Videau-Delibes 1991; and Wallace-Hadrill 1989, 4, whose point about patronage has broader application: “to define the phenomenon strictly in terms of Roman concepts is to invite confusion of ideal and reality”; cf. Saller 1982, 6.

¹¹⁰ The problems of reductionism, oversimplification and essentialism of encountered or studied cultures affect more than ancient studies: the West and Western scholarship generally have “long been assailed for universalizing what are in reality historically, culturally and geographically specific systems of analysis and representation, as part of its attempt to secure its dominance over the rest of the world” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 179).

¹¹¹ Farrell 2001, 39: “the theory that would make Latin a dialect of Greek is ... a reflex of Greek hope”.

une langue barbare?”. This article is a watershed, paradoxically offering both the clearest attempt at a specific social context for Aeolism and conclusions about the idea that go beyond what that context can support because of its use of Freudian psychoanalytic terms. Dubuisson describes his project as being “redonner pleine valeur historique à des données qui semblaient relever de la pure érudition”; by thus insisting on contexts beyond the merely intellectual, Dubuisson invokes a plausible sort of socio-historical determination of linguistic ideas.¹¹² He goes further than earlier studies by arguing for “un milieu bien déterminée” for Aeolism: the limited world of Greek intellectuals at Rome, and in particular the social circle of Pompey the Great.¹¹³ But despite this specific society Aeolism is taken as representing psychologies experienced by Greek and Roman cultures in general. For Dubuisson its emergence reflects the Romans’ “intolerable complexe d’infériorité à l’égard de la langue et de la culture grecque”,¹¹⁴ and its disappearance in the first century AD shows the triumphant return of “orgueil romain” consonant with the more blatant international power politics of the Principate.¹¹⁵ The subjects experiencing these psychologies are apparently the cultures

¹¹² Dubuisson 1984, 68. Cf. Gabba 1963, an early treatment of Aeolism that avoids psychoanalysis in favor of sociological analysis. Like Gabba and Collart 1954, Dubuisson sees the more ancient idea of an Arcadian origin for Rome as at least making possible the linguistic conclusions of Aeolism: linguistic reasons alone could not have been enough to require an explanation in Aeolism, since the idea of universal grammar should have made similarities between Greek and Latin unsurprising (63-64 with n.82).

¹¹³ Idem 59-60 (with n.30) and 63.

¹¹⁴ Idem 67.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. with n.97. “Roman pride” is also seen in the term *utraque lingua*, which Dubuisson takes as indicating a Roman “trinary system” of classification competing with the Greek binary division of the world into Greek and non-Greek; and in *Latinitas* as a chauvinistic Roman response to Greek *Hellenismos* (n.99). For “pride” cf. Opelt 1969, 33: “L’orgoglio della lingua latina si era svegliato.”

themselves, taken as distinct and unitary wholes. Thus Dubuisson is able to consider for example first Greek grammarians, then Roman grammarians, as separate groups; for him an author may be assigned to a given group on the basis of his working language alone.¹¹⁶

Dubuisson's general ideas about Aeolism and their psychological and sociological presuppositions, but not his closely argued and possibly valuable specific points about Pompey's social circle, have strongly informed the *communis opinio* about the ancient idea. Thus the psychoanalytical turn in interpretations, especially the complementary concepts of 'pride' and 'inferiority complex', may be traced to his article.

The specific power structure imagined in this cultural psychoanalysis is in line with traditional or Romantic views opposing the Greek classical period with the late Roman Republic and early Principate, the former meaningful and philosophical, the latter merely or even basely political, deeply compromised and subconsciously aware of it.¹¹⁷ In these terms the origin of all language, a Greek concern, is considered philosophical if not rarefied, while the origin of Latin, limited to the Roman period, is viewed at best as pragmatic scholarship and more often as an exercise in flattery devoid of real meaning. There is evidence for a somewhat similar categorization of the Greek past and the Roman present among the ancients.¹¹⁸ But as an analysis of ancient

¹¹⁶ E.g. in the case of Ateius Praetextatus, who for Dubuisson is "Roman" because he wrote in Latin (62 n.65). *Contra* the reservations about Ateius' "ethnicity" voiced by Werner (above, n. 103).

¹¹⁷ See Habinek 1992.

¹¹⁸ See Petrochilos 1974; and Sherwin-White 1967, 78: the Greek present is itself contrasted with the more glorious Classical Greek past.

evidence the opposition has become overdrawn and limiting.

Farrell's recent notice illustrates the enduring strength of this opposition. He has the admirable aim of wishing to rehabilitate the Roman side of things from the damage done to it by years of overly philhellenic scholarship. He argues persuasively that the frequent ancient trope comparing Latin's limited resources to Greek's abundance (the so-called 'poverty topos') denotes lexical incommensurability alone, and not, as often inferred, general linguistic inferiority linked with a more widespread Roman inferiority complex felt in the face of superior Greek culture.¹¹⁹ In a similar manner he at first moves away from having Aeolism depend simply on Roman psychology by apparently leaving open a choice between Greeks and Romans as the idea's inventors: the idea is "[t]he most extreme manifestation of the tendency to assimilate Latin to Greek", a tendency not explicitly attributed here to either Greeks or Romans.

