

Doing Conversation Analysis in Latin: The Case of Hedging

Rules underlying conversation and linguistic phenomena specific to interaction, have received a lot of attention, especially in the areas of conversation analysis¹ and pragmatics of conversation²: we now know that, while superficially messy, conversation follows a set of underlying rules which all speakers know and are in principle expected to adhere to: rules about when to take the conversational floor; desirable and undesirable responses; strategies to convey one's undivided attention to one's co-interactant, etc. When these rules are intentionally or unintentionally breached, for instance when an undesirable response is given—such as declining an invitation or providing an uninformative response—the situation calls for various mitigating strategies to avoid giving offence. One of these strategies is *hedging*—modifying one's commitment to the truth of one's statement.

In this paper, I shall look at hedging behaviour in Latin. Hedging has received some attention in Latin, notably in terms of politeness and language characterization,³ but less from the point of view of Conversation Analysis. Using such sources as Plautus, Terence, Cicero and Petronius, and methodology developed within Conversation Analysis, I will address the following questions:

- Which expressions are used as hedges in Latin? Are they similar to hedges in other languages?
- In what contexts do they occur—i.e., which antecedents trigger them?
- Does the choice of hedging depend on the context of production (addressee, purpose of production, time) or genre (comedy, correspondence, novel)?
- What, if anything, does hedging tell us about spoken Latin? In other words, is Conversation Analysis applicable to Latin sources?
- Do the sources in Latin reflect hedging behaviour which has been shown to obtain on other languages?

Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research has shown that hedging behaviour depends on cultural and cognitive factors. To gain a better understanding of hedges (linguistic devices) and hedging (communicative strategy), it is important that large bodies of data in different languages and cultures be studied. Latin, a large-corpus language, provides a wealth of material to study this phenomenon in detail and thus enrich our understanding of cognitive underpinnings of hedging, of cultural differences and commonalities, and of the interaction of

¹ See, for instance, Sacks, H., Schegloff, E., and Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation. *Language* 50, 696–735.

² See, for instance, Haugh, M. (2012). Conversational interaction. In K. Allan & K. Jaszczolt (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Pragmatics* (Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics, pp. 251-274). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Barrios-Lech, Peter (2016). *Linguistic Interaction in Roman Comedy*. Cambridge, Cambridge: University Press: 142–165;

Mencacci, Francesca (2022). 'Text as Interaction: *Vt Mihi (Quidem) Videtur* as a Hedging Device in Latin Literary Texts.' In *Politeness in Ancient Greek and Latin*, edited by Luis Unceta Gómez and Łukasz Berger, 103–126. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

hedges and genre. This paper is intended as a contribution to the growing cross-cultural body of research on hedging.