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## The Noise-lovers: Cultures of Speech and Sound in Second-Century Rome

*James Uden*

At an unknown point in the mid-second century, a Christian orator from Syria delivered a bold and linguistically audacious oration, warning his audience of the seductive dangers of noise. ‘Make sure you are not swept away by the assemblies of those who are noise-lovers, not wisdom-lovers [φιλοψόφων... οὐ φιλοσόφων]’, urges Tatian.<sup>1</sup> These noise-lovers, he says, ‘lay down opinions’ [δογματίζουσιν] that are self-contradictory, and each ‘makes proclamations’ [ἐκπεφώνηκε] as they occur to him. The verbs make Greek philosophers seem not like fellow intellectuals but like a political force, an institution, bearing down upon the solitary dissident with the weight of their cultural prestige. Tatian presents himself as an outsider, someone who has turned away from the noise of the crowd and towards the Truth. But he remains fixated on sound. The ‘noise-lovers’ are mistaken not only in what they say, but in *how* they say it. They speak spontaneously, automatically, saying whatever pops into their heads (κατὰ δὲ τὸ ἐπελθόν, 3.3).<sup>2</sup> Tatian will go on, later in the oration, to use all sorts of rare and invented Greek words in order to describe his enemies’ speech. They babble, gabble, burble, chatter, natter – all manner of inarticulate noise. Yet his own warning rings strikingly with its own verbal sound: the sentence is structured around the jingle between *philosophos* and the rhyming coinage *philopsophos*, an adjective taken from his teacher Justin Martyr but used, obviously, for its sound.<sup>3</sup> Tatian’s speech is highly self-conscious, signaling participation in a broader second-century culture in which language was used to test and express identities in new ways throughout the empire. When he urges his audience to reject the γλωσσομανία of

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<sup>1</sup> *Oratio ad Graecos* 3.3. I use the text of Whittaker 1982. The work is dated variously to a period when Tatian was a student of Justin in Rome, at around 160 CE (Hunt 2003: 3), or to a later period when Tatian had returned to the East, after 176 CE (Grant 1988: 113-4).

<sup>2</sup> For the expression (they speak ‘as it befalls’ them) as a hostile description of others’ speech, cf. Origen, *Cels.* 1.40, Greg. Nyss. *Contr. Eun.* 3.8.29.

<sup>3</sup> Just. 2 *Apol.* 3.1; Nasrallah 2010: 72. Justin used the word to describe a single person, the Cynic philosopher Crescens; in Tatian it is a charge against the entire surrounding intellectual culture.

Greek philosophers, their ‘speech-madness’, it is significant that – so far as we can tell – he invented the term himself. Tatian’s linguistic ingenuity, amid a competitive world of words, is a complex statement of both difference and belonging.<sup>4</sup>

Other chapters in this volume, especially those of Nasrallah and Geue, will emphasize the importance of written documents – authorized or forged, true or false – in communicating authority and ideas in the second-century empire. This chapter explores interactivity off the page through the more unstable media of speech and sound. Although Tatian subverts and questions many of the assumptions of elite Greek and Roman culture of his period, he nonetheless identifies himself with a broader archetype familiar from many Latin and Greek texts of the mid-second century. He is what we might call a ‘deliberate speaker’, who presents his own speech in a particular way: he speaks not spontaneously or instinctively but with deliberation and care, with the weight of study and reading behind his words, drawing attention to his own sophistication and correctness. The deliberate speaker draws attention to his words *qua* words. Each element of his vocabulary is the building block of his identity, articulating his history, his community, his in-group and out-group; and those against whom he defines himself are accused of merely babbling, speaking nonsense, producing mere noise. In this chapter, I draw a comparison between the Greek orator Tatian and the Latin rhetorician Fronto in order to highlight ideals of sound and speech that cut across barriers of language, geography, ideology and religion in the era. Literary figures draw attention to their speech and word use in order to express their sense of belonging to distinct groups, but it is the broader valorization of the word itself that makes language a pre-eminent tool of self-description in the second-century empire.

Scholars in the past have argued for the need to keep separate the microcultures of linguistic difference in our period.<sup>5</sup> My aim is not to overstate their similarity but to explore their simultaneity. I argue that the performance of values associated with deliberate speech enabled the self-definition of people in very different subject positions

<sup>4</sup> Pollux 2.107-29 lists a multitude of other words derived from γλῶττα to describe speech, but γλωσσομανία has no parallel. There are similar formations in Attic drama, which was a significant source of inspiration for Tatian. Cf. Eur. *Med.* 525: τὴν σὴν στόμαργον... γλωσσαλγίαν (‘your endlessly talking tongue-blather’) with Mastronarde 2002: 259. For a list of Tatian’s neologisms and poetic words used for the first time in prose, see Heiler 1887: 88-95.

<sup>5</sup> Swain 2004: 17-8, 39 in particular advocates for a firm distinction between elite Latin and Greek linguistic communities in the period.

in the second-century empire. As has been well studied, eloquence in Atticist circles depended on the careful imitation of classical texts at the core of the Greek canon (Swain 1996: 17-64; Kim 2010), whereas Latin literary figures of the same era showed a partiality towards rarer, ante-classical texts. The digging up of old and obscure linguistic features – a key part of Fronto’s lexical theory – was practically a definition of bad style for his Greek-speaking contemporary, Lucian (*Pseudol.* 24; *Lex.* 17; *Rhet.* 17).<sup>6</sup> But to dwell on differences is to risk obscuring important parallels. The outsider to both linguistic communities was the person whose words were fast and natural, whose speech was the product of instinct and spontaneity rather than erudition, contemplation, education, and effort. Writers who pronounce on linguistic use in the period promoted an ordered, artificial mode of language deliberately distanced from spontaneous and natural speech.

