CLASSICAL GREEK RHETORICAL THEORY AND THE DISCIPLINING OF DISCOURSE

περὶ τῆς ῥητορικῆς εἰπέ

DAVID M. TIMMERMAN AND EDWARD SCHIAPPA

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CLASSICAL GREEK RHETORICAL THEORY AND THE DISCIPLINING OF DISCOURSE

This book contributes to the history of classical rhetoric by focusing on how key terms helped conceptualize and organize the study and teaching of oratory. David M. Timmerman and Edward Schiappa demonstrate that the intellectual and political history of Greek rhetorical theory can be enhanced by a better understanding of the emergence of "terms of art" in texts about persuasive speaking and argumentation. The authors provide a series of studies to support their argument. They describe Plato's disciplining of *dialegesthai* into the art of dialectic, Isocrates' alternative vision of *philosophia*, and Aristotle's account of *dēmēgoria* and *symboulē* as terms for political deliberation. The authors also revisit competing receptions of the *Rhetoric to Alexander*. In addition, they examine the argument over when the different parts of oration were formalized in rhetorical theory, illustrating how an "old school" focus on vocabulary can provide fresh perspectives on persistent questions.

David M. Timmerman is professor of rhetoric and Chair of the Humanities and Fine Arts at Wabash College. He is coeditor of *Rhetoric and Democracy: Pedagogical and Political Practices* and has contributed to *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, and *Advances in the History of Rhetoric.*

Edward Schiappa holds the Paul W. Frenzel Chair of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, where he is professor and Chair of the Department of Communications Studies. He is the author of several books, including *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* and *The Beginnings of Greek Rhetorical Theory.*

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DAVID M. TIMMERMAN

Wabash College

EDWARD SCHIAPPA

University of Minnesota

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For Our Families

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Introduction: *Terms of Art as a Focus in the History of Rhetorical Theory*

We contend that the history of Greek rhetorical theory can be enhanced by paying attention to the emergence of *terms of art* in texts about persuasive speaking and argument. In this introduction, we describe what we mean by "terms of art" and provide a theoretical and historical rationale for our project. We conclude the chapter by explaining the way the subsequent chapters develop this rationale through the examination of specific terms of art.

By "terms of art," we mean simply any words or phrases that take on reasonably specialized denotative functions within a particular language community. Such terms are typically known in linguistics and philosophy as "kind terms"; not "natural" kind terms denoting physical, chemical, or biological objects, but what Nelson Goodman (1978) calls "relevant" kinds that sort the things of our world into categories in order to meet particular needs and interests. Terms of art can categorize at various levels of scope. They may be as broad as Aristotle's notion of style or expression (*lexis*), subsets of composition style such as *lexis eiromenē* and *lexis katestrammenē*, or terms that describe specific stylistic qualities such as *akribeia* or precision (O'Sullivan 1992; Halliwell 1993).

As domains of human activity evolve and grow more sophisticated, the vocabulary used by practitioners of these domains becomes more specialized and technical. Regardless of whether explicitly defined by members of a language community, terms of art can be understood as performing a constitutive role within that community that can be formulated as a shared rule: X counts as Y in context C (Schiappa 2003a). Such explicit or implicit rules perform an ontological-epistemological function (i.e., what are the relevant objects within our knowledge domain?) as well as a linguistic function (i.e., what should we call phenomenon X?). Put another way, the production of terms of art accomplishes two tasks – such terms tell us what the relevant objects *are* in a particular knowledge domain, and what we should *call* various phenomena. Our interest is in the emergence of the technical vocabulary of rhetorical theory: not only the birth of rhetorical theory *qua* rhetorical theory, but also the development of various terms of art that advance the pedagogical, political, and intellectual goals of rhetorical theory.

The history of rhetorical theory has been charted many times and in a variety of ways. One approach may be described as *thematic* and functions at a fairly high level of abstraction. George A. Kennedy's (1999) influential *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, for example, divides early rhetorical theory into three strands, which he describes as technical, sophistic, and philosophical rhetoric; these strands, he suggests, persist throughout the history of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Although such an approach has the benefit of scope, it risks a loss of precision. As Schiappa (1999) argues, the categories of technical, sophistic, and philosophical rhetoric may work well to make sense of the long tradition of classical rhetoric, but they do not work particularly well to describe theorizing about discourse and

pedagogy in fifth-century BCE Greece. Part of the problem, which we rehearse throughout this book, is that care must be taken to avoid imposing a later-developed vocabulary on the early texts of rhetorical theory. Otherwise, we risk misunderstanding the difficulty with which the problems of language and persuasion emerged and were negotiated by various theorists and educators.

