

# Athenians Talk Like This, but Thessalians Talk Like This: What the Attic Plays Tell Us About Sociolinguistics in Classical Greek Discourse

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The Ancient Greek plays have been discussed by literary and linguistic scholars alike for millennia. In the past decades, with the rise of sociolinguistics and historical sociolinguistics, the gaze of some researchers has become fixed on the social information embedded in these classical works. Aristophanes in particular has been studied for his wide array of dialect usage [1]. Much is known about the culture and social stratification of Ancient Greece, including some documentation of language attitudes [2]. We propose to construct a corpus of all of the complete attested Ancient Greek plays, in which we will tag all dialogue for speaker and listener social demographics—gender, age, social status, ethnicity.

As for the nature of our queries, we will focus first on discourse particles. There are several frequently occurring particles in Ancient Greek that serve various functions. One such particle,  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  is multifaceted in its usage and often serves as a simple continuative marker. It can also be used as a conjunction and in the common construction  $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ldots\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ , which roughly translates as ‘on one hand...on the other hand.’ The various and frequent nature of this particle in particular will be useful in our research as the authors of the plays may at some level—be it conscious or otherwise—use this discourse particle, and others like it, to indicate some social meaning.

We will query the corpus first for the frequency of such particles, focusing on the most common, and analyze the social information of each particle’s most frequent users. At this point, we will analyze the function that the particles serve in the speech of the characters to determine if there is statistically significant variation therein. This will give us insight into the minds of the authors of the Ancient Greek plays. We will learn if these particles were, in the minds of the playwrights, used more or less by any particular social group or dialect.

## References

- [1] Colvin, Stephen. 2000. “The language of non-Athenians in old comedy”. In: *The rivals of Aristophanes*, ed. by David F. Harvey and J. Wilkins, 285-298. Duckworth.
- [2] Crespo, Emilio. 2006. “The language policy of the Athenian state in the fifth century BC”, *IL* 29:91-101.