

## **Conversation Analysis in Roman comedy. PRAGMATICS, PROSODY, and PERFORMANCE**

The project aims at investigating what rules governed stage talk in Roman comedy, here viewed from the different perspectives: as a record of communication between characters (within the play's world) and between actors (during the performance). The best-preserved source for the study of comedy in Latin are texts by two authors, Plautus (c. 250-184 BC) and Terence (c. 195-159 BC). The collection of twenty-six (almost) entirely transmitted comedies by Plautus and Terence is extremely valuable for linguists. The dialogues of these works imitate the style of colloquial Latin – as we can assume – used by the playwrights themselves and their audiences. Theatre historians, on the other hand, read the texts – with their specific idiom and metrical structure – looking for traces of the ancient practice of staging comedies by professional groups of actors, at a time when there was no permanent theatre building in Rome. Our project seeks to approach the surviving scripts of Plautus and Terence by combining both approaches, of Linguistics and Theatre Studies. We want to point out the mutual influences and interdependencies between elements imitating the colloquial speech of the Romans and mechanisms belonging rather to the conventional world of performance, which – among other things – may have facilitated the interaction between actors.

To study stage talk we will use methods of Conversation Analysis, a set of tools for describing social interaction. This methodology, developed in the 1960s by H. Sacks, E.A. Schegloff and E. Jefferson, gives priority to rigorous data analysis in an attempt to uncover the "machinery" of communication routines. Thus, conversational analysis can provide us with a single set of tools to study different aspects of stage speech, strongly demarcated in the work of philologists to date. The artistic aspects of the text, together with its elaborate metrical structure, sometimes distance the more restrictive linguists, inspiring distrust of the linguistic data being analysed. It turns out, however, that even in a metrically recited (or sung) comedy text, the division into lines often coincides with the end of the speech or falls at places where the speakers take meaningful pauses, which may become a signal triggering action of the other performer.

Thanks to methods of Conversational Analysis that emphasize the multimodal aspect of communication, we can better understand the principle by which comedy characters take, yield, or lose speaking turns in a conversation. The same tools can also indicate how the actors knew that the moment to deliver their lines or perform another action was finally approaching. Previous studies of Roman comedy suggest that a theatre troupe had only a few weeks to memorise the text and the stage movement, while during the performances there must have been moments of improvisation. According to our project, an adequate analysis of the preserved scripts can reach different levels of stage interaction, including the way actors cooperate and coordinate during a performance.

To do this, we will first build a database of stage talk, distinguishing between different modes of communication: dialogues or various ways of speaking to the audience (monologues and asides). By using a tagging system we will describe the wider context of each interaction, its participants and their relationships, and we will annotate individual speech actions (e.g. interruptions, topic changes, orders). After tagging the most important elements of metrical structure (e.g. colon boundaries, verse endings, and elisions), we will indicate possible pauses and changes in the rhythm of speech. Finally, by using the database with transcripts of Plautus' and Terence's stage talk (later available online), we will explore possible links between conversational structure, actors' interaction and rhythmic aspects of speaking. We will identify the many interplays between Pragmatics, prosody, and stagecraft in Roman comedy.