The particular self-consciousness about educated speech, which is evident in a great many texts (Latin and Greek, Christian and non-Christian), is a reflection of broader phenomena in elite intellectual culture of the second century. Shared knowledge (*paideia*), grounded in the laborious reading and study of the past, was increasingly valued as a source of cohesion for the social elite in a vast and heterogeneous political community. To become *pepaideumenos* (‘cultured’) was to become part of an in-group that ranged across geography and ethnic origin.<sup>7</sup> As a result, ethnic background, which had previously been defined in large part through linguistic difference, became less and less closely tied to cultural identity. At an earlier point in history, the question ‘what do you sound like?’ would have told an audience where you were from, who you were. To be Greek was (among other things) to speak Greek; to be non-Greek was to be a ‘barbarian’ (βάρβαρος), the producer of inarticulate sound (*ba-ba-ba*).<sup>8</sup> In the second century CE, the answer was not so easy. The intelligentsia of our period, as Richter says, ‘was composed of displaced persons: Syrians in Athens, North Africans in Rome, Greeks in Egypt’ (2011: 176). Within the expanded and cosmopolitan world of the second century, *paideia* had become a cultural currency that moved beyond ethnic borders, and

<sup>6</sup> Gellius also, on the Latin side, warns that it can be taken to excess (1.10.10).

<sup>7</sup> There is a lot of bibliography on this point, but Schmitz 1997 and Whitmarsh 2001 are pivotal, as is Eshleman 2012 on *paideia* and Christian self-definition.

<sup>8</sup> See Hall 1991: 3-13 on the word’s onomatopoeic origins and the ‘priority of the linguistic criterion in the Greeks’ self-determination of their ethnicity’.

so the sound of a person's words no longer reliably indicated ethnicity or geographical location. Instead it indicated a host of allegiances to class and cultural affiliation that were under constant renegotiation and redefinition.<sup>9</sup> A person was 'barbarous' not for any literal inability to speak Latin or Greek, nor because one was born in any particular part of the world, but because one fell – willingly or unwillingly – outside highly artificial new categories for cultural respectability linked to language. Lexicographers and rhetoricians may have used words to preserve distinctions in culture and history amid a multicultural empire, but it is above all a *rupture* in the historical correspondence between language and ethnicity that makes sound so self-conscious a means of identity creation in the second century. The immense pressure on speech to communicate a sense of belonging to the educated elite resulted in a culture of eloquence that, even when produced extemporaneously (as by the sophists), was expected to reflect deliberateness, thought, and study.

Varied forms of speech made up a diverse soundscape in the Roman world. Speakers in this period depicted themselves in written works against the backdrop of political panegyrics, scholarly debates, philosophical diatribes, and religious preaching. It was an environment surfeited with sound. Recent work in classical studies has sought to recover a better sense of this ancient phonosphere. Maurizio Bettini's influential study *Voci: Antropologia sonora del mondo antico* (2008), which draws much of its evidence from second-century texts, explores the significance Greeks and Romans attributed to animal 'speech' and the continuum they saw between natural and human sound. Shane Butler (2015) has recently argued for a mode of reading classical texts in which the sonic features of literary language are interpretable as attempts to record the timbre of ancient voices. This work on the Roman senses has not tended to have an especially political or civic focus, and yet its attention to ancient experience reminds us that communication between political actors within the empire was embodied and aural as much as it was textual and read.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as this work also shows, the studious attention to words was never entirely separate from the seductions and attractions of sound. The line

<sup>9</sup> See Lavan in this volume on the polyvalence of ethnic categories like 'Roman' and 'Greek' in our period. On this process of cultural redefinition from a satirical Roman standpoint, see Uden 2015: 86-116.

<sup>10</sup> On the limitations and possibilities of the 'sensory turn' in studies of the Roman Empire, see the chapters in Betts 2017.

between one's orderly speech and others' nonsensical babble was the object of constant contest and argument, but authors also imagine the possibility of noise communicating across the empire as a whole. Indeed, there are moving glimpses in our second-century sources of the power of sound bringing order to the world, whether in the Emperor's speech, the seductions of music, or the divine Word itself. This chapter also seeks to highlight the traces of this alternative vision, in which sound is understood not as the suspicious Other of articulate speech but as a force that can elide or traverse difference, an aspect of experience with an Imperial power all its own.

### **Educating the Deliberate Speaker: the Case of Fronto**

At the very center of Imperial power, one of the earliest letters of the rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto instructed his student, Marcus Aurelius, in the importance of carefully fashioned speech. In a well-known passage, the teacher commends his pupil for 'applying attention and hard work to digging up words from the depths' (*curam industriamque adhibes, ut verbum ex alto eruas*).<sup>11</sup> Eloquence requires trawling for, and picking out, the most appropriate words from the storehouse of Latin literature. The ideal word is one that the audience would never hope for or expect (*insperatum... atque inopinatum*), but, if it were replaced, nobody could think of one better.<sup>12</sup> The hallmarks of this rhetorical theory are deliberateness and deliberation. Fronto does not seek to encourage an effortless facility of thought or speech, nor does his ideal oratory spring forcefully from any particular cause or occasion. He seeks instead to slow down the process, to interrupt any direct flow between thought and expression. He wants his student to curate his own words. Some twenty years later, when Marcus had already become emperor, the old teacher would praise his student for never surrendering to a sort of eloquence that was automatic or spontaneous. 'Most of all, he says, 'I take joy that you never snatched up any word that occurred to you [*obvia*], but sought out the best'.<sup>13</sup> Those who speak

<sup>11</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.3.3 (van den Hout 1988: 57). Given the inconsistency in the numbering of Fronto's texts, I give the Teubner page with each citation. On the date, van den Hout 1999: 150; Davenport and Manley 2014: 21: 'one of the earliest letters... probably written in 139'.