A second common approach is author centered, or, to be more precise, *author/text* centered, because often what we know about a particular author is only what can be gleaned from the extant texts associated with his or her name. There are many books on Greek rhetoric that have the obligatory chapters on Corax/Tisias, Gorgias, Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, and Theophrastus. Michelle Ballif and Michael Moran's (2005) *Classical Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, for example, includes chapters on sixty authors or influential texts whose authors may be uncertain. Such author/text–centered approaches are useful because they bring a greater degree of precision to the historian's task, particularly if readings of a given author/text are well informed by an understanding of the author/text's political, theoretical, and linguistic context. The resulting historical narratives can also be dramatic and interesting because they can focus on conflicts – such as Plato versus Isocrates – or can perform a recovery of a neglected figure – such as Aspasia, Gorgias, or Protagoras (see Glenn 1997; Consigny 2001; McComiskey 2002; Schiappa 2003b). This approach demonstrates more faith in the coherence of texts and our ability to divine authorial intentions than some may find comfortable, but such narratives are unlikely to abate.

A third common approach to the history of rhetorical theory can be described as concept driven. Thomas O. Sloane's (2001) majestic *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* contains no entries for individual

rhetorical theorists. Rather, it is entirely an account of concepts, theories, and practices, many of which are described in terms of their historical development. Of course, the range of phenomena denoted by a particular concept can vary considerably because one can move from a particular focus – such as a specific author's conceptualization of *kairos* or *mimēsis* – to genres of discourse, or to a concept as broad as *philosophia* or *rhētorikē*.

Our book is an augmentation to this third approach. We want to go beyond the question of what a particular concept denotatively or connotatively *means* in a particular text or set of texts to ask what sort of intellectual *work* the emergence of terms of art in rhetorical theory accomplishes. Three interrelated questions motivate our book. First, to what extent does a particular term contribute to the specification and sophistication of the cognitive and linguistic apparatus of rhetorical theory? Second, how might subsequent rhetorical theory, practice, or pedagogy *change* as a result of the introduction of specific terms of art? Third, in what ways might our understanding of past rhetorical theory and practice be enhanced if we attend to terms of art rather than, as has often been the case in histories of rhetoric, projecting later-developed vocabularies on texts produced prior to the introduction of relevant terms of art?

Why Terms of Art Matter: A Brief Theoretical Rationale

The case for the importance of terms of art in rhetorical theory can be made on diverse theoretical grounds. Most scholars would agree with the proposition that new vocabulary changes the available semantic field and that new conceptual categories change the way

we think, regardless of one's particular theoretical or methodological pieties. In contemporary rhetorical theory, the clearest statement to this effect is Kenneth Burke's (1973) notion of entitlement. That is, language sums up situations and makes sense of human experience, and language *entitles* reality: "The mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something-other" (4). The creation of a new word provides a somewhat new way of summing up or entitling a portion of human experience. One rhetorical effect of entitling a new "thing" is that it creates the impression that the "thing" has been "out there" all along, waiting to be discovered and described. Nouns, in particular, suggest things that already exist: "And that no doubt accounts for the feeling that when one is using nouns, one is manipulating the symbols of a self-subsistent reality" (Weaver 1985 [1953], 128; see also Corrigan 1989, 8). Richard Weaver (1970) claims that all language use is evocative; thus, language can be described as *sermonic*: "every use of speech, oral and written, exhibits an attitude, and an attitude implies an act" (178). That is, naming a phenomenon "X" as opposed to "Y" encourages a potentially different set of attitudes and actions toward that phenomenon. For example, psychologist Roger Brown (1958) observes that "the dime in pocket is not only a *dime*. It is also *money*, a *metal object*, a *thing*" (14). Although the same phenomenon is being denoted, there is no question that using one name rather than another can evoke quite different attitudes and responses.

From a psychological perspective, we know that language affects human perception and cognition. All meaningful human experience is formed experience, organized through a continual process of abstraction, bordering, and categorization (see Gregg

1984, 25–51). Differences in the ways diverse vocabularies encode or categorize a domain of experience influence how individuals conceive of reality in that domain. The categorizing function of language can be a form of persuasion or "symbolic inducement"; different terminologies prompt us to perceive and respond to the world in different ways (50–1).

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of meaning clarifies the psycholinguistic importance of the introduction of terms of art (see de Saussure 1973; Culler 1977). According to de Saussure, *language* is a system of signs. A given sign is made up of a signifier (word) and a signified (concept). Signs possess meaning in a given linguistic community not so much from objective referents as from their relationship to other signs within a language system (*la langue*). According to later-developed linguistic theory, the meaning of individual terms depends, in part, on their relationship to other terms in the relevant semantic field. A *semantic field* is a set of interrelated terms or lexemes that define a portion of reality. The introduction of new terms – such as through the use of a new metaphor – will change the available semantic field and hence our understanding of that portion of reality (Kittay 1987). That is, the introduction of a new signifier simultaneously introduces a new signified and thus expands the spectrum of conceptual possibilities for a given linguistic community. Viewing the process in reverse, *sans* signifier, there is no corresponding signified readily available in the language system. Without appropriate terms of art, the conceptual space for the intellectual work of theorizing is limited to what might be called *predisciplinary* vocabulary.

