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TRANSLATING ARISTOPHANES' PUNS

This paper sketches a taxonomy of Aristophanic puns and explores the strategies employed by 'faithful' English translations for rendering such jokes. No pun is untranslatable. At the same time, there is no perfect translation but a range of options, more or less effective for a certain context, audience, and type of pun. The challenges which translators face with Aristophanic jokes, as well as the ingenious solutions they offer on occasions, invite us to reappraise the original puns, whose wittiness is too often denied by scholarship.

Keywords: Aristophanes, translation, humour, jokes, puns, paretymology, *para prosdokian*

If translating literature is a challenging task, then translating poetry – and especially poetic comedy – seems a nightmare, at least for those translators who care to do justice to the dramatists' style and the purpose of the genre. Even within the field of translating 'faithfully', one finds oneself between Scylla and Charybdis: to be grammatically faithful (which usually comes at the expense of humour) or stylistically faithful (at the expense of accuracy of form). At which point of this pendulum each translator will settle depends on their personal taste and skill, as well as the purpose/intended audience of each translation. Various aspects of Aristophanic language are hard to render,[1] such as the

[1] For an overview of Aristophanes' techniques of verbal humour, see D. Kanellakis, *Aristophanes and the Poetics of Surprise* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2020), 23–5. For dedicated monographs, see G. Kloss, *Erscheinungsformen komischen Sprechens bei Aristophanes* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2001); A. López Eire, *La lengua coloquial de la Comedia aristofánica* (Murcia, 1996); C. Michael, 'Ο κωμικός λόγος του Αριστοφάνους' ('The Comic Language of Aristophanes', unpublished PhD thesis (Athens, 1981); further bibliography in A. Willi (ed.), *The Language of Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2002). For an overview of (some of) the challenges in translating Aristophanes see G. Sifakis, *Προβλήματα μετάφρασης του Αριστοφάνη* (*Problems in Translating Aristophanes*) (Athens, 1985), and J. Robson, *Aristophanes. An Introduction* (London, 2009), ch. 10, esp. 203–7 on puns.

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fluctuation of register,[2] the dialects and idiolects of his characters, proverbs and metaphors which do not make sense today, *hapax* words, and, of course, puns.

It is true that there are some cases of ancient Greek expressions which survive today (such as the proverbial κόκκυγές γε τρεῖς, *Ach.* 598 = 'τρεις κι ο κούκος' in Modern Greek, meaning 'hardly anyone'),[3] or coincidentally have an exact match in other modern languages (such as ἡμέτερος ὁ πυραμοῦς, *Thesm.* 94 = 'we take the cake', meaning 'to be an extreme example of').[4] But such rare instances of luck aside (that is, when an 'identical' joke is impossible in the target language), translators are expected to come up with 'analogous' constructions, stylistically equivalent to the Greek text – or to 'give up' and simply explain the joke of the original in a footnote. Of all categories of jokes, this article deals with the challenges in, and strategies for, translating Aristophanes' puns in English.[5] The purpose is to discuss different types of puns in terms of their translatability, and different translating strategies in terms of their effectiveness. Through this analysis I wish to question the bias that 'Aristophanes' puns are sheldom sophisticated',[6] by suggesting that the translators' persitence in seeking effective renderings is a gauge for the quality of jokes that are intriguing in the original language.

[2] On translating Aristophanes' lyrics, see J. Robson, 'Transposing Aristophanes: The Theory and Practice of Translating Aristophanic Lyric', *G&R* 59 (2012), 214–44. On their high, low, and hybrid register, see M. S. Silk, 'Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet', in J. Henderson (ed.), *Aristophanes. Essays in Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), 99–151.

[3] Other examples: τὸ πρᾶγμα…αὐτὸ βοᾷ, *Vesp.* 921 = το πράγμα φωνάζει από μόνο του (≈ 'it is evident'); εἴθ᾽ ἐξεκόπην πρότερον τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν, *Nub.* 24 = κάλλιο να μου βγει το μάτι (≈ 'better suffer physically than…'); γάλα τ᾽ ὀρνίθων, *Av.* 734 = και του πουλιού το γάλα (≈ 'every delicacy'); τὠφθαλμὼ δάκνει, *Lys.* 298 = τρώω κάποιον με τα μάτια (≈ 'check him/her out'); ἀποκρινομένῳ οὐδὲ γρῦ, *Plut.* 17 = δε βγάζω γρυ (≈ 'I don't say a thing'); ἀβίωτον εἶναί μοι πεποίηκε τὸν βίον, *Plut.* 969 = κάνω τον βίο αβίωτο (≈ 'make one's life unbearable'). See T. Kostakis, 'Παροιμίες και παροιμιακές φράσεις στον Αριστοφάνη' ('Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases in Aristophanes'), *Λαογραφία* 24 (1966), 121–4.

[4] Other examples: τῇ πανσελήνῳ, *Ach.* 84 = American slang 'moon', meaning 'showing my ass'; ἐνόρχης ἔστ᾽, *Lys.* 661 = American slang 'have the balls', meaning 'to be brave'; διαβεβλημένου κυνός, *Vesp.* 950–1 = British saying 'give a dog a bad name', meaning 'to besmirch one's reputation' (but used literally in the Aristophanic context, for a dog under trial).

[5] For the history of English translations of Aristophanes, see J. M. Walton, *Found in Translation. Greek Drama in English* (Cambridge, 2006), 253–67; S. Halliwell, 'Aristophanes', in O. Classe (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation* (London, 2000), i.77–8.

