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Speech in Ancient Greek Narrative

Mathieu de Bakker and Irene de Jong

The chapters in this volume have amply demonstrated the ubiquity and variety of speech in Greek narrative. There is no narrative genre without speech, and hardly any narrative text without speech. This need not surprise in the literature of a culture which loved theatre and performance, and also invented (and amply practised) the art of rhetoric.

The speeches bring us, obviously, the words of men, but also, less obviously, of women. Although women in antiquity had virtually no public voice (except in religion), in literature they make themselves heard right from the start as heroines (e.g. Andromache or Penelope), later as historical characters (e.g. Artemisia or Livia Augusta) and in the novels even as protagonists (e.g. Chloe or Callirhoe). Gods, likewise, are seen speaking, to each other and to mortals, and this must have been reassuring; daily life mainly allowed people a one-sided form of communication with the gods (prayer), the only exception being oracles, which did provide divine answers to mortal questions.

Greek narrative showcases a wide variety in types of speech: prayer, supplication, lament, challenge, vaunt, soliloquy, oath, oracle, paraenesis, message, dialogue and monologue. The epic genre is open to the widest variety, followed by drama, while historiography increasingly favours the public oration, and the novel shows a predilection for private dialogue, soliloquy, prayer, and lament. Philosophy, instead, focuses on one type, dialogue, as its vehicle of instruction.

Greek narratives adhere to the convention of shared language (all characters speak the language of the narrative, in our case Greek) which characterizes all narrative (and film). Only very occasionally does a narrator draw attention to the fact that actually a foreign character speaks a different language or, on the same note, explains how characters can communicate with each other, either because there are interpreters (Herodotus, novel) or because they know a foreign language. The latter happens with obvious narrative effect (once) in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and Apollonius of Rhodes, and repeatedly in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* and Heliodorus. The increase in these two later texts seems more routinely, and arguably reflects an increased bilingualism in late antiquity.

Speeches are presented in various modes of speech. Narrators may quote them as if they were spoken by their characters (direct discourse, DD), but can also make themselves more overt in presenting them in indirect discourse

(ID), which allows them to insert comments, and to highlight their choices in selecting or summarizing their content. Narrators can also only briefly indicate a speech (via a record of speech act, RSA) with or without a reference to its content, and finally merely suggest the presence of speeches when describing actions that imply the use of spoken discourse (implied speech).

It is clear that in Greek narrative DD is chosen to represent words that somehow are of prime importance for the narrative: because they propel forward or motivate the plot, because they inform us about the character of a person, or because they structure the narrative. But the correlation of direct speech and importance does not entail that ID or RSA would only present less important speech. These modes of speech may be chosen out of narrative economy but their more blurred status (it is the narrator who summarizes what a character said) also allows for various subtle uses.

Direct speech pretends to represent the *ipsissima verba* of characters and this claim is uncontroversial in fictional genres or genres which are supported by the Muses, such as epic or lyric. But it poses a problem for the historians, who are only too aware that they can never present what was really said by persons living in a different age and often in a different place than they themselves. From Thucydides onwards, some of them feel the need to account for their habit to include speeches all the same, which they took over from their epic predecessors as recorders of the past. Furthermore, DD can be used to present speeches that are ascribed to a group of people ('collective speeches') or that are delivered more than once ('iterative speeches'). In these cases, too, we are one step removed from *ipsissima verba*.

Narrators tend to alternate the modes of speech in the course of their narrative, but they may also do so within the course of one dialogue. Such angled narration of dialogue enables the narrator to foreground one of its participants and thereby, for instance, point up the (im)balance of power between interlocutors. Narrators can even alternate speech modes within the same speech ('mixed speeches'), and thereby highlight the one part of the speech at the expense of the other.

The length of speeches in DD can vary from a single sentence, the form mostly chosen to present one-liners that cap an anecdote, to long set-speeches. Epic and historiography in particular show a tendency towards the inclusion of longer speeches. Speeches of spectacular length are for instance Odysseus' *Apoloioi* in the *Odyssey* or the speeches of Cicero, Calenus or Agrippa in the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio. In general, longer speeches are inserted in primary narratives told by an external narrator.

Whenever characters start quoting words ('speech in speech'), these speeches tend to be much shorter. Such 'clipped' speeches are the hallmark of epic, the Homeric hymns, choral lyric, and narratives in tragedy, and serve

to mark dramatic highpoints or crucial words. But speech in speech is also used to express what others might say ('imaginary speech'). In Homer, imaginary speech reveals the heroes' fixation on status and 'what others think about them'. In oratory, philosophy and the novel, however, the trope acquires argumentative force.

An important device to frame speeches and to steer our interpretation of them, is attributive discourse, the (often short) introductions and cappings of speeches. Originally a device necessary to separate narrator-text from character-text in the oral performance of the epics, narrators saw the potential of these *inquit*-formulas. Homer himself already alternates formulaic speech-introductions with individual ones indicating tone or emotion. Occasionally, the historians hint at their mediating role as narrators by introducing and capping the speeches in their works with pronouns like *τοιαῦδε* or *τοιαῦτα* ('words of this kind, of such a kind') instead of *τάδε* ('these words'). In choral lyric, meanwhile, the absence of cappings may lead to a deliberate blending of the voices of narrator and character, and can therefore be seen as a metaleptic device. In oratory, too, attributive discourse is sometimes suppressed with similar metaleptic results, which creates the impression of free indirect discourse (FID). In other cases, however, the attributive discourse is deliberately positioned within the speech to emphasize a word or mark a transition ('intercalated attributive discourse'), or it becomes the focus of attention itself, when a speech is narrated with multiple references by the narrator to the various ways in which it was phrased ('partitioned speech'). Some narrators, finally, have come to consider attributive discourse a burden: Platonic dialogue with its infinite number of speech turns abandoned them, thus anticipating our modern novel. This is part of a more general tendency for dialogues to be narrated in an increasingly natural way. Taking their cue from drama, authors like Xenophon and Plato develop effective ways to represent philosophical debates with minimal, or no, intrusion of the narrator. Their influence can be seen in the works of the biographers (e.g. Plutarch, Philostratus) and in the Greek novels.

On the whole, Greek narrators use speech in their narratives to give relief to the events, highlight or dramatize crucial episodes and decisions, portray their characters, single out important thoughts and *bon mots*, report debates, and show the various ways in which interaction between humans (and also gods) contributed to the events. It may be taken as characteristic for Greek literature that speech so often takes the form of persuasion or deceit. The two often are two sides of the same coin: persuasive speech serves to make a false tale believable. Greek narrative displays a remarkably flexible use of speech, and developed all kinds of stylistic means to include it. This way it produced a lasting influence on all later literature to come.