

A Greek Delocutive Noun? Some Notes on ποίφυγμα and its Alleged Cognates¹

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Delocutives are formed with an *utterance* (x) as a radical. Common in Greek are verbs meaning “say x” (e. g., πατερίζω); nominal formations denote for instance a *person* saying x or the utterance x per se. The latter type would explain the hapax ποίφυγμα in A. Th. 280, where Eteocles says, upbraiding a group of women for their hysteria: “do not pray in ποίφυγμασιν”. If ποίφυγμα is taken as a delocutive nominal formation from ποι φύγω (a Greek cliché), the sense would fit the context as well as Aeschylus’ propensity for wordplay.

At the beginning of Aeschylus’ *Septem contra Thebas*, 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, its leader (182–281). Towards the end of his speech he describes how best to pray and goes on to utter:

τοιαῦτ’ ἐπέυχου μὴ φιλοστόνωσ θεοῖς
280 μῆδ’ ἐν ματαίοις κἀγρίοις ποίφυγμασιν.
οὐ γάρ τι μᾶλλον μὴ φύγῃς τὸ μόρσιμον.

The word ποίφυγμα 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.)² – the context is too fragmentary

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² Classical authors and works are abbreviated as in LSJ, and cited, unless noted otherwise, from the editions listed in L. Berkowitz & K. A. Squitier, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Canon of Greek Authors and Works* (Oxford [etc.]

to make it possible to determine the meaning – and also in three ancient and medieval dictionaries: Hesychius, Theognostus and the *Suda*. Hesychius glosses σχῆμα ὀρηχιστικόν³, 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* 4.332⁴ and Hutchinson on *Th.* 78–181 (pp. 55–56).

Modern scholars have taken ποίφυγμα to be related to the noun φύσα and the verb φυσάω, and perhaps also to the interjection φῶ (LSJ), being a verbal noun to the likewise supposedly related verb ποιφύσσω. According to this etymology, ποίφυγμα 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 terror⁵. Quite the opposite: φυσάω usually denotes fierceness and/or boastfulness, absolute as well as in expressions like δεινὰ φυσᾶν and μέγα φυσᾶν (cf. LSJ s.v. I). Furthermore, “panting” is irrelevant to the behaviour for

1990³). The names of periodicals are abbreviated as in *l’Année philologique*. The following works are referred to by the author’s last name or an abbreviation only: É. Benveniste, “Les verbes délocutifs” in *Studia philologica et litteraria in honorem L. Spitzer* (Bern 1958), 57–63, reprinted (and referred to here) in id., *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 1 (Paris 1966), 277–85; K. Brugmann, *Vergleichende Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*, 2.1 (Strassburg 1906²); A. Debrunner, “Zur Hypostasierung von Wünschen und dergleichen” in *Festschrift für Max Vasmer zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin 1956), 113–23; M. Fruyt, “Les verbes délocutifs selon E. Benveniste” in *Émile Benveniste vingt ans après. Actes du colloque de Cerisy la Salle, 12 au 19 août 1995* (LINX special issue, Nanterre 1997), 61–71; G. O. Hutchinson (ed.), *Aeschylus. Septem contra Thebas* (Oxford 1985, rep. corr. 1987); R. Kassel/C. Austin (K.-A., eds.), *Poetae comici Graeci, I. Comoedia Dorica Mimi Phylaces* (Berlin–New York 2001); F. Létoublon, “Derivés d’onomatopées et délocutivité” in “Ἡδιστον λογοδειπνον: *Logopédies: Mélanges ... offerts à Jean Tailardat* (Paris 1988), 137–54; H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones (LSJ), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, with a Revised Supplement (Oxford 1996³); E. Tichy, *Onomatopoeische Verbalbildungen des Griechischen* (SAAW 409, Vienna 1983). If no further reference is supplied, ad. loc. or s.v. is to be understood.

³ Theognostus’ explanation, σχῆμα [ποικίλον] (del. Tichy 312, n. 225), probably derives from Hesychius. *Suda* lists the word but offers no explanatory gloss.

⁴ C. Müller (ed.), *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum*, 4 (Paris 1851).

⁵ Cf. Tichy 311, n. 224.

which the women are rebuked in this particular case, and when dignified with attributes like ματαίους (“vain”) and ἀγρίους (“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 panting”⁶.

As for the allegedly cognate verb ποιφύσσω, most commentators and etymologists seem certain of its meaning, deriving it from φῦσα, “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 ποιφύσσω and its cognates is utterly confusing.

