

Ancient and modern linguistic approaches to the history of Attic comedy

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1. Introduction

The chronology and historical evolution of Greek, and especially Attic, theatre has been studied intensely for a long time and from a variety of different angles. One natural focus have been the texts themselves, both fragmentary and complete; but archaeological and epigraphical material has also been of major importance, and comparative anthropological approaches have enriched the picture further. In one way or another all of these investigations were already foreshadowed in antiquity. One may think, for example, of Aristotle's distinctly anthropological considerations on theatre ultimately having its root in an innate and profoundly human instinct of imitation (*Poet.* 1448b5–9, τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας) or on comedy having arisen from performances of earlier phallic songs that 'remain common even today in many cities' (*Poet.* 1449a12–13, ἡ δὲ [sc. κωμωδία] ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικά [sc. ἐξαρχόντων] ἃ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν πολλαῖς τῶν πόλεων διαμένει νομιζόμενα); or, on the epigraphic side, of Aristotle's compilation of the official *didaskaliai* in book form as a scholarly tool that proved invaluable to ancient and, less directly, modern scholars alike (cf. *Arist. fr.* 618–630 Rose).

As a modest supplement to all of this, the following contribution aims to offer a look at some *linguistic* considerations that may be brought to bear on the theme of the present volume. It should be stressed, however, that it neither provides room for, nor is capable of, presenting a critical survey of the various ways in which linguistic analyses have for example contributed to attempts at solving long-standing questions of dramatic authorship, like the ones surrounding the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* and the Euripidean *Rhesus* – all the more so since its primary concern was meant to be comedy, a genre whose historical exploration presents its own rather unique set of challenges. In order to illustrate these, I propose to review and exemplify three different ways in which, or *levels* on which, language-based arguments are worth considering together with all the other kinds of evidence we have ('Now'); and at the same time to show how each of them was trialled, at least *in nuce*, already in antiquity ('Then'). None of them, it is true, is likely to lead to any revolutionary new insights into the macro- or micro-history of Greek theatre, but there should still be some value in a general *prise de conscience* as they all have some role to play in refining our understanding of the world of ancient drama.

2. Linguistic archaeology

2.1. Then

To start with the first level, in Chapter 3 of his *Poetics* Aristotle famously provides evidence that as far back as the fourth century BC certain people tried to dissect theatrical *terminology* in order to discover something about the origins of theatre (*Arist. Poet.* 1448a24–1448b2):

ἐν τρισὶ δὴ ταύταις διαφοραῖς ἡ μίμησις ἐστίν, ὡς εἵπομεν κατ' ἀρχάς, ἐν οἷς τε <καὶ ᾗ> καὶ ὥς. ὥστε τῇ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη μιμητὴς Ὀμήρῳ Σοφοκλῆς, μιμοῦνται γὰρ ἄμφω σπουδαίους, τῇ δὲ Ἀριστοφάνει, πράττοντας γὰρ μιμοῦνται καὶ δρῶντας ἄμφω. ὅθεν καὶ δράματα καλεῖσθαι τινες αὐτά φασιν, ὅτι μιμοῦνται δρῶντας. διὸ καὶ ἀντιτιοιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγωδίας καὶ τῆς κωμωδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς (τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμωδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἱ τε ἐνταῦθα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς

παρ' αὐτοῖς δημοκρατίας γενομένης καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας, ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἦν Ἐπίχαρμος ὁ ποιητὴς πολλῶ πρότερος ὢν Χιωνίδου καὶ Μάγνητος· καὶ τῆς τραγωδίας ἔνιοι τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ) ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημεῖον· αὐτοὶ μὲν γὰρ κώμας τὰς περιοικίδας καλεῖν φασιν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ δῆμους, ὥς κωμωδοὺς οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ κωμάζειν λεχθέντας ἀλλὰ τῇ κατὰ κώμας πλάνῃ ἀτιμαζομένους ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως· καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτοὶ μὲν δρᾶν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ πράττειν προσαγορεύειν.

So imitation relates to these three aspects, as we noted at the outset: through what media, what, and how. Thus, Sophocles is on the one hand the same type of imitator as Homer, because they both imitate serious people, and on the other hand the same type as Aristophanes, because they both imitate people who operate and act. Hence, some say, the term δράματα ('actions'), because they imitate people who act (δρῶντας). On the same basis the Dorians lay claim to both tragedy and comedy – in the case of comedy, both the Megarians here, saying that it came into being when democracy was instituted among them, and those in Sicily, for the poet Epicharmus was from there, being much earlier than Chionides and Magnes, and in the case of tragedy some of those in the Peloponnese –, presenting the names as evidence: they say that they call surrounding settlements κῶμαι, whereas the Athenians call them δῆμοι, supposing that the comedians are not called after their revelling (κωμάζειν), but because of their travelling from one κώμη to the next, being kept out of the city in dishonour; and also that they call doing something (ποιεῖν) 'acting' (δρᾶν), whereas the Athenians use the word 'operating' (πράττειν).

Aristotle himself does not seem to think that this is a particularly profitable undertaking; otherwise he would hardly add the non-committal *τινες φασι* even to the innocuous – and from his theatre-theoretical point of view unproblematic – statement that the generic term δράματα is owed to the fact that in theatrical performances people are imitated 'who act' (δρῶντας). Compared to this, a more problematic aspect of the argument will have been the supplementary inference that, because δρᾶν is (allegedly) the Doric equivalent of Attic πράττειν, the institution of dramatic performances must be a Doric one. But even when it comes to the still more questionable derivation of κωμωδία from κώμη 'village', rather than κῶμος (or κωμάζειν) 'revel', by means of the parallel claim that since κῶμαι is the Doric equivalent of Attic δῆμοι, comedy must be of Dorian extraction, any Aristotelian objections are at best implicit: we merely sense them behind his citation of the alternative κωμάζειν etymology.

It would be of considerable interest to know for sure who the Dorians were who in this way laid claim to both tragedy and comedy. At first sight, Aristotle's text suggests that he is referring to some actual Peloponnesian, notably Megarian, source(s), whether oral or (much more likely) written; but it is also possible to understand his formulation ἀντιποιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγωδίας καὶ τῆς κωμωδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς (τῆς μὲν κωμωδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἱ τε ἐνταῦθα [...] καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας [...]) καὶ τῆς τραγωδίας ἔνιοι τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ) ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημεῖον as shorthand for 'an etymological claim is made (by some unnamed agent) *on behalf of* the Megarians/Peloponnesians'. In addition to authors like the fourth-century Megarian historians Dieuchidas and/or Praxion, whose interest in demonstrating Athenian dependence on Doric cultic institutions is independently inferrable (cf. Dieuchidas *FGrH* 485 F 2),¹ and in view of the importance assigned to Sicily – or more specifically Epicharmus – in parts of the argument, Aristotle could therefore also be engaging with a Sicilian Doric author like Alcimus who similarly claimed for Sicily the invention of the erotic Παίγνια genre (Alcimus *FGrH* 560 F 1), whose 'Sicily/Epicharmus first' attitude is well-documented by the treatise *Πρὸς Ἀμύνταν* in which he presented Plato as heavily indebted to Epicharmus (cf.

¹ Thus Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1906, 619 n. 1; cf. Jacoby 1955, 390–391 and 396, Ornaghi 2016, 331–334.

Alcimus *FGrH* 560 F 6 = Dion. Hal. 3.9-17 with [Epich.] fr. 275–279), and whose plausible association with Dionysius II of Syracuse, himself the author of a work *Περὶ τῶν Ἐπιχάρμου ποιημάτων* (cf. Sud. δ 1179), would also fit the overall picture. But be that as it may, the important thing is that we grasp here the beginnings of a pre-Aristotelian tradition of ‘linguistic archaeology’ that has lost none of its appeal until the present day.

2.2. Now

For the term *κωμωδία*, we find further reflexes of the etymological debate in the medieval *Prolegomena* on comedy, with some modification of the viewpoints recorded in Aristotle’s *Poetics*;² but in modern times the *κῶμος* theory has largely carried the day. There are in fact good linguistic reasons for discarding its competitor. The noun from which *κωμωδία* and *κωμωδέω* are derived, *κωμωδός*, belongs to an amply-attested group of so-called ‘verbal rectional compounds’ featuring a verbal second element (in our case *-ωδός* < *-αοιδός*) after a nominal first element. The semantic relationship between these two elements is not quite so random in Greek as it is in similar English compounds: when the verbal element is transitive, it directly governs the nominal element in the overwhelming number of cases. In other words, if taken as ‘village singer’, a *κωμωδός* should *a priori* be someone singing *of* a village, rather than *in* a village. There are, admittedly, exceptions: a *κιθαρωδός* is not someone who sings *of* a cithara, but who sings *to* the cithara. This is licensed because *αἰδῶ* does not have to be transitive; and yet, here too the underlying concept of ‘cithara performance’ is much more unified than a concept of ‘village singing’ could be.

