A Greek Delocutive Noun?
Some Notes on ποιήσαι and its Alleged Cognates

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Delocutives are formed with an utterance (x) as a radical. Common in Greek verbs are verbs meaning “say x” (e.g., παραφθαρέω); nominal formations denote for instance a person saying x or the utterance x per se. The latter type would explain the haphazard ποιήμα in A. Th. 282, where Eteocles says, upbraiding a group of women for their hysteria: “do not pray in ποιήσαμεν”. If ποιήσαι is taken as a delocutive nominal formation from ποιήσας (a Greek cliché), the sense would fit the context as well as Aeschylus’ propensity for wordplay.

At the beginning of Aeschylus’ Septem contra Thebans, the chorus, consisting of the women of Thebes, is in a state of terror. They approach the gods of the city with desperate supplications and prayers, and are rebuked for their behaviour by Eteocles, his leader (182–281). Towards the end of his speech he describes how best to pray and goes on to utter:

τοιαίτ’ ἐπάνω μὴ φιλοσώπως θείς
280 μηδὲ ἐν μεταίοις κάργιοις ποιήσαις
οὐ γὰρ τι μᾶλλον μὴ φύγης τὸ μόρισμον.

The word ποιήσαι appears only here in Greek literature, apart, as it seems, from in a damaged papyrus fragment attributed to the late epic poet Dionysius (fr. 10v.3) – the context is too fragmentary to make it possible to determine the meaning – and also in three ancient and medieval dictionaries: Hesychius, Theognostus and the Suda. Hesychius glosses σχῆμα ἐφηστοῖν, which may be a conjecture based on the present passage: he might have taken the word to refer to the wild movements of the chorus, which is not a bad guess: see below; cf. also Aristocles Musicus in FHG 4.3.24 and Hutchinson on Th. 78–181 (pp. 55–56).

Modern scholars have taken ποιήσαι to be related to the noun φῶς and the verb φοιάζω, and perhaps also to the interjection φοι (LSJ), being a verbal noun to the likewise supposedly related verb ποιήσαι. According to this etymology, ποιήσαι should mean something like a “puff” or a “blow”, a sense which is unsuitable to this context. Theoretically, one could perhaps suppose that the women of Thebes are “panting” with excitement, but it would probably be impossible to find any other example in literature where breathing or panting are taken as distinct signs of fright and terror. Quite the opposite: φοιάζω usually denotes fierceness and/or boastfulness, absolute as well as in expressions like ἀρχαὶ φοιάζων and μέγα φοιάζων (cf. LSJ s.v. 1). Furthermore, “panting” is irrelevant to the behaviour for


2 Theognostus’ explanation, σχῆμα [ποιόν], (del. Tichy 312, n. 225), probably derives from Hesychius. Suda lists the word but offers no explanation.


4 Cf. Tichy 311, n. 224.
which the women are rebuked in this particular case, and when dignified with attributes like μάκαρον ("vain") and δυσφόρος ("savage"), the effect is bathos. In the previous two hundred verses the chorus has been screaming and ranting in fear, at the risk of upsetting and demoralising the entire populace (262), and moreover approached the gods of the city in a disorderly, undignified manner (95-102, 108-81 passim). Eteocles would hardly then upbraid them for their "vain, savage plaintext".

As for the allegedly cognate verb ποιόμαι, most commentators and etymologists seem certain of its meaning, deriving it from φῶς, "breath, blast". Tichy (311-14), however, has rightly observed that the support for such a sense is scant. In fact, on closer inspection, the semantic and etymological evidence for ποιόμαι and its cognates is utterly confusing.

As for the word-formation, Tichy (314) observes that there is no phonological ground for deriving ποιόμαι-/-με- (> *πο-ικ-ιε-, *πο-ικ-ιε-) from φῶς (>*πο-ικ-ιε- or *πο-ικ-ιε-): a guttural appears in no words of the latter stem. As for the meaning of the word in extant literature, ποιόμαι is found in Anyte (AP 7.215), Lyco. 198, Nic. Ther. 180 (the adverb ποιόμην also appears in 371), Euph. fr. 135, Max. 101 and possibly Opp. Hal. 2.288 (so most ms. and the scholiast to the passage). Pace LSI et al., these authors do not seem to be very much in agreement as to the proper sense of the verb. In Anyte and Lyco. 198 at least and certainly in Oppian, if we are to trust the reading of the majority of the mss., a meaning synonymous to the similar verbs παύομαι and παύομαι ("move about" a ship and a cauldron, respectively, and "quiver" in the case of Oppian) seems much preferable to the traditional "blow". So Tichy (312-13), who argues that ποιόμαι is synonymous to these two verbs, and that ποιόμαι in Th. 280 means something like διάδρομος φοβή (cf. Th. 191, and cf. Hesychius' explanation, cited above). The expression ἐν ποιόμαισιν, however, intimately connects the ποιόμαισι to the verbal act of praying, and makes it unlikely that ποιόμαισι should refer to movement.