But in moving away from Romans as unitary psychoanalytical subject Farrell goes too far in the opposite direction. Instead of providing a new analysis he inverts the old one: for him Aeolism is not an expression by Romans of their perceived inferiority, but "a reflex of Greek hope." In this way Farrell falls into a ubiquitous post-structuralist trap of not actually challenging old oppositions but simply repeating them by inverting their categories and presuppositions.¹²⁰ Greeks and Romans are still imagined as culturally (and even somehow essentially) distinct, with the cultures as wholes considered unitary subjects fit for basic psychoanalysis.

In general, this kind of cultural psychologizing is suspect in its construction of

¹¹⁹ Farrell 2001, 30 and 32; cf. Minyard 1985.

¹²⁰ See Spivak 1998, Young 1990.

internally unitary ancient cultures, imagined as speaking a single language on the “one nation, one language” model borrowed from 19th-century nationalist discourse, for reasons suggested above and discussed in more detail below. Also questionable is its application of Freudian psychological terms. Terms such as ‘inferiority complex’ seem to be applied more or less uncritically and without reference to any particular theoretical framework. It is thus not specified in the first place why psychological states, even if or perhaps especially if widespread, should have resulted in linguistic ideas at all, much less in Aeolism in particular, especially given its expression by diverse authors coming from different backgrounds.

A rejection of cultural psychologizing in classical studies is already offered by Gruen. He objects to the practice in general, and in particular to a neat dichotomy between Romans and Greeks. Instead he describes a “willingness of Romans to be Hellenized” as early as Cato (fr. 19) and subsequently a context of widespread Roman participation in Hellenistic culture.¹²¹ On this reading, by the second century BC at the latest it is no longer a question of actually distinct groups, but of how and in what ways being Hellenized or Hellenistic no longer seems non-Roman.¹²² The category of Roman, a civic category with cultural connotations, is not necessarily exclusive of the category of Greek, increasingly a cultural category independent of civic status; as noted, the decoupling of these categories within individual and group identity is at odds with

¹²¹ Cf. Gruen 1992, 227-235, whose phrasing is taken up by Farrell 2001, 38, where Aeolism is “the most extreme manifestation of the tendency to assimilate Latin to Greek.” This connection is indicative of the extent to which the traditional categories and terms of analysis are unconsciously shared among critics and may thus go more or less unexamined.

¹²² See Hölkeskamp 1999, 14-15.

the modern notion of the nation-state, but in line with recent reevaluations of ancient social organization. Thus although Gruen is able to write for example that “[Roman political aspirants did well to avoid the stigma of aesthete or intellectual”,¹²³ this was not a question of simple anti-hellenism as opposed to phil-hellenism, but a more nuanced strategic use of overlapping and incommensurable categories in specific domains (in this case for political gain). Directly opposed to cultural psychoanalysis of the sort applied to Aeolism, Gruen concludes: “[t]his is not simply a matter of a Roman “inferiority complex” in the face of Greek culture, as argued by M. Dubuisson, *LEC* 49 (1981): 27-45.” Implicit is the suggestion that phenomena other than political posturing cannot be explained with reference to psychological subjects based on anachronistic or overdrawn oppositions.

Outside of the tradition treating Aeolism, much work has been done on the society of the Roman world, including general studies and specific treatments of intellectual society. This work helps to problematize the dichotomies making up the traditional *communis opinio*. Rawson 1985 for example offers a nuanced reading of Republican intellectual society generally whose details and even broad strokes help to contextualize Aeolism, while Christes 1979 studies the prevalence of slaves and freedmen as teachers at Rome, thus pointing to a complex society of different but overlapping social classes, cultures, and levels of education. Similar contexts, emphasizing how social factors and structures condition linguistic conclusions, are provided by sociolinguistic studies, especially of knowledge of Greek at Rome or among Romans. Dubuisson 1991 for example shows how ‘literacy’ must be

¹²³ 1984, 265 n. 95.

differentiated internally, and in general was located only among the political elite.¹²⁴ These studies, by attesting to Greek and Roman individual and group participation in shared social and cultural practices, help to decenter the psychological subjects presupposed as distinct and unitary by traditional scholarship.

Moreover, a half-century and more of post-Freudian and post-colonial psychoanalytic theory has challenged in the abstract the assumption of unitary individuals, much less of wholly coherent cultures, and thus of explanations for individual or group behavior in simple psychological terms.¹²⁵ From a post-colonial perspective, psychoanalytic criticism seems narrowly Western (European) in orientation, and thus of dubious application to groups or cultures with different histories and material conditions, including by extension ancient cultures.¹²⁶ By explaining Aeolism as a Greek psychological response to Roman rule, or a Roman response to Greek cultural superiority, generalizing psychological explanations obscure the idea's potentially self-contradictory diversity of articulation and purpose – a diversity made inevitable by the differences between authors of different ethnicities, classes, places,

¹²⁴ See also Rochette 1993, Schöpsdau 1992, Kaimio 1979 (discussed below), and Treggiari 1969.

¹²⁵ Cf. Longino 2002 against psychologizing in philosophical or non-sociological history of science.