In a similar vein, we may justify *κωμωδός* via the *κῶμος/κωμάζειν* theory. It is usually – though only tacitly – assumed that there must be enough conceptual unity in the idea of ‘singing in/as a *κῶμος*’ to justify the compound. Even so, two things are worth stressing: (a) the *κωμ-* element of *κωμωδοί* (and *κωμωδία*) is not to be understood as the ‘subject’ of the underlying verbal phrase, the *κωμωδία* is not the ‘singing *by* the *κῶμος*’;³ and (b) we should seriously contemplate the alternative of seeing in the *κωμ-* element a ‘direct object’ of the singing, just as in *μελωδία*, for example. If we do so, we can compare the use of the word *κῶμος* we find in Pindar and other lyric texts: there the word designates, not the ‘revel’ itself or the ‘band of revellers’, but ‘the ode sung at one of these festive processions [i.e., “the

² See Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* III.1–5 Koster, where the originally Doric impetus of the *κῶμαι* theory seems completely forgotten as the proponents of the *κωμάζειν* theory are said to *object* to it on the grounds that *κῶμαι* is not an Attic word; Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* IV.1–3 Koster, where the *κῶμαι* theory is (implicitly) taken up, but related not so much to a presumed habit of people ‘travelling from one village to the next, being kept out of the city in dishonour’ (Arist. *Poet.* 1448a38) as to one whereby citizens who were wronged in the villages would have gone at night to the deme of the wrongdoer to publicly incriminate him (τὸ παλαιὸν οἱ ἐν ταῖς κώμαις ἀδικούμενοι παρὰ τῶν πολιτῶν νυκτὸς ἀπὸ τῶν δῆμων ἐκείνων, ἔνθα ὁ ἀδικήσας ἦν, καὶ ἔλεγον ὅτι ἔστι τις ἐνταῦθα ποιὼν εἰς τὸν γεωργὸν τάδε; cf. similarly Anon. *Cram. de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* XIb.3–13 and XIb.38–39 Koster, Schol. Dion. Thr. pp. 18–20 Hilgard = *Proleg. de com.* XVIIIa.2–14 Koster). A curious conflation of the theories is then offered by Tzetzes in his *Στίχοι περὶ διαφορᾶς ποιητῶν* (= *Proleg. de com.* XXIa.26–45 and XXIa.115–119 Koster), which focus on the latter instantiation of the *κῶμαι* theory as just described, but additionally bring in references to *κῶμοι* Διονύσου (vv. 40, 118) as well as *κῶμα* ‘sleep’ (vv. 32, 115; cf. the same Tzetzes’ *Prolegomena ad Lycophronem* = *Proleg. de com.* XXIIb.29–32 Koster, Anon. *Cram. de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* XIb.39–40 Koster, *Proleg. de com.* XIIb Koster, Schol. Dion. Thr. pp. 18–20 Hilgard = *Proleg. de com.* XVIIIa.47–48 Koster); all of this is difficult to align with Tzetzes’ simultaneous claim – ultimately harking back to Eratosthenes (cf. Burkert 1966, 93 n. 14) – that tragedy, comedy, and satyr play all go back to a single primeval genre under the name *τρυγῶδία* (v. 57) (cf. *Et. Magn.*, s.v. *τραγῶδία* (p. 764.9–12 Gaisford) = *Proleg. de com.* XVI.7–9 Koster; the same entry then also offers a summary list of the ancient etymologies of *κωμωδία*, as does Diomedes *ars gramm.* p. 488.5–14 Keil = *Proleg. de com.* XXIV.2.26–35 Koster).

³ Compare the remarks to this effect in the discussion of the term *τραγῶδία* by Burkert 1966, 92, in the wake of Reisch 1902, 466–468, and Pickard-Cambridge 1927, 164–165; see further fn. 40 below.

procession[s] which celebrated a victor in games”]’ (LSJ 1018, s.v. II; cf. the related ἐγ-κῶμ-ιον). Moreover, we can recall the relatively recent, but entirely convincing and formally unassailable, etymology that connects Gr. κῶμος (via a pre-form *kóms-o-) with Vedic śáṃsa- ‘praise’, as attested in phrases such as śáṃso narám ‘praise of men’ (with the compound nārā-śáṃsa-; e.g. RV 1.106.4, 2.34.6, etc.).⁴ The core semantics of the root involved, however, are not purely laudatory, if we also accept the connection with Lat. *cēnsēre* (< *k̑ms-éie/o-), referring to a ‘(critical) assessment’ of sorts.⁵ That such an assessment could turn into straightforward ‘praise’ when applied to a victorious sportsman, hero, or god goes without saying; but the ‘singing of the κῶμος’ could also still contain those elements of ribaldry and rebuke that are so constitutive of early comedy, and have been regarded as such since antiquity. If understood in this way, the term κωμῳδία might originally have been less interested in a particular ‘comastic’ performance mode, be it phallic, satyric, or whatever, than in the communicative content of the genre. While not being quite as elusive as its sister term τραγωδία is, the word κωμῳδία, too, thus remains more of an unknown than is often acknowledged.

3. Linguistic profiling

3.1. Then

Moving on to the second level of analysis, we switch from linguistic archaeology to ‘linguistic profiling’. What I mean by this is the attempt to read the language of a dramatic genre as one key to its historical evolution. When, for example, ancient sources comment on the ‘harshness’ of Cratinus’ comedy, which was continued by Eupolis more than by Aristophanes (cf. Platon. *diff. char.* = *Proleg. de com.* II.1–5 and II.15 Koster (αὐστηρὸς ταῖς λοιδορίαις, πικρὸς λίαν), Vit. Ar. = *Proleg. de com.* XXVIII.4–5 Koster (πικρότερόν τε καὶ αἰσχροτέρον Κρατίνου καὶ Εὐπόλιδος βλασφημούντων ἢ ἔδει), Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* III.34–35 Koster), there must have been a linguistic element to this, even if the fragments no longer allow us to make out pin down the difference in tone. And it makes sense to connect such an older formal-linguistic ‘profile’ of comedy with the ἱαμβικὴ ἰδέα Aristotle tells us Crates was the first to abandon by shifting towards a more plot-focused comedy (*Poet.* 1449b7–9, Κράτης πρῶτος ἤρξεν ἀφέντος τῆς ἱαμβικῆς ἰδέας). However, it remains difficult to gauge to what extent we are dealing with *individual* preferences, the *generic* reach of which was overstated, through extrapolation, by ancient critics. Their acquaintance with the full range of pre-Aristophanic comedy was also limited, but they were keen to retrace an evolutionary line that was, as Aristotle remarks, more or less hidden in the case of comedy (*Poet.* 1449a38–39, ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία διὰ τὸ μὴ σπουδάζεσθαι ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔλαθεν).

3.2. Now

Later on, of course, our evidence is sufficient to observe how Middle Comedy changes gear, in comparison with Old Comedy, by reducing verbal inventiveness and, more fundamentally, linguistic unpredictability. The type figure of the bombastic cook in Middle Comedy is symptomatic. The cook’s speech is regularly imbued with dithyrambic elements, so much so that this becomes part of his *χαρακτήρ*: in addition to being a cook, he is a *Sprachzauberer*.⁶ In that sense we still find a degree of linguistic fluidity that is reminiscent of Old Comedy

⁴ See especially Durante 1974 and 1976, 51–54, and Dunkel 1995, 13–15; cf. also Hackstein 2002, 190. To qualify κῶμος as “a Pre-Greek word” is gratuitous (Beekes 2009, 1.814, s.v.), and the connection of κῶμος and Ved. *káma*- ‘desire’, which Janda 2000, 278–281, proposes instead, would be unconvincing even if there was any reason to believe that κωμῳδία was originally a *Heischelied* (an idea already mooted by Varro: see Varr. fr. 305 Funaioli).

⁵ Cf. Dunkel 1995, 16–18, slightly modifying García Ramón 1993 (against Wackernagel 1927, 321–327).

⁶ Nesselrath 1990, 257–262; cf. Dobrov 2002.

since it is unnatural enough in real-world communication not to survive into New Comedy. But it has become ‘predictable’ fluidity, tied to a specific group of characters. As such, it does not contradict the wider observation of one anonymous treatise *Περὶ κωμωδίας*, according to which ‘the poets of Middle Comedy did not touch on poetic composition, but, through taking up everyday language, they rather have prosaic qualities, so that the poetic style is rare among them’ (Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* III.42–44 Koster, τῆς δὲ μέσης κωμωδίας οἱ ποιηταὶ πλάσματος μὲν οὐχ ἤψαντο ποιητικοῦ, διὰ δὲ τῆς συνήθους ἰόντες λαλιᾶς λογικὰς ἔχουσι τὰς ἀρετάς, ὥστε σπάνιον ποιητικὸν εἶναι χαρακτῆρα παρ’ αὐτοῖς).⁷ Moreover, as has rightly been stressed, there is nothing but abstract – essentially lexical – stereotyping behind such dithyrambic intrusions: we witness in them a “striking *absence* of ‘intertextuality’ and [sc. targeted, rather than just stylistic] parody”.⁸ The reception of what remains of linguistic heterogeneity thereby becomes less demanding, since less dependent on the ‘correct’, but strictly context-dependent, processing of randomly intruding codes. The shared cultural knowledge required of the audience is minimized, turning Middle Comedy into an art form that is ‘koineized’ not only thematically, by its abandonment of Athenocentric political allusivity, but also through linguistic conventionalization.

