A Corpus-Stylistic Approach of the Treatises of St. Athanasius about Idolatry

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the corpus stylistic analysis of the treatises of Saint Athanasius. In this interdisciplinary study classical texts are approached through linguistic tools and the main purpose is to describe the style of Saint Athanasius in these treatises, after having extracted all these quantitative data utilizing computational tools. The language Saint Athanasius uses is a language that expresses intensely his speculations on the achievement of religious change and restructuration. His language expresses his religious ideology. His speeches are persuasive, ideological and represent the rhetorician’s opinion. They are based on the speaker’s intentionality; it directs him to the specific rhetorical framework, since he aims at one and unique inspirational result, that is, persuasion.

Keywords: Coherence, Cohesion, Corpus Linguistics, Ideological Goal, Idolatry, Intertextuality, Lexical Bundles, Style

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

In this article, we are going to describe the significance of corpus linguistics when combined with the analysis of classical texts. Alexandropoulos (2013ab, 2014abc) tries to approach the byzantine texts in a new rhetorical way using rhetorical theories and corpus analysis tools. Corpus linguistics (Kennedy, 1992; Atkins, Clear, & Ostler, 1992; Leech & Fligelstone, 1992) can help us understand the use and repetition of some words or lexical bundles, fixed and semi-fixed multi-word combinations; these formulaic sentences can contain one word or many words. Corpus linguistics gives us the opportunity to use text-handling tools as a concordance, word frequency counts (per % or per ‰) or wordlists, keyword analysis, cluster analysis and lexicogrammatical profiles; in this way, we can extract and study longer sequences of words in discourse statistically; this enables us to focus more on what is frequent, instead of examining what stands out following the traditional Aristotelian rhetoric approach. (Nowadays corpus processing and linguistics focus on lexical bundles and many researchers of the linguistic discipline try to recognize some high frequency multiword sets. Mainly, some linguists, such as Baker (2006),

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Biber & Barbieri (2007), Biber, Conrad & Cortes (2004), Cortes (2004), Hyland (2008ab) focus on lexical bundles and try to describe their structure and their functions into the texts. Halmari (2005) utilizes computational tools also in order to describe the style of Reagan and Clinton. Alexandropoulos (2014c) describes the most frequently used intertextual sources in the political speeches of Julian using also corpus analysis tools. Alexandropoulos (2014ab) examines also the classical texts combining rhetoric analysis with corpus stylistic tools. After extracting all these quantitative data from the corpus we can go even further, following a qualitative interpretation of them, because, as Biber et al. (1998) support, corpus-based research also aims to uncover patterns of language use through the analysis of these results.

The issue of this research is based on the idea of defining and studying the rhetorical and linguistic practice of St. Athanasius, who expresses his disagreement with the Ethnics and his religious view. Until now, we can find a lot of traditional studies in literature review in reference with byzantine, classical texts, based on the Aristotelian concept of rhetoric (Brédif, 1879; Cameron, 1994; Hunger, 1978; Kennedy, 1994; Mirhady, 2007; Nesselrath, 1997; Pernot, 2000; Roberts, 1984; Ross, 1974; Wolf, 2008). Corpus linguistics can be combined with and serve the goal of this interdisciplinary research. The above combination enables us to have clear results, based on quantitative and qualitative data. The perceptual salience is not always enough to approach texts.

The main objectives of this research can be reflected in the following questions:

1. What are the most frequently used words, adjectives, pronouns, verbs and lexical bundles?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the two speeches?
3. How the most frequently used elements serve the speaker’s ideological goal and define his style?

Our research is relied on two texts of St. Athanasius (295–2 May 373) – who was the twentieth bishop of Alexandria – concerning his beliefs about idolatry (Bardy, 1914; Brakke, 1995; Cavallera, 1914; Cross, 1945; Dragas, 1980; Kannengiesser 1973, 1991; Lauchert, 1911; Meijering, 1968; Pettersen, 1990; Roldanus, 1968; Thomson, 1971) (Table 1). St. Athanasius was a great Father of the Church and a pillar of Orthodoxy. It is believed that he was one of the most important theologians as he contributed to the formation of the Trinitarian dogma.

According to Clifford (1907) Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria, Confessor and Doctor of the Church. Athanasius was the greatest champion of Catholic belief on the subject of the Incarnation that the Church has ever known and in his lifetime earned the characteristic title of “Father of Orthodoxy”, by which he has been distinguished ever since. While the chronology of his career still remains for the most part a hopelessly involved problem, the fullest material for an account of the main achievements of his life will be found in his collected writings and in the contemporary records of his time. He was born, it would seem, in Alexandria, most probably between the years 296 and 298. An earlier date, 293, is sometimes assigned as the more certain year of his birth; and it is supported apparently by the authority of the “Coptic Fragment” and corroborated by the undoubted maturity of judgement revealed in the two treatises “Contra Gentes”

Table 1. Constituents of corpora of St. Athanasius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Words Tokens Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contra Gentes</td>
<td>19,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De incarnatione verbi</td>
<td>21,410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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