

The Kiss in Plautus' *Stichus*: Notes on Gestures and Words in View of a Pragmatics of Comic Communication

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In this paper, I aim to show how the pragmatics of communication can specifically contribute to the study of gestures in Plautus' comedies. Since gestural expressiveness is far from being a new and scarcely explored topic in studies on *palliata* in general and Plautus in particular,¹ my observations are not intended to provide an exhaustive or systematic overview of the subject. Rather, I wish to reflect on some methodological insights through a case study in order to focus on how a pragmatic approach may lead to a better understanding of Plautus' texts.

It may be useful to begin by briefly mentioning some fundamental premises underlying the pragmatic approach to gesture.² From the perspective of pragmatics, gesture is mostly a form of analogic communication (i.e. complementary to verbal communication) in which the specific function of transmitting referential data predominates in its logical and syntactical architecture, while the ability to express relational information remains limited. On the contrary, analogic communication entails the prevalence of the specific ability to express

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- 1 Indeed, the topic lends itself to different—albeit closely connected—approaches. From our perspective, however, the stream of research into non-verbal behaviour, i.e. body language and mimicry, in Roman comedies—first introduced by Warnecke (1910) and taken up again by Taladoire (1951)—is particularly interesting. Some useful reflections on *palliata* may be found in Handley's essay on New Comedy (2002); Panayotakis (2005) provides a clear methodological framework, while Monda (2010, 2014) offers thought-provoking examples of specific case studies. A connected field of inquiry deals with the relationships between gestures, improvisation techniques, and mime, with particular reference to Plautus: see Arnott (1995), Hofmann (1995), Petrone (1995), and Zimmermann (1995); on the role of dance, see Moore (2012: 105–134). Other works present a comparative study (already familiar to ancient rhetoric) of the actor's and the orator's *actio*: among the many studies on this, see Graf (1991), Fantham (2002), Dutsch (2002, 2007, 2013) and Nocchi (2013). For a general overview of ancient gesture, see Sittl (1890) with his valuable and numerous observations on Plautine texts; as for the Roman world, see Aldrete (1999, 2017) and Corbeill (2004).
 - 2 Watzlawick et al. (1967: esp. 29–52). On the application of methodological instruments borrowed from the pragmatics of communication to the study of Latin literary texts, see the comprehensive overview in Ricottilli (2009); more specifically, for an in-depth analysis of gesture, see Ricottilli (2000: esp. 81–116 for methodological observations on the contribution of the pragmatic approach to the analysis of Virgil's text).

the relational aspects of communication, while the syntax employed to define the nature of relationships remains elusive. As a result, human communication is based on the interaction of these two languages (verbal and gestural), which convey different levels of information in different ways. They therefore are mutually 'untranslatable' in general, if not at the cost of a significant loss of information.

Some implications of these general assumptions are particularly interesting for our study. Firstly, gestural language is ambiguous: tears can express either joy or pain, a smirk can signify either complicity or contempt, a raised fist can symbolise a threat or an expression of unity, etc. Secondly, gestural language may be used either as an alternative to verbal language or in combination with it. In any case, a gesture is seldom either an exact substitute for or a perfect equivalent of words; moreover, in virtue of its ability to express relationships, gestural language is particularly suited to assuming metacommunicative meaning. In other words, if a gesture accompanies words, it often shows how the referential contents that are conveyed by the words should be understood; ultimately, it expresses the nature of the relationship between the interactors.

Through the case study which will follow, I aim to demonstrate how these (inevitably generalised) pragmatic assumptions may foster the understanding of culturally specific texts, like Plautus' comedies. In particular, I wish to analyse an extreme case in which a misalignment between verbal and gestural language emerges.

The passage I will discuss is set within the second scene of Plautus' *Stichus*, where two sisters welcome their father with an *osculum* (*Stich.* 89–92) upon his arrival: in this greeting scene, the interaction between the verbal and gestural levels of communication is interesting in general, but I will mainly focus on the kiss between the elderly father and his daughters.

If we rely on Ekman and Friesen's classification of gestures, this kiss must be placed in the category of 'emblems', along with gestures of greeting, farewell, assent, denial, etc.³ Emblems generally express a meaning shared by a specific group of individuals who use them. Therefore, they feature a high level of awareness, in that their use is (much) more conscious and intentional than that of other non-verbal behaviour. Moreover, they often have an immediate verbal translation, 'usually consisting of a word or two, or perhaps a phrase',⁴ e.g. clapping one's hands finds his linguistic equivalent in 'Bravo!'. From this point of

3 Ekman and Friesen (1969: 63–68, 94–95).

4 Ekman and Friesen (1969: 63).

view, they are, in a certain sense, one of the closest gestural categories to verbal language. Emblems are also characterised by strong social codification or, in other words, high cultural value: different cultures use different emblems and, conversely, the same emblematic behaviour may convey different meanings in different cultures.