[6] K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes. Clouds* (Oxford, 1968), 96. Other descriptions of his puns are 'feeble', 'banal', 'awful', even 'atrocious'; see references in S. Kidd, *Nonsense and Meaning in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Cambridge, 2014), 138. For Halliwell, 'we are badly placed to judge whether *any* pun in Aristophanes would have struck his contemporaries as witty or feeble'; S. Halliwell, *Birds and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), lii n. 59 (emphasis in original).

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Three methodological clarifications are necessary before I begin. First, as implied above, this article is only concerned with 'faithful' or 'accurate' translations, as opposed to 'adaptations', 'appropriations', 'rewritings', and the like.[7] This is not to say that the latter categories are without interest as far as their translating practices are concerned, but they tell us little (if anything) about the dramatist's (rather than the translator's) style. 'Faithful' translations, on the contrary, and indeed those 'scholarly' or 'academic' translations that initiate most students into Aristophanes, determine to a great extent our disposition towards his humour, and therefore it is important to be aware of how they (can) make Aristophanes likeable, or not. I draw my examples from the Loeb editions, the Aris & Phillips series, collections of Aristophanic translations, and commentaries which translate individual lines at their lemmata, while in various instances I propose my own renderings.[8] Secondly, I will only deal with puns that exist in the Greek text, not puns 'forced' by translators: again, such jokes tell us more about the translator's skills than Aristophanes'.[9] Finally, I will

[7] Of course, 'adaptations', 'appropriations', 'rewritings', etc. of *specific* jokes within an otherwise 'faithful' translation are included, and indeed highlighted, in my analysis.

[8] Specifically I use (hereafter all cited by surname only, with *ad loc.* implied): C. Austin and S. D. Olson, *Thesmophoriazusae* (Oxford, 2004); C. Bailey, *The Clouds* (Oxford, 1952); D. Barrett, *Aristophanes. The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs* (London, 1964) (= *Frogs and Other Plays*, rev. S. Dutta [London, 2007]); P. Dickinson, *Aristophanes. Plays*, 2 vols. (London, 1970); M. Dillon, *Frogs* (Perseus Digital Library, 1995); N. Dunbar, *Birds* (Oxford, 1995); S. Halliwell, *Birds and Other Plays* [*Lysistrata, Assembly-Women, Wealth*] (Oxford, 1998); S. Halliwell, *Aristophanes. Clouds, Women at the Thesmophoria, Frogs* (Oxford, 2015); J. Henderson, *Aristophanes* (new Loeb edition), 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1998–2007); B. H. Kennedy, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (Cambridge, 1883); D. M. MacDowell, *Wasps* (Oxford, 1971); W. W. Merry, *The Clouds, The Acharnians, The Frogs, The Knights, The Birds, The Wasps, Peace* (Oxford, 1879–1900); W. J. Oates and E. O'Neill (eds.), *The Complete Greek Drama*, vol. 2 (with an anonymous translator of Aristophanes) (New York, 1938); F. A. Paley, *The Peace* (Cambridge, 1873); D. Parker, *The Wasps* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1961); W. Rennie, *The Acharnians* (London, 1909); B. B. Rogers, *Aristophanes* (original Loeb edition), 3 vols. (London, 1924); H. Sharpley, *The Peace* (Edinburgh and London, 1905); A. H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, 11 vols. (Warminster, 1980–2001); A. H. Sommerstein and D. Barrett, *Aristophanes. The Knights, Peace, The Birds, The Assemblywomen, Wealth* (London, 1978); W. J. M. Starkie, *The Acharnians* (London, 1909); W. J. M. Starkie, *The Clouds* (London, 1911).

[9] J. Robson, 'Lost in Translation? The Problem of (Aristophanic) Humour', in L. Hardwick and C. Stray (eds.), *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Oxford, 2007), 168–82, concludes by suggesting as one topic for further research the question 'And what of "found" humour: do puns emerge or non-humorous sequences *become* humorous in translation?' (emphasis in original). This is a rather surprising suggestion, given that the paper itself has already given the (affirmative) answer, with Robson quoting three translators: Bond in R. Bond, R. Beacham, and M. Ewans, 'Translation Forum', in J. Barsby (ed.), *Greek and Roman Drama. Translation and Performance* (Stuttgart, 2002), 178: 'Sometimes…you ignore the pun in the Greek or the Latin and sometimes you import one *which is not there*, because whatever you've lost you can compensate for by invention'; A. H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Aristophanes. Lysistrata, The Acharnians, The Clouds*

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not delve here into translation theory and humour theory,[10] or outdated theoretical debates such as 'reading drama versus watching drama' (which extends to 'reading a translation versus performing a translation')[11] or 'obscenity versus political correctness'. What I am interested in, instead, is the microstructure of puns and whether they can be translated with the same or similar constructions in English in order to keep the same, or generate a similar, comic meaning. To this end, I have grouped my examples into different categories of puns – overlaps are by no means precluded – and the observations in each category about the translating strategies will be analysed deductively at the end.