<sup>12</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.3.57 (van den Hout 1988: 57); Holford-Strevens 2003: 134-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ad Ant. Imp.* 1.2.7 (van den Hout 1988: 89); van den Hout 1999: 224 favors 161 CE for the date.

naturally are imagined as succumbing to base physical processes, ‘gaping and yawning for a word to rain down spontaneously on to the tongue, like the Palladium from heaven’.<sup>14</sup>

Fronto had political and personal reasons for emphasizing the importance of rhetoric and shoring up his own place at court.<sup>15</sup> Yet we may still be surprised by how central he makes this sort of verbal archaeology to the emperor’s mission. As he explains in that early letter, amid an atmosphere of performance and pretense, eloquence is one skill that cannot be dissimulated or beguiled. ‘Truly’, he says, ‘in the selection and placement of words, a person is immediately brought to light, nor can anyone employ deception for long’ (*in verbis vero eligendis conlocandisque ilico dilucet nec verba dare diutius potest*).<sup>16</sup> The verb *dilucet* here recalls the adjective *dilucidus*, commonly used in rhetorical texts and even in this letter to denote ‘clear’ or ‘lucid’ speech. But, in an unparalleled turn of phrase, Fronto audaciously transforms the rhetorical term so that it has a personal subject: Marcus *himself* is ‘clarified’ or ‘brought to light’ by a slow and deliberate choice of words.<sup>17</sup> Even the selection of a single syllable will make clear (*declarat*) the discernment and knowledge of the speaker, Fronto warns, so there is real risk and ‘danger’ (*periculum*) in speech.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the teacher’s own letter, which begins with invective against the ‘half-experienced and half-learned’, provides an early version of the abuse of false or insufficient learning that will come to dominate second-century literature, whether in Aulus Gellius’ tales of disgraced grammarians, Galen’s attacks on medical rivals, Lucian’s satires on rhetorical, religious and philosophical frauds, or the castigation of faux pas by Athenaeus’ dining sophists. Scenes of this kind test not merely

<sup>14</sup> *De Eloquentia* 2.3 (van den Hout 1988: 136).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Champlin 1980: 94: ‘Fronto was unmistakably a courtier’; perhaps also in an erotic relationship with Marcus (Richlin 2006).

<sup>16</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.3.3 (van den Hout 1988: 57).

<sup>17</sup> *TLL* s.v. *diluceo* [Gudeman]; cf. Dozier 2013 on brightness as metaphor in Roman rhetoric. As other commentators observe, Fronto is himself playing with words, since the phrase to ‘employ deception’ is *verba dare* (‘to give words’); the opening *in verbis vero* may also play on Marcus’ cognomen, *Verus*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.3.4 (van den Hout 1988: 58). In his demonstration, he gives the example of *os colluere* (to ‘wash the mouth’ – a significantly physical image), and then shows that the choice of other prefixes (*pelluere*, *abluere*, *eluere*) would have exposed the speaker’s gaucherie, though they differ by only a single sound. Apuleius similarly says that he courts ‘danger’ (*periculum*) when he speaks because he knows he is judged on every single word. The need to retain his good reputation keeps him from saying anything ‘carelessly and off the top of my head’ (*neglegenter ac de summo pectore hiscere*, *Flor.* 9.5-6).

knowledge but belonging, an individual's identification with a shared vision of cultural heritage and how it should be preserved and embodied.

Fronto's ideal speech – artificial, deliberate and controlled – is also reflected in his polemic against those who embody its opposite. He associates those who fail to meet his rhetorical standards with a more elementary distinction between speech and sound, associating them with natural noise or physical processes. Philosophers who pay no attention to the style of their speech, for example, merely 'chirp' (*friguttire*), he says, whereas skilled speakers 'ring out' grandly (*clangere*).<sup>19</sup> Reviewing orators from Rome's past, he judges that too many of them 'moo' (*mugiunt*), the only such use of the verb in extant Latin to describe an orator's style.<sup>20</sup> The indulgent over-abundance of Senecan style he describes as food, 'soft and feverish little plums', and to a person *playing* with food, someone who throws his olives up in the air at a dinner-party and catches them in his mouth rather than simply eating them.<sup>21</sup> Errors in speech are also likened to a sheep's 'bleating' in a self-deprecating letter in Greek to the mother of Marcus Aurelius, Domitia Lucilla. Begging forgiveness for any word that is 'without authority or barbarous or otherwise counterfeit or not entirely Attic', Fronto likens himself to the sixth-century philosopher Anacharsis:

κοινὸν δὴ τὸ νέμεσθαι ἐμοί τε καὶ Ἀναχάρσιδι· κοινὸν οὖν ἔσται καὶ τὸ βληγᾶσθαι νεμομένοις, ὅπως ἂν τις βληγήσῃται. οὕτως μὲν δὴ καὶ τὸ βαρβαρίζειν τῷ βληγᾶσθαι προσήκασα.

Both Anacharsis and myself can graze, and both of us can bleat while we graze, just as anyone might bleat. And just like that, I've likened barbarism to bleating (*Ad M. Caes.* 2.3.5 [van den Hout 1988: 24]).

At the level of both imagery and sound, the sentence reduces speech to noise: by repeating the onomatopoeic word βληγᾶσθαι ('bleat') three times in short succession,

<sup>19</sup> *De Eloquentia* 2.13 (van den Hout 1988: 141); Fleury 2006: 109. *Clangere* is used of the sound of eagles, so both verbs could allude to the sound of birds: Bettini 2008: 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 3.17.3 (van den Hout 1988: 49). On the usage, van den Hout 1999: 135.

<sup>21</sup> *De Oratationibus* 2-3 (van den Hout 1988: 153-4).