On the other hand, the meaning "blow" has to be accepted, pace Tichy (312), at least in the fragment of Lyco. 198, yet it is difficult to see how ποιόμασιν, and perhaps in Nic. Ther. 180, of a snake hissing (although the phrase ὑδατοι ποιόμασιν might possibly be conceived as "moving uncertainly about"), γλώσση ποιόμην in 371 could mean either "with a quivering tongue" or "hissing with its tongue".

Part of the Hellenistic tradition must have taken the meaning as "blow". But apart from Tichy's suggestion of "move to and fro", an apparently unrelated meaning "frighten" (ἐφοβεῖν) is also recorded by grammarians. The scholiast to Opp. Hal. 2.288 lists a quite fantastic range of meanings, some of which agree with Tichy's interpretation: ποιόμασιν πενεστάναι, ὁδοίμα, ὁδοιμάζοντα, πυρεμασίν, ληρίζοντα: ποιόμαισιν ἐνι το ὄφωρος ὁμάν. Finally, the meaning φοβεῖν for ποιόμαι is given by the Suda.

There is one alleged pre-Hellenistic appearance of ποιόμαι, in the title of one of Sophron's mimes (fr. 49 Κ.-Α., p.215). Kaibel conjectured Παυκά ποιόμαισι from Σ Nic. Ther. 180 Παικάς ποιόμαισι (or φοβεῖς) and Ath. 7.324f παικά καποκοιμέσα, but his conjecture is uncertain to say the least. The title "You will blow (scare?) your darling" is, first, unintelligible (pace Olivier), secondly, text-critically unsound in dismissing the final sigma of παικάς, which, appearing seemingly independently in both witnesses, is unlikely to be a corruption of the easy παικᾶς.8

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8 See LSI s.v. ἐν Α. I. 3.1, s.v. εἰκόνα. I.
9 Hsch. s.v., Σ Nic. Ther. 180 (cf. ibid. 371), schol. vet. on A. Τh. 280. Tichy's (312) manner of connecting the two meanings by one mediating sense, "tawend anseischweben" is not convincing.
12 One might suggest παικάς ή φοβεῖς (Doric fut. of φοβός, "flee", very badly attested, but cf. Sophr. fr. *108 Κ.-Α.) - "where can you escape παικᾶς?", or παικάς ποιόμαι - "where find refuge from παικάς?". The noun παικάς is however unattested. The meaning "love" (παικάς = παικάς ποιέομαι? would make it an erotic commonplace; cf. e.g., Longus in the preface to Daphnis & Chloe, πῶς γὰρ υἱός Ερωταί δοξαν ή φιλέστρα, Meleager in AP 7.196, S. Ant. 781-90, E. Med. 633, and B. Lier, Ad topicam carminum amatorum symbalae (Ostern 1914, rep. in the Garland Library of Latin Poetry series, New York [etc.] 1978), 17-18, 20-21. Tichy's (313) aug-
Let us return to Aeschylus' ποιήσαμα. Hutchinson ad loc. "expects some kind of cry" (so the schol. rec. θυμίζεις, βοιαζεῖς). This may be the case. As observed by Tichy (312), Aeschylus has himself commented on the etymology of ποιήσαμα (in a way typical of his poetical technique). As an explanation as to why the chorus should not pray in ποιήσαμαν, Eteocles says οὐ γάρ τι μάλλον μὴ φύγῃς τὸ μόρφωμα. It is unlikely that φύγῃς, repeating the φων-element in ποιήσαμα, is coincidental.

A possible solution, not previously advanced, is that Eteocles, and through his mouth Aeschylus, uses ποιήσαμα as if formed from the exclamation ποιήσαμα, i.e., that he is saying to the chorus: "do not pray in 'where-shall-I-runs' – for none the more shall you run away from Fate."