This is why it is particularly important to examine this type of gesture within the framework of the Roman cultural context. Licinia Ricottilli's study *Gesto e parola nell'Eneide*, which contextualises Ekman and Friesen's results with reference to the language of Roman gesture, is particularly useful here.⁵ In her reading of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ricottilli observes how Roman emblems are generally enacted not only with great awareness and deliberate communicative intentions, but also, in many cases, with a specific 'componente rituale, che, implicando un forte controllo sociale, tende ad intensificare il grado di controllo personale nell'esecuzione del gesto stesso.'⁶

1 A Case Analysis: The Kiss in Plautus' *Stichus* 89–92

At the beginning of the comedy, the two sisters Panegyris and Pamphila⁷ complain about their absent husbands, who have been abroad for three years to improve their fortunes. The two *matronae* know that their father intends to make them divorce from their destitute absent husbands, in view of more illustrious marriages. The women are aware of their father's unchallengeable authority (see 69 *cuius potestas plus potest*) and, seeing that any open opposition would be both impious and shameful, plan to use the weapon of entreaty (*exoratio*), in order to dissuade him from his heinous plan.⁸

5 Ricottilli (2000) examines the relationship between gestures and words in Virgil's *Aeneid* with particular reference to the rhetorical treatment of gesture in antiquity (*quasi sermo corporis*, according to the famous definition in Cic. *De or.* 3.222) and to contemporary fields of research, such as the pragmatics of communication and Ekman and Friesen's classification (1969). A useful working definition of gesture is provided by Ricottilli (2000: 16): 'per gesto intendiamo un comportamento corporeo o facciale che assuma un valore comunicativo, informativo o interattivo nei confronti di un destinatario diretto o di un eventuale osservatore, e per il quale esista una possibilità di controllo da parte dell'emittente'.

6 Ricottilli (2000: 23): 'a ritual component which, by implying a strong degree of social control, tends to intensify the degree of personal control in the performance of the gesture itself'.

7 Regarding the names of the two *matronae*, which the manuscripts have transmitted rather uncertainly (the younger sister was quite likely a nameless character; indeed, many editors prefer the generic designation of *Soror* in place of Pamphila), see Petersmann (1973: 85).

8 *Stich.* 70–74.

As soon as the *senex* Antipho arrives, both daughters rush to welcome him and lavish him with attention:

[1] Plautus *Stichus* 89–96

- Pan. is est ecastor. ferre aduorsum homini occupemus osculum.
 Pamph. salue, mi pater. Ant. et uos ambae. ilico agite assidite.
 Pamph. osculum— Ant. sat est osculi mi uostri. Pan. qui, amabo,
 pater?
 Ant. quia ita meae animae salsura euenit. Pamph. asside hic, pater.
 Ant. non sedeo istic, uos sedete; ego sedero in subsellio.
 Pan. mane, puluinum— Ant. bene procuras. mi satis sic fultum
 est. sede.
 Pamph. sine, pater. Ant. quid opust? Pan. opust. Ant. morem tibi
 geram. atque hoc est satis.
 Pamph. numquam enim nimis curare possunt suom parentem filiae.

My proposal for the translation of this sequence is as follows:⁹

- Pan. Oh, it's him, let's make the first move and kiss him.
 Pamph. Greetings, father dear!
 Ant. Same to you both. Come on, just sit down where you are.
 Pamph. A kiss—
 Ant. Enough with your kissing!
 Pan. But why, father dearest?
 Ant. Because that's how my breath has turned salty.
 Pamph. Sit here near us, father.
 Ant. I won't sit there. You both sit down; I will sit on a stool.
 Pan. Wait, a cushion—
 Ant. No need to fuss. I'm perfectly comfortable like this. Sit down.
 Pamph. Allow me, father—
 Ant. Is this really necessary?
 Pan. Yes, it is.
 Ant. All right, whatever makes you happy. Now that's enough!
 Pamph. Daughters can never take enough care of their fathers.

9 For Plautus, I draw on de Melo (2011–2013) for both the Latin text and the English translation, unless otherwise stated (as in the present case).

As we can see, the dynamics of interaction in this scene highlight the contrast between the exuberant acts of the daughters as they rush to welcome their father with deference on one hand and, on the other hand, the static and dry reactions of their father, who shields himself with brusque and imperious manners, and interrupts the *matronae's* words and gestures.

Let us now focus on the kiss sequence. The two sisters anticipate their father (*occupemus*)¹⁰ and hurry to kiss him. From a pragmatic perspective, we might say that the women are trying to force the normal punctuation of the interactive sequence by forestalling a move they expect—and dread—from their interactor. Although they attempt to set up a harmonious interactive framework, their proposal is immediately rejected with a command that is aimed at keeping them lower than and at a distance from him (*ilico agite assidite*).

The proxemic framework of this sequence is particularly explicit in the text: we can observe the quick movement of the daughters towards their father and the rigid attitude of the *senex*, who stands stiffly before them and keeps his distance while maintaining his dominant position.