Fronto facetiously reproduces the sort of inarticulate sound that he associates with linguistic barbarism.<sup>22</sup> Fronto's admirer Aulus Gellius would later collect words for 'prattlers, babblers, and chatterboxes' in a chapter of his *Attic Nights*, and a fragmentary passage of Fronto himself compiles Latin words for stutterers.<sup>23</sup> His harshest metaphors suggest that speech that is somehow flawed by his exacting rhetorical standards is not merely gauche or ineloquent, but barely human speech at all.

The speech ideals typified by Fronto are a crucial element in articulations of what it means to be truly Greek or Roman in this period, and his work attests to the danger of falling outside of those categories. When Fronto apologizes for any possible 'barbarism' in his letter to Domitia Lucilla – and when Marcus Aurelius playfully calls himself a 'barbarian' (*opicus*) in a letter describing Greek panegyrists – both mock the captious criticism of Attic purists in Rome.<sup>24</sup> But Fronto *was* an outsider, at least in ethnic terms. He was born in Africa, and it has been convincingly argued that his other images of self-description in the letter to Domitia (he compares himself to a hyena) draw subtle attention to his foreign origins in order to demonstrate just how convincingly he has overcome the social barriers they may have presented.<sup>25</sup> The identification with Anacharsis, who was accepted as a philosopher in Athens despite his Scythian origins and was the first foreigner to receive citizenship, is frequent among writers of the period. As Daniel Richter has demonstrated, Anacharsis became an icon in the second-century empire less for his wisdom than for his self-making: he was able to fashion himself as Greek, just as innumerable foreigners in this new age could fashion themselves as Greek – or Roman – through an ever more careful and refined appropriation of culture and speech.<sup>26</sup> Fronto's own career is a stunning testament to his success at this endeavour. Decades later the emperor would compliment him on his extraordinary *elegantia* by saying that 'only you are speaking Latin, and the rest of us are speaking neither Latin nor

<sup>22</sup> The verb is only found in Aristophanes before the Hellenistic period, usually of the sound of sheep but once to describe the wailing of babies (*Vesp.* 570): Taillardat 1962: 275.

<sup>23</sup> Gell. 1.15.20 (*locutuleios et blaterones et linguaces*); Fronto, *De Eloquentia* 4.1 (van den Hout 1988: 146-7).

<sup>24</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 2.11.2 (van den Hout 1988: 31). Elsewhere, Marcus describes *Attici* as irritating and self-satisfied (*Additamentum* 7.2 [van den Hout 1988: 249]).

<sup>25</sup> Keulen 2014: 131-4.

<sup>26</sup> Richter 2011: 160-76.

Greek'.<sup>27</sup> There is a further irony in the letter to Domitia in Fronto's description of malapropisms as 'without authority' or 'counterfeit' (ἄκυρον... ἀδόκιμον); for although the comparison of vocabulary to coinage is found in other contemporary texts,<sup>28</sup> it was surely a live metaphor in a letter addressed to the imperial family, which authorized actual currency in the empire. Fronto can playfully expose himself to linguistic criticism in this letter because, when juxtaposed against the world of politics, the image of Attic arbiters 'authorizing' vocabulary makes Greek cultural power seem distinctly unreal.

When Fronto comes to describe Roman political control, it turns out that it is very much bound up with the careful administration of words. Fronto imagines a vital connection between verbal and political order. The emperor must not combine words 'randomly' (*temere*). He should assess their 'rank, weight, age', drawing up a lexical army (the early stages of the Parthian War likely form a very real military background to the metaphor, though the letter cannot be dated with certainty).<sup>29</sup> From the 'population of all words, so to speak' (*verborum omnium, ut ita dixerim, de populo*), Fronto advises Marcus to marshal word-legions, together with word-reinforcements of word-soldiers drawn from word-volunteers. In a fragmentary section of the same letter, he speaks of 'word-forts' (*castella verborum*) and 'word-marketplaces' (*conciliabula verborum*), dotted through the Imperial word-landscape.<sup>30</sup> These are figurative images, of course, but they reflect an earnest belief that eloquence is a weapon of imperial power, a force that the emperor must cultivate and preserve. Linguistic discernment is a political virtue as much as a rhetorical one.<sup>31</sup> The power of the emperor is exercised, Fronto says, *through* and *on* words: through oral speeches to crowds, through legal rescripts that move 'throughout the world' (*per orbem terrae*), through words of praise and condemnation that 'repress the rebellious and terrify the wild'. Empire, in short, is presented and

<sup>27</sup> *Ad Ant. Imp.* 1.4.2 (van den Hout 1988: 92); on this passage, Fleury 2017: 250.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Apul. *Apol.* 38.5 of words 'struck by the Latin mint'; δόκιμος, common in Phrynichus for 'approved' vocabulary (Strobel 2009: 99), is also a technical term for legal tender (Kurke 1999: 310-3).

<sup>29</sup> *De Eloquentia* 2.1-2 (van den Hout 1988: 135-6). On the image, see Ronnick 1997: 242-4, who links it with a fragment of Cato preserved and discussed by Gellius (6.3.52).

<sup>30</sup> *De Eloquentia* 2.4 (van den Hout 1988: 136). At the end of the second century, Athenaeus (1.20B) famously dubbed Rome the 'epitome of the world', another bookish metaphor that turns the empire into text.

<sup>31</sup> Champlin 1980: 123. Cf. Pollux, who dedicates his *Onomasticon* to Commodus, and similarly depicts the emperor in his preface as the master of both politics and *paideia*.

reproduced ‘through words and letters’ (*verbis... ac litteris*).<sup>32</sup> Indeed, many of the chapters in this volume will show just how Imperial documents become charged with extratextual force in the second century, as an object of faith and a means for establishing group and individual identity.<sup>33</sup> The eloquence imagined by Fronto is the product not of inspiration or genius but of study, knowledge of history, and the maintenance of careful distinctions. Words, no less than people, must be put in rank and brought to order. In Fronto’s rhetorical vision of empire, then, the emperor is the ultimate deliberate speaker. He expresses power in the administrative arrangement of a vast world of words.