The meaning of ποιήσαμα is then "the utterance ποιήσαμα". The chorus has not said this, but the phrase is a common cliché in Greek literature, uttered by people who are frightened and desperate: cf. A. Supp. 777, S. OC 828, 1738, E. Med. 1271, II 291, Ion 1253, Or. 1375, Cyc. 194, Ph. 977, Trag. Adesp. 653, Ar. Ar. 354, Pl. 438, Men. Sam. 568, and also II. 14.507, 16.283, Od. 20.43, and in prose, e.g., Aeschin. 3.209, X. Ars. 24.19–20, Ach. Tat. 8.2.1.

The type of formation has been recognised for some forty years by linguists. The words of the type usually go by the term suggested by their "discoverer", Emil Benveniste: delocutives. Unlike deverbal and denominatives, but closely related to, strictly perhaps even a sub-group of, onomatopoeically formed words (see n. 18), delocutives are derived not from verbs or nouns as such, but from human utterances in their capacity as characteristic spoken phrases or sound-patterns. The formation is usually simple: a common utterance is taken more or less verbatim and fitted out with a suffix. The commonest formation in Greek is a verb (usually Aristophanesian), meaning "say/cry so-and-so", which as good as always take the ending -έγω (or -ίζω), e.g., ἱππεύουσας ("cry θ' παιδών"), ἱππεύμενος ("talk about κόλπων"), παπάζω or -ίζω ("say πάπτατα"), πατερίζω ("say κάτο"), σκυρακέω ("say ἔσκορακας"), τίζω ("say τ'"), χαβρείζω ("say ἀσφείετε") and, if formations from interjections are allowed, φεξάζω, βίζω, γνίζω, ἐλέζω, αἰδέο, ἀλαζάζω, βομβαζέω, εἴδαζο, εἶδαζο, ἰάζο, κοινοζέω, ὀποτόθο, ἄκω, ἄκεω, ὀμάζω, πυπαζέω, μίζω, νυτιάζω. If we will see, words formed from utterances can take a range of meanings, often referring not to the act of speaking but to, e.g., the utterance itself, the person speaking it, or some act often performed in connection with it. For bibliography on the subject of delocutives see Fruyt 70–71.

The formation may be said to be a kind of hypostasis. On this type of word-formation in Indo-European languages, see Debrunner, pasim, and Brugmann 33ff. Debrunner 115–17 anticipates Benveniste in listing a range of delocutives as a separate category of hypostasis (but without coining a separate term). If however Debrunner 116 on ἐγίαινο, χαῖνο, and Benveniste 279 on ὀγιά, On the Greek delocutive verbs in general, see also J.-L. Perpillou, Recherches lexicales en grec ancien (Louvain-Paris 1996), 69–91.

Benveniste (285) claims strict demarcation between delocutives and onomatopoeic words, or, strictly, between words (verbs) derived from interjections (ἀκός, φεξίς etc.), which he argues are "merely" onomatopoeic, and those derived from other utterances: "une delocutif a toujours pour radical un signifiant." But the distinction is not convincing, since the line between signifying and non-signifying utterances is blurred (cf. Fruyt 66–67). The defining quality of this kind of formation appears rather to be the opposite: the morphemes involved are not treated as significants, but as mere sound-patterns, their semantic value having no relevance in the process of word-formation. Formations from interjections will naturally be more common, since a location must be immediately recognised as a distinct and common utterance to form a delocutive (or, in the case of several of Aristophanes' delocutives, the utterance is recognised as base for the formation by virtue of being uttered just before: e.g., Th. 616–17 – ἐχθεὶς ἔρχομαι κόλπαμα – τί καρδομείζω. Commonality is obviously the case with interjections, but also with clichés such as ποιήσαμα and ἱππεύμενος, and there ought be no formal distinction between formations like, e.g., φεξάζω, μίζω on the one hand, and τίζω, παπάζω on the other. See also H.E. Breeckel, Sprachwissenschaft 1 (1976), 367–69; B. de Cornwall, RLR 40 (1976), 119, n. 1; J.-C. Auscambre, Revue Romane 20 (1915), 169–207. pasim; J.-L. Perpillou, REG 95 (1982), 233–74; pasim; and Lécotboub, pasim.