Comic names

Puns are often found in proper names of persons and places. We may distinguish between *invented* names based on a comic word, and *existing* (or slightly modified) names which resemble a comic word.[12] In the first group we have, for instance:

A1 Προξενίδης ὁ Κομπασεύς (*Av.* 1126), translated as 'Proxenides of Braggarton' (Henderson), 'of Boaston' (Sommerstein, Dunbar), 'of Bragham' (Kennedy), 'the Braggadocian' (Rogers), 'the Braggartian' (Oates and O'Neill), 'the Boastonian' (Merry);

(Harmondsworth, 1973), 36: 'I have found it necessary to adapt his jokes, or, where even this is impossible, to compensate for their loss by adding something *elsewhere*'; D. Parker, 'WAA [William A. Arrowsmith]: An Intruded Gloss', *Arion* 2 (1992–3), 253: 'But verbal jokes are normally lost. So, we were to compensate. Put in *other* jokes' (emphasis added in all three cases). An example of a 'compensation' pun (or what I called a 'forced' pun above) is ἐς κόρακας ἐλθεῖν (*Av.* 128), which Sommerstein translates as 'go to birdition' (instead of 'perdition'): this is an ingenious translation, for certain, and funnier than the literal 'to the crows', but translates *a metaphor* (indeed, a non-humorous metaphor beyond the context of *Birds*) rather than *a pun* of the original.

[10] On both of which, with reference to translating Aristophanes, see Robson (n. 9); Robson (n. 2), 215–18.

[11] For Ewans, 'It is surprising (and disappointing) that actability has not been an important criterion for many translators of Aristophanes. See, for example, Halliwell 1998, Preface [n. 6 here], in which the only criteria are "readability" and "historical accuracy"!' M. Ewans, 'Translating Aristophanes into English', in D. Chiaro (ed.), *Translation, Humour and Literature. Translation and Humour* (London and New York, 2010), i.88 n. 3. While I have some reservations about the truth of the statement itself (see n. 14 below), my main objection is that, from postclassical times until today, we have, on a global scale, incomparably more readings of (translations of) the Greek plays than performances – so there is nothing to be apologetic for.

[12] I have turned all my examples into the nominative case.

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A2 Ποσθαλίσκος (*Thesm.* 291), translated as 'little Dick' (Henderson), 'little Dickie, little Willy' (Austin and Olson), 'little Willy' (Halliwell), 'little Willykins' (Sommerstein), 'little son Erektos' (Barrett);
A3 χαυνοπολῖται (*Ach.* 635), translated as 'citizens of Simpletonia' (Henderson), 'of Emptyhead' (Sommerstein).

Some examples of the second group are:

B1 Βαλλήνη (*Ach.* 234), translated as 'Peltingham' (Henderson, Sommerstein), 'Hurlingham' (Merry) – punning on Pallene and βάλλων of 236;
B2 Παιονίδης Κινησίας (*Lys.* 852), translated as 'Kinesias from Paionidai' and 'Cinesias from Paeonidae' (Halliwell, Henderson, both missing the pun), 'Mr. Screw from Bangtown' (Henderson), 'Cinesias from Bangwell' (Sommerstein), 'from Bangladesh' (Kanellakis) – punning on the name of the *deme* Paionidai, which resembles παίω ('to fuck'), together with Κινησίας (a real name punning on κινῶ = 'to fuck') making a hyperbole;
B3 Σεβῖνος [ὁ] Ἀναφλύστιος (*Ran.* 427), translated as 'Humpus of Wankton' (Henderson), 'Fuck-you from Anaphlystos' (Halliwell), 'Phucus of Dickeleia' (Sommerstein), 'Shaftus of Stiffwick' (Barrett/Dutta) – punning on the name of the *deme* Anaphlystos, which resembles ἀναφλάω ('to masturbate'; cf. *Eccl.* 979), together with Σεβῖνος (an invented name punning on σέ + βινῶ = 'I fuck you') making a hyperbole;[13]
B4 ἀνὴρ Κόπρειος (*Eq.* 899) and Κοπρεαῖος (*Eccl.* 317), translated as 'a man from Dungstown' (Henderson), 'from Shittington', 'from Crapton' (Sommerstein), 'a Coprolitish man' (Rogers), 'Mr. O'Shit' (Oates and O'Neill), 'from Shithole' (Kanellakis) – the *deme* Copros near Eleusis, either named after the mythical hero Copreus, son of Pelops, or directly from κόπρος, literally means 'dung';
B5 ὁ νοῦς δ' ἐν Κλωπιδῶν, said of Paphlagon (*Eq.* 79), translated as 'his mind in Larcenadae' (Sommerstein), 'in Thieveton' (Merry), 'on Crimea' (Henderson), 'in Kleptomanchester' (Kanellakis) – punning on the name of Clopidae, a settlement of the *deme* Aphidna, which resembles κλοπεύς ('thief');[14]

[13] Bowie argues, *pace* Rosen, that 'obscene punning names in comedy seem to constitute a very weak link with iambos'. E. Bowie, 'Ionian Iambos and Attic Komoidia: Father and Daughter, or Just Cousins?', in Willi (n. 1), 44; R. Rosen, *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (Atlanta, GA, 1988), 26. On Archilochus' punning names, see M. G. Bonanno, 'Nomi e soprannomi archilochei', *MH* 37 (1980), 65–88.