‘*Imperium*’, as Fronto also tells Marcus’ colleague Lucius Verus, is ‘a word that encompasses not just power, but speech’; and an awareness of the power of sound is never very far from his descriptions of the force of carefully ordered speech.<sup>34</sup> Imperial citizens are represented as ears to be lulled or trained: ‘everyone’s ears have been driven under the yoke and are slaves to your dear voice’, Fronto says to his young pupil.<sup>35</sup> Fronto adopts conventional comparisons from the Roman rhetorical tradition between speech and musical instruments, deriding the excessive musicality of bad style and praising the manly trumpet-blare of the ideal Roman orator. The emperor’s speech should be like a horn (*tuba*), not a pipe (*tibiae*), he advises. By contrast, the style of Seneca – the advisor of a ‘bad’ emperor – ‘tinkles’ too much like bells (*tinnulas*) and rattles like a ‘castanet’ (*crotali*).<sup>36</sup> But he innovates by likening Marcus to the mythical singer Orpheus, whose powers:

quamquam diversis nationibus convenae variis moribus inbuti, concordarent  
tamen et consuescerent et congregarentur, mites cum ferocibus, placidi cum  
violentis, quom superbis moderati, cum crudelibus timidi...<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *De Eloquentia* 2.6 (van den Hout 1988: 138).

<sup>33</sup> See Shannon-Henderson, pp. XXX, Nasrallah, pp. XXX.

<sup>34</sup> *Ad Verum Imp.* 2.12 (van den Hout 1988: 123): *Imperium autem non potestatis tantummodo vocabulum sed etiam orationis est.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.2.3 (van den Hout 1988: 55).

<sup>36</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 2.1 (van den Hout 1988: 35); *De Orat.* 3, 10 (van den Hout 1988: 154, 157). On the musical metaphors, see Wille 1967: 503-11; Fleury 2006: 104-20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ad M. Caes.* 4.1.1 (van den Hout 1988: 53).

...bring harmony and community and togetherness to strangers, though they belong to different nations and are educated with varying customs – the meek with the wild, the peaceful with the violent, the reserved with the boastful, the fearful with the cruel....

The ability of Marcus to reconcile his teacher with another man (Julianus)<sup>38</sup> offers an immediate context for the comparison, although the opening of the letter is mostly missing. But the political language clearly outlines a broader ideal for the emperor, in which the ability of Orpheus to calm wild animals through music becomes a symbol for the emperor's ability to unify peoples in the empire through eloquence, and a celebration of the orator's art.<sup>39</sup> Later, when Marcus is emperor, Fronto assures him that the *senatus populusque Romanus* listen to his speeches with 'diligence, good will and pleasure', their passionate love increasing with the sound of his voice.<sup>40</sup> Sound carries. The power of the emperor must move beyond the arrangement of individual words to harness the force of verbal noise. 'Even a lightning bolt would fail to terrify', warns Fronto, 'if it struck without thunder'.<sup>41</sup>

### **Speech and Imperial Interaction: Tatian's *Oration to the Greeks***

When we return from Fronto to Tatian, we are not charting direct contact between the two authors, nor are we following a trail back to an original source. Instead, the goal is to demonstrate the extent to which a similar self-consciousness about speech had permeated the empire in the mid-second century CE and became a means of self-authorization and competition in different cultural and religious communities.<sup>42</sup> Like Fronto, Tatian casts

<sup>38</sup> See van den Hout 1999: 145 on his identity.

<sup>39</sup> Fleury 2006: 264-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ad Ant. Imp.* 1.2.6 (van den Hout 1988: 88)

<sup>41</sup> *Ad Verum Imp.* 2.8 (van den Hout 1988: 122).

<sup>42</sup> For recent methodological reflections along these lines, cf. Harrill 2017: 471 on the benefits of 'going beyond the limited hermeneutic framework of an original source', in order to study 'separate responses to shared cultural phenomena' in the empire. It is not impossible that the two figures had some awareness of each other (Fronto made accusations against the Christians, at least according to a later source: Minucius

himself as a ‘barbarian’ and an outsider, but his *Oratio ad Graecos* scrutinizes more intensely the bases on which people were considered insiders or outsiders in his period. Born in Assyria, Tatian describes in his oration travelling the Roman world ‘as a sophist’ (σοφιστεύσας), before ‘bidding farewell both to Roman boastfulness and frigid Athenian erudition’ and embracing the ‘philosophy you call barbarous’ (βαρβάρου, 35.1).<sup>43</sup> His rhetorical performance, which violates and adheres to Atticizing prescriptions in equal measure, is also legible as a provocative attempt to open up a new space in contemporary rhetorical culture. The *Oratio ad Graecos* is both a defense of Christianity and a commentary on linguistic politics. It exposes the breakdown in the correspondence between ethnic identity and speech which, I argue, lies at the root of the period’s intense self-consciousness about language. Tatian’s insistence on his own verbal order and correctness demonstrates an attachment to an ideal of deliberate speech that connects him to many other figures in his era. The similarities between Tatian and Fronto suggest the diffusion of certain shared ideas about speech across Latin and Greek orators in the mid second century; and although both writers knew the rules to the game, Tatian was far more brazen when he decided to break them.

Tatian’s most explicit linguistic pronouncements rebel against the culture of Greek Atticism in the period, drawing attention to his own bad fit within the movement:

εἰ γὰρ ἀττικίζεις οὐκ ὄν Ἀθηναῖος, λέγε μοι τοῦ μὴ δωρίζειν τὴν αἰτίαν· πῶς τὸ μὲν εἶναί σοι δοκεῖ βαρβαρικώτερον, τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ὁμιλίαν ἰλαρώτερον; (*Or.* 26.4).