On the level of verbal communication, Antipho amasses various directive utterances within six lines (90 *ilico agite assidite*; 93 *uos sedete*; 94 *sede*, to which one may add the sharp invitation at 95 *atque hoc est satis*) and expressions indicating refusal (93 *non sedeo*; 94 *bene procuras*);¹¹ most importantly, he interrupts his daughters' lines three times, i.e. when Pamphila asks for a kiss (91 *osculum*), as well as when each of the two sisters offers him a cushion (Panegyris at 94 *mane, puluinum*; Pamphila at 95 *sine, pater*). This represents a way for Antipho to get the upper hand by hijacking his daughters' turns to talk.

10 For *occupare* with the infinitive, see Petersmann (1973: 109) and Ussing (²1972: 11 435). See also Krauss (2008: 33) 'Panegyris announces her plan to kill their father with kindness: she says they will make the first move by kissing him [...]. This line has a military ring, despite the affectionate context, and echoes their father's own warlike plan'.

11 While it is true that simple imperatives do not necessarily convey harshness in directives in Latin (Risselada 1993: 111–122, 163; Unceta Gómez 2009: 65), in this context they are summed with various signals indicating urgency and irritation, especially with the threefold command to sit down as well as the presence of *agite* at 90. This illocutionary device is opposed to *amabo* (91), a typical 'polite modifier' of female language in *palliata*: as Adams (1984: 67) observes, 'whereas *obsecro*, *quaeso* and *amabo* usually tone down a remark, *sis* and *age* can be described as "intensifiers"' and *age / agite* + imperative is often to be understood as 'urgent in tone [...] or hortatory'. The adverb *ilico* (90) may convey locative value if one considers the system of spatial references at 92 *asside hic*, *pater* and 93 *non sedeo istic* [...] *sedero in subsellio*, but it may also feature a sharp temporal connotation related to urgency (see Don. ad Ter. *Andr.* 514; v. *ilico* in *TLL*, 7.1, 330.77; Lodge 1924–1933: 11 743). For more on *bene procuras* as a formula of polite refusal, see Petersmann (1973: 110).

The words of the *senex* express an abrupt and impositional attitude that is correlated with the proxemic requirement to mark a hierarchical distance between himself and his daughters. On the basis of this observation, I agree with the scholars who believe that Antipho avoids the kiss, rather than shielding himself after being assaulted by his daughters with kisses.¹² In particular, line 91 (*sat est osculi mi uostri*) most likely expresses an absolute refusal of his daughters' *osculum* (singular, with an abstract connotation); i.e. he rejects the gesture of kissing in general, rather than the kisses that are being offered in the specific situation. In this light, we could contest the hypothesis of those who imagine such interaction at line 91:

Pamph. A kiss—(*they embrace him and kiss his cheeks*)
 Ant. (*interrupting*) I've had enough of your kissing.¹³

The main reason for rejecting similar translations, however, lies in the nature of the gestures involved. Many commentators interpret the scene of the kiss as a simple clash between the women's expansiveness and the old man's gruffness, as he is afraid of becoming overwhelmed and being seen as weak and tender by his daughters, with whom he is about to argue:¹⁴ the dynamics of the situation certainly are an important component of the interaction between the characters on stage, but not all the implications of this gesture seem to have been fully investigated so far. As previously mentioned, the kiss belongs to the category of

12 'Osculum prohibet, quod offerebatur', noted Havekenthal, who also underlined the local value of *ilico* in line 90 (1607: 463). Ernout (1932–1938: VI 218) and Scandola in *Questa* (2005: 105) also interpret his gesture thus: 'Panfila (*gettandogli le braccia al collo*): un bacio .../ Antifonte (*allontanandola bruscamente*): Ne ho abbastanza dei vostri baci'.

13 De Melo (2013). This interpretation finds an influential precedent in Lambin (1577: 990): 'Satis vos osculatus sum.' Petersmann (1973: 109) acknowledges the difficulty of interpreting the passage but tends to believe that Antipho does not shield his face from his daughters' kisses immediately: 'dieser wehrt weitere Küsse ab, weil sein Gesicht davon schon naß und salzig ist'. Nixon (1916–1938: V 17) also leans in the same direction: 'Pan. Let's surprise him with a kiss as he comes in (*they do so with high success*)', as does Poster (1995: 324): 'Sister: Just one more hug! / Antipho: I've had enough of your hugs and kisses'. See also Petrone (1989: 94, 2015: 42–43): 'il particolare insistito del bacio con cui le figlie vanno ad accogliere il genitore, mentre questi tenta invano di sottrarsi. [...] non è il caso di dargli altri *oscula*'.