At the same time, generic conventionalization extends beyond comic polyphony: it also affects the linguistic base layer. We tend to forget this because from our point of view the base language of Middle Comedy is the same as the base language of Old Comedy: spoken everyday Attic. But Middle Comedy, unlike Old Comedy, belongs to a world where the sociocultural status of Attic is changing: the genre’s rise coincides with the establishment, or conventionalization, of Attic Greek as a literary default language, a code to be mastered by anyone with even the most limited educational ambition. Though separated from the Attic of Old Comedy by no real *formal* dividing line, the Attic of Middle Comedy is therefore no longer readable as an Athenian in-group language: as a literary medium it has come to belong to *every* speaker of Greek.⁹ To be sure, Athens and the Athenian Dionysia remain the genre’s Hollywood and Oscar Night, but as long as a play was written in the ‘proper’ way no-one cared any more if a playwright or director came from Thurii (Alexis), Rhodes (or Colophon) (Anaxandrides), Thessaly (or Kios or Smyrna or Rhodes) (Antiphanes), Sinope (Dionysius), Ambrakia (Epicrates), or Sicyon (or Thebes) (Sophilus).¹⁰ In that sense, the dialectal

⁷ The only apparent contrast between this view and schol. Ar. *Plut.* 515b, according to which a dithyrambically inspired line in the *Plutus* ‘already reeks of Middle Comedy’ (ἤδη τὸ ἔπος τοῦτο τῆς μέσης κωμωδίας ὄζει), is dubbed ‘Meineke’s paradox’ by Dobrov 2002, 182–183, referencing Meineke 1839, 291. In the Aristophanic scholia, a generalizing statement of this kind is unique.

⁸ Dobrov 2002, 186–187.

⁹ The eventual emergence of a new demarcation line between ἀττικίζειν and ἐλληνίζειν, as famously attested already in the third-century comic poet Posidippus’ fr. 30, is an indirect consequence of this: native Athenians will have started to emphasize linguistic features that had not in this way become ‘international’ property. On the politics of dialect in Old Comedy, see especially Cassio 1981 and Colvin 1999; the identity aspect is most prominent in Pl. Com. fr. 183 and Eupolis fr. 99.25 (cf. Colvin 1999, 281–284, 287; more generally also Willi 2002, esp. 121–125, 136).

¹⁰ Among the poets of Old Comedy, nearly all for whom any information regarding their origin is given at all are recorded as Athenians (Amipsias, Apollophanes, Archippus, Aristomenes, Aristophanes, Autocrates, Callias, Cantharus, Crates, Cephisodorus, Chionides, Cratinus, Eunicus, Eupolis, Hermippus, Magnes, Metagenes, Myrtilus, Nicochares, Nicophon, Pherecrates, Philonides, Philyllius, Phrynichus, Plato, Sannyrio, Strattis, Teleclides, Theopompus): for one or two rare and uncertain exceptions, see Alcaeus (test. 1 = Sud. α 1274, Μιτυληναῖος, εἴτα Ἀθηναῖος), Diocles (test. 1 = Sud. δ 1155, Ἀθηναῖος ἢ Φλιάσιος). Many poets of Middle Comedy were of course still Athenians: they include Aristophanes’ sons (Ararus, Philippus, and Philetaerus or Nicostratus) as well as Amphis (uncertain, possibly from Andros; cf. test. 1), Augeas, Ehippus, Eubulus, Heniochus, Sotades, Stephanus (the son of Antiphanes, who became an Athenian citizen), Timocles, and Timotheus.

continuity paradoxically tells us something about the *transformation* of comedy in the fourth century.

4. Linguistic anatomy

4.1. *Then*

Yet, continuity is a relative concept, and the Attic language itself was naturally evolving in the one and a half centuries separating Magnes from Menander. As another anonymous treatise *Περὶ τῆς κωμωδίας* remarks (Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* V.2–7 Koster),

τῆς δὲ νέας διαφέρει ἡ παλαιὰ κωμωδία χρόνῳ, διαλέκτῳ, ὕλῃ, μέτρῳ, διασκευῇ. χρόνῳ μὲν καθὼ ἡ μὲν νέα ἐπὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου, ἡ δὲ παλαιὰ ἐπὶ τῶν Πελοποννησιακῶν εἶχε τὴν ἀκμὴν. διαλέκτῳ δέ, καθὼ ἡ μὲν νέα τὸ σαφέστερον ἔσχε τῇ νέᾳ κεχρημένη Ἀτθίδι, ἡ δὲ παλαιὰ τὸ δεινὸν καὶ ὑψηλὸν τοῦ λόγου· ἐνίστε δὲ καὶ ἐπιτηδεύουσι λέξεις τινάς.

Old Comedy differs from New Comedy in terms of time, language, subject matter, metre, and arrangement. In terms of time, in that New Comedy had its peak under Alexander, Old Comedy during the Peloponnesian War. In terms of language, in that New Comedy is more given to clarity, thanks to its use of Younger Attic, and Old Comedy to powerfulness and sublimity of expression; but occasionally they also make use of some [specific] words.

The focus of this rhetorically imbued characterization is again on differences of style – ‘clarity’ (σαφέστερον) vs. ‘expressivity’ (δεινὸν καὶ ὑψηλόν) –, but mention is also made in passing of New Comedy’s ‘Younger Attic’ (i.e., in contrast to the ‘Old Attic’ of Old Comedy, with its lexical specificities).¹¹ We thus reach our third level of analysis, ‘linguistic anatomy’. What insights, if any, does a fine-grained dissection of the surviving texts have to offer to the theatre historian – not *only* to the historian of language, to whom the colloquial and everyday component of comic language is of huge value since it is otherwise hidden from our eyes? If it were possible, for example, to establish that a given expression is part of comedian X’s idiolect, that could enable us to attribute fragments of disputed or unknown authorship; and if we were able to say that this or that lexeme fell out of use in the 430s, this could help us to resolve some of the chronological uncertainties we face when dealing with the comic fragments.

Unfortunately, most such hopes and expectations are bound to be disappointed. Our general knowledge of the language of Athens is simply too fragmentary. Time and again we lack a large enough corpus of comparanda to make any confident statements; and so we constantly run the risk of falling into the trap into which our ancient predecessors could already fall even though they still accessed a much fuller body of primary evidence – simply because they did not have the convenient lexicographical tools we possess today. According to a scholion on Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (schol. Ar. *Ran.* 146a, with Strattis fr. 8), some ancient scholars said that Strattis in his *Atalantos* was the first (presumably comic) writer to use the word σκῶρ ‘shit’; but another commentator with a good sense for chronology – perhaps Didymus – was quick to point out that this is wrong since the *Atalantos* was staged ‘much later’ (πολλῷ ὕστερον) than

¹¹ In the Aristophanic scholia the notion of οἱ παλαιοὶ Ἀττικοί (presumably to be contrasted with οἱ νέοι Ἀττικοί) appears only once, in schol. Ar. *Plut.* 166aα on κναφεύει vs. later γναφεύει; contrast schol. Ar. *Plut.* 166aβ and Sud. κ 1855 (= schol. Ar. *Eccl.* 415) where the same phonological divergence is classified in the more usual way as Ἀττικόν vs. κοινόν (but cf. Probert 2004 on the reality behind a three-way contrast ‘Old Attic’ vs. ‘Younger Attic’ vs. ‘Koine’). Note that Menander is still thought of as a presentable Ἀττικός in e.g. schol. Ar. *Thesm.* 572 or schol. Ar. *Plut.* 35a, while schol. Ar. *Av.* 1514 does not hesitate to censure the Aristophanic phrase πηνίκ’ ἄττ’ ἀπώλετο; as ‘not Attic, [...] neither archaic nor accurate’ (οὐκ Ἀττικόν [...] οὐδὲ ἀρχαϊκόν οὐδὲ ἀκριβῶν); for further strict criticism of this kind compare schol. Ar. *Thesm.* 828 on both Aristophanes and Eupolis unduly mixing up στρατιά ‘army’ and στρατεία ‘campaign’.