If you Atticize without being Athenian, then tell me why you don’t ‘Doricize’?  
How is it that one seems to you more barbarous, and the other more genial for public speech?

Felix, *Octavius* 8.9), but my analysis depends instead on both writers’ participation in a broader set of discourses in the empire.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Frigid erudition’ is ψυχρολογία, a word unknown before Epictetus, but used in polemical contexts by Lucian and Galen as well as Tatian. On Tatian’s criticism of contemporary *paideia*, see the stimulating account of Nasrallah 2010: 65-70; also Fojtik 2009.

Tatian criticizes the arbitrariness of Attic being enshrined as the prestige form of the Greek language. Like Fronto and many others in the period, Tatian mentions Anacharsis in the *Oratio* in order to demonstrate that Athenians have welcomed the teaching of a ‘barbarian’ (12.4), though he seems more specifically influenced by the Cynic epistles that circulated under Anacharsis’ name, which preached that Attic was merely one dialect among many and bore no sign of virtue for its speaker.<sup>44</sup> ‘What benefit would there be to Attic speech?’, Tatian challenges (27.3). He also criticizes the artificiality of contemporaries fashioning themselves as Greek, highlighting the gap between one’s birthplace and the identity they affect through the sound of their speech. Why should a Dorian imitate Attic? Or, for that matter, why should a Syrian imitate Attic – a Syrian like Lucian, or Tatian himself? Hellenism is a cultural construction set confusingly loose from ethnicity or geography. ‘Because there is so much dissension among them [the dialects]’, says Tatian in his speech’s opening, ‘I am at a loss over whom to call a Greek’ (1.5). Tatian is thinking not of written style here but of embodied sound: he says that those speakers who imitate the characteristic double *tau* and *rho* of Attic dialect ‘smash together sounds, as in a boxing match, to produce Athenian jabbering’.<sup>45</sup> The patina of Attic elegance is also artificial because of the hybridity of the dialect itself: Attic speakers have incorporated many foreign words, he says, and ‘made their speech mixed through using barbaric expressions’ (βαρβαρικαῖς... φωναῖς, 1.5). Tatian’s own morphology and syntax adheres, though not uniformly, to Atticizing style (the double *tau* predominates over double *sigma*; he uses contracted and superlative forms of adjectives; there is no confusion between the first and second aorist; he uses the optative, albeit sparingly).<sup>46</sup> But his attraction to rare words and coinages – like *philospsophos*, ‘noise-lover’ – runs provocatively counter to the Atticists’ censures. Rather than interpret this as the result of any failure of education or effort on Tatian’s part, we should see it instead as a deliberate rebellion against attempts to classify others according to their language. With each lexical

<sup>44</sup> Richter 2011: 164-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Or.* 26.3: ἐν πυγμῇ συγκρούεις τὰς ἐκφωνήσεις αὐτῶν διὰ τὸν Ἀθηναίων ψελλισμόν.

<sup>46</sup> On the Attic and non-Attic features of Tatian’s style, see Heiler 1887, who remarks that a reader might ‘marvel’ (96) at the fact that Tatian follows prescriptions in so many respects while at the same time deriding Atticizing culture. On the qualifications for good Attic style in the period, see the overviews of Swain 1996: 30-1; Kim 2010 and 2017.

clang and quirk, the Christian reiterates his outsider status within the stylistic caste of elite Atticism.

The Syrian ex-sophist may have remade himself as a misfit within Hellenizing circles, but his continuing preoccupation with language nonetheless aligns him with a much broader culture of deliberate speech. He draws attention to the order and correctness of his speaking as proof of his truth and guarantor of his identity. His words, he says, have a more divine ‘pronunciation’ (ἐκφωνήσεως, 12.5) than those of his opponents, a word familiar from ancient grammarians, and he claims that Christian women use words of godly ‘enunciation’ (τα κατὰ θεὸν... ἐκφωνήματα, 33.2).<sup>47</sup> Conversely, he berates his enemies for catachreseis, ‘misusing figures of speech’ (καταχρᾶσθε τοῖς σχήμασι, 26.3), and attacks philosophical accounts of nature of being ‘contests of words’ rather than a ‘putting into order’ (διακόσμησις, 27.2) of the truth.<sup>48</sup> The stylistic judgments reflect a deeper, spiritual point. For Tatian, good speech is good because it corresponds to the order of the divinely created reality, the true order (κόσμος) that the Christian accurately perceives and expresses.

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Tatian also attacks those who speak spontaneously, using whatever word ‘befalls’ them and succumbing to *glossomania*, a neologism that suggests crazed irrationality (3.3). Stephen Kidd’s work has shown how λῆρος (‘nonsense’), φλυαρία (‘babbling’) and related words were used by Greek authors to describe ‘a type of false and useless speech’, which is produced by someone with an ‘impaired sense of reality’, or, especially in Imperial-era texts, in such excessive quantity that it loses its claim on sense. ‘To call something “nonsense”’, Kidd writes, ‘is a pragmatic act which deprives an utterance of force and meaning’.<sup>49</sup> The Christian speaker applies this vocabulary on a grand scale, so that not individual people but entire cultures of philosophy, art, and learning surrounding him are presented as nonsense, babble, non-speech.<sup>50</sup> In a world of overlapping speech communities, discourses had to be tuned in

<sup>47</sup> ἐκφώνησις, ‘pronunciation’ or ‘exclamation’: Dickey 2007: 235; there are ten attestations in Apollonius Dyscolus as well as in other Greek grammarians. The related form ἐκφωνήμα is used twice by Tatian but unattested before him.

