

If the “discursive formations” were identified by Foucault (1989) as the means through which identity is shaped in our society, writing constitutes the most positive language performance that can be observed from antiquity (Adams 2003, 6).

Funerary inscriptions constitute an attractive ground for individual expression in eternalizing the memory of the deceased based on self-representation. This paper addresses the use of the Latin language in funerary inscriptions in Greece during the Roman age (2nd BCE – 3rd CE), demonstrating how language choices can be a fundamental aspect of identity expression.

Despite the general predominance of a Western-Italian perspective in the scholarship, the last decades witnessed an increased interest in Graeco-Latin bilingualism and linguistic change also from a Greek point of view. The work of J.N. Adams (2003) can be considered the first systematical contribution on the topic; but other studies have focused on Graeco-Roman bilingualism (Biville et Al. 2008; Rochette 2010, pp. 284-289 with further bibliography) and its socio-historical implications (e.g. Rizakis 2021).

For my paper, I will consider both monolingual inscriptions in Latin and bilingual inscriptions using the Greek and Latin languages. In bilingual inscriptions, studying the two versions of the same text in parallel can show how similar concepts may be adapted to each language, with different outcomes. Differences between Greek and Latin are often indicative of diverse cultural backgrounds. Information can be selected according to the language, in a way that not only the text on the stone but also what is not inscribed can become, for us, a valuable source of information. For example, in the bilingual epitaph of Q. Avilius from Rheneia (*CIL*, III 7242), the epithet *Lanuvine* (“from the city of Lanuvium”) in Latin is paired with the ethnic “Rhomaios” in the Greek text. In this case, the Latin text consciously expresses more details regarding the identity of the deceased, highlighting the deep interconnection between language and identity expression. In other inscriptions, attempts to translate a word into another language can show the will to unify the two versions for both the Latin and Greek audiences, smoothing cultural distances. Where already existing words were not considered suitable, new words were sometimes created. In yet other cases, the contribution of a second language is limited to the script (“transliterated” texts), or formulas. Finally, errors and misspellings not only show potential tensions between the original intentions and the effective manufacture of the monument but also a certain distance between the deceased’s cultural background and the local context.

The use of the Latin language in the Greek world can itself be considered a clear ethnic statement. In addition, the ways Latin was used, also in comparison with the Greek, can help us understand the dynamics and strategies adopted at different points in the encounter between Latin and Greek speakers. Starting from the funerary epigraphical evidence, this paper explores in which ways identity can be expressed, both consciously and unconsciously, through language, defining a range of possibilities as wide as all the different facets of identity.

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