the *Frogs*, where σκῶρ also occurs (*Ran.* 146; cf. schol. *Ar. Ran.* 146b). We cannot tell how the error had arisen,¹² or why the prominent attestation in *Frogs* had been overlooked; but the main point of interest is that such a question of lexical chronology was already asked at all. Admittedly, we have no reason to think that this was standard practice or happened frequently; but we do know (a) that there was a strong lexical focus in ancient scholarship on comedy from early on, starting with Lycophron of Chalcis and Eratosthenes of Cyrene and culminating in the ambitious comic lexicon of Didymus of Alexandria, and (b) that the great Λέξεις of Aristophanes of Byzantium already contained a section entitled Περὶ τῶν ὑποπευομένων μὴ εἰρησθαι τοῖς παλαιοῖς (*Ar. Byz. fr.* 1–36 Slater), which betrays a distinctly diachronic interest that could of course be put to good use in editorial and textual-critical activity.¹³ In this spirit, a scholion on Aristophanes' *Peace* highlights that 'even/already the ancients' (καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι; i.e., writers like Aristophanes) could use the word κάκκη for 'excrements' (schol. *Ar. Pax* 162); someone – perhaps the early commentator Callistratus – singled out βλιμάζοντες in *Av.* 530 as a νεωτερικὴ λέξις used in lieu of ψηλαφῶντες (schol. *Ar. Av.* 530a);¹⁴ and some ancient editors of Aristophanes evidently felt uneasy about his use in the *Plutus* of the verb ποδαγράφω, which they (questionably) considered a non-Attic, Hellenistic, word (schol. *Ar. Plut.* 559b).¹⁵ Moreover, again Callistratus advocated a reading τὸν ναῦλον 'the fare' instead of τὸ ναῦλον in *Ran.* 270, observing that the masculine use was usual at the time of Aristophanes (sc. in contrast with linguistic convention in later times) (schol. *Ar. Ran.* 270a);¹⁶ and yet another scholion on *Frogs*, though regrettably unclear in the specifics, indicates that already Eratosthenes had inveighed again a group of ψευδαττικοί who thought that grammatical mistakes in certain

¹² Not least because the *general* chronological priority of Aristophanes *vis-à-vis* Strattis must have been clear to anyone, regardless of the relative chronological ordering of individual plays. In Aristophanes, the *Frogs* attestation precedes another one in *Plutus* (*Plut.* 305); cf. Orth 2009, 75, with further comparanda. By contrast, the attestation of Dor. σκάρ in Epich. fr. 48.3 (as well as Sophron fr. 11) will have been outside the purview of the responsible lexicographer. For the attribution of the correction to Didymus, see Boudreaux 1919, 115.

¹³ Cf. Pfeiffer 1968, 198–199, Slater 1986, 5–27, Tosi 1994, 155–162. Note especially *Ar. Byz.* fr. 1 with Cratin. fr. 489; fr. 9 with *Ar. Thesm.* 1059; fr. 15 with Cratin. fr. 345; fr. 18 with Pherecrates fr. 58 and Philemo fr. 62; fr. 25C–E with *Ar. Av.* 42 and Pl. Com. fr. 247; fr. 28A–D with *Ar. Vesp.* 979 and *Ran.* 35; fr. 30 with Eupolis fr. 448; fr. 36 with Eubulus fr. 10.

¹⁴ The same scholion shows how a subsequent scholar qualified this assertion by detecting a slight semantic difference between βλιμάζειν and ψηλαφᾶν (βλιμάζοντες Γ³: ὅτι νεωτερικὴ ἢ λέξις. Καλλίστρατος· ἀντὶ τοῦ “ψηλαφᾶν”. VM₉Γ³ ἔοικε δὲ πλέον τι σημαίνειν, τὸ “μετὰ συντονίας”. VI³).

¹⁵ It is not clear if they suggested to emend ποδαγράφοντες into ποδαλγῶντες, although this would be one possible interpretation of the scholion (ποδαγράφοντες] ὅτι ἐλληνικὸν τὸ “ποδαγράφον”. RVEBarb τινὲς δέ, φεύγοντες αὐτό, “ποδαλγῶ[σι]” λέγουσιν. V); alternatively, the second part merely contains a general observation on purist avoidance without any bearing on the Aristophanic text as such. Note that ποδαγράφω is first attested in *Ar. fr.* 322.9 from the *Ἡρώες*, a comedy usually dated to the same period as *Birds* (cf. Geissler 1969, 55, Kassel/Austin 1984, 173). Interestingly, no-one seems to have taken similar exception to the isolated (and metrically unavoidable) use of non-Attic (Ionic?) gen. τάπητος in *Ar. Plut.* 542, although scholars were perfectly aware that the 'proper' Attic form of the word – and the one otherwise consistently used throughout the history of Attic comedy – was δάπιδος (see schol. *Ar. Plut.* 528a).

¹⁶ The addition that even among later authors (νεώτεροι, μεταγενέστεροι) masc. ναῦλος is found need not be Callistratus'; it does not contradict the use of ntr. ναῦλον in fourth-century authors like Demosthenes, but rather acknowledges that the occurrence of masc. ναῦλος in a later author would not be entirely unexpected either. Vice versa, schol. *Ar. Av.* 1418a (τίς ὁ περῶν ΕΓ: πρὸς τὸ σχῆμα ᾧ χρῶνται συνεχῶς οἱ νέοι συγγραφεῖς. “τίς ὁ περῶν” ἀντὶ τοῦ “τίς περῶ;” RVEΓLh) does not imply that Aristophanes is classified a νέος συγγραφεύς, merely that his usage here foreshadows a later development (the factual accuracy of which assumption may of course be doubted in this instance: the scholiast seems to be thinking of the periphrastic σχῆμα Χαλκιδικόν, illustrated in Lesb. Gramm. Περὶ σχημάτων 5 by ὥς τὸ “Σωκράτης ἀπολογούμενός ἐστιν” ἀντὶ τοῦ “ἀπολογεῖται”, rather than considering the pragmatic difference between 'Who is it that is fitting you with feathers?' and 'Who is fitting you with feathers?').

fake plays (πεπλασμένα δράματα) could be whitewashed by defending a parallel misreading in an Aristophanic comedy (schol. Ar. *Ran.* 1263c).¹⁷

4.2. Now

So far, so good, then – but where does that leave *us*? Are the difficulties we face such that we better abandon any investigation into linguistic chronology without further ado? Since inscriptional evidence in the form of the so-called *fasti*, the *didaskaliai*, and the victors' lists¹⁸ suggests that within the history of Old Comedy there was something of a caesura in the early 420s, when a new generation of poets including Aristophanes and Eupolis rose to prominence and replaced authors like Cratinus, Crates, and Teleclides, it might not be unexpected if there was also a linguistic boundary separating, say, Cratinus or Crates from Aristophanes. Looking at the extant fragments, however, it turns out to be impossible to find anything in the former two poets that would look unusual in a play or fragment of Aristophanes. Moreover, there is the additional problem that even if we were able to identify as seemingly 'early' or 'late' a given feature in, say, a fragment of Cratinus, we would come up against the problem of idiolect: before we could conclude from this that the play to which the fragment in question belongs is also 'early' or 'late' in the career of Cratinus, we would have to be certain that the linguistic feature was not simply part of his idiolect throughout his life. In order to allow conclusions of this kind, our body of evidence would therefore have to be much larger than it actually is.

Such a more favourable situation we have only with Aristophanes, thanks to the preservation of eleven complete plays that range over nearly four decades (from *Acharnians* in 425 BC to *Plutus* in 388 BC) and whose exact dates we can determine with certainty in nearly all cases thanks to didascalic information transmitted in the hypotheses.¹⁹ But what is striking here is how much linguistic uniformity we again encounter. This does not of course mean that the linguistic makeup of every comedy is identical; the topical diversity is such that it has to impact on the lexical constituency in particular. Yet, if we were randomly given a five- or even ten-line sequence from an extant comedy, without knowing that particular play, we would find it exceedingly hard to assign such a 'fragment' to Aristophanes' early or late phase with any confidence. If we were lucky, there might be some *indicators* in it, but never more than that. Let us briefly consider one or two examples of what such indicators could look like.

In the extant Aristophanic plays there are 284 instances of the particle δῆ, whose distribution seems fairly unremarkable. In the early *Acharnians* and *Knights*, for instance, we have 20 and 19 attestations, respectively (i.e., once in every 62 and 74 lines), in the late *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* 22 and 14 (i.e., once in every 54 and 86 lines). A rather different picture emerges with δῆπου. This is attested 23 times in the extant plays and additionally once in a fragment of the

¹⁷ τῶν ψήφων λαβών] Ἐρατοσθένης τῶν ψευδαττικῶν τινὰς γράφειν φησὶ †“τῷ ψήφῳ λαβών”, ἵνα καὶ τὰ πεπλασμένα δράματα ἐν οἷς τὸ παράπαν τοῦτο ἡγνόνηται δοκῇ μὴ σεσολοικίσθαι.† Chantry 1999, 142, following Dindorf 1838, 136, tentatively proposes that the ψευδαττικοί might have mistreated ψήφος as a masculine noun and, when challenged, claimed that Aristophanes himself could use it like this (failing to see that *Ran.* 1263 in reality contained a partitive genitive τῶν ψήφων); however, the gender of ψήφος does not seem to have been fluid anywhere in Greek. Alternatively, one might perhaps think of a misuse of the dual (τῷ ψήφῳ) in places where a plural was needed; Chantry's objection that “non enim hic de duobus lapillis agi quisquam duxisset” would be weak if the ψευδαττικοί did not actually think of ‘two stones’ but nevertheless maintained the – from Eratosthenes' (and our) point of view soloecistic – use of a dual.