<sup>48</sup> On the preoccupation with order as a distinguishing feature of Tatian’s thought, see Crawford 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Kidd 2014: 17.

<sup>50</sup> This is not the case with all the early Christian apologists. In the larger corpora of Tatian’s teacher Justin and his contemporary Athenagoras, there is no use of the word φλυαρία or its verbal form, and λῆρος is employed sparingly (one instance in Justin, three in Athenagoras).

and out, so that one's in-group was heard clearly and the rest becomes static, mere noise. Throughout the *Oratio*, Tatian aims to reduce the pagan culture around him to the border of unintelligibility. 'Nonsense' in the *Oratio* (λήρος) describes the pronouncements of astrologers (9.4), mythical stories about gods (21.1), art and literature by Greek women (33.1), and the mimes of Sophron, which were still popular in Tatian's day (34.2). Grammarians' speech is 'babble' (φλυαρία, 26.2), as is the talk of those who attack Christian culture (35.2). Tatian's enemies are mistaken if they think Christians 'babble' when they meet (33.1).<sup>51</sup> Greeks with eloquent speech but wayward thought are not truly eloquent, simply 'blatherers' (στωμύλοι, 14.1) or pedants (35.1). The Greeks' stories of gods are 'prattle' (φλήναφα, 21.2), and he rejects the claim that Christians 'prattle a lot and talk drivel' (πάνυ φληνάφους τε καὶ σπερμολόγους, 6.2). The very frequency of these words also gives a vivid sense of the sound of Tatian's world, the cacophonous noise of hostile discourses clashing in his social environment. Alongside a great number of words that mean to 'laugh at', 'mock' or 'jeer', he mentions the 'shouting' of Cynics (κεκραγώς, 25.1), the 'old woman ramblings' of Pherecydes (γρασιολογία, 3.2), and the 'rude jests' (βωμολοχία, 35.2) of his own critics.<sup>52</sup> For Tatian, the individual emerges not in the authoritative quiet of the written word but in the contentious hubbub of public speech.

At times, too, Tatian imagines the pagan world around him as producing sound that falls below the level of articulate speech. Most strikingly, in the speech's opening he describes the purveyors of Greek wisdom as:

ἐπιφυλλίδες καὶ στωμύλματα, χελιδόνων μουσεῖα, λωβηταὶ τέχνης, λαρυγγιῶσί τε οἱ ταύτης ἐφιέμενοι καὶ κοράκων ἀφίενται φωνήν (*Or.* 1.3).

... "throwaways and chatterboxes, a school of swallows, stains on their art", and their devotees croak and make the sound of ravens.

<sup>51</sup> Tatian in another work appears to have grouped 'babbling' (φλυαρία) alongside blasphemy (or 'slander') and licentious talk as sins of speech (frag. 7, Whittaker 1982: 81). This perhaps reflects, in extreme form, the 'discipline of the tongue' enjoined by wisdom literature (Prov. 10:8, 10:14, 10:19, 13: 3; cf. Hultin 2008: 120-8).

<sup>52</sup> Laugh at/mock/ jeer: γελάω/ γελοῖος/ γελωσ (10 instances); λοιδορέω/ λοιδορία (7); χλευάζω/ χλεύη (5); διαβάλλω (3); ἐπιτωθάζω (1); καταγελάω (1); διαγελάω (1).

The first half of this sentence is quoted from Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and the rest may allude to Aristophanes, too.<sup>53</sup> In the original context, these lines are Dionysus' disgusted description of the flaccid tragedies of Euripides' successors. There is typical irony in Tatian turning a line from Attic drama against Attic learning, but note also that, equally typically, he has transformed an attack on a single playwright into a broader attack on an entire culture. All Greek *paideia* is aggressively represented as background noise. There is also a potential theological underpinning. Tatian wrote a now-lost work 'On Animals', in which he seems not only to have denied rationality to animals, but also to humans who 'act like beasts'. While all humans are endowed with the physical capacity for speech, he argues that only those who are the 'likeness of god' are capable of true intelligence and understanding (*Or.* 15.1-3).

Like Fronto, Tatian also uses images of state control to imagine a world of words, but his version of the metaphor makes clear his very different subject position in the empire. Whereas Fronto had praised the emperor's ability to organize and arrange his words in classes and ranks, Tatian attacks the cultural elite for capturing words from other cultures and parading them like prisoners-of-war. 'Stop leading triumphs of other peoples' words!', he exclaims (παύσασθε λόγους ἀλλοτρίους θριαμβεύοντες, 26.1).<sup>54</sup> He attacks the paradox that the dominant language in learned circles accords prestige to words that are out of use in regular discourse: 'you engage in public processions', he says, 'but hide your words in corners' (26.3). Tatian even imagines an attempt at decolonizing the Greek language. 'If each *polis* were to take back its own phrases', he says, 'your quibbles would be made impossible (26.1)'. Like Fronto, Tatian conflates the cultural and political, imagining Greek *paideia* in metaphors that associate it with the power of the Roman state. Grammarians for example, who typically occupy a lowly position in elite Greek and Roman texts of the period, are presented by Tatian as immensely powerful, 'battling and slaying' one another. Their pronouncements on proper Attic sounds ignite conflict between the very words themselves: 'why do you ready the

<sup>53</sup> Ar. *Ran.* 92-3. The form *λαρυνγιῶσιν* is also found in *Knights* 358, where it is, however, a future tense from the related verb *λαρυνγίζω* (cf. Dem. *De Cor.* 294). Later in the speech, Tatian creates his own Aristophanic neologism when he describes Stoic philosophers as 'raven-voiced' (κορακόφωνοι, 15.1; cf. Pind. *Ol.* 2.87). Ravens were the noisiest of birds, according to Aelian (*NA* 2.51).