¹²⁶ Against the direct applicability of Western psychoanalysis to non-Western cultures, see Deleuze and Guattari 1977. Fanon and Spivak argue for “scrupulous attention ... to the *material and historical contexts* of both (neo-)colonialism and psychoanalytic theory” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 151; emphasis added); and insist “that the psychic economy of colonialism mediates *material, historically grounded, relations of unequal power*” (idem 1997, 147; emphasis added). Since psychoanalysis itself comes from particular conditions, its application to other conditions cannot go unconsidered.

and times, not to mention cultures alien to our own.¹²⁷

Due to this decentring of psychological subjects on individual and group scales, motivations for individual and group behavior must be derived not from assumptions about group organization, but from examples of individual practice.¹²⁸ Post-colonial theory is decisive in showing that ‘the Roman’, as it were, cannot speak, because there was no Roman as such, no lost but definable other to be redeemed into speech. Instead *individual* Romans, both indigenes and immigrants, can and did speak (in Latin and Greek!), and it is their equally individual examples of discourse which must be the basis of analysis.¹²⁹ In this light, Aeolism requires an explanation based on individual utterance and motivation, and thus always embedded in specific social contexts – that is, as above, greater and more nuanced attention to historicity. As suggested in the Introduction, the theories I use are mainly those of folk linguistics and the sociology of knowledge. The result is something like a genealogy or archaeology of Aeolism in the Foucauldian mode, with attention paid to its internal temporal organization and its articulation across and through actors themselves differentially inscribed into a complex

¹²⁷ Cf. Fanon’s “insist[ence] that factors such as gender and class, as well as geographical and cultural location, materially inflect the psychic economy” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 145). In Greco-Roman antiquity there may be factors mitigating the problems raised by diversity, e.g. ‘cultural Hellenism’.

¹²⁸ For a similar argument by a classicist against the assumption and reification of unitary cultures, see Hall 2002, who questions, for example, if Sappho’s participation in both Greek and Lydian worlds “suggest[s] that our unitary conception of Greek culture is unsatisfactory”. Cf. Bourdieu 1977, 27.

¹²⁹ See Spivak’s article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 1988), and the follow-up question posed by Wallerstein: “Does India exist?” (2001). The answers must be negative or at least contingent, for as Fanon points out any internal coherence ascribed to a (colonized) culture may be a product of (colonial) analysis which for reasons of power fails to “recognize [divisions] as real and ... falsely sublimate[s them] into a greater unity” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 145). The same problems arise in saying ‘Romans speak’; cf. Petrochilos 1974, who tempers generalized Roman patriotism with sensitivity to individual Roman appraisals of Greeks and Greek culture.

social and cultural system.

Aeolism in a Sociology of Ancient Linguistic Thought

The two problems of reductionism and naïve cultural psychologizing, along with their underlying assumption of unitary cultures functioning independently of social context, require solutions that attend to social context by being grounded in Aeolism's diverse articulation and attestation over time and place – in its historicity. Aeolism's inevitable diversity is the key to its interpretation.

The reading I offer herein attempts to respond to this situation, in the belief that Aeolism's historicity and its inherent concern with languages and peoples may be best approached with an eye to sociolinguistic methods. Earlier work has shown the usefulness of sociolinguistics for ancient studies, not despite but because of the required focus on individual utterance and motivation. J. Kaimio, for example, in his study of Greek language in the Roman world, “focus[es] on individual choice” between Latin and Greek.¹³⁰ By paying attention to extra-linguistic variables including location, literary genre, and class, Kaimio is able to organize the uses of Greek and Latin by individuals in the Roman world (not necessarily ‘Romans’) into complementary areas (e.g. Latin as the language of Roman law and the military, Greek as the language of education).¹³¹ He likewise adds detail to the otherwise broad psychological claim of Roman ambivalence to the Greeks, finding more appreciation for Greek as a high

¹³⁰ Kaimio 1979, 13.

¹³¹ *Idem* 321 (law), 322 (education); generally 326. On Greek and Latin in Roman education cf. *idem* 195-207 and Marrou 1965. Greek may have been used by educated Romans as a language of self-expression; see Pabón 1939.

prestige language among Roman nobles, including frequent composition in Greek by senators, than among the middle or lower classes, whose experience of the Greek language might be limited to interaction with the Greek-speaking slave and freedmen population of the city.¹³² In all, Kaimio's analysis and others like it are successful to the extent that they avoid relying on blunt sociological categories like Greek or Roman in favor of documenting the complex organization of languages and language variants into specific social domains, as gleaned from examples of actual and individual practice.¹³³

Aeolism may be read as a 'vernacular' linguistic idea mostly limited to a specific social circle. Against a background of absent institutional resources for teachers and students of language, as well as the slavery, conditional and partial freedoms, and dependence on patronage in which many linguists operated, Aeolism may be read as a symbol of group solidarity.¹³⁴

All of these features have important consequences for the group composed of the authors propounding Aeolism. The elaborate network in which they participate also obviously includes multiple shared practices, not limited to research into language. Although the first century BC in general may be marked by a "linguistic self-

¹³² Idem 172, 322-324; cf. Farrell 2001, 28-51, and Marouzeau 1947 on the Latin 'poverty topos'; and the comments by Gruen (quoted above in the text) on how elite Romans spun their public images away from hellenism so as to curry favor with a Roman public only partially interested in things Greek.

¹³³ Cf. Adams 2003b, Rochette 1997a, Balsdon 1979 and Petrochilos 1974.

¹³⁴ On slavery and patronage in educational contexts, Christes 1979 and Petrochilos 1974; see further below.

consciousness”, with language an “all-pervading subject” for research,¹³⁵ the ideas of the authors in question on language and on the origin of Latin in particular may be better explained with, again, less reference to *Zeitgeist* or pan-cultural forces (including cultural Hellenism) and with more regard to their participation in a specific community of practice, albeit one determined in part by the larger cultural and social setting (including lack of institutionalization or of disciplinary coherence).

