

Sicilicissitat

Greek and Latin in contact in Roman Sicily.

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Sicily, a famously multilingual environment in the Classical period, went through a deep Hellenization during the Hellenistic Age. Although there is evidence for bilingualism with Punic and for some influence of local languages, this process made Greek the majority language of the island.

This situation did not change suddenly after the Roman conquest, since there were no large migrations and settlers from Italy in the Republican period. Even later on in the Imperial period, the Romans never showed interest in actively enacting any linguistic policies in Sicily, or elsewhere in the empire for that matter.

Nevertheless, Sicily gradually underwent a ‘fluid Romanization’ (TRIBULATO 2012), which became more patent at the beginning of the Imperial period. As a result of this process, we can see a radical increase in Latin epigraphic evidence in Sicily from the 1st c. AD (PRAG 2002). This increase, however, should not be interpreted as evidence for a corresponding collapse of the Greek language. Instead, there is a roughly comparable number of both public and private Greek inscriptions to the previous period, which suggests a degree of consistency.

My aim here is to verify the extent of bilingualism in Roman Sicily (see CONSANI 2006, TRIBULATO 2008 and KORHONEN 2008) through ancient textual sources and inscriptions, with specific attention to diatopic variation. Since my focus will be on epigraphic material, I shall discuss bilingualism in a twofold manner: first, I will analyse actual bilingual inscriptions, which are a small but representative group (e.g. CIL 10. 7064 = IG XIV 472; CIL 10. 7078 = IG XIV 491); secondly, I will look at relevant phenomena of interference, both epigraphic and linguistic, throughout the corpus of Greek inscription from Roman Sicily that I am currently building.

In particular, the diachronic change in the usage of formulae in funerary inscriptions demonstrates a common pattern of development and a similar epigraphic culture, though never fully overlapping (KORHONEN 2004). Despite the relevance of formulae, which can blur our perception of actual language contact, we observe a number of common tendencies through the epigraphic evidence, which I will put into dialogue with features shared by Greek and Latin.

Ultimately, my goal is to offer some observations about language contact and language identity in Sicily, based on a systematic review of the available evidence, in order to determine the degree and the spatial and temporal reference frames of bilingualism in Sicily.

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