<sup>54</sup> For *θριαμβεύω* of the Roman triumphal parade, Mason 1974: 54.

letters of the alphabet for war?’ (26.3). For Tatian, images of triumphs, soldiers, and provincial rebellion signify injustice and forced appropriation; for Fronto, diligent administration and order. In his letter to Domitia Lucilla, Fronto facetiously imagined the arbiters of Greek *paideia* ‘authorizing’ vocabulary, and the old distinction between Roman power and Greek culture allows him to condescend to Greek criticism while underlining the limitations of their control. Tatian combines Greece and Rome into one oppressive but indistinct hegemony.

One particularly difficult chapter of the *Oratio* (5) suggests that Tatian, so preoccupied with language and speech, also struggled with the likeness of the divine Word to human language. In some sections of the text, he envisions God through the prism of speech. His theological explanation is inflected with the language of ancient grammar: he uses *merismos* (the division of a sentence into parts) and *diaeresis* (the separation of a single word into two, or a diphthong into two syllables) to explain the division of Logos (the part) from God (the whole).<sup>55</sup> This is a kind of division, he says, in which nothing is lost, and he makes the point by reference to his own speech. When he speaks, he does not ‘lose’ anything as a result of sending words into the world; and likewise the division of the Word from God is a partition without separation, which entails no loss.<sup>56</sup> Tatian imagines his own speech in markedly divine terms: ‘in projecting my voice’, he says, ‘my purpose is to put in order the chaotic matter in you’.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately though, God’s Word must truly exceed any conception of human speech. The ‘Lord of the entire world was also the originator of it all’, Tatian says (5.1).<sup>58</sup> Human words can be incorrect or correct, used badly or well; the Word can create. Fronto’s vision of the imperial power of sound – the music of an Orphean emperor – is bested by Tatian’s vision of divine Logos, which both is and is not assimilable to human language. In a

<sup>55</sup> *Or.* 5.1. See Grant 1958: 126-7, 1988: 129-130 on this aspect of Tatian’s thought. On the grammatical vocabulary, Dickey 2007: 232, 245.

<sup>56</sup> The theological argument is indebted to Tatian’s teacher Justin (*Dial.* 61), and before him Philo, but the grammatical language is Tatian’s own: Hunt 2003: 69, 118-22, Koltun-Fromm 2008: 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Or.* 5.2: προβαλλόμενος δὲ τὴν ἑμαυτοῦ φωνὴν διακοσμεῖν τὴν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀκόσμητον ὕλην προήρημαι.

<sup>58</sup> Tatian also emphasizes that Christian *paideia* is preverbal (or supravverbal?), predating writing and the invention of the alphabet (31.1, 36.1). Tatian here follows his mentor Justin Martyr (Droge 1989: 91-2). As Geue argues in this volume (pp. XXX), Justin claims cultural primacy for Moses, while still presenting him as a writer like the Greeks he is claimed to have influenced.

culture of deliberate speakers, the Christian believes in a power beyond the capacity of human words.

### **Empire and Sound**

When we attempt to understand the spread of ideas in the intellectual life of the second-century empire, the method of tracing direct verbal allusions between texts can go only so far. Our sources inform us only obliquely of the circulation of ideas outside written texts, in early Christian congregations, Cynics preaching on street-corners, the tales of travellers and traders, and so on. Much of the era's 'ambient' interaction is lost. Moreover, an illusion of sameness is generated in second-century texts not by the constant reading of each other's work, but by authors independently drawing upon the shared, usable resource of the past. Most of all, although the second and third centuries saw the universalization of certain aspects of Roman civic culture – including citizenship itself – the contemporary literary scene is marked by the production of highly parochial literary and linguistic microcultures, which sought to entrench a sense of cultural and historical distinctness in an ongoing dialectic between belonging and individualism. The ideology of Atticizing, and its eventual codification in the later second century in lexica, is one example; the contests of erudition among highly educated Latin 'archaizers' is another. To seek direct verbal allusions in this period between the works of Greeks and Romans, Jews and Christians, is to neglect the fact that writers often defined their place in the empire by projecting an artificial sense of isolation from others, by immersing themselves in history and effacing their interactions with contemporary figures and forces. This makes all the more pressing the need to understand interactivity in other terms. Unless we are willing to forge categories of analysis that cut across the era's own divisions, we risk merely reproducing the parochialism and prejudice of its most vocal representatives.

'Say something so that I can see you', said Socrates, in a line apparently invented in the second century CE.<sup>59</sup> The educated Greek or Roman of the period came to

<sup>59</sup> Apul. *Flor.* 2.1 ('*ut te videam*', *inquit*, '*aliquid et loquere*').

light through speech – through a careful, self-conscious attention to words. To voice not just the right word, but the right *sound* in a word, was associated with the preservation of distinctions of class, culture, and history. This emphasis on deliberate speech also manifested itself in a preoccupation with nonsense and babble. Tatian constantly reiterates the charge that those around him are making inarticulate sound, which throws his own orderly speech into greater relief and projects his message with clarity among the constant din of competing ideologies. The connection between speech and sound was not forgotten in the period either, and there remains an attraction to the power of noise, especially as a means of expressing control beyond one's group. The emperor was a singer, seducing endless ears; the emanation of God's Logos was a force beyond grammar. But what proportion of these writers' own texts depends upon the very elementary seductions of sound? How much of the meaning of Fronto and Tatian lies precisely in their wordplay, their assonance, their noise? James Zetzel's (2000) description of 'Fronto's almost sensual pleasure in the sounds of words' could be extended to Tatian, to Apuleius and Lucian, and to a great number of other writers of their era. Tatian's warning was correct. The empire was full of *philopsophoi*, 'noise-lovers'. Although the Christian orator would undoubtedly have denied it, he was far from immune himself from the power and pleasure of sound.

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