¹⁸ For a convenient and thorough commented edition of these texts, see now Millis/Olson 2012.

¹⁹ The exceptions are *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, for which no hypotheses are extant, but even for these two plays the respective datings to 411 BC (see esp. schol. Ar. *Thesm.* 1060 together with schol. Ar. *Ran.* 53; cf. Austin/Olson 2004, xxxiii–xxxvi) and the period 393–391 BC (cf. e.g. Ussher 1973, xx–xxv) are reliable.

Phoenician Women (fr. 572²⁰). 11 out of these 24 examples belong to either *Ecclesiazusae* (3×) or *Plutus* (8×). This could be a coincidence. However, it probably is not since we further notice that there is not one attestation of this apparently unremarkable particle in the numerous fragments of Cratinus and Eupolis; in fact, the only other poet of Old Comedy where we find δῆπου (just once) is Pherecrates (fr. 98.2) – beyond that, a *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* search throughout the comic corpus merely yields attestations in the fourth-century poets Anaxandrides (1×), Antiphanes (1×), Crobylus (1×), and, above all, Alexis (3×) and Menander (9×).²¹

Or take the stem ἀπαξάπαντ-, with its (presumably colloquial) intensification. There are 20 attestations in Aristophanes, of which again roughly half (9×) are in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* alone, and an additional one in the equally late *Aiolosikon* (fr. 2.2). Here, too, Cratinus and Eupolis have nothing to offer, whereas we do find one instance each in Hermippus, Archippus, Strattis, and Plato Comicus – but then, the activity of at least the latter three also reaches down well into the fourth century, where they are joined by Antiphanes, Xenarchus, Philemon and Menander.²²

So, there do seem to be some changes in linguistic fashion – but the point is this: neither δῆπου nor ἀπαξάπαντ- are *excluded* from Aristophanes' early plays, and so their value for dating undated stretches of text turns out to be limited.²³ It is curious to note that ἀπαξάπαντ- occurs 5 times in *Peace* (= 50% of the fifth-century evidence for Aristophanes) and δῆπου 4 times (= 33%), but there is no obvious explanation for this disruptive 'peak' in 421 BC: we simply have to accept that linguistic change, even when macroscopically linear, can be microscopically untidy.

4.3. Some test cases

Against this background, it is unsurprising if linguistic anatomy has not generally been used in assigning undated fragmentary plays to certain periods in Aristophanes' career. Except for

²⁰ The Φοίνισσαί are placed in the early 400s by Geissler 1969, 61, and Bagordo 2020, 166, because of their parodic relationship with Euripides' homonymous tragedy; contrast the remarks of Sommerstein 2009, 283 with n. 45, quoted in fn. 24.

²¹ Anaxandrides fr. 1.4, Antiphanes fr. 220.1, Crobylus fr. 9.3, Alexis fr. 7.2, 34.3, 205.5, Men. *Asp.* 442, 443, *Kol.* 59 (?), *Kon.* 11, *Sam.* 256, 458, 486, fr. 163.58 and 241.1 *CGFP*. There is a somewhat parallel pattern in the use of δῆπουθε(ν) (Ar. *Vesp.* 296, *Pax* 1019, *Av.* 187, *Plut.* 140; Alexis fr. 279.2, Antiphanes fr. 205.9, Bato fr. 5.8, 7.3, Crobylus fr. 8.2, Eubulus fr. 106.20, Men. *Asp.* 397, *Epit.* 401, *Perik.* 511, 521, *Sam.* 597, 647, Philemo fr. 109.1, Philetaerus fr. 13.4).

²² See Hermippus fr. 73.3, Archippus fr. 14.4, Strattis fr. 37.2, Pl. *Com.* fr. 15.1; Antiphanes fr. 132.6, Xenarchus fr. 7.16, Philemo fr. 93.9, Men. *Mis.* 268, fr. 264.8 K.-A. In prose, ἀπαξάπαντ- is extremely rare, no doubt because of its colloquial expressivity; before the end of the 4th cent. see only Aen. *Tact.* 22.9. By contrast, δῆπου is fairly common already in early Attic oratory and prose (e.g. Antiphon (11×), Andocides (7×), Thucydides (4×)); here it may be that what had begun life as a heavy and formal particle became increasingly deformed.

²³ Note, too, that the identification of such linguistic ups and downs is considerably helped by the fact that *Ecclesiazusae* + *Plutus* constitute a chronologically distinct late 'group'; features clustering there but not in the earlier plays can be detected more easily. By contrast, this late group is not by itself large enough to ensure that whatever is absent (or not clustering) there but present (or more common) in the earlier plays is of similar significance (i.e., suggestive of the *decline* of a potential indicator). In order to make such a development plausible, more emphasis needs to be placed on the wider picture. For example, quasi-prepositional εὐθύ + gen. in the sense of '(straight) to(wards)' is attested 10× in Aristophanes (1× each in *Eq.* [254], *Nub.* [162], *Av.* [1421], and *Eccl.* [835]; 4× in *Pax* [68, 77, 301, 819]; 2× in fragments [fr. 166, 671]), 3× in the fragments of Eupolis (fr. 54.1, 196.1, 327.3), but nowhere in the remnants of Middle and New Comedy; together with the fact that such εὐθύ, for all its potential usefulness in texts mentioning directed movement (e.g. conversations, historiography, oratory), is found only five or six times in Plato (in just three passages: *Theag.* 129a/d, *Lys.* 203a/b, *Gorg.* 525a), only twice in Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.4.11, *Cyr.* 5.2.37 (?)), and never in the orators, this is indeed suggestive of a decline, but the Aristophanic evidence alone would not have been very telling here.

those fragmentary plays where we happen to have secure didascalical informations (*Banqueters*, datable to 427 BC thanks to Ar. fr. 590.3–5 (= *P.Oxy.* 2737) and other sources; *Babylonians*, datable to 426 BC thanks to schol. Ar. *Ach.* 378 and other sources; *Proagon*, datable to the Lenaia of 422 BC thanks to a hypothesis on *Wasps*; *Amphiaraos*, datable to the Lenaia of 414 BC thanks to a hypothesis on *Birds*), we mostly depend on intertextual, factual, or prosopographical allusions: the *Merchantmen* (Ὀλκάδες), for instance, must be early because they dealt with Cleon, the *Lemnian Women* (Λήμνιαι) may belong to the period around 410 BC because one fragment (Ar. fr. 373) arguably alludes to Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* of c. 413 BC, and the *Storks* (Πελαργοί) are regarded as late because they mentioned the poet Patrocles and the demagogue Neoclides who were equally referred to in *Plutus*.²⁴

Whether there is any scope in adding a linguistic angle to such explorations may best be tested on the basis of the fragments of two comedies whose lateness is certain: *Aiolosikon* and *Kokalos*. These plays not only foreshadowed those of Middle or even New Comedy (cf. Platon. *diff. com.* = *Proleg. de com.* I.29–30 Koster, Vit. Ar. = *Proleg. de com.* XXVIII.5–7 and 54–55 Koster, *Proleg. de com.* XXIXa.7–8 Koster) but we are also told that the poet left them to be staged by his son Ararus (*argum.* Ar. *Plut.*). Now, given the respective numbers of just 16 (*Aiolosikon*: Ar. fr. 1–16) and 13 (*Kokalos*: Ar. fr. 359–371) fragments, with a total of less than 20 complete lines for each comedy, the situation may not look too promising. And yet, some potential signals of lateness can be made out. For the *Aiolosikon* we may take note of two points:²⁵

1. As mentioned earlier, Ar. fr. 2 contains one of the Aristophanic attestations of the stem ἀπαξάπαντ-, which mainly cluster in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus*.
2. Ar. fr. 6 is cited by Pollux (1.79) because of the use in it of the word κοιτών for 'bedroom'. Pollux is thereby implicitly responding to stricter Atticists who held that the proper Attic word was δωμάτιον (cf. Phryn. *eccl.* 222; for δωμάτιον in Aristophanes see Ar. *Lys.* 160, *Ran.* 100 and 311, *Eccl.* 8, and Ar. fr. 18 from the *Amphiaraos* of 414 BC; elsewhere in comedy: Eubulus fr. 102). As Pollux makes clear, κοιτών also occurred in Menander (Men. fr. 614), but it may have been reprimanded there²⁶ and in any case the lexeme cannot have been widespread in earlier comedy as this would have invalidated the stricter Atticists' doctrine.