[14] Commenting on Sommerstein's translation, Ewans (n. 11), 80, says that 'this approach [of translating names] does not give an actor the material he needs for a good performance. It is better simply to abandon the puns, and go for the effective meaning instead.' I fail to understand in what

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B6 A man ἐκ Κοθωκιδῶν (*Thesm.* 620) is usually simply translated 'from Cothodidae/Kothokidai' (Rogers, Barrett, Oates and O'Neill, Sommerstein, Halliwell), which was a *deme* near Eleusis, but there is possibly a pun on κόθημα = αἰδοῖον, hence 'a guy from Phalladelphia' (Henderson), 'Penisylvania', 'Hornywood' (Kanellakis);

B7 Instructed by Socrates to go to bed, Strepsiades is afraid that οἱ Κορίνθιοι will bite him (*Nub.* 710) – an explicit (cf. 699) pun on κόρεις, 'bugs', translated as 'Cootie-rinthians' (Henderson), 'Tom Tugs' (Sommerstein), 'Bedouins' (Starkie), 'Phlaeacians' (Bailey).

These examples represent five translating strategies:

1. Transliteration (Paeonidae, Cinesias, Anaphlystos, Cothodidae), which does not render either the pun or the comic concept, and leaves modern readers – even us classicists in many cases – wondering about the pragmatics of each name;
2. Turning existing English common names into proper names (little Dickie, Mr Screw, from Shithole, Tom Tugs), which renders the comic concept but not the pun;
3. Inventing English proper names that pun on common names (Bragham, Larcenadae, Simpletonia, Shittington). This renders the comic concept but only a certain type of punning mechanism – equivalent to the Greek puns A1–A3 above – which might be considered 'the easy solution';
4. Adaptation of modern names, with slight phonetic interventions (Boaston, Dickeleia, Phalladelphia, Penisylvania) or larger ones (Kleptomanchester, Cootierinthians) so that the comic concept of the original pun is added to. The more familiar the reader or spectator is with the modern name, the more effective the joke: for instance, Dickeleia or Thieventon make comic sense to anyone but are funnier to those who know Deceleia (an ancient *deme* of Attica) or Steventon (Oxfordshire);
5. Appropriation of modern names which coincidentally include an equivalent – though unappreciated in real life – pun to that of the ancient text (Crimea, Bedouins, Bangladesh) and therefore need no interventions.

Strategies 4 and 5 render both the concept and the pun, but entail a significant cultural displacement. Such spatial and/or temporal reframing is excused, if not enthusiastically received, in the case of passing

way 'theft' would be *theatrically* better than any of the translations in my list – each of which, no doubt, would work best in certain audiences.

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jokes, but it is always avoided when it comes to the names of the main characters. In the realm of 'faithful' translations, Strepsiades (literally 'twister') cannot become, let's say, 'Tino Turner' – which would not strike us negatively if it were a one-off. Even more conservative renderings (strategy 3) are avoided: Paphlagon, for example, who is thus named because ἀνὴρ παφλάζει, 'the man's on the boil!' (*Eq.* 919, Sommerstein), is nowhere translated as what would be a very modest adaptation – 'Bubbleagon'.

Paretymology

Puns are often created by claiming, or implying, a false etymology for a word through its mere phonetical resemblance with another word (a paronym). Thus we have, for example:

C1 πόλις supposedly related to πόλος (*Av.* 184), which is neatly translated with pairs such as site>city (Kennedy, Henderson), stage>state (Sommerstein), station>state (Rogers), pole>polity (Merry);

C2 πατρὶς supposedly meaning πᾶσ' ἵν' ἂν πράττῃ τις εὖ (*Plut.* 1151) – the only existing translation which attempts to capture the pun is 'homeland is wherever one feels at home' (Halliwell), which yet loses out, in that 'home' and 'homeland' are not paretymologically related and that 'to feel at home' does not carry the monetary connotations of Hermes' εὖ πράττω;

C3 ἐριώλη (literally 'hurricane'), supposedly meaning 'a waste of wool' (ἔριον+ὀλλύναι), is ironically attributed by Philocleon to a coat made of ἐρίων τάλαντον ('a talent of wool', *Vesp.* 1148–9). That coat has been ingeniously translated as 'a waste-coat', punning on 'waistcoat' (Merry, MacDowell);

C4 ἔργῳ 'φιαλοῦμεν, 'to get to work' (actually from ἐπι+ἰάλλω), is paretymologically linked by Trygaeus to 'libation bowl' (φιάλην, *Pax* 431–2).[15] The pun has been translated with pairs such as 'pitcher' and 'pitch in' (Henderson), 'bowl' and 'bowl along at work' (Merry), or 'get boldly on with the job' (Sommerstein, noting: '*boldly* is not in the Greek, but has been added to help reproduce the joke';

C5 The chorus hesitates to welcome Peace by offering her an ox, because that could be seen as a promise to send military help to their allies in

[15] According to Asclepiades of Myrlea (Ath. 11.103), the latter word comes from πιεῖν+ἅλις: a fanciful etymology too. G. Babiniotis, *Ετυμολογικό λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής γλώσσας* (Athens, 2010) questions the connection to *IE* root *pō-/pī-* 'to drink'.