The authors who propounded Aeolism, in opting thus for a Greek origin for Latin, made “choices in the contexts of particular social networks rather than as some generalized response to the universal conditions” of Greeks or Romans.¹³⁶ From this perspective the individual authors’ linguistic ideas, like their lives, are consistent with the contingent nature of group interaction in the Roman world of the first century BC: everything depends on and reflects the individual’s experience of group overlap grounded in shared social practices. By exploring Aeolism in its contexts, we may thus arrive at a more nuanced understanding of both the idea and its setting – the social networks and communities of practice which comprised the Roman world of the first century BC, a world characterized by continual interactions between languages and their speakers, and by self-conscious investigation of the same. What it meant to be Roman, or Greek, or both or neither, in the contentious times leading up to and including the so-called Roman revolution may be seen in ancient thought about

¹³⁵ Rawson 1985, 105; cf. 119: “‘grammatical’ interests and procedures penetrated every area of intellectual activity”; and cf. 109: e.g. Caesar was “like so many in this time” in his great “interests in literary and linguistic matters”.

¹³⁶ Nichols 1983, 54. Nichols is here writing not of Romans or Greeks, but of women; the relevance highlights how gender theory is remarkably useful in revealing and combating the received assumptions of ancient studies.

language.

An Ancient Audience

We may catch a glimpse of answers to these questions by exploring the range of individuals who definitely or possibly knew about Aeolism. Some modern treatments claim that the idea had little currency among the ancients.¹³⁷ It is true that, as shown, evidence for Aeolism has been preserved mostly in fragments, either as bits of text in larger works of incidental relevance, or as titles of works supposed to have been written in some cases about Aeolism in particular but also about Latin etymology in general (and in some cases with no decision possible). Still, the absence of explicit evidence does not imply that only a few unusual and esoteric scholars knew of (or believed in) Aeolism. Many authors touched on it, and their close associations with others raise the possibility of widespread Aeolism or forms thereof among the intellectual society of the Roman elite of the first century BC.¹³⁸

In the first place are those few authors whose ideas about Aeolism have been preserved directly and clearly in their own work (in each case here and below I list the

¹³⁷ Farrell 2001, 38: "It is not clear that many Romans or Greeks subscribed to or indeed cared very much one way or the other about this theory or the issues that it raises for us." It should be clear that I disagree with both of these propositions: many Romans and Greeks did care, and especially about the issues raised by a theory that makes seemingly distinct groups unavoidably mixed and thus poses questions of identity, incorporation, and what it means to be Roman in the Augustan Age: big questions asked in many types of discourse, including, as I hope to have shown, linguistics. On the other hand, the evidence as it stands suggests a disinterest in Latinity, which may be part of a more widespread Greek intellectual disinterest in Roman culture; see Dubuisson 1979, 103; and more generally Bowersock, 1969.

¹³⁸ Cf. Erskine's argument regarding the myth of Trojan origins for Rome: although only scattered scholarly argument has survived, the idea probably enjoyed local currency, and local variation, among different communities (2002: 131-156).

authors with the citation suggesting interest in Aeolism):¹³⁹ Varro (*L.L.* 8.8), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1.89.1), Quintilian (1.6.31), and, much later, Priscian (1.4.20).

It is an open question, second, how many acquaintances and readers of these first authors acquired the idea from them but have gone unremarked as such in the evidence. For example, Dionysius' work is addressed to a patron, Aelius Tubero (1.80.1), who might have been familiar his client's ideas,¹⁴⁰ while Varro exerted intellectual influence especially in the area of language over his contemporaries, any number of whom may have adopted his ideas on Latin origins (e.g. Vitruvius 9.*praef.*17 refers to Varro as a 'scholarly classic'). Such acceptance is made more likely by the general context of intellectual or cultural Hellenism, in which etymologies and origins played crucial roles in all areas of inquiry, thought on language included.¹⁴¹

Third are those scholars whose works have been preserved only in fragments: attributions or brief descriptions in other authors, or lists of titles in late antique compendia, in either case attesting more or less clear interest in Aeolism. These make up the bulk of authors expressly associated by some source with some form of the idea: in the second century BC Cato the Elder (Varro 295 *Fun.*); in the first century BC Hypsicrates of Amisus (FGrHist 2 B 925.6-7), Philoxenus of Alexandria (Mazzarino 396=Theodorides 240 (323)), Tyrannion (probably the elder, of Phoenicia; Haas 176);

¹³⁹ "In their own work" may be an artificial distinction, since e.g. the ideas attributed to Cato are more substantial than those preserved in Quintilian's, not to mention Priscian's, own hand. But it seems a useful distinction on the grounds of possible misrepresentation by other authors.

¹⁴⁰ Schultze 1986.

¹⁴¹ Similarly Lloyd notes that "a linguistic τεκμήριον fits perfectly with the interests of 5th Century anthropology" (1994: 7); thus the parallels between *Kulturgeschichte* and philosophical thought continue in the first century BC (see also Chapter Three).

and in the first century AD Didymus (Prisc. 3.408.5ff) and his student Apion (*Athen.* 4/15.680d).

A related group, fourth, consists of fragments from scholars and intellectuals whose linguistic research into Latin, preserved as statements of general interest or as etymologies deriving Latin words from Greek, make their adherence to or awareness of Aeolism proper a possibility if by no means a certainty: in the second century BC Ennius and L. Aelius Stilo; in the first M. Antonius Gniphō (Suet. *Gram.* 7), P. Nigidius Figulus (*N.A.* 10.4), Aristodemus of Nysa,¹⁴² Ateius Praetextatus or Philologus (Fun. 141), in the Augustan Age Santra (Fun. 386; Suet. 14.4), Cloatius Verus (Fun. 469: *uerborum a Graecis tractorum*), Ateius Capito (Seruius *ad Aen.* 1.273), Juba King of Numidia,¹⁴³ and Strabo; and in the first century AD Seleucus under Tiberius (*Athen.* 9.398a),¹⁴⁴ and the etymologist Verrius Flaccus.

