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Linguistic Accommodation and the Koine

The scope of the paper will be evidence for the willingness or otherwise of speakers in the Greek world to modify the way they spoke and wrote more or less before 400 BC. I am chiefly interested in looking at code-switching and linguistic accommodation, and in relating this to modern perceptions of the nature of the *koiné*.

There are a number of ways in which in which people modify the way they speak. In the modern discipline of linguistics these fall under slightly different headings, which merely reflect the way the discipline is organized. The fundamental question I wish to address is why, at the end of the fifth century, a period of happy linguistic diversity, the looming presence of the *koiné* is already evident. I believe that to explain the rise of the *koiné* as a simple result of the prestige of Ionic (culture, script, and alphabet) is over-simple and out of touch with modern thought on language change.

Linguistic accommodation is a form of code-switching closely connected but not identical with convergence. Speakers of different varieties will often converge in interaction: peculiarities of speech will be deleted and other features adopted. The Old Oligarch is right when he points the finger at the cosmopolitan nature of Athens and Piraeus and blames them for the decline in Old Attic purity. In this context it might be worth noting that the notion of prestige as a factor in linguistic change is now out of favor with linguists: change *in the system* almost always comes from below. Since language is a part of the social and political culture of a community, we can turn to other areas of Greek life for data which will help us establish some predictions. Secondly, there is literary evidence, where one has to distinguish between (a) the adoption of a particular linguistic code as a result of the act of writing within a particular genre, and (b) the depiction of speech accommodation (mimesis). Thirdly, there is epigraphic (vases, proxeny decrees, treaties, etc.) and onomastic evidence.

It is possible, in my view, to see the beginnings of what was later known as the *koiné* in the classical period, as populations increased and inter-Greek contact ballooned. If we ask ourselves, was the *koiné* a form of speech accommodation, I think the answer must strictly be No; but I think that it may have been the result of such a process, since evidence suggests that at the macro-level this is how linguistic innovations travel.