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case of further war – a far-fetched connection of βοΐ to βοηθεῖν (*Pax* 926).[16] The chorus' reaction has been successfully translated as 'we don't want to have to go on an *oxpedition* anywhere' (Sommerstein), 'no need of bull-works now' (Rogers), 'we want no bullying here' (Paley);

C6 Having sore eyes (τὰς λήμας) caused by smoke, say the old men in *Lysistrata*, must be a result of Λήμνιον πῦρ ('Lemnian fire', a proverbial expression owed to the volcanic history of Lemnos: *Lys*. 299–301). The limited phonetic overlap of the two words makes it a weak pun, which, reasonably, no English translation has bothered to render. If necessary, we could perhaps translate as 'our eyes are searing like from lemon, it must be then a fire from Lemnos' (Kanellakis);

C7 ἀσκωλίαζω (to play a hopping game involving a balloon, <ἀσκός) is linked to not having κωλῆ (pork thighs, ham: *Plut*. 1128–9) to eat; the first letter of the verb contributes to the pun, as it echoes an alpha privative. Presumably, the implication is that, without animal sacrifices, Hermes' stomach will look like a balloon, that is, full of air. Two effective translations are: 'ham...ham it up [sc. the hunger]' (Henderson) and 'gammon...game on bladders' (Rogers);

C8 Strepsiades regrets having bought a κοππατίαν (a *koppa*-branded racing horse) for his son. 'I wish I'd had my eye knocked out (ἐξεκόπην) with a stone first!' he exclaims (*Nub*. 23–4: Henderson). A translation that renders the pun is 'I wish that I had my eye "hacked" out, before I had ever seen this "hack"' (Merry).

Based on our examples, we can trace the following translating strategies, other than translating word for word, which ruins the pun:

1. Phonetic adaptation of words, substituting paretymology with misspelling (waste-coat, oxpedition, bull-works);
2. Making slight semantic additions to facilitate a pun in English (boldly, Lemnos, ham it up);
3. Creating an equivalent English paretymology (pole>polity, pitcher>pitch in, gammon>game on).

It should be noted that far-fetched etymologies were not necessarily viewed as fanciful material by the ancient Greeks; they found prominent place in Plato's work, for example, where they are often

[16] βοή (>βοηθεῖν) is of uncertain *IE* origin but possibly comes from the same root as βοῦς (< ⋆g^{w}*ou*-), in which case we cannot speak of paretymology in our passage. Be that as it may, the 'common' root is merely an onomatopoeia, and so it generates 'etymological' relations as loose as those between the English words 'clink', 'click', 'clap' and 'clock'.

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taken as evidence in support of an argument.[17] At the same time, we may assume that not many Athenians were researching 'historical linguistics', and therefore it remains unclear whether Aristophanes' audience perceived (and laughed at) his paretymologies *as such*. Even worse, could some spectators have taken his paretymologies as facts? What is certain is that Aristophanes had carefully trained his audience to recognize wordplay as a malicious device of sophists and neoteric poets, in the context of his comedies at least, and therefore even the plausible paretymologies would sound suspect. Thus, in *Frogs*, Euripides is satirized for supposedly having composed the gnomic **C9**: τὸ πνεῖν δὲ δειπνεῖν (*Ran.* 1478), translated as 'breath and breakfast' (Merry), 'breath be mutton broth' (Rogers), 'dying is dining' (Sommerstein, noting: 'I have altered the sense for the sake of a pun').

Para prosdokian

Para prosdokian (*p.p.*) is the type of joke where the latter part of a sequence (be that a phrase within a sentence, or a word within a phrase, or even a syllable within a word) introduces an unexpected end, either by contradicting or reinterpreting the semantics of the first part (e.g. 'John makes good money, he was always a competent...forger') or by violating a formula or popular intertext (e.g. 'If I were...I'). While *p.p.* jokes are very frequent in Aristophanes,[18] only a few of them are based on a pun. Some examples, if not an exhaustive list, are:

D1 ἀπολεῖς ἄρ᾽ ὁμήλικα τόνδε φιλανθρακέα (*Ach.* 336), with the last word placed *p.p.* for φιλάνθρωπον, translated as 'Then you'll kill this, my coeval, my coal-eague?' (Henderson), 'my coeval, the philanthr-acist' (Starkie);

D2 διαπειν ᾶμες (*Ach.* 751), appearing *p.p.* for διαπίνομεν, translated as 'fasting' (instead of 'feasting': Rennie, Henderson), 'having shrinking bouts' (instead of 'drinking bouts': Sommerstein), 'drink dry...toasts' (instead of 'dry wine': Starkie);

D3 πρὶν ἀντιλαβέσθαι πρωκτὸν ἕτερον τῆς φλογός (*Thesm.* 242), with πρωκτὸν placed *p.p.* for οἰκίαν, translated as 'before the flames catch hold of another *arse*' (instead of 'house': Sommerstein, noting 'the [phonetic] similarity – in some dialect pronunciations, identity – of the two English words is a rare piece of good luck for the translator!');

[17] See D. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge, 2003), 29.
[18] See Kanellakis 2020 (n. 1), chap. 1.

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D4 ἐλθὼν σῆς δάμαρτος ἐσχάρας (*Thesm.* 913), with the last word (= αἰδοῖον) appearing *p.p.* for ἐς χέρας (cf. Eur. *Hel.* 566), translated as 'come into your wife's charms!' (instead of 'arms': Henderson), 'hearth' (not a *p.p.* but a double entendre: Halliwell, Sommerstein).

The translating strategies these few examples present are:

1. Finding an identical English pun (feasting/fasting), if lucky;
2. Inventing an equivalent English pun (charms/arms, drinking/shrinking, arse/house); or
3. Phonetic adaptation (coal-eague, philanthr-acist).