As for the word-formation, Tichy (314) observes that there is no phonological ground for deriving ποιφύσσω/-φυξ- (> **ph^hük-ïe-*, **ph^hük-s-*)⁷ from φῦσα (> **ph^hüt-sa-* or **ph^hūs-sa-*): a guttural appears in no words of the latter stem. As for the meaning of the word in extant literature, ποιφύσσω is found in Anyte (*AP* 7.215), Lyc. 198, Nic. *Ther.* 180 (the adverb ποιφύσθην also appears in 371), Euph. *fr.* 135, Max. 101 and possibly Opp. *Hal.* 2.288 (so most mss. and the scholium to the passage). Pace LSJ et al., these authors do not seem to be very much in agreement as to the proper sense of the verb. In Anyte and Lycophron 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 παιφάσσω and ποιπνύω (“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 ποιφύσσω is synonymous to these two verbs, and that ποίφυγμα in *Th.* 280 means something like διάδρομος φυγή (cf. *Th.* 191, and cf. Hesychius’ explanation, cited above). The expression ἐν ποίφυγμασιν, however, intimately connects the ποίφυγματα to the

⁶ There is no support in any of the other alleged instances of the stem for translations like “blurtings” (T. G. Tucker, ed., Cambridge 1908), “cris haletans” (P. Mazon, ed. [G. Budé], Paris 1920), “shrieks” (H. W. Smyth, ed. [Loeb Classical Library], London 1922).

⁷ Our only evidence for the quantity of υ in ποιφύσσω is given by Hesychius (π 46) and the *Suda* (π 3103), both of whom render it short in the infinitive ποιφύξαι.

verbal act of praying, and makes it unlikely that ποίφυγμασιν should refer to movement⁸.

On the other hand, the meaning “blow” has to be accepted, pace Tichy (312), at least in the fragment of Lycophron, Ζεφύρου μέγα ποιφύξαντος, and perhaps in Nic. *Ther.* 180, of a snake hissing (although the phrase ἄκριτα ποιφύσσοντος might possibly be conceived as “moving uncertainly about”). γλώσση ποιφύσθην 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” (ἐκφοβεῖν) is also recorded by grammarians⁹. The scholium to Opp. *Hal.* 2.288 lists a quite fantastic range of meanings, some of which agree with Tichy’s interpretation: ποιφύσσοντα· πνευστιῶντα, ὀρμώντα, ἀσθμαίνοντα, κινούμενα, στενάζοντα· ποιφύσσειν ἐστὶ τὸ διαφανῶς ὀρμᾶν. Finally, the meaning φυγεῖν for ποιφύξαι is given by the *Suda*.

There is one alleged pre-Hellenistic appearance of ποιφύσσω, in the title of one of Sophron’s mimes (*fr.* 49 K.-A., p. 215). Kaibel¹⁰ conjectured Παιδικὰ ποιφύξεῖς from Σ Nic. *Ther.* 180 παιδικὰς ποιφύξεις (or -φύξεις) and Ath. 7.324f παιδι κασπομφύξεις, but his conjecture is uncertain to say the least. The title “You will blow (scare?) your darling” is, first, unintelligible (pace Olivieri¹¹), secondly, text-critically unsound in dismissing the final sigma of παιδικας, which, appearing seemingly independently in both witnesses, is unlikely to be a corruption of the easy παιδικὰ¹².

⁸ See LSJ s.v. ἐν A.III.1, s.v. ἐπέυχομαι I.

⁹ Hsch. s.v., Σ Nic. *Ther.* 180 (cf. Σ *ibid.* 371), schol. vet. on A. *Th.* 280. Tichy’s (312) manner of connecting the two senses by a mediating one, “snort furiously” (*wütend anschauen*) is not convincing.

¹⁰ G. Kaibel (ed.), *Comicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, 1.1, *Doriensum comedia mimi phlyaces* (Poetarum Graecorum fragmenta 6.1, Berlin 1899), 163.

¹¹ A. Olivieri (ed.), *Frammenti della commedia greca e del mimo nella Sicilia e nella Magna Grecia*, 2–3 (Naples 1947), 104–5.