Terms of art have the effect in practice of stabilizing the meaning of that portion of human experience being named. Richard B. Gregg (1984) calls this process *linguistic fixing*: "Language helps fix

or stabilize tendencies and processes already present in thought and experience" (87). In fact, empirical evidence supports the relationship between the specificity of a given vocabulary and the degree of analytical sophistication and conceptual retrievability.[1] A relationship exists between vocabulary and understanding: the more complex the vocabulary, the more sophisticated the observed learning. Most studies tend to presume a relationship between categorical representation in thought and the availability of names for categories (see, e.g., Harnad 1987, 535–65). Although cognitive psychologists sometimes stress the autonomy of language and thought, most acknowledge that there are learning contexts in which a change in the lexicon corresponds to a change in the "underlying conceptual structure" (Keil 1989, 148).

Different technical vocabularies function in a manner that is analogous to the ways in which different maps work (Dorling 1997). The same domain can be mapped in a variety of ways – meteorological, demographic, economic, biological, topographical, transportation, geological, historical, political, and so on. It is pointless to ask which sort of map depicts reality as it "really is." Maps are necessarily selective, partial, and are constructed for specific interests and purposes (Wood 1992). Maps can be judged for their usefulness only with respect to such interests and purposes. Even such notions as "accuracy" only make sense relative to the specific purpose of a map (Monmonier 1991). The value of a vocabulary (or map) will vary considerably, depending on those needs and interests; however, there is no idealized language that captures all our possible needs and interests at once, just as no single map

[1] See Brown and Lenneberg 1954; Brown 1956; Lakoff 1987, 220–34; Rosch 1988; see also Schiappa 2003a, 185, note 2.

can simultaneously serve all possible uses to which maps can be put. Once a map is presented to us, or a phenomenon described, social influence is exerted in the sense that we must either behave appropriately or provide an alternative mapping or definition.

In short, from the perspective of almost any imaginable theory of language and meaning, the introduction of terms of art within a given community of language users is an important development warranting the attention of historians.

Why Terms of Art Matter: A Brief Historical Rationale

Theory can only take us so far. The value of a focus on terms of art must be demonstrated through case studies that yield a revised historical understanding of the emergence and development of Greek rhetorical theory. We believe that the rationale for the study of terms of art is particularly strong if we acknowledge that the emergence of a technical vocabulary of rhetorical theory and pedagogy was a gradual process in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, facilitated by the rise of literacy in general and of theoretical prose in particular. Such a process was a combination of metaphorical extension and neologism, as writers struggled to invent an appropriate vocabulary with which to describe language at various levels of abstraction – from linguistic categories at the level of morpheme and lexeme to different kinds of composition style to prose genres.

The most important linguistic invention relevant to our purposes is the creation of the discrete category of rhetoric (*rhētorikē*) itself. Obviously, rhetorical *practice* – the self-conscious use of written or oral prose to achieve specific ends – dates back as far as we can see, and observations about the importance of speaking in

public and private settings can be found in texts throughout the classical period (Gagarin 2007). Nonetheless, the linguistic creation of a discrete category to designate the art of the rhetor, signified by *hē rhētorikē technē* or simply *hē rhētorikē*, is arguably a watershed event for crystallizing rhetorical theory that occurs in the early fourth century BCE. Because previous publications have addressed this issue in some depth (Schiappa 1999, 14–29; 2003b), we limit ourselves here to key premises we believe to be reasonably well established.

First, the earliest surviving use of the term *rhētorikē* is in Plato's *Gorgias* in the early fourth century BCE. This philological datum is noted by a variety of sources dating back to 1934.[2] Second, it is likely, although impossible to prove definitively, that Plato himself coined the term. Plato created a wide assortment of words ending with -*ikē* ("art of") and -*ikos* (which, depending on context, denotes a person with a particular skill). One study documents that of the more than 350 -*ikos* words in Plato's writings, more than 250 are not found earlier (Chantraine 1956, 97–171). A computer search of the entire database of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* project suggests that the Greek words for eristic (*eristikē*), dialectic (*dialektikē*),

[2] In 1934, Werner Pilz noted in passing that the word "*rhētorik* – findet sich nicht vor Plato." The same observation can be found in Wilhelm Kroll's (1940, 1039) influential essay on rhetoric in the German classical encyclopedia *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, J. W. H. Atkins' (1949, 766) article on Greek rhetoric in the first edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the well-known *A Greek-English Lexicon* by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (1940, 1569), H. Hommel's (1972, 4:1396) note on rhetoric in *Der Kleine Pauly*, and Josef Martin's (1974, 2) *Antike Rhetorik*. A search of the entire database of Greek texts in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* supports the claim that the earliest surviving use of the Greek word for rhetoric is in the dialogues of Plato (Schiappa 2003b, appendix B).