14 *Stich*. 79: *scio litis fore—ego meas noui optume* ('I know there will be arguments—I know my girls perfectly'). See, for example, Petrone (1989: 210): 'È una gara tra furbi, come sempre nelle commedie plautine, ma anche tra persone che mescolano affetto e interesse: le figlie eccedono in carezze perché il padre, preso nei lacci dell'affetto, acconsenta alla loro scelta, questi cerca di stare sulla difensiva e di respingerne le tenerezze, per non cedere subito'. See also Petrone's previous work (1977: 40).

emblems: therefore, it entails a focus on the specific cultural meaning that the social context gives to the gesture itself. In fact, not only is the *osculum* included in this ritualised situation of greeting family members but it is, in itself, subjected to a strongly symbolic ritualisation in Roman culture, where the so-called *ius osculi* is a well-known institution, recommended by the *mos maiorum*.¹⁵

Petrone rightly points out that ‘si tratta evidentemente del bacio di controllo che a Roma i parenti maschi danno alle donne di casa.’¹⁶ Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, this insight stands alone among modern Plautine studies, which, moreover, seem to have failed to grasp the explicit reference to the ritual nature of this kiss in a fragmentary passage of Festus, which quotes the very line in question:¹⁷

[2] Festus 214 Lindsay

significatur etiam osculo sauium, ut Plautus in *Neruolaria* (*Stich.* 91): ‘*Osculum* sat est osculi mihi (uostri). Qui, amabo, mi pater?’; quod inter cognatos, propinquosque institutum ab antiquis est, maximeque feminas ...

The kiss (*sauium*) is also referred to with the term *osculum*, as Plautus attests in *Neruolaria* (*Stich.* 91): ‘*Osculum*—Enough with your *osculum*!—But why, father dearest?’; a use which was introduced in antiquity among kinsmen and in-laws and especially women ...¹⁸

The passage—lacuna notwithstanding—clearly shows how Festus, in explaining the *osculum* as an ancestral Roman *institutum*, is perfectly aware of the ceremonial background underlying the interaction. Nevertheless, excepting

15 As far as the classification of kisses in Latin (ritual, erotic, or as a show of affection)—in other words, the differences between *osculum*, *sauium*, and *basium*—is concerned, it is well known that traces of an ancient debate remain: see, e.g., Moreau (1978), Flury (1988), Cipriani (1992). On the vocabulary concerning kisses in Plautus, see Plepelits (1972).

16 Petrone (2015: 42): ‘it is clearly the “kiss of control” that male relatives give to the women of their household’; see also Petrone’s previous work (1989: 94).

17 The passage is mentioned by Giovanni Pietro Valla in his commentary on Plautus (1499) concerning the use of the word *osculum* in *Stich.* 91. Later on, however, the discussion of this important evidence of Plautus’ indirect tradition was not as concentrated on the interpretative aspects as it was on the attribution of this verse, which Festus does not ascribe to *Stichus*, but rather to *Neruolaria*, one of the so-called non-Varronian comedies. For a recent and well-balanced discussion of this issue, see Monda (2015).

18 My translation.

Petrone's mention, this rituality is neither perceived by Plautus' modern readers, nor—perhaps more importantly—does it seem that the anthropological, pragmatic, and dramaturgical implications of this ritual gesture have ever been explored in *Stichus*.¹⁹

2 The Anthropological Context

Before returning to our comic situation, let us now briefly focus on the *ius osculi*: as is well known, many ancient records explain this ritual, in which *cognati* and *propinqui* (i.e. kin and in-laws) kissed the women of their family. Different interpretations of this gesture have been suggested in antiquity as well as in modern scholarship, but, in most cases, the classical authors sustained that the *ius osculi* is justified by the need to control and guarantee the reputation of women in the family.²⁰ In particular, the following features (amongst others) may help us better understand the text we are examining:

- 19 Petrone (1989: 94) grasps the anthropological allusion to *osculum* but does not construct a specific analysis around it, believing that in this scene affection prevails over ritual: 'qui il fatto consuetudinario si fa pretesto di un sottile movimento sentimentale e psicologico, ricco di complicazioni e persino delicato, pur nella dimensione comica. [...] Il bacio 'di controllo' si trova invischiato in una rete di rapporti che lasciano indovinare uno spaccato domestico diverso da quello che ci si potrebbe immaginare alla luce della tradizionale severità paterna e delle norme del diritto. [...] l'*auctoritas* paterna vacilla, per affetto, nei confronti delle figlie.' See also Petrone (2015: 42). In our view, while the *matronae* are certainly reconfiguring the kiss as a show of affection, we should not overlook the implications of the *osculum* in Antipho's communicative intention: therefore, a pragmatic analysis of this gesture aids not only the investigation of its function in the interaction between the characters and in its interplay with the words, but also that of its cultural value and of the role it plays in Plautus' comedies.
- 20 See e.g. Polyb. 6.11a.4 (in Athen. 10.440e–f): λαθεῖν δ' ἐστὶν ἀδύνατον τὴν γυναῖκα πιούσαν οἶνον. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οὐδ' ἔχει οἶνον κυρεῖαν ἢ γυνή· πρὸς δὲ τούτοις φιλεῖν δεῖ τοὺς συγγενεῖς τοὺς ἑαυτῆς καὶ τοὺς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἕως ἑξανεψίων καὶ τοῦτο ποιεῖν καθ' ἡμέραν, ὁπόταν ἴδῃ πρῶτον. λοιπὸν ἀδήλου τῆς ἐντυχίας οὐσης τίσιν ἀπαντήσῃ φυλάσσειται· τὸ γὰρ πράγμα κὰν γέυσηται μόνον οὐ προσδεῖ διαβολῆς ('It is impossible for a woman to drink wine in secret. Firstly, in fact, a woman cannot dispose of wine; secondly, she must kiss her relatives, as well as her husbands', up to her second cousins, and must do so every day as soon as she encounters them. Therefore, because she does not know whom she will meet, she will be cautious. For even if she only has a taste of wine, this custom makes any gossip superfluous'; my translation). On Cato's perspective, see Plin. *nat.* 14.90: *Cato ideo propinquos feminis osculum dare, ut scirent an temetum olerent* ('Cato writes that male relations kiss their women in order to know whether they smell of wine': my translation from Pliny's text); as well as Gell. 10.23. See also the extensive analysis in Plut. *Rom. Quaest.* 6, which Moreau (1978) believes to be most likely influenced by Varro's linguistic and antiquity studies: see esp. 'διὰ τί τοὺς