¹² One might suggest παιδικὰς ποίφυξεις; (Doric fut. of φύζω, “flee”, very badly attested, but cf. Sophr. *fr.* *108 K.-A.) – “where can you escape παιδικὰς?”, or παιδικὰς ποίφύξεις; – “where find refuge from παιδική?” The noun παιδική is however unattested. The meaning “love” (παιδικαί = παιδικαί πράξεις?) would make it an erotic commonplace; cf., e.g., Longus in the preface to *Daphnis & Chloë*: πάντως γὰρ οὐδεὶς Ἔρωτα ἔφυγεν ἢ φεύζεται, Meleager in *AP* 7.196, S. *Ant.* 781–90, E. *Med.* 633, and B. Lier, *Ad topica carminum amatorium symbolae* (Ostern 1914, rep. in the *Garland Library of Latin Poetry* series, New York [etc.] 1978), 17–18, 20–21. Tichy’s (313) sug-

Let us return to Aeschylus' ποίφυγμα. Hutchinson ad loc. "expects some kind of cry" (so the schol. rec. θρήνοις, βοαίς)¹³. This may be the case. As observed by Tichy (312), Aeschylus has himself commented on the etymology of ποίφυγμα (in a way typical of his poetical technique¹⁴). As an explanation as to why the chorus should not pray in ποιφύγματοςιν, Eteocles says οὐ γάρ τι μᾶλλον μὴ φύγῃς τὸ μόρσιμον. It is unlikely that φύγῃς, repeating the φυγ-element in ποίφυγμα, is coincidental.

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

The meaning of ποίφυγμα is then "the utterance ποῖ φύγω". 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, *IT* 291, *Ion* 1253, *Or.* 1375, *Cyc.* 194, *Ph.* 977, *Trag. Adesp.* 653.42, Ar. *Av.* 354, *Pl.* 438, Men. *Sam.* 568, and also *Il.* 14.507, 16.283, *Od.* 20.43, and in prose, e. g., Aeschin. 3.209, X. *An.* 2.4.19–20, 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", Émile Benveniste: *delocutives*. Unlike deverbatives 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-patterns¹⁵. The formation is usually simple: a common utterance is

gestion, that παιδικὰς ποιφύξεις (acc. pl.) is a colloquial expression in the accusative, "den man als 'Diese kindliche Schreckhaftigkeit!' zu dem Bewegungsverb ποιφύσσε- stellen könnte", is far-fetched.

¹³ Incidentally, οἰμώγματοςιν would fit the metre as well as the context; cf. *Th.* 8, 1023, *Ag.* 1384. Cf. also *Ag.* 1672 ματαίων ... ὑλαγμάτων.

¹⁴ On Aeschylean etymological wordplay, especially on personal names, see W. Kranz, *Stasimon* (Berlin 1933), 83, 287–89; W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* 1.2 (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 7.1.2, Munich 1934), 297 f.

¹⁵ I use the term as referring strictly to the *formation* of words. Benveniste himself as well as some of his followers have confused matters by introducing semantics into the concept. Thus Benveniste allowed as delocutives only, in effect, "verbs formed from an utterance X, meaning 'say X'" (285). But as

taken more or less verbatim and fitted out with a suffix¹⁶. The commonest formation in Greek is a verb (usually Aristophanean), meaning "say/cry so-and-so", which as good as always take the ending -ζω (or -ιζω)¹⁷, e. g., ἠπαιωνίζω ("cry ἡ παιών"), καρδαμίζω ("talk about κάρδαμα"), παππάζω or -ίζω ("say πάππα"), πατερίζω ("say πάτερ"), σκορακίζω ("say ἐς κόρακας"), τίζω ("say τι"), χαιρετίζω ("say χαιρε/χαιρετε"), and, if formations from interjections are allowed¹⁸, φεύζω, βήζω, γρούζω, ἐλελίζω, αιάζω, ἀλαλάζω, βομβάζω, ειάζω, εὐάζω, ιάζω, κοκκύζω, ὀτοτύζω, ὦζω, οἶζω, οἰμώζω, πυππάζω, μύζω, ψιττάζω¹⁹.

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 delocutive word-formation, see Fruyt 70–71.

¹⁶ The formation may be said to be a kind of hypostasis. On this type of word-formation in Indo-European languages, see Debrunner, *passim*, and Brugmann 33 ff. Debrunner 115–17 anticipates Benveniste in listing a range of delocutive verbs as a separate category of hypostasis (but without coining a separate term).

¹⁷ Cf. however Debrunner 116 on ὑγαιίνω, χαιίρω, and Benveniste 279 on χαιίρω. On the Greek delocutive verbs in general, see also J.-L. Perpillou, *Recherches lexicales en grec ancien* (Louvain-Paris 1996), 69–91.

¹⁸ Benveniste (285) claims strict demarcation between delocutives and onomatopoeic words, or, strictly, between words (verbs) derived from interjections (ὦζω, φεύζω etc.), which he argues are "merely" onomatopoeic, and those derived from other utterances: "une délocutif 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 signifiants, 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 locution 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 – ἐχθὲς ἐφαγον κάρδαμα – τί καρδαμίζεις;). Commonality is obviously the case with interjections, but also with clichés such as ποῖ φύγω and ἐς κόρακας, and there ought be no formal distinction between formations like, e. g., φεύζω, μύζω on the one hand, and τίζω, πατερίζω on the other. See also H. E. Breeckle, *Sprachwissenschaft* 1 (1976), 367–69; B. de Cornulier, *RLR* 40 (1976), 119, n. 1; J. C. Ancombre, *Revue Romane* 20 (1985), 169–207 *passim*; J.-L. Perpillou, *REG* 95 (1982), 233–74 *passim*; and Létoublon, *passim*.