For the *Kokalos*, three observations are potentially relevant:

1. In Ar. fr. 360, the emphasizing adverb κομιδῇ 'exactly, totally' is used. In Aristophanes we also encounter this once each in *Clouds* (*Nub.* 391), *Peace* (*Pax* 820), and

²⁴ See Geissler 1969, 36–37 (Ὀλκάδες), 55 (Λήμνιαι), and 71–72 (Πελαργοί), Torchio 2021, 95–96 (Ὀλκάδες) and 163 (Πελαργοί). Without much discussion, Sommerstein 2009, 283 with n. 45, treats the Λήμνιαι as "certainly or probably belong[ing] to the 390s or 380s"; even if this is overly confident, it is of course true that the fact that "plays [such as *Lemnias*, *Phoinissai*, *Polyidos*] are based on fifth-century tragedies does not prove that they were necessarily written within a few years after the tragedies in question".

²⁵ A side issue is raised by the fact that ancient sources mention two plays entitled Αἰολοσίκων, whose relationship to each other is uncertain; if Αἰολοσίκων β' was a διασκευὴ of Αἰολοσίκων α' from which the choral parts had been removed (cf. Anon. *de com.* = *Proleg. de com.* I.6 Koster), at least Ar. fr. 8, 9, and 10 (?) would have to belong to the first version of uncertain (but presumably also late) date (see further Sommerstein 2009, 281–283, Orth 2017, 21–25).

²⁶ The transmitted wording of Pollux, εἰ γὰρ καὶ Μένανδρος αὐτὸ βαρβαρικὸν οἶεται, ἀλλ' Ἀριστοφάνης ὁ κωμωδοδιδάσκαλος τὰ τοιαῦτα πιστότερος αὐτοῦ, εἰπὼν ἐν Αἰολοσίκωνι κτλ., naturally leads to the idea that "videtur Menander aliquem ea voce usum ab altero reprehendi fecisse" (Kock 1888, 255, after Lobeck 1820, 252–253 n., cited by Kassel/Austin 1984, 317); if so, Pollux for once had to dismiss a negative judgment on κοιτών that was (at least partly) based on Menander, although normally it was he who was more tolerant of Menandrian usage than strict Atticists like Phrynichus (cf. Tribulato 2013).

Thesmophoriazusae (*Thesm.* 3), but four times in *Plutus* (including a cluster of three attestations, which *might* make fun of a linguistic fashion: *Ar. Plut.* 833, 834, 838; 1086). Outside Aristophanes, we find the same adverb just once in Pherecrates (fr. 28), but frequently (9×) in Middle and New Comedy²⁷ (as well as in non-comic fourth-century authors such as Plato and Demosthenes).

2. In *Ar.* fr. 361, the adverb πώμαλα is used as a dismissive negative answer ('not at all'). The only other Aristophanic occurrence of this is in *Plutus* (*Plut.* 66), although there is one more comic example again in Pherecrates (fr. 9). In a fragment of a letter of Lysias, πώμαλα seems to have been associated with a particularly colloquial tone (*Lys. ep.* 1, fr. 451 Carey; cf. ἐν συνηθείᾳ λεγόμενον, and note that the speakers quoted are women), and there is one further fourth-century attestation in Demosthenes (*Dem.* 19.51).
3. In *Ar.* fr. 362, someone is told to 'hand out/over' an 'account board' (ψηφολόγιον) and two stools (δίφρω δύο): ἐκδότης δέ τις... Very similar orders involving the verb δίδωμι are given in *Birds* (*Av.* 1693, ἀλλὰ γαμικὴν χλανίδα δότης δεῦρό μοι), *Frogs* (*Ran.* 871, ἴθι νυν λιβανωτὸν δεῦρό τις καὶ πῦρ δότης), and *Plutus* (*Plut.* 1194, ἀλλ' ἐκδότης τις δεῦρο δῶδας ἡμμένας); but it is only in the *Plutus* that the compound ἐκδίδωμι is also used. There is of course no way of knowing if the preverb ἐκ- had a significant function here. However, it should be noted, firstly, that we seem to witness an innovating tendency to use 'redundant' preverbs also elsewhere in the *Plutus*,²⁸ and, secondly, that ἐκδίδωμι is otherwise completely absent from pre-Menandrian comedy – while in Menander there are two or three instances that again resemble the Aristophanic order.²⁹

From these examples it will be obvious that no individual point can ever be probative on its own. If we want to use linguistic evidence in such a way, it has to be cumulative (and, as such, set in relation to the overall quantity of fragments available for any given play). Keeping that in mind, however, our two test cases are encouraging enough to try out the procedure on those fragmentary plays of Aristophanes which remain particularly difficult to date on other grounds. These include the Ἀνάγυρος, the Δαίδαλος, the Δαναῖδες, the Πολύιδος, the Σκηνὰς καταλαμβάνουσαι, the second Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι, and the Ταγηνισταί.³⁰ Of these, Geissler not implausibly placed both the Ἀνάγυρος and the Πολύιδος in Aristophanes' middle period, roughly in the 410s, and both the Σκηνὰς καταλαμβάνουσαι and the second Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι may well belong to the early 400s, whether or not the latter are really a sequel to the first Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι;³¹ linguistically, at least, there is

²⁷ Antiphanes fr. 75.12, 127.10, 189.14, 217.4, 239.2, 249.3, Eubulus fr. 40.7, Timocles fr. 20.3, Men. *Perik.* 746.

²⁸ See Willi 2003, 49, 56, and 62, on verbal ἐπακολουθέω, συνακολουθέω, συμπαραμείγνυμι, ἐκπυνθάνομαι, προσβιάζομαι, nominal κατάδηλος, and adverbial ἐξεπίτηδες.

²⁹ Men. *Dysk.* 963–964 (ἐκδότης στεφάνους τις ἡμῖν, δῶδας), *Sam.* 731 (δεῦρο δ' ἡμῖν ἐκδότης τις δῶδας); cf. also the plausible supplement in Men. fr. 151.459 *CGFP* (παιδάριον, ἄψας δῶ[ιδας] ἡμῖν ἐκδίδου). The use of ἐκδίδωμι for 'give [a girl] in marriage' is of course to be kept apart (Men. *Asp.* 333, *Georg.* 9, *Dysk.* 336, etc.).

³⁰ Also the Διόνυσος ναυαγός, Νῆσοι, and Ποίησις, whose authenticity was questioned already in antiquity (*Vit. Ar.* = *Proleg. de com.* XXVIII.67 Koster); the few fragments remain uninformative here too (cf. Torchio 2021, 58–59 [Νῆσοι] and 219 [Ποίησις]).

³¹ See Geissler 1969, 50–51 (Ἀνάγυρος and Πολύιδος), 56 (Σκηνὰς καταλαμβάνουσαι), and 63 (Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι β'); cf. Austin/Olson 2004, lxxxiv–lxxxvii (Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι β'), Orth 2017, 233–236 (Ἀνάγυρος), Bagordo 2020, 10 (Σκηνὰς καταλαμβάνουσαι), Torchio 2021, 236–237 (Πολύιδος). On the Πολύιδος contrast Sommerstein 2009, 283 with n. 45 (cf. fn. 24 above). For the Δαίδαλος and Δαναῖδες, Geissler 1969, 45, offers no date at all (apart from the remark that "in den Jahren 427–421 ist kein Platz mehr für sie vorhanden"), whereas he very tentatively and broadly places the Ταγηνισταί in c. 415–400 BC (Geissler 1969, 48–49; cf. Bagordo 2020, 42); the dating of the latter to c. 415 BC by Baldry 1953, 58, is based on an interpretive suggestion without real substance.

nothing to speak *against* these dates. At the same time, a linguistic inspection of the fragments of the Δαναΐδες does not yield anything of interest either.