- an *osculum* is a kiss on the mouth (Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 6 τῶι στόματι φιλοῦσιν) that is explicitly intended to check the woman's abstinence from wine (respectable women were prohibited from drinking wine, as it was, according to the *mos maiorum*, notoriously linked to adultery);
- furthermore, it is a sign of honour and power for women, who can thus display their bond with men of recognised standing in public (Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 6: ὡς τιμὴν ἅμα καὶ δύναμιν αὐταῖς φέρον);
- inasmuch as it guarantees and displays a woman's connection to a certain household, it is a sign of recognition and acceptance; conversely, the act of rejecting the *osculum* sanctioned a woman's *infamia* and openly expressed her kinsmen's rejection of her, as Cicero clearly states in *Rep.* 4.6: *si qua erat famosa, ei cognati osculum non ferebant.*²¹

In short, the matter of recognition is a central node in the semantic system of the Roman *osculum*.

Confirmation of this may be found e.g. in a renowned *exemplum* narrated by Valerius Maximus that focuses on how exactly an *osculum* could be used as proof of belonging to a kinship group. Sempronia, the sister of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus and wife of Scipio Aemilianus, when summoned by a tribune of the plebs to appear before the assembly of the people, does not surrender to the pressures of the crowd and refuses to kiss a certain Equitius, thereby refusing to acknowledge him as the son of her brother Tiberius:

[3] Valerius Maximus 3.8.6

coacta es eo loci consistere ubi principum ciuitatis perturbari frons solebat, instabat tibi toruo uultu minas profundens amplissima potestas, clamor imperitae multitudinis obstrepebat, totum forum acerrimo studio

συγγενεῖς τῶι στόματι φιλοῦσιν αἱ γυναῖκες; πότερον, ὡς οἱ πλείστοι νομίζουσιν, ἀπειρημένον ἦν πίνειν οἶνον ταῖς γυναίξιν· ἔπως οὖν αἱ πιόσαι μὴ λανθάνωσιν ἀλλ' ἐλέγχωνται περιτυγχάνουσαι τοῖς οἰκείοις, ἐνομίσθη καταφιλεῖν; [...] ἢ μᾶλλον ἐδόθη τοῦτο ταῖς γυναίξιν ὡς τιμὴν ἅμα καὶ δύναμιν αὐταῖς φέρον, εἰ φαίνοντο πολλοὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς ἔχουσαι συγγενεῖς καὶ οἰκείους; ('Why do the women kiss their kinsmen on the lips? Is it, as most authorities believe, that the drinking of wine was forbidden to women, and therefore, so that women who drunk wine should not escape detection, but should be detected when they chanced to meet men of their household, the custom was established? [...] Or was this rather bestowed upon the women as a privilege that should bring them both honour and power if they should be seen to have many good men among their kinsmen and in their household?': translation from Babbitt 1962). For a modern-day discussion of this issue, see Contini (1984); Bettini (1988, 1995); Timpanaro (1987); Cipriani (1992).

21 'If a woman had a bad reputation, her relatives would not have kissed her' (my translation).

nitebatur ut Equitio, cui Semproniae gentis falsum ius quaerebatur, tamquam filio Tiberi fratris tui osculum dares. tu tamen illum [...] execrabili audacia ad usurpandam alienam propinquitatem tendentem reppulisti.

You were forced to stand there, where leading citizens usually fail to hide their agitation, where the highest authority of the State pressed you and threatened you with an intimidating look, where the clamour of the ignorant mass resounded, where the entire forum pressured you to kiss Equitius, whose right to belong to the *gens Sempronia* as the son of your brother, Tiberius, was falsely claimed. But you [...] pushed away he who so boldly attempted to claim a bond of kinship to which he had no right.²²

This moralising tale offers us a peculiar twist of the traditional custom of the *osculum*, as it recounts the deeds of a representative of a high-profile *gens* (in this case an irreprehensible *matrona*) by using the ritual of the kiss to ensure the purity of her kinship group: her public refusal to kiss him reveals the unworthiness of this impostor, who is trying to shamefully infiltrate an *aliena propinquitas*, thereby contaminating a noble lineage.