¹⁹ Debrunner (115) observes that modern Greek contains several even bolder formations, e. g., καληνωρίζω ("say καλήν ὥραν"), καληνώρισμα ("the

A couple of these words have been used by Aeschylus in the same kind of wordplay as the one we suggest for ποίφουγμα; cf. for instance Ag. 1307–8, where φεύζω (φύζω?) is an Aeschylean hapax:

- φεῦ φεῦ
- τί τοῦτ' ἔφευξας;

φῦ φῦ ... ἔφουξας Heyse

and Eu. 117–18, 123–24:

- (μυγμός)²⁰
- μύζοιτ' ἄν, ἀνήρ δ' οἴχεται ...
- [...]
- (ὠγμός)
- ὠζεις, ὑπνώσσεις ...

There are also nouns of this kind. Usually, they are not strictly delocutives, but deverbatives of a corresponding delocutive verb: αἶαγμα, -αγμός, ἀλάλαγμα, -αγμός, μυγμός, οἴμωγμα, -ωγμός, σκοροα-ισμός, etc. “True” delocutive nouns or adjectives, i. e., not derived from verbs, are rarer, at least in Greek. Georges Darms, in general survey on the phenomenon of delocutivity, mentions only one Greek example, the personal name Κεϊτούκειτος (Ath. 1.1e)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 “κεῖται ἢ οὐ κεῖται”²². Létoublon (148) adds the epithet of Apollo Ἰηπαιών to this category: “he whom one invokes crying ἰη παιών” (cf. ἰηπαιωνίζω). Another example of a personal name might be the Homeric Hero Οὐκαλέγων (*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 *kāṃdīs*, “one who says *kām*

utterance καλήν ὥραν”, “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: Clytaemestra describes the sounds of the Erinyes with the delocutive verbs μύζω and ὠζω. Cf. Ar. *Th.* 231: – μῦ μῦ – τί μύζεις; and the passage from Aristophanes quoted in n. 18 above.

²¹ *MH* 37 (1980), 207 ff. On delocutive nouns and adjectives see also Fruyt 67.

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

disam”: “in which direction (shall I turn)”²³ – cf. ποῖ φύγω! A *fatalist* is named *yadbhaviśya*, “one who says *yad bhaviśyati*” (“what will be [will be]”)²⁴. In Swedish we find *hallåa*, “female TV-presenter”, a delocutive formed from the interjection *hallå* (“hello”).

ποιφουγμα, on the other hand, would be a designation of the phrase ποῖ φύγω itself, not of the person speaking it or addressed by it. Thus we find in Russian the noun судибоги (*sudibogi*), denoting a speech in which appear the words “God may judge”: Богъ его суди!, “may God judge him”; Богъ ему судья!, “God [be] a judge to him”²⁵. There is at least one other example of this kind in Greek (apart from the deverbative formations οἴμωγμα, etc., mentioned before): in Ar. *Eq.* 408, the noun βακχέβακχον denotes the utterance Βάκχε, Βάκχε in the phrase ἰηπαιώνισαι καὶ βακχέβακχον ἄσαι (“cry ἰη Παιών and sing Βάκχε, Βάκχε”). We may also note that the noun ἀλαλή is formed directly from the cry ἀλαλαί, without an intermediary verb. Nevertheless, one may suspect that Aeschylus, if ποίφουγμα is a word of his own creation, would have been inspired by common nouns like οἴμωγμα and αἶαγμα (cf. n. 13 above), without considering the fact that they are not true delocutives, but strictly deverbatives.

As for ποιφύσσω, 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’ ποίφουγμα must be derived (cf. Theocritus’ στήτα, “woman” or Euphorio’s and Lycophron’s πόποι, “gods”). The appearance of a word of the same stem in Sophron must be regarded as uncertain.

²³ *Mahābhārata* 12.6320.

²⁴ The name of a fish in the *Hitopadesa*. Cf. Brugmann 34, 74.

²⁵ Cf. Brugmann 34. Another interesting type of delocutive nominal formation is found in Swedish *jävlaranamma*, 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 (*d*)*jävlar anamma* (originally “devils may take” [you, it, etc.]).