Most of the authors in the third and fourth groups were professional intellectuals at Rome, teachers of Greek and/or Latin language and literature (*grammatici*) or rhetoric (*rhetorici*) (and rarely both, like Gniphō); hence their prominence in Suetonius' handbook on *grammatici*. As teachers they of course had students and patrons. It may be assumed that some of the students adopted their teachers' ideas about the languages

¹⁴² Strabo 14.1.48, schol. A ad *Il.* 1.453, Varro *L.L.* 75; see Dubuisson 1987.

¹⁴³ Juba (RE 2) wrote a work on ὁμοιότητες, *Similarities*, "eine vergleichende Zusammenstellung (Kulturgeschichte' klingt viel zu vornehm) von Sitten und Institutionen, vor allem auf sprachlicher Grundlage. Berücksichtigt waren in erster Linie Römern und Griechen." Rochette takes this to "montre[r] qu'il est un des représentants de la thèse selon laquelle le grec est une langue parente du latin" (1997a: 237).

¹⁴⁴ Seleucus seems to have derived not Latin from Greek, but Greek from Latin (Klebs 1897, 254; cf. Rochette 1997a, 237).

in question, and that, given the general context of Hellenistic intellectual and cultural supremacy and posturing, so did some of their patrons. There is corroborating evidence that some of the known students and patrons had additional or long-standing interests in language, ranging from questions about usage to more ‘scientific’ linguistic concerns like phonology and metrics.

This expanded circle of possibly interested parties, both students and patrons of foreign-born scholars, reads like a who’s who of late Republican and early Imperial Rome. I list them roughly according to the chronological order of the scholar.

Hypsicrates served Julius Caesar and was read by Strabo. Philoxenus was known personally by Atticus and thus perhaps by Cicero and others in his family and/or circle.¹⁴⁵ Tyrannio as noted was captured by Lucullus and freed by Tullia, had as his patron Murena, and was known by Atticus and Cicero, as well as Caesar and perhaps Quintus Caecilius Epirota (a *grammaticus*); he was read by Strabo (12.c.548, 13.c.609, 16.c.757), Apellicon (*ibid.*), Dionysius Thrax, M. Pomponius Dionysius, Andronicus of Rhodes, and Diocles; Varro may rely heavily on aspects of his thought.¹⁴⁶ Dionysius dedicated his work on Thucydides to Q. Tubero and at least pretended to write to Cn. Pompeius and Ammaeus; among his “Greek and Roman readers” must be counted Strabo.¹⁴⁷ Strabo himself, from a prominent Pontic family, knew Aristodemus (his teacher, 14.1.48), Tyrannio, and Posidonius. Aristodemus, the grandson of Posidonius,

¹⁴⁵ Philoxenus may have influenced Varro; see Briquel 1984, 452-453.

¹⁴⁶ Lehmann 1999, 118-129.

¹⁴⁷ Rawson 1985, 61; on Dionysius’ audience see Schultze 1986.

was also a close associate of Pompey's and taught his children (Suet. *Gramm.* 27.2).¹⁴⁸ Santra is cited by Hieronymus as a source for his *De Uiris Illustribus* (along with Varro, Nepos, and Hyginus),¹⁴⁹ and was read by Suetonius (Jerome *Uir.* 2.821). Apion was a student of Didymus', succeeded Theon as the head of the Alexandrian school, and knew the emperor Caligula; he was attacked by Jerome (*Contra Ap.* 2), and read by Gellius (5.14), Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 30.6.18), and Apollonius of Sophista.

Among free-born Romans, Ateius Praetextatus provided an epitome of Roman history for Sallust, knew C. Asinius Pollio, and was read by Ateius Capito; he also knew (or attended a lecture by?) the grammarian Gniphon, and taught Appius and Pulcher Claudii. Nigidius, by all appearances too esoteric even for his time and thus eclipsed intellectually by the more popular Varro,¹⁵⁰ was nonetheless known personally by Cicero (*ad Fam.* 4.13.3), perhaps by Atticus, and by Varro; was supported by Pompey (Cic. *Inv. Sall.* 14; *In Uat.* 14 and schol.); was close enough friends with Sallust and Uatinius to name their association a *sodalitium*;¹⁵¹ and was read by Gellius, Suetonius, and Jerome (*Chron.* 1901, 1972, 1989). Cloatius Verus is cited alongside Aelius by Verrius Flaccus, and was possibly read by Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 25.8-9). Finally, Verrius himself taught Caius and Lucius Caesar, perhaps thus knowing Augustus and Tiberius; taught alongside both Crassicius Pansa and Scribonius

¹⁴⁸ Rawson 1985, 68.

¹⁴⁹ Christes 1979, 80 n.67.

¹⁵⁰ Gell. *N.A.* 19.14.3: *Nigidianae ... commentationes non proinde in uulgus exeunt, et obscuritas subtilitasque earum tamquam parum utilis derelicta est.*

¹⁵¹ Rawson 1985, 94.

Aphrodisius; and is cited by Pliny and Gellius (17.6.4). By all accounts Verrius was the most influential etymologist of his time: his home city of Praeneste honored him with a statue, an honor few linguists of any age could match.