For both the Δαίδαλος and the Ταγηνισταί, however, we might be a little luckier. In the case of the Δαίδαλος, Ar. fr. 194 most likely contained the word ἐνίοτε ‘sometimes’, which, as Wackernagel observed, is a late arrival in Attic Greek.³² Although Eupolis already has it once (in fr. 221, datable to 422 BC), in Aristophanes we can only compare *Plut.* 1125 (as well as *Plut.* 867 with ἐνίους; ἐνιοί is otherwise equally un-Aristophanic). Moreover, Ar. fr. 191 presents the sequence εἷς γέ τις (in the gen. ἐνός γε του), which – as an emphatic equivalent of simple τις – is matched by two occurrences again in the *Plutus* (*Plut.* 402, 413), one in *Thesmophoriazusae* (*Thesm.* 430 μιᾷ γέ τῳ τέχνῃ; cf. also ἀμωσγέπως in the preceding line), and one in Ar. fr. 506 from Ταγηνισταί, also one of the plays still to be dated.³³

The Ταγηνισταί, in their turn, deserve mention also because of Ar. fr. 509 with κατόπιν σφῶν ἔπομαι: ἔπομαι is regularly construed with the simple dative in Aristophanes, but combines with (somewhat redundant) μετά + gen. and κατόπιν + gen. twice in *Plutus* (*Plut.* 823, 1209); moreover, κατόπιν itself occurs four times in *Plutus*, as against another four times in the entire rest of Aristophanes (including our fragment).³⁴ Furthermore, in Ar. fr. 504 we come across the verb κατέδραθεν ‘he has fallen asleep’ (used euphemistically for ‘he has passed away’), which at first looks unremarkable enough since it is already attested in Homer (*Od.* 5.471, 7.285, 8.296, 15.494, 23.18); but in Aristophanes it is otherwise found just once in *Clouds* and *Thesmophoriazusae* each, before the fourth-century plays *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* present another four attestations – a distribution that is best explained if the lexeme was gradually finding its place in the spoken dialect of the time.³⁵ Similarly, Ar. fr. 508 contains the active verb ἀποχράω meaning ‘to be sufficient’ (καὶ γὰρ ἡλικίαν ἔχεις ἀποχρῶσαν ἤδη), which has two Aristophanic parallels, one in *Birds* and one again in *Plutus* (plus one more in Pherecrates), while being almost completely absent from classical Attic prose before Lysias, Isocrates, and Plato – in stark contrast to Ionic prose as well as Doric comedy.³⁶ Adding to this Ar. fr. 511 with ἀπελάγγανεν, which is specifically cited by Harpocration to illustrate the – apparently exceptional³⁷ – presence of a redundant preverb, i.e. a lexical feature whose

³² See Wackernagel 1907, 6 n. 1; cf. Willi 2003, 60–61.

³³ Cf. Willi 2003, 50; elsewhere in Old Comedy there are also Cratinus fr. 270 and Pherecrates fr. 82. A late date for the Δαίδαλος was assumed on aprioristic grounds by Cobet 1840, 82 (“parum reputasse videtur [Bergk], quam proventus aetate Aristophanes argumenta, quale fuit *Daedali*, sibi tractanda sumserit”).

³⁴ ἔπομαι + dat.: Ar. *Vesp.* 1278, *Pax* 727 (with ἄμα), 1366, *Av.* 1755/6, *Plut.* 308 = 315 (idiomatic); κατόπιν: Ar. *Eq.* 625, *Av.* 1150 (adverbial), 1497, *Plut.* 13, 757 (adverbial), 1094, 1209 (adverbial). Cf. Willi 2003, 48 and 49, and note that the only non-Aristophanic occurrence of κατόπιν in Greek comedy is in Philemo fr. 115 (κατόπιν ἀκολουθεῖν (?)). Thucydides has adverbial κατόπιν twice (3.22.3, 4.32.3), while prepositional κατόπιν is otherwise first attested in Plato (2×: *Prot.* 316a, *Gorg.* 447a). The first writer who uses the lexeme with some frequency after Aristophanes is Polybius.

³⁵ Thucydides and Lysias have the verb once each (Thuc. 6.61.2, Lys. fr. 197 Carey), Xenophon twice (*Hell.* 7.2.23, *Ages.* 9.3), and Plato a few times (*Apol.* 40d, *Phd.* 71d and 72b, *Symp.* 219c, 223c, and 223d); otherwise it is absent from Attic prose and oratory of the classical period.

³⁶ Ar. *Av.* 1603, *Plut.* 484, Pherecrates fr. 155.6. Ionic prose: Hdt. 3.138, 5.31, 6.137 (= Hecataeus *FGrH* 1 F 127), 7.43, 7.148, 7.196, 8.130, 9.48, 9.79, 9.94; Doric comedy: Epich. fr. 113.7, 113.8, 161. One early instance in Attic prose does appear in a fragment of the non-Athenian orator and sophist Thrasymachus (fr. 85 B 1 D.-K.). In Attic tragedy, there is one occurrence in Aesch. *Agam.* 1575. Note, too, that Ar. fr. 508 – together with Ar. *Plut.* 484 and Pherecrates fr. 155.6, but not *Av.* 1603 with the commoner phrase ἀπόχρη μοι – belongs to an even more restricted group of instances where the verb occurs in a form other than the finite 3sg. (cf. LSJ 227–228, s.v.).

³⁷ In addition to the fragment from Ταγηνισταί, Harpocration (α 190 Keaney, s.v.) cites one instance each from Antiphon (fr. 63 Thalheim) and Lysias (fr. 266 Carey); note that ἀπολαγγάνω in Lys. 4.3 differs in meaning (‘fail in drawing lots’; cf. Eur. *Ion* 609, LSJ 205, s.v. ἀπολαγγάνω II.). Again, an Ionic arrival is not implausible here, in view of Hdt. 4.114, 4.115, 4.145, 5.57, 7.23, combined with the absence of further classical Attic instances beyond Eur. *HF* 331 (for which the phenomenon of tragic redundancy/overspecification may be

potential ‘lateness’ has already been mentioned, as well as Ar. fr. 513 with the irregular perfect form ἡρίσταμεν, which had its most direct counterparts in Hermippus (fr. 60, ἡριστάναι) and Theopompus (fr. 23, ἡρίσταμεν) but which is rightly cited by Athenaeus (422ef) alongside comparable ‘shortened’ perfect forms such as δεδευτνάναι, most evidence for which Athenaeus found in Middle Comedy,³⁸ we obtain an overall profile that seems to square better with the later period of Aristophanes’ career than with the middle (let alone early) one. However, such a conclusion remains to be balanced against the mention of Prodicus in Ar. fr. 506, which would certainly not be incompatible with a date of, say, 400 BC, but which is reminiscent of the equally dismissive mention of the same sophist in the *Birds* of 414 BC (Ar. Av. 692; cf. also *Nub.* 361). So, even for Aristophanes, where the preconditions are in principle much more promising than in the case of other comic poets, linguistic anatomy does not as a rule yield relative-chronological results that are as unassailable as we might wish them to be.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we have looked at three different ways in which linguistic data can potentially be exploited in order to learn more about the prehistory, history, and chronology of ancient drama. Our focus has been on comedy, and it has to be said that at least the method last discussed, linguistic anatomy, would have to be framed rather differently if we were dealing with tragedy; this is because the correlation between the linguistic code of tragedy and ‘real’ language is much less tight than that between the language of comedy and the contemporary dialect of Athens. Linguistic archaeology, in its turn, has been tried repeatedly for tragedy (τραγωδία), with notoriously inconclusive results (cf. the Appendix), and it encounters difficulties of an even more fundamental kind in the case of dithyramb and satyr play because of the apparently non-Greek character of the central terms involved there.³⁹ Finally, linguistic profiling as understood above works best on diachronic data that allow a separation of individual from generic preferences: given our exceedingly fragmentary knowledge of tragedy beyond the triad of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the ground is treacherous here as well, although perhaps not to a point of making *any* attempt pointless.

If what has been presented above remains inconclusive in so many respects, and if it raises more questions than it answers, that is not in itself a reason not to pursue such avenues. In classical scholarship there is sometimes a tendency only to turn to linguistics when it can give hard and fast answers, while forgetting about it anywhere else. But if we were to apply the same yardstick to literary or historical scholarship, the results would simply be disastrous for our ‘knowledge’ base. So, yes, there may be nothing to *prove* that κωμῳδία was not always simply the ‘rowdy revellers’ song’; that watching a play of Middle and New Comedy would not have fostered the same sense of cultural *and* linguistic ownership in the Athenian theatre

invoked: cf. Willi 2019, 122).

³⁸ Even if Aristophanes already had δεδευτνάναι in his *Proagon* of 422 BC (Ar. fr. 480), as also in the undated *Δαναΐδες* (Ar. fr. 260); beyond these, Athenaeus cites Pl. Com. fr. 157 (δεδευτνάναι, in the *Σοφισταί* dated to c. 411 BC or shortly after by Geissler 1969, 56, and Pirrotta 2009, 284), Alexis fr. 114 (δεδείτναμεν), Eubulus fr. 90 (δεδείτναμεν) and 91 (δεδευτνάναι), Antiphanes fr. 141 (δεδευτνάναι), Epicrates fr. 1 (δεδευτνάναι). Unlike that of Hermippus (whose *Στρατιῶται* with fr. 60 may belong to c. 430 BC or soon after, cf. Geissler 1969, 25–26, and Comentale 2017, 208), Theopompus’ main activity no doubt belonged to the period after 400 BC (cf. Geissler 1969, 11 and 70–80, Farmer 2022, 11–12).

