

Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *De compositione verborum* is a curiously underexploited text in the study of ancient education. The work is dedicated to Dionysius' student Metilius Rufus, whom Dionysius addresses in the preface (*Comp.* 1) and at other points in the work (esp. *Comp.* 20; 26). These passages are our only certain examples from the first century B.C. of language in which a Greek teacher addresses a Roman student while that Roman was his student. While it is obvious that such passages must also be directed towards the larger readership of the *De compositione verborum*, there is no reason to suppose that readers would have evaluated Dionysius' language according to different norms than the ones that prevailed in "reality." These passages may therefore be used, with caution, to investigate the relationship between Greek teacher and Roman student in this period.

Most modern teachers, especially at the college level, have their authority as experts buttressed for them by institutional supports (see Clark 2006, *passim* esp. 16-19), which Dionysius and his peers lacked. Further, a Greek teacher had to construct an authoritative voice for himself despite his inferior status relative to his typically aristocratic Roman students and despite the familiar negative stereotypes of Greeks found among Romans (see Isaacs 2004, 318-405, for a recent survey). The *De compositione verborum* reveals one possible strategy that a Greek expatriate in Rome might adopt to cope with these particular challenges.

Much of the preface, in particular, is taken up with deference towards Metilius' superior position as a technically adult Roman citizen. Dionysius advances claims of superior authority for himself, based on *paideia* and age, obliquely, and hedges them by making their implications ambiguous. This lends itself well to analysis in terms of the well-established Brown-Levinson model of linguistic politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987). The prominence of negative face redress is notable. Also worth noting is that at least one claim to superior authority that a modern would expect, that Metilius is not a native speaker of Greek, is not made, and perhaps could not be made in a socially acceptable way (cf. Parthenius *Erotika Pathemata*).

These suggest that Dionysius was indeed laboring under a deficit of authority. In response, he adopts a strategy of "authority substitution" in which he either associates himself with figures of superior authority (such as Metilius' father) or even removes himself entirely from the pedagogical relationship, representing it as a direct encounter between his student and the "classic" Greek authors of the past. If Dionysius' strategy here was typical of Greeks in his position, then the *De compositione verborum* can offer insights into the origins and operation of classicism in the Roman period (see recently Porter [ed.] 2005, *passim* esp. 301-353).