Several important Romans, perhaps the most important in this period and in the context of linguistics, appear again and again in the fragmentary genealogy of Aeolism: Cicero, Atticus, Varro, Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus, along with their families and occasionally other dependents. This may not surprise: since the focus of the ancient evidence is quite often this elite circle and its politically powerful members, their intellectual associates may rightly be expected to have found a place in the tradition. Moreover, given the perceived disjunction between elite intellectual and popular visceral interests,¹⁵² these associates might represent the limit of persons with an interest in Aeolism. But it is just as possible that other students and associates of these professors of Aeolism have simply not registered in the evidence; and it is impossible that there were not other professors of language (in fact many more are mentioned, even connected with etymology, but not explicitly linked with Aeolism). The ideas made it to Quintilian, and to Priscian, and they have made it to us. How many more in antiquity could have known about or subscribed to some form of Aeolism?

In the same way, fifth, other authors, intellectuals, and general persons associated with these professional scholars stand a chance of having been exposed to their ideas: these would include family, patrons, and more casual connections both through personal contact and through the reading of published works. Finally, we must

¹⁵² E.g. the politician's attempt to appear non-intellectual for his voting audience (Gruen 1984, 265 n. 95, discussed above) and the perception of the 'Roman mob' as easily sated by 'bread and circuses' (*panem et circenses*, Juv. 10.81; see Veyne 1990).

allow for the possibility that some (many?) other scholars were familiar with these ideas on their own.

Into this last category may fall, albeit noncommittally, Horace. Although he “does not take an explicit stand on this complex and contentious issue ... allusion to the debates over Latin’s origins” seems to inform the defense of neologisms in his *Ars Poetica* (48-69).¹⁵³ Horace seems to argue that a traditional or rhetorical preference for ‘native’ (*nata*) Latin words over ‘created’ ones (*ficta*) does not take enough account of the guiding force of usage, ‘convention’ (*usus*). Such convention apparently implies, as Horace states, that “new and recently invented words will have legitimacy provided they fall away, sparingly, from a Greek source” (*noua fictaque nuper habebunt uerba fidem, si / Graeco fonte cadent parce detorta*; 51-52). In *Satire* 1.10 Horace expands on the idea of neologism and borrowing needing to happen ‘sparingly’, even from Greek, when he disagrees with someone who praises Lucilius’ immoderate blend of Greek and Latin (20-24):

“But [Lucilius] did a great thing, mixing Greek and Latin words.” Oh you imbeciles! ... “But his speech, from both languages, is more sweetly pleasing, as if a renowned Chian [wine] is mixed with a Falernian.”

‘at magnum fecit, quod uerbis Graeca Latinis / miscuit .’ o seri studiorum ... ‘at sermo lingua concinnus utraque / suauior, ut Chio nota si conmixta Falerni est.’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Duffalo 2005 (quoted material 97-98).

¹⁵⁴ The moderation works both ways: “you wouldn’t be bringing wood more crazily to the forest than if you prefer to fill the great throngs of the Greeks” (*in siluam non ligna feras insanius ac si / magnas Graecorum malis implere cateruas*; *Sat.* 1.10.34-35).

Horace argues that such a blend of languages, already inappropriate for poetry, is certainly inappropriate for public speech including oratory (25-30). The wine simile put into the mouth of Lucilius' fan adds to this: although Horace is no stranger to wine imagery, the simile is especially appropriate here in that drinking wine not mixed with water (*merum*, as the Chian and the Falernian seem not to be) is a conventional example of immoderate behavior and even paradigmatic of barbarism.¹⁵⁵ Horace clearly advocates a more moderate blend, perhaps along the lines of the Attic seemingly endorsed by Ps.-Xenophon (whose adjective for that 'well-blended' language, *κεκραμμένα*, as noted above, also is used of wine mixed rightly with water). A further connection with Dionysius of Halicarnassus' ideas about mixture, related to Ps.-Xenophon's and contemporary with Horace, must remain a matter of speculation.

Thus it is hard to say whether these passages show Horace not only advocating moderation in neologism but also disliking the idea of a Greek origin for Latin as a whole. But he must have been aware of the origin of Latin as a topic of ongoing debate, and of Aeolism as one position in it in general if not in its details or individual adherents.

All of the individuals discussed could have been aware of some form of Aeolism. The math must be fuzzy, depending on more variables than constants, but all of these groups together add up to a fairly large-seeming total, and more importantly to a group of wide social and cultural range. From the composition of this group alone, Aeolism cannot be taken as a wholly Greek or wholly Roman idea. Although it is inscribed into the elite political circles of late Republican Rome, Aeolism like much of

¹⁵⁵ See further Gera 2004 and Chapter Three.

Hellenistic literary culture thrives at the boundaries between groups.

