

DOING THINGS WITH WORDS IN PLAUTUS' *PSEUDOLUS*

by

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ABSTRACT: The article proposes a linguistic analysis of the pragmatic component of the dialogical exchange in Plautus' *Pseudolus* in order to shed some light on the verbal behaviour of the main character. After examining two particularly important scenes in the play (*Pseud.* 1–132, 415–574) it is stated that the source of Pseudolus' influence is the illocutionary level of his speech.

While the original contributions of the Roman playwright regarding his Greek sources were identified by scholars decades ago, *Pseudolus* surely stands out for the great accumulation of Plautine elements in Plautus. *Pseudolus* presents a whole spectrum of stock characters known from other Plautine comedies: the ingenious slaves (Pseudolus, Simia), the malicious pimp (Ballio), the naïve youth (Calidorus), the severe father (Simo), the boastful cook, and even a reminiscence of a braggart warrior in the soldier's slave, *cacula* (Harpax)¹. Not only the *personae*, but also intrigue based on double deceit (of *leno* and *senex*), false identities (Pseudolus-Syrus, Simia-Harpax), and the play-within-the-play, can be considered typical of Plautus. Thus, modern scholars mostly agree on calling *Pseudolus* a masterpiece of its genre even if it was acknowledged to contain some important structural problems² and a rather simplified and inconsistent plot³.

In order to explain the inconsistencies in this late and successful Plautine play, scholars have drawn attention to its *quasi* improvised⁴, metatheatrical and

¹ BARSBY 1995: 60 f. Cf. MOORE 1998: 94 f., who stresses the way the *dramatis personae* of the play meet and even exceed the audience's expectations, being "super-versions" of the stock characters. It would not be accurate, however, to claim that *Pseudolus* elaborates on every significant Plautine figure, for the roles of the *meretrix* or *uxor* are not developed in this play (cf. *Bacch.*, *Cas.*, *Poen.*, etc.). According to Cicero (*Sen.* 50), *Pseudolus* was one of Plautus' favourite plays.

² WILLIAMS 1956.

³ WRIGHT 1975: 403.

⁴ BARSBY 1995.