Phonological figures

Puns are often based on repetitive sounds, through figures such as alliteration ('*S*ee it, *s*ay it, *s*orted'), anadiplosis ('Fear leads to *anger*. *Anger* leads to hate'), anaphora ('*Every* breath you take / and *every* move you make / *every* bond you break / *every* step you take…'), homoioteleuton ('the soon*er* the bett*er*'), and paronomasia ('muscular mice'), or through homophony ('Jim'/'gym'). Of course, apart from comedy, such figures are extensively used in high-register poetry and oratory, and there is nothing inherently funny about them, as the examples above show. It remains upon the semantics to give them a comic, or other, tone; the homophony 'weak'/'week', for instance, becomes a pun only when placed in a witty sentence: 'Seven days without laughter makes one weak' (Mort Walker).[19]

Let us consider some examples of phonetic repetition based on *figura etymologica*:

E1 κέλης κέλητα παρακελητιεῖ (*Pax* 900), translated as 'jockey will outjockey jockey' (Henderson, Sommerstein) or 'riders will ride side by side' (Oates and O'Neill);

E2 καὶ μιαρὲ καὶ παμμίαρε καὶ μιαρώτατε (*Ran.* 466), translated as 'scum you! Utter scum! Scum of the earth!' (Henderson), 'you villain, arch-villain, you utter villain' (Sommerstein, cf. Dillon, Rogers);

E3 κατώρυξέν με κατὰ τῆς γῆς κάτω (*Plut.* 238), translated as 'he buries me d*own* under gr*oun*d' (Sommerstein), which invests in alliteration rather than in repetition;

[19] To use a reverse example, the phrase χρῆσθε τοῖς χρηστοῖσιν (*Ran.* 735), 'honour the honest' (Sommerstein), 'use the good and the useful' (Rogers), is a *figura etymologica* but not a pun; it is said as a sober statement within a non-humorous context.

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E4 δεινότατον ἔργον παρὰ πολὺ ἔργων ἁπάντων ἐργασόμεθ᾽ (*Plut.* 445), translated as 'We'll be doing far the most dastardly deed ever done' (Henderson), which also replaces paronomasia with alliteration;

E5 πόδα σὺ κυλλὸν ἀνὰ κύκλον κυκλεῖς (*Av.* 1379), translated as 'you twist and turn your limping limb' (Merry; surprisingly he notes that 'there is probably some joke we do not understand', even though his fine translation provides the answer: it is a pun for the sake of a pun);

E6 ἡλιάσει πρὸς ἥλιον (*Vesp.* 772), literally meaning 'You'll be judging [at Heliaia] out in the sun', which is not rendered as a pun in any existing translation. I suggest 'You'll be deck-chairing the court'.

The following examples entail phonetic repetitions based on alliteration:

F1 χαῖρ᾽, ὦ Χάρων (*Ran.* 183, repeated three times[20]) is not rendered as a pun in most translations ('Welcome, Charon!' Rogers, Henderson; 'Hello, Charon!' Sommerstein, Halliwell) but an English alliteration *is* possible: 'cheery Charon!' (Dillon), 'Cheerio Charon!' (Dickinson), 'Hello, hell!' (Kanellakis);

F2 ἐπᾴσομαι μέλος τι μελλοδειπνικόν (*Eccl.* 1153), literally 'I'll accompany you with a sort of pre-dining celebration song' (Sommerstein),[21] has been neatly translated as 'I'll sing a song, a Lay of Lay-the-dinner' (Rogers);

F3 χέσαιτο γάρ, εἰ μαχέσαιτο (*Eq.* 1057) has been translated as 'If she fought she'd be taken short' (Sommerstein), 'In fighting she's always a fright in' (Rogers) – both rendering the rhyme but not the scatological content – and 'When the spears start hitting, she promptly starts shitting' (Sommerstein);

F4 The exchange between Chremylus and Blepsidemus ποῦ; / παρ᾽ ἐμοί. / παρὰ σοί; / πάνυ. (*Plut.* 393) has been best translated as '"Inside where?" / "In my house." / "In your house?" / "That's right."' (Henderson, cf. Sommerstein, with 'Exactly' at the end). I would change the coda to 'Indeed' to make a perfect alliteration;

F5 Similar is the exchange between Euripides and his kinsman: Ἀγάθων ὁ τραγῳδοποιός. / ποῖος οὗτος Ἀγάθων; (*Thesm.* 29–30), literally '"…the tragic poet Agathon." / "What Agathon do you mean?"' (Henderson).[22] No existing translation renders the pun, for which I propose replacing alliteration with homophony: '"…the tragic poet Agathon, you know." / "I…no."'

[20] Perhaps a para-satyric quotation (cf. *Σ*).
[21] Perhaps a para-tragic parody, cf. Soph. *Trach.* 205.
[22] Cf. the hypothetical exchange 'Let's go to Edgware!' 'Edge…where?'

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Aristophanes himself offers examples of homophonic puns:

G1 The comic pronouncing of Διὸς καταιβάτου (*Pax* 42), literally 'Zeus the Descender', as Διὸς σκαταιβάτου – a phenomenon called 'juncture' in phonetics – has been translated as 'Zeus of the Thunder Crap' (Henderson, cf. Sommerstein) and, most ingeniously, as 'sulphur-bolting Zeus' (Rogers), given that both kind of strokes involve emission of that chemical. Merry notes: 'If it is thought worth while to elaborate a joke in English, there is material for it in *sweeping bolt* and *bolt sweepings*!' In any case, it seems difficult to translate with a juncture pun in English;[23]

G2 Another juncture pun is τί δῆτα ληρεῖς ὥσπερ ἀπ᾽ ὄνου καταπεσών; (*Nub.* 1273), literally 'Why are you talking such nonsense, as if you'd fallen off a donkey?' (Sommerstein), which sounds like ἀπὸ νοῦ καταπεσών: 'off your head/off your Ned' (Merry);

G3 The homophony between the female name Ἀμεινία and its male version, Ἀμεινίας, which in vocative also becomes Ἀμεινία (*Nub.* 689), and the confusing exchange it creates between Socrates and Strepsiades, is not only another example of Aristophanes warning his audience that wordplay is linked to sophistry – it has also proven one of the greatest challenges in translating Aristophanes. Most translators simply transliterate the name in English and add an asterisk[24] to explain the joke in the footnotes, but Sommerstein achieves an equivalent pun by substituting the name:

SOC. If you met Alexander, what would be the first thing you'd say to him?
STR. I'd say – I'd say 'Hello, Sandie!'
SOC. There you are, you've called him a woman.