Conclusions

There seems to be a world of difference between ancient thought on language origins generally, as discussed in preceding Chapters, and thought on the origins of an individual language like Latin. The origin of language in general attracted serious and sustained attention from Greek and Roman intellectuals, and subsequently has been of continued and contentious interest in the course of Western thought. By the late Republic, the scholar P. Nigidius Figulus can call it a ‘famous philosophical dispute’, about which he and others have ‘pronounced many arguments’. Even among what little has survived, such ‘arguments’ are abundant and varied, including more or less incidental comments (e.g. Horace *Serm.* 1.3.96-106), fuller sustained treatments (e.g. Lucretius *DRN* 5.1028-1090 and Epicurus *Hdt.* 75-76), and dedicated works (Plato *Crat.*); as the examples show, the arguments are spread throughout poetry and prose, both Greek and Latin. All of this justifies the OCD in characterizing language origins as one of the two main philosophical questions addressed by ancient linguistics.¹⁵⁶

The contrast with the origin of Latin could not be plainer. Nonetheless there is much to be gained from a comparison of the origin of Latin, in particular, with the origin of language. Indeed, although the latter does not seem to have led directly to the

¹⁵⁶ OCD s.v. linguistics, ancient §2: “To what extent was language a natural or inborn capacity of human beings, and how far was it the result of a tacit social contract?” These questions and their implications are considered in the text. The other question concerned the ratio of regularity (*analogy*) and irregularity (*anomaly*) in derivation, inflection, and usage; see e.g. Dihle 1957. These philosophical problems are to be contrasted with the more practical problems which later occupied ancient linguistics (especially at Alexandria): literary criticism and language pedagogy (usually of Greek).

former, it did provide one important context. By examining the history of ancient thought on the origin of language, we may thus come closer to a historical understanding of ancient ideas about individual languages and their roles in the world. In particular, it becomes clear that both the general question and the more specific ideas about Latin increasingly over time served similar goals: the expression of ideas about group contact and overlap and about individual identity. However, between the heyday of philosophical interest in general language origins and the apex of inquiry into the origin of Latin, the types of groups involved had changed: from the broadest groups (humans, animals, and hybrids), to principally ethnic groups (e.g. Egyptians v. Phrygians in Psammetichus' experiment, and more usually Greeks against all others), to smaller social circles overlapping within an increasingly shared cultural (Hellenistic) and political (Roman) milieu.

Despite the pervasive Greek component of Greco-Roman culture, Aeolism cannot be a completely Greek idea. In the first place, the authors espousing it were not all or even mostly ethnically Greek. The majority had come to Rome from the east, including e.g. Syria and Phoenicia. They all of course participated in the 'Greek culture' common to the educated class across the Mediterranean basin; but this does not make them or Aeolism 'Greek' any more than participation in that common culture guaranteed adherence to Aeolism among the many other attested linguists. Further, the Aeolists were (mostly) politically Roman, having arrived at Roman citizenship through freedman status or otherwise. Near Eastern in origin, Greek in education, politically Roman – the Aeolists' complex and individual identities make identification of Aeolism as a straightforwardly Greek idea quite impossible. What is more, not even everyone who shared those three traits of origin, education, and political status were Aeolists.

Other attested linguists, both professional instructors (*grammatici, rhetorici*) and ‘laymen’, had different ideas or, it seems, none about the origin of Latin. Thus even the Aeolists’ shared characteristics are not enough to explain the ancient idea.

The linguistic situation and its imagined form were complex. Nominally distinct groups overlapped in prehistorical essence and contemporary practice, an overlap recognized in ideas about language origins and elsewhere (the Romans and their language were originally Greek) but in constant tension with equally widespread desire for ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ purity (Greek and Latin, like Greeks and Romans, are different in many ways, and should be: a chauvinistic ἑλληνισμός is imitated in *latinitas*). These facts, their representations, and the tensions surrounding them reached from the lowest levels of Roman society, where Greek was *lingua franca*, to the highest. The emperor Augustus is reported as hosting a party where the guests were obliged to dress and speak against type: “the rule was that Romans had to use Greek dress and speech and *vice versa*” (*lege proposita ut Romani Graeco, Graeci Romano habitu et sermone uterentur*; Suet. *Aug.* 98.3). The inversion works at all only if the boundary between the two groups still exists. But it also shows how the groups are taken, at least in jest, to depend on few criteria.¹⁵⁷ Such permeability was disquieting to many ancient authors, and was a fact which the jocular atmosphere and certainly limited duration of Augustus’

¹⁵⁷ This permeability of course parallels that found between other ancient groups, especially once ‘Greekness’, or hellenicity, changed from being grounded in ethnicity, i.e. shared descent, to cultural traits (*paideia*) (Hall 2002, 172-228). The easy acquisition of the latter meant that the differences between identities became surmountably ‘analogic’, rather than exclusively ‘digital’; idem 179-180 (drawing on Eriksen 1993 for terminology). Thus “the Hellenistic culturally-based definition of Hellenic identity endured well into the period of Roman rule” (idem 224).

event may have done little to dispel.¹⁵⁸ One wonders if any of the guests objected, had trouble deciding which set of customs to adopt, or if, indeed, there were present any exponents of Aeolism, who got to the unspoken heart of the matter by wearing Greek clothes but speaking Latin, all the while claiming thus to be speaking Greek.

¹⁵⁸ The party is reminiscent of the more dramatic social inversions on carnival days in early modern Europe; see the penetrating analysis of Bakhtin 1984.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has considered ancient Greek and Roman ideas on the origin of language, grouped under a series of themes: the traditional philosophical division of ideas on language origins into ‘conventionalist’ and ‘naturalist’ camps (Chapter One); the biology, physiology, and psychology of language (Chapter Two); the relationships among language, human culture, and their imagined origins, glottogony and anthropogony (Chapters Three and Four); linguistic diversity and multilingualism (Chapters Four and Five); and the origin of a specific language, Latin (Chapter Six). This thematic organization is intended to show that ideas about language origins, more or less regardless of their generality or specificity, were “good to think with” about contemporary mytho-social concerns distinct from language and even from ‘linguistics’ as such.