Debrunner (115) observes that modern Greek contains several even older formations, e.g., καλναγίζω ("say καλνανάναν"), καλνακόφωμα ("the..."
A couple of these words have been used by Aeschylus in the same kind of wordplay as the one we suggest for ποιήμα; cf. for instance Ag. 1307–8, where φεύξει (φεύξεσ) is an Aeschylean hapax:

- φεύξει
- τι τούτο δέρει
- φεύξει

and En. 117–18, 123–24:

(μυμφὸς)²⁰
- μύμφοι ἄν, ἀνήρ δ’ οὐχέται ...
- οὐκόν...
- οὐκόν...

There are also nouns of this kind. Usually, they are not strictly delocutives, but deverbatives of a corresponding delocutive verb: ὀμ.buyμα, ἀγχύμα, ἀλλάζημα, ἄγχυμα, μυμφόμα, ὀμπαγμα, ἄγχυμα, ποικηθεισμός, etc. "True" delocutive nouns or adjectives, i.e., not derived from verbs, are rarer, at least in Greek. Georges Darms, in a general survey on the phenomenon of delocutivity, mentions only one Greek example, the personal name Κατωκειστός (Ath. 1.16)²¹. This was given to a prominent scholar among the Deipnosophistae (Ulpianus from Tyre) who, according to Athenaeus, was in the habit of always asking fellow scholars “καίται ὁ ὁ λέγεται.” Léoublon (148) adds the epithet of Apollo Σπευδάτος to this category: “he whom one invokes crying οὐκέτασι” (cf. ἐπιμελεία). Another example of a personal name might be the Homeric Hero Ὀμπαγήλος (Il. 3.148), who, one may imagine, would have received his name for similar reasons, always going around saying “I don’t care”.

There are several examples of delocutive nouns and adjectives in other Indo-European languages. In Sanskrit, for instance, we find for “fleeing”, “escaping”, no less a word than kāṃdī, “one who says kām

utterance καλῆν φωνήν, “a ‘goodday’” – see below on nominal delocutive formations).

²⁰ Whether or not these stage-directions are genuine (see, e.g., O. Taplin, PCPhS 23 [1977], 121–32), the principle for the "wordplay" remains the same: Clytaemnestra describes the sounds of the Erinyes with the delocutive verbs μύξα and ὀξα. Cf. Ar. Th. 231: – μῦ μῦ – τι μῦξες; and the passage from Aristophanes quoted in n. 18 above.


²² “Is (the use of) the word current or not current (sc. in Attic Greek)?”

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diētām”; “in which direction (shall I turn)?”²² – cf. ποιῆμα! A fatalist is named παθόδαιμος, “one who says παθόδαιμος” ("what will be [will be"]²²). In Swedish we find hallå, "female TV-presenter", a delocutive formed from the interjection hallå ("hello").

ποιήμα, on the other hand, would be a designation of the phrase ποιημα itself, not of the person speaking it or addressed by it. Thus we find in Russian the noun сувэбио (sudiboi), denoting a speech in which appear the words "God may judge": божь его суд, "may God judge him"; божь ему суд, "God [be] a judge to him."²². There is at least one other example of this kind in Greek (apart from the deverbative formations ὀμπαγμα, etc., mentioned above): in Ar. Eg. 408, the noun ὄπλοπταρχον denotes the utterance βοάξ, βόαξ, in the phrase ἱπτανωσίας καὶ ὄπλοπταρχον ἄκου "cry ὅ Παῦλον and sing βόαξ, βόαξ." We may also note that the noun ἀλλάξει is formed directly from the cry ἀλλάξει, without an intermediary verb. Nevertheless, one may suspect that Aeschylus, if ποιήμα is a word of his own creation, would have been inspired by common nouns like ὀμπαγμα and ὀμπαγμα (cf. n. 13 above), without considering the fact that they are not true delocutives, but strictly deverbatives.

As for ποίησις, a solution could be that the verb is a ghost-word, an invention of some Hellenistic scholar-poet trying to reconstruct a verb from which he supposed Aeschylus' ποιήμα must be derived (cf. Theocritus' σίμη, "woman" or Euphorio's and Lycophrön's πότα, "gods"). The appearance of a word of the same stem in Sophron must be regarded as uncertain.

²² Mahābhārata 12.6320.
²³ The name of a fish in the Hesperides. Cf. Brugmann 34, 74.
²⁴ Cf. Brugmann 34. Another interesting type of delocutive nominal formation is found in Swedish diisleranamma, meaning something like "vigorous resolution", thus denoting a quality of the "speaker". A person with this quality would, it is understood, utter the manly curse (diisler anamma (originally "devils may take") [you, it, etc.],