3 The Role of the *osculum* in Plautus' Comedies

Moving from the level of the cultural implications of the *osculum* to its role in Plautus' plays, we notice some similarities with the tale of Sempronia—albeit in a strictly comical way—in *Epidicus*. The *senex* Periphanes, tricked by his slave Epidicus, believes that the citharist Acropolistis is the illegitimate daughter he had with Philippa many years earlier in Epidaurus. Later, when Philippa arrives in Athens to ask for his help to find their real daughter, who has been taken as a prisoner of war, Periphanes leads to her Acropolistis and urges her to kiss the girl, but Philippa refuses to grant her an *osculum* and the acknowledgement this would entail:

[4] Plautus *Epidicus* 570–576

Acr. quid est, pater, quod me exciuiisti ante aedis? Per. ut matrem
tuam
uideas, adeas, aduenienti des salutem atque osculum.

²² My translation.

- Acr. quam meam matrem? Per. quae exanimata exsequitur aspectum tuom.
- Phil. quis istaec est quam tu osculum mi ferre iubes? Per. tua filia.
- Phil. haecine? Per. haec. Phil. egone osculum huic dem? Per. quor non, quae ex te nata sit?
- Phil. tu homo insanis. Per. egone? Phil. tune. Per. quor? Phil. quia ego hanc quae siet nec scio nec noui neque ego hanc oculis uidi ante hunc diem.
- Acr. Why is it, father, that you called me out in front of the house?
- Per. So that you can see your mother, go to her, and greet and kiss her on her arrival.
- Acr. What mother of mine?
- Per. The one who is almost dead while seeking to behold you.
- Phil. Who is that woman you're asking to give me a kiss?
- Per. Your daughter.
- Phil. This woman?
- Per. Yes, this woman.
- Phil. I should give her a kiss?
- Per. Why not, since she was born from you?
- Phil. You're mad.
- Per. I?
- Phil. Yes, you.
- Per. Why?
- Phil. Because I don't know or recognize who she is and I haven't set eyes on her before this day.

As Raffaelli rightly points out, the situation in Plautus' *Epidicus* is 'l'opposto del canonico meccanismo dell'agnizione.'²³ While Periphanes anticipates an ἀναγνώρισις between mother and daughter, soliciting an *osculum* as a seal, Philippa affirms that she does not recognise Acropolistis precisely by denying her the kiss. We can also note how, in this interaction, the emblem is performed together with a verbal expression: Philippa's refusal to give the *osculum* (574

23 Raffaelli (2014: 94). This mechanism of inverting the *agnitio*, moreover, is pivotal in *Epidicus*, in which it is duplicated in a sequence with two interlinked non-recognitions, then followed by the traditional ἀναγνώρισις which resolves the whole situation in the end. For more regarding the centrality of *agnitio* in the construction of the plot of *Epidicus*, see also Philippides (2016).

egone osculum huic dem?) is roughly 'translated' by her verbal explanation (575–576 *quia ego hanc quae siet nec scio nec noui neque ego hanc oculis uidi ante hunc diem*).²⁴

While the verb *osculari* is very common in Plautus, as it encompasses ritual kisses as well as erotic ones, the noun *osculum* occurs in only three situations in Plautus:²⁵ besides the two dialogues examined in [1] and [3], it is also featured in the famous scene from *Amphitruo* (676–860) in which Alcmena reacts coldly to Amphitruo's *salutatio* upon his return from war: she believes she has just said good-bye to him after the *longa nox* (which, however, we know she really spent with Jupiter disguised as her husband). In the following dispute, Alcmena, indignant because she believes that Amphitruo is testing her (688 *an periclitamini ...?* and 692 *temptas*), claims that she has already greeted him and given him an *osculum* (716 and 800–801).²⁶

In short, the failure to obtain the requested *salutatio*, a ritual in which the *osculum* plays an important part, is interpreted by the husband as a symptom of a problem regarding his wife's *pudicitia*:

[5] Plautus *Amphitruo* 711–713

... salutare aduenientem me solebas antidhac,
appellare itidem ut pudicae suos uiros quae sunt solent.
eo more expertem te factam adueniens offendi domi.

You used to greet me on my arrival before and to address me the way modest wives normally greet their husbands. On my arrival I've found you at home without that habit.

24 See also *Epid.* 581–582 (Periphanes to Acropolistis): *quid tu, quae patrem tuom uocas me atque osculare, quid stas stupida? quid taces?* (What about you, who call me your father and kiss me? What are you standing here like an idiot? What are you silent for?).

25 See Lodge (1924–1933: II 272). For an examination of the use of *osculum*, *sauium*, and *osculari* in Plautus, see Plepelits (1972).

26 *Amph.* 714–716 Alc. *ecastor equidem te certo heri aduenientem ilico et salutauit et ualuis-sesne usque exquisiui simul, mi uir, et manum prehendi et osculum tetuli tibi* ('I certainly did greet you here on your arrival yesterday and asked you at the same time if you'd been well throughout, my husband, and I took your hand and gave you a kiss'); 799–801 *adueniensque ilico me salutauisti, et ego te, et osculum tetuli tibi*. *Amph. iam illud non placet principium de osculo*. ('on your arrival you immediately greeted me and I you, and I gave you a kiss. *Amph.* I already dislike that first point about the kiss.'). For more on greeting scenes in Plautus' comedies, see Berger (2016).