I have hoped to show how approaching the evidence from a perspective different from that of language science or linguistics may prove productive. Although there is value in the new models of ancient language science, which highlight the emergence of a linguistic discipline in the first century BC, there is also room to explore both non-scientific ideas about language in antiquity (since ‘folk linguistics’ was intertwined with *Sprachwissenschaft*) and the non-scientific, even non-linguistic uses to which they were put. Some ancient thinkers may have started asking linguistic questions for their own sake, and may thus have started to construct linguistics as a discipline (albeit with important differences from modern linguistics). But most of the available ancient interest in language origins, like much of ancient thought on language generally, was

either explicitly practical (e.g. criticism, philology, and translation) or implicitly broader than the rubric 'language science' seems to allow. Ancient thought on language origins was never a discipline, but a topic addressed in different discourses, and which was itself used, like a myth, to address other issues.

The primary issue is that of group membership and organization. The order of the Chapters above is intended to highlight what may be regarded as a series of concentric circles, with greater specificity of language corresponding to more limited membership in ever more closely defined groups. At the same time, as I have tried to emphasize throughout, no group thus described is completely closed, and even in cases where the principles of inclusion and exclusion are seemingly quite clear examples may be cited of marginal membership and even outright overlap. For example, although human language is increasingly viewed over time as being grounded in human physiology, that physiology is not entirely unique to the human animal, being shared by birds and half-human, half-animal creatures, as well as being susceptible to introduction to other pure animals through divine intervention (not to mention portents). If accounts of language origins represent an original state of ideally distinct groups, they also reflect ancient authors' awareness of the impermanence and permeability of group boundaries.

The historical fact of group overlap, as well as its continued possibility in the present, assumed great importance because of the deeply felt connection between language and identity. From the earliest texts on, individuals are identified as members of groups partially and sometimes principally on the basis of shared language. This feeling found one famous expression in the idea that to be Greek is above all to speak Greek, with even the Athenians on some accounts beginning as barbarians (Pelasgians) and becoming Greek through their adoption of the language. No less telling is the

converse, that Greeks whose language has been altered by group contact have become 'barbarized'.

This perceived fluidity of group identity, in past and present, dependent on an innate but also acquired trait like language, implies that an individual's identity is a matter less of essence than of practice. Language may be inherent and (mostly) unique to humankind, but which language one spoke was, for most authors, a matter of upbringing that could nonetheless be altered, even as an adult, by contact with foreigners and their tongues. Exiles like Ovid and the Athenians referred to by Solon attest to individual examples of what must have been quite common contact-induced change. Identity in antiquity was not, as it were, univocal.

Especially striking is how language change and its consequences for identity-as-practice complicate traditionally simple group labels and undermine the boundaries between them. Reactions to individual changes run the gamut, but in general the ancient authors' tone is troubled. For example, categories seemingly as stable as 'Roman' and 'Greek' were recognized, albeit grudgingly, as showing a deep interpenetration in practice: although traditions of cultural priority tended to make Greek the source and Roman the recipient, passage between the two was available enough to be a theme at parties. Horace may have had it right in suggesting that *Graecia capta* captured her captor in turn, only underemphasizing how continuous and profound was the process: Romans became Greeks as a matter of culture, learning Greek as more than a lark; while Greeks became Romans as politics demanded, speaking and writing Latin in official contexts even in the Hellenistic East. In both cases something as seemingly essential as 'national' identity proved malleable in practice, at times in terms of a single trait, especially language. The overlap of Greek and Roman found its most striking expression in Aeolism, the idea that Latin was a dialect of Greek. None of this is to say

that differences did not remain important, or that authors and groups did not strive to differentiate themselves, for example through the propagation of cultural stereotypes or through ‘competitive imitation’, *aemulatio*. But awareness of such fluid identity and thus group overlap must have been widespread, especially in the face of a societal multilingualism that was more pervasive and unavoidable than is revealed by the sources with their mere two literary languages, *utraque lingua*, and mostly elite concerns.

Thought about the origin of language provided a means to address these and other complex and contradictory issues, issues that inevitably arose in a world characterized by group overlap and interpenetration but which also cherished ideals of lineal identity. Just as etymology was used to discover the original and essential meanings of words, so too were ideas on language origins useful for probing (or inventing) the original status of groups in the past and thus their ideal organization and morality in the present. The parallel has a striking consequence: just as etymologies could be misleading, or show surprising connections between two or more ostensibly distinct languages (a point made with fine comic force by Plato), so too did research into language origins necessarily show that traditional groups, from humans and animals down to Greeks and Romans, were separated by boundaries fuzzier than not, more permeable than not. Thus ideas about language origins allowed for the articulation of otherwise ineffable and disturbing realities.¹

Specifics aside, the broader lesson for ancient studies is a related ‘unthinking’ of traditional categories of analysis, abandoning traditional binary oppositions in favor of

¹ Cf. Buxton 1994, 204: “myths often fulfil the role of pathfinders, testing out boundaries, imagining the consequences of interferences between categories.”

'choosing not to choose' among fuzzier logics of complementarity and overlap. In this way may we move past such supposed oppositions as 'conventional' and 'natural' accounts of language origins, and, more broadly, that between 'language science' or *Sprachwissenschaft* and 'folk linguistics', the latter allowing a fuller exploration of ancient linguistic thought. Only by taking the evidence on its own terms, contradictory though they may be, may classics continue to approach the ancient world in all its rich diversity. I hope to have shown the productivity of this approach in exploring a relatively underexplored but rich area, the origin of language in ancient thought.

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