³⁹ The idea of Janda 2000, 282–286, and 2010, 98–101, that the δῖθύραμβος was originally “ein ‘bei der Salbung der Tür’ vorgetragenes Lied” (**duj-dʰuor-(h₂)angʷo-*) is no more attractive than the explanation of the parallel term θρίαμβος as “Salbung/Preisung des Feigenblattes”; a non-Greek (though not necessarily non-Indo-European) origin is commonly assumed *faute de mieux*, as also for σάτυρος (cf. e.g. Frisk 1960–72, 1.391–392 and 2.681–682, s.vv., Chantraine 1968–80, 1.282 and 2.990, s.vv., Beekes 2009, 1.333–334 and 2.1311–1312, s.vv., all with further literature).

of Dionysus that an audience of 430 or 420 BC would have experienced; or that Ταγηνιστοί cannot have been staged already in 415 BC – but *if* we choose to maintain one or all of these claims, we should at least do so *en connaissance de cause*, acknowledging the obstacles and uncertainties and addressing them as best we can.

Appendix: The ‘Dorian’ claim to tragedy

Aristotle is fairly clear that the ‘Dorians’ laid claim not only to comedy, but also to tragedy, and that they did this too by using an *etymological* argument (*Poet.* 1448a29–35 ἀντιποιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγωδίας καὶ τῆς κωμωδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς [...] ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημεῖον; cf. §2.1 above). In the case of tragedy, however, he unfortunately does not give any further clue as to how exactly the point was made. It is of course possible that the putative Dorian derivation of the term δρᾶμα was thought to be sufficient to appropriate both major dramatic genres at the same time, without offering the same additional specificity for τραγωδία as was offered for κωμωδία; but that is not what a literal reading of Aristotle’s words suggests. If taken at face value, they rather imply that the noun τραγωδία itself was read as a σημεῖον – even though it then follows that Aristotle, for whatever reason, chose not to look into that at greater length.

Now, whether or not the winner of the earliest tragic competitions in Athens *really* got a goat (τράγος) as a prize, and this goat was then sacrificed to Dionysus, the ancient (and modern⁴⁰) explanation of the word τραγωδία that turns around this idea bears an Athenian stamp: the τράγος prize first surfaces in an entry of the *Marmor Parium* focused on Thespis and Athens (*FGrH* 239 A 43), and Eratosthenes may subsequently have alluded to it in connection with the Athenian Icarius and the people of the deme Ikaria (fr. 22 Powell, from Hygin. *de astr.* 2.4).⁴¹ By implication, the Dorian theory should then rather be sought behind one of the other etymological approaches listed (for example) in *Et. Magn.*, s.v. τραγωδία (p. 764.1–10 = *Proleg. de com.* XVI Koster).

Of these, the one which connects τραγωδία with τρυγωδία can be discarded because it essentially seeks to explain the latter term, not the former; and the one deriving τραγωδία from τετράγωνος (by reference to a square arrangement of the chorus) is formally too far-fetched to be designed for argumentative purposes. This leaves the following: ἢ ὅτι τὰ πολλὰ οἱ χοροὶ ἐκ σατύρων συνίσταντο· οὗς ἐκάλουν τράγους, σκώπτοντες, ἢ διὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος

⁴⁰ It was famously defended by Burkert 1966, esp. 89–102, after others (e.g. Reisch 1902, 468, Pickard-Cambridge 1927, 164–165, Schmid 1934, 46–48; cf. now also Zimmermann 2011, 453), with reference to the formal difficulties raised by the – at the time, more widespread – view that the ‘goat song’ of the τραγωδοί was to be understood as the ‘song of/by goats’, i.e. of/by singers dressed up as σάτυροι ~ goats (thus, after Welcker 1826, 240–241, e.g. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1907, 81–86, Lesky 1972, 32 and 47, Latacz 1993, 53–56). In order to alleviate the formal problems – notably the fact that the τραγ- element would refer to the singing subject –, Meier-Brügger 2017, 52–54, has argued that τραγωδία/τραγωδός may be modelled after the structurally different μονωδία/μονωδός with an adjectival first element. However, not only are the lexemes μονωδία/μονωδός themselves attested relatively late, but they also do not really present a neat semantic match. This may be the reason why Meier-Brügger himself eventually posits κωμωδία as an intermediate step (“Von der μονωδία und speziell von der κωμωδία führt ein direkter Weg zu der Neuentwicklung τραγωδία als einem Gesang, wo diesmal (Sänger als) Ziegenböcke (verkleidet) chorisches auftreten und singen”); yet, if we do that, there is no longer any need for a reference to μονωδία at all. As soon as the term κωμωδός, originally referring to the ‘singer of a κῶμος(-song)’ (i.e., with κῶμος as a direct object?, cf. §2.1), was semantically reanalysed as ‘singing member of a κῶμος(-group)’ (i.e., with κῶμος newly understood as the ‘subject’ of the singing), the ideal model for τραγωδός designating the ‘singing member of a group of (metaphorical) τράγοι’ would have been available. Because of the relative chronology and the associated cultural weight of their institutionalization in sixth/fifth-century Athens, we tend to conceptualize tragedy as somehow more basic than, if not altogether prior to, comedy; but to extend this prejudice to their respective designations may unduly distort things.

⁴¹ However, the passage is not without its difficulties and even the reading περὶ τράγον ὥρχήσαντο is uncertain: see Geus 2002, 102–105.

δασύτητα, ἢ διὰ τὴν περὶ τὰ ἀφροδίσια σπουδὴν· τοιοῦτον γὰρ τὸ ζῶον (‘or because the choruses were often composed of satyrs: these they called “goats”, in jest, either because of their shaggy body or because of their sex drive (for such is the nature of the animal)’).

We are not told *who* (allegedly) called the satyrs τράγοι, but since it was certainly not a standard usage, we should probably understand ‘(some) ancients’. Intriguingly, this is exactly what we need for the Dorian theory: some authority will have held that the ‘Dorians’ – in contrast to the Athenians, who ostensibly did not – spoke not of σάτυροι, but of τράγοι when describing Dionysus’ retinue. And that in turn conjures up the famous mention, in Herodotus (5.67), of Sicyonian τραγικοὶ χοροὶ honouring Adrastus rather than Dionysus (until Cleisthenes of Sicyon ‘gave them back’ to Dionysus): whatever the precise mode of performance may have been, it seems perfectly possible that some satyr-like dancers were involved here, and referred to as τράγοι by the locals. Such a designation would of course have been metaphorical (e.g. based on their shaggy and/or phallic appearance, as indicated in the *Et. Magn.* entry; cf. also Hsch. τ 1237 Hansen-Cunningham τράγους· σατύρους, διὰ τὸ τράγων ὄτα ἔχειν, and for the equation σάτυροι ~ τράγοι also schol. Theocr. 3.2a/c where τίτυροι is identified as a Sicilian equivalent of either σάτυροι or τράγοι), in the same way as, for example, Athenian girls in the service of Artemis Brauronia were called ἄρκτοι ‘bears’; and thus, the counter-argument that “Corinthian vases of this period [sc. c. 600 BC] offer countless variations on the retinue of Dionysus, but no singing goats” and that the padded dancers on these vases “are much less τράγοι than the satyrs of Attic satyr-play”⁴² no more invalidates such a theory than the observation that depictions associated with the cult of Artemis at Brauron typically show young girls who are naked or clothed in a short chiton⁴³ would contrast with the designation of these girls as ἄρκτοι. Sicyonian claims to the origins of tragedy can be independently inferred thanks to the notice of Sud. θ 282 Adler, s.v. Θέσπις, mentioning an Epigenes of Sicyon as inventor of tragedy, as well as Themistius, *or.* 27, p. 337b Harduin (καὶ τραγωδίας εὐρετὰ μὲν Σικυώνιοι, τελεσιουργοὶ δὲ Ἀττικοὶ ποιηταί); they may have been recorded in the Sicyonian ἀναγραφή on poets and music of c. 400 BC (*FGrH* 550⁴⁴), which Aristotle could either have accessed directly (just as his contemporary Heraclides of Pontus apparently did: see *FGrH* 550 F 1) or through an intermediary source such as the Megarian writers mentioned in §2.1. However, without much more being said already at this point in the treatise on *Poetics* about possible satyric origins of tragedy (a point taken up in passing only later, in *Arist. Poet.* 1449a20–21), it would have been unclear to Aristotle’s readership why the fact that in some less familiar variety of Greek satyrs were apparently referred to as τράγοι might have *any* bearing on the question of who ‘owned’ tragedy; and so, in order not to get side-tracked too much, Aristotle may have preferred to skip over this etymological line of argument which was far more intricate than the one relating to the terms κωμωδία and δρᾶμα.

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⁴² Burkert 1966, 90; that τράγοι could have been the “Name einer Cultgenossenschaft oder einer Gruppe von Personen in einer bestimmten Cultfunction [...], nach Art von ἵπποι, ταῦροι, πελειάδες, μέλισσαι, ἄρκτοι, βουκόλοι” was already considered by Reisch 1902, 468.

⁴³ Cf. Kahil 1965 and 1977.

⁴⁴ Cf. Jacoby 1955, 476–477.

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