Across these subcategories of phonological puns, we have encountered the following translating possibilities:

1. Finding an equivalent pun in English which renders both the comic content and the type of figure of the original ('Cheerio Charon', 'hitting'/'shitting', '♂Sandie'/'♀Sandie');

[23] For some examples of juncture-puns in English, see R. Alexander, *Aspects of Verbal Humour in English* (Tübingen, 1997), 30–1.

[24] 'One of the cleverest puns of this type [sc. juncture puns], I think, was the motto linguists adopted at a conference in the USA. Because linguists use an asterisk to mark ungrammatical sentences, the motto emblazoned on hundreds of T-shirts at this particular conference was "Be ungrammatical. You only have your *ass to risk*".' B. Blake, *Playing with Words. Humour in the English Language* (London, 2007), 77.

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2. Inventing a pun in English which renders the comic content but replaces the type of figure of the original ('off your head/off your Ned', 'deck-chairing', 'dastardly deed ever done');
3. Inventing a pun in English which renders the type of figure of the original but modifies its comic content ('If she fought she'd be taken short').

Double meaning

Double entendres, a surprisingly large number of which are *not* sexual, are our last, but not least, category. We may distinguish between words hinting at other words (usually paronyms) and words ambiguous in themselves. Some examples of the first group:

H1 A juror made of συκίνου wood (*Vesp.* 145), literally 'figwood', with a pun on συκοφάντης ('slanderer'), is neatly translated as someone made of 'Impeach wood' (Henderson), or with a juncture pun, 'I'm peach wood' (Parker). We see that both parts have been semantically adapted (fig>peach, slanderer>impeacher) to facilitate a pun in English. Sometimes it is possible to attempt an identical pun in the target language, but here the option 'syco-more' (Van Daele) is rather weak, in that most English speakers would *not* automatically recall 'sycophant';[25]

H2 σὺ δέ γ᾽ ὄζοις ἂν καλαμίνθης (*Eccl.* 648), literally 'you'd smell of catmint' (<μίνθη), with a pun on μίνθος ('human ordure'), has been translated as 'you'd smell of *eau d'ordure*!' (Henderson, probably playing with the perfume brand *eau d'orange verte*), and with the orthographic pun 'you'd be smelling of…tur(d)meric' (Sommerstein, who acknowledges that this is a substitute pun);

H3 In his allegorical dream, the slave Xanthias saw a whale (Cleon) weighing βόειον δημόν (*Vesp.* 40), literally 'beef fat', with the last word being a paronym of δῆμος. The pun is translated as 'weighing

[25] Of course Van Daele translates into French, where 'sycomore' (not 'sycamore') is the right spelling, and thus phonetically closer to 'sycophante', which, unlike the English 'sycophant' (flatterer), retains the exact nuance of the Greek (slanderer): V. Coulon and M. van Daele, *Collection Budé. Aristophane* (Paris, 1924), ii.23. But the association is not so easy for a French speaker either, while for Greek speakers it was obvious that συκοφάντης indeed came from σῦκον (+φαίνω). The explanation of this etymology has troubled scholars since antiquity. Zenodorus (first century BC?) mentions two possible origins: (a) picking up the first fig of the season was considered as luck by the Athenians and, for that reason, some would sneak into others' fields to grab one – thus συκοφάντης was understood as 'getting into others' business'; (b) there was a law in Athens against exporting figs, and the person who accused someone for breaking the law was called a συκοφάντης, 'fig revealer' (*Lexica Graeca Minora* [1965], 258).

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pea pulse' (a homophone of 'peoples': Henderson) and 'weighing a bit of grease' (a homophone of 'Greece': MacDowell);

H4 Placed in a context where men express their worries about their wives' fidelity, the phrase ὀρχουμένης μου τῆς γυναικὸς ἑσπέρας (*Lys.* 409), literally 'last night my wife was dancing' (Sommerstein), is certainly a pun on ὄρχεις ('testicles'): 'my wife was having a ball the other night' (Henderson) or, more accurately, 'my wife attended a couple of balls last night' (Kanellakis);

H5 I highlighted the role of the context in **H4** because, in the current example, the same lexeme (ορχ) creates a non-sexual double entendre. The sons of Carcinus the dancer are called τριόρχοι ('buzzards', *Vesp.* 1534), as a pun on τρεῖς ὀρχησταί ('three dancers', cf. *Σ*), regardless of the literal meaning of the word, that is, 'with three testicles'.[26] They have been translated as 'triple duckers' (a weak paronym of 'triple dancers': Henderson) and 'three kinglets' (Oates and O'Neill).

