

We contend that the intellectual and political history of rhetorical theory can be enhanced by paying particular attention to the emergence of “terms of art” in discourse about persuasive speaking and argument. Our argument proceeds in two steps. The first is to note that the emergence of a technical vocabulary of rhetorical theory and pedagogy was a gradual process in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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 lexeme and morpheme to different kinds of composition style to prose genres. The argument will be illustrated with a series of examples, including vocabulary advanced by the Older Sophists (for example, the term *dialegesthai*), early terms describing style (*lexis eiromenê* and *lexis katestrammenê*), and terms for prose genres (*epideiktikê*) and even *rhêtorikê* itself.

The second step is to advance our argument as to why the emergence of terms of art matters. The theoretical case can be made that new language changes the semantic field and new conceptual categories change the way we think. In addition to laying out a theoretical case, we will reference case studies that illustrate how such an approach to texts concerning persuasive speaking and argumentation in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE changes our understanding of both what the texts “mean” and the work such texts did in shaping subsequent theoretical texts, pedagogical practices, and, in some instances, rhetorical practices of rhetors.