Finally, some examples of ambiguous words:

I1 μὴ 'κκόρει τὴν Ἑλλάδα (*Pax* 59) prima facie means 'don't sweep Greece away!' (Henderson) but can also be understood as 'don't make Greece empty of young people' (Olson), 'don't rob our youths' (Sharpley) – a double entendre which no translation has managed to render; perhaps 'Stop cleansing the Greeks' (Kanellakis);

I2 A husband is suspicious of his wife, who visits the shoemaker too often with the excuse τοῦ ποδὸς τὸ δακτυλίδιον πιέζει τὸ ζυγόν (*Lys.* 416–17), 'the sandal-strap is hurting her toe'. But since δακτύλιος means anything ring-shaped, including the anus (LSJ, s.v. ii.2), we cannot blame the wife for being dishonest, at least: 'the thong is squeezing her pinky winky' (Henderson);[27]

I3 When bald Aristophanes compares himself to other comic poets by saying κἀγὼ μὲν τοιοῦτος ἀνὴρ ὢν ποιητὴς οὐ κομῶ (*Nub.* 545), he means both 'But myself, being such a man and a poet [sc. humble], I do not plume myself' and 'But myself, being such a man and a poet [sc. bald], I do not let my hair grow'. The pun translates perfectly

[26] The bird was thus named probably due to an anatomical misunderstanding. C. A. Wood and F. M. Fyfe (eds.), *The Art of Falconry. De arte venandi cum avibus of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen* (Stanford, CA, 1943), 79: 'One must not mistake the suprarenal gland, that lies close to them, for the male testes'. On Carcinus' family, as presented by Aristophanes, see E. Stewart, 'An Ancient Theatre Dynasty: The Elder Carcinus, the Young Xenocles and the Sons of Carcinus in Aristophanes', *Philologus* 160 (2016), 1–18, esp. 14: 'Though we cannot be certain, the balance of probabilities seems to suggest either that there were three sons or that, even if there were four in reality, only three appeared as dancers at the end of *Wasps*.'

[27] J. Henderson, *Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), *ad loc*: 'Dover informs me of the identical usage [of ring = anus] in (northern) British slang'.

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into English as 'I do not act like a bigwig' (metaphor: Henderson), 'give myself hairs' (homophone of 'airs': Sommerstein), or 'give myself (h)airs' (orthographic pun: Merry).

The translating strategies found in these examples are:

1. Retaining both meanings of the Greek double entendre in English (a ball/balls, give airs/hairs);
2. Retaining one of the two meanings and adapting the other semantically ('pea pulse' retains δῆμον but adapts δημόν, 'tur(d)meric' retains μίνθος but adapts μίνθη);
3. Adapting both meanings ('Impeach wood' retains neither 'sycophant' nor 'fig', 'kinglets' retains neither 'dancers' nor 'buzzers', and 'cleansing' retains neither 'sweeping' nor 'taking the young away').

Conclusions

Puns are widely used by Aristophanes to adorn every important aspect of his comic repertoire: politics, sex, personal abuse, mockery of the sophists, paratragedy and poetic self-identification. Sometimes they are heavily dependent on the context – which usually makes them more difficult to translate – and at other times they are quite autonomous.[28] In either case, they pose a challenge to translators, whose renderings are determined both by their linguistic skills (or persistence) and by luck: the luck of finding exact matches between Greek and English. However, in the same way that Aristophanes' puns have been underestimated by scholarship, the variety of translating strategies has also been underestimated, and the factor of luck overpraised by both scholars and translators themselves.

The collection of examples in this article has shown many instances where an equivalent pun is equally, if not better, placed than an identical pun (see the 'syco-more' case), to render the original pun. More importantly, these examples show that there is *nothing*

[28] Old Comedy being 'a fundamentally narrative genre, any jokes are likely to be embedded in the structure of the narrative [rather than discrete entities]. To take only one of the almost limitless examples in Aristophanes, the *Acharnians* contains an extended riff on the double meaning of χοῖρος as both "piglet" and a slang term for the female genitalia… To repackage this joke as a stand-alone one-liner is certainly possible. However it would be considerably less funny than it is in situ, since the χοῖρος pun is only one strand of a whole nexus of jokes which make up the humour in this scene': N. Scott, 'Metaphors and Jokes in the Fragments of Cratinus', *Arethusa* 52 (2019), 238–9.

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untranslatable (with humour still in place) and, to this end, I have also suggested some renderings of my own for puns not translated *as such* so far. In many cases (if not in most), translating 'as such' does not mean 'by the same exact *type* of pun as in Greek'. Here, of course, we have a scale of translatability: a juncture pun in Greek is more difficult to be translated as a juncture pun in English (almost impossible) than it is for an alliteration pun in Greek to be rendered as an alliteration pun in English (not requiring any special inspiration).

Revisiting the translating strategies traced in each section, we found three strategies in most categories of puns, which may be seen as three levels of proximity to the Greek text: proximity of the semantics (nuances) or of the morphology (type of pun). Punning comic names appear to be the only category for which more translating strategies are available, and this supports what I said above about contextual parameters: because punning comic names in Aristophanes usually have very loose contextual relations – looser than those of paretymologies, for example, which are part of the 'argumentation' against the sophists – and because they are usually single words – in contrast to *para prosdokian*, for example, which requires at least a pair of words – there is more freedom in how to translate them.

The list of puns discussed in this article is anything but exhaustive, and my categorization of them anything but restrictive. Instead, emphasis has been placed on the holistic mapping of the translating methods. It is hoped, however, that scholars who wish to delve further into Aristophanes' puns (in the original language) will benefit from this. . .punorama.

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