From their omniscient viewpoint, the spectators are perfectly aware that Alcmena's failure to greet her real husband in her *salutatio* as expected from her is due to the fact that she had already welcomed a false Amhpitruo in his place. In fact, Alcmena's mistake regarding the *osculum* emblematises the misunderstanding around which the whole plot revolves. Once again, recognition is the central node of this ritual gesture on Plautus' stage.

4 The *osculum* in the Interactional Context in *Stichus*

Let us now return to the dramatic context of [1]. Having examined the two scenes from Plautus above, [4] and [5], the ritualistic meaning of the *osculum* should now be more evident. The two *matronae* demand the ritual *osculum* from their father as a sign of harmony in the family at a time of crisis and conflict. In light of the previous analysis, we now see that, in the eyes of the spectators, the father's avoidance of the *osculum* must have appeared as a much stronger gesture than an old man's gruffness in the face of his daughters' overwhelming affection.

Indeed, if we examine the immediate context, we can observe how, before meeting his daughters, Antipho thinks aloud and imagines two possible strategies for interacting with them:

[6] Plautus *Stichus* 75–87

principium ego quo pacto cum illis occipiam, id ratiocinor:
 utrum ego perplexim lacesam oratione ad hunc modum,
 quasi numquam quicquam in eas simulem, an quasi quid inaudiuierim
 eas in se meruisse culpam; an potius temptem leniter
 an minaciter? scio litis fore—ego meas noui optume—
 si manere hic sese malint potius quam alio nubere.
 non faciam. quid mi opust decurso aetatis spatio cum ⟨m⟩eis
 gerere bellum, quom nil quam ob rem id faciam meruisse arbitror?
 minime, nolo turbas, sed hoc mihi optimum factu arbitror:
 perplexabiliter earum hodie perpauefaciam pectora.
 sic faciam: assimilabo quasi quam culpam in sese ammiserint.
 postid [agam] igitur deinde, ut animus meus erit, faciam palam.
 multa scio faciunda uerba.

I'm considering the beginning, how I should start with them: should I vex them with my speech obscurely like this, as if I were never accusing them

at all, or as if I'd heard something, that they'd become guilty; in other words, had I better handle them gently or threateningly? I know there will be arguments—I know my girls perfectly—if they prefer staying here to getting married to different men. I won't do it. What's the use of waging war with my girls now that I've reached the end of the course of my life, when I don't think they've done anything for which they deserve my doing this? No, I don't want commotions; rather, I think this is the best thing for me to do: I'll frighten their hearts in a confusing manner today. I'll act like this: I'll pretend that they've committed some offense. Then, after that, I'll reveal what my feelings are. I know that I'll have to use a lot of words.

What should Antipho do? Should he provoke them with ambiguous words (*perplexabiliter*), act as if nothing has happened, or pretend that he has heard rumours about some misdemeanour of theirs (*quasi quid indaudiuerim eas in se meruisse culpam*)? Endearments or threats? The old man considers his options but eventually decides that he will not go to the extremes. Therefore, he will make an attempt at intimidation (*perplexabiliter earum hodie perpauefaciam pectora*), but he will be ready to withdraw before the conflict escalates: he will frighten his daughters, behaving at first as if they were guilty, and only later dropping his pretence, and exposing his true feelings for them.

In the end, Antipho meets his daughters after revealing to the audience that he will adopt an accusatory attitude. As a result, the rejection of the kiss is a very strong gesture, when related to his resolve to accuse the *matronae*. It is tantamount to a refusal to recognise them as his daughters, almost an act of repudiation, and above all constitutes a serious threat to the daughters' reputation, as seen in Cicero's attestation (*Rep.* 4.6): *si qua erat famosa, ei cognati osculum non ferebant*.

However, the fact that not a single accusation is expressed on a verbal level in the entire scene is significant: in the text, there is not a single word of doubt about the women's behaviour.

When his daughter Pamphila asks why he refuses her an *osculum* (*qui, amabo, pater?*), Antipho answers (*Stich.* 92): *quia ita meae animae salsura euenit* (the literal translation of which is 'because that's how the saltiness has come to my breath'). This is not the place to enter a drawn-out debate surrounding this line, which is generally considered obscure in meaning: a detailed analysis of the bibliographical references and a new perspective on the line may be found in a recent article of mine.²⁷ Here, it is sufficient to note that it

27 See Raccanelli (2019), which reviews the numerous exegetical hypotheses on *Stich.* 92 that

is often a misunderstanding of the gesture that hinders the interpretation of the line, especially if one reads the scene while thinking of reciprocal kisses on the cheek.²⁸ It becomes much clearer if we think about the ritual *osculum* on the mouth and its cultural implication in ensuring a woman's sobriety and *pudicitia*. By refusing his daughters' kisses, Antipho creates the expectation of saying something censorial on their breath, and therefore on the propriety of their behaviour, but indeed, at the very climax of the exchange, he releases the tension by drawing attention to his own breath. In other words, he is communicating *perplexabiliter*, just as he had promised before, in that he is combining his gesture of refusal with an elusive verbal message; he threatens an accusation with the gesture but does not confirm it with words. Instead, he withdraws with a vague allusion to his own breath, as if activating a kind of self-censorship mechanism to avoid explaining the real reasons for his irritation. In any case, he does not voice the terrible accusation that would sully his daughters' good name. Moreover, he removes the accusation hinted by his gestures immediately afterwards by pointedly saying:

[7] Plautus *Stichus* 99–101

Ant. bonas ut aequom est facere facitis, quom tamen apsentis uiros
 perinde habetis quasi praesentes sint. Pamph. Pudicitia est,
 pater,
 eos nos magnificare qui nos socias sumpserunt sibi.

have been proposed in Plautine scholarship and suggests a new approach to read Antipho's words through a systematic comparison with the most appropriate *loci paralleli*. In particular, in Plautus the word *salsura* seems to refer to methods of conserving food that evoke olfactory and taste reactions of disgust. Antipho therefore seemingly motivates his refusal to kiss his daughters with the excuse that he has bad breath. In my view, Antipho's line is based on an ambiguous strategy (*perplexabilis*) which in terms of communicative pragmatics could be construed as a misalignment between the level of content (on which the character utters a trivial, self-denigrating witticism, in line with the Plautine *topos* of jokes about fetid breath; see e.g. *As.* 893–985; 929; *Merc.* 574–576) and the metacommunicative level of the interaction (in which a veiled threat is conveyed). Therefore, the off-handed remark is not an expedient that is adopted as an impromptu joke, but rather has the deliberate function of providing comic relief in a tense situation.

28 De Melo (2013: 27) supplements the translation with the comment: 'the girls' cheeks are still wet with tears, hence the reference to salting', drawing on the work of Ernout (1932–1938: VI 218) and Petersmann (1973: 109): 'd.h. die Schwestern weinen noch (vgl. zu v. 20) oder sie sind vom Weinen noch tränenbenetzt und küssen den Vater (*osculum*). Dieser wehrt weitere Küsse ab, weil sein Gesicht davon schon naß und salzig ist.'

- Ant. You're acting the way good women ought to act, since you treat your husbands as if they were present, absent though they are.
- Pamph. *It's a matter of womanly virtue*, father, to honor the men who have taken us as their partners.²⁹

On this foundation of restored harmony, the verbal skirmish between the *pudicae matronae* and the father continues, for he subjects them to witty questioning about feminine virtues. The sisters answer alternately in a kind of antiphonal competition, yet somehow the father still exercises the function of control evoked by the ritual *osculum* in the following *agon*:

[8] Plautus *Stichus* 126

edepol uos lepide temptaui uostrumque ingenium ingeni.

I've tested you two and the nature of your nature delightfully.

Indeed, his testing is nothing but a game (*lepide temptaui*³⁰) and the contest between the sisters provides a new opportunity for them to highlight their virtues and their perfect conformity to the code of behaviour for *matronae*.

5 The Relationship between Word and Gesture

To summarise what has been observed so far: when enacting his intention to frighten his daughters, Antipho does not express his accusation in words. In fact, as far as verbal language is concerned, we only find sharp commands, denials, and—conversely—explicit recognition of the daughters' *pudicitia*. Only on the level of gestural language is there a feigned accusation (*assimulabo quasi quam culpam in sese admiserint*), expressed through the refusal of the *osculum*, a denial of the ritual recognition which is reserved, as previously seen, for women of dubious reputation (*famosae*).

Even if the emblematic gesture finds a correspondence on the verbal plane ('I acknowledge/do not acknowledge you as a worthy daughter/wife, etc.'), here

29 My adaptation of de Melo's translation is in italics. Preemptive reassurance about the two women's innocence was also granted by Antipho as early as line 82 (*quom nil [...] meruisse arbitror?*).

30 As previously seen, the issue of testing (*periclitator, tempto*) is also important in *Amph.* 688 and 692.

we can clearly confirm that gestures are not an exact equivalent of words. An explicit accusation of *impudicitia*, and therefore a verbal codification of such repudiation, would be quite incompatible with the comic context of *Stichus*; indeed, Antipho immediately rules out any blame through explicit words of confirmation of their good behaviour (99 *bonas ut aequom est facere facitis*).

If the refusal to grant recognition through the *osculum* can be performed on the stage elsewhere in Plautus, it is because:

- in *Epidicus*, the unacknowledged woman is a citharist with no reputation; she is part of a deceitful plan that must be thwarted;
- in *Amphitruo*, we are faced with the extreme case of an unwitting adulteress, a victim of mistaken identity; more importantly, we are dealing with a tragicomedy, in which the intermingling and substitution of men and gods subvert the rules of the genre and allow the tragic theme of adultery to be restructured and integrated into a comic context.

In *Stichus*, the denial of the ritual *osculum* is a gesture expressing what words do not (and cannot) say, not even as a pretence (*assimulabo*). In fact, casting a shadow on the reputation of a *matrona* would evoke a tragic scenario incompatible with the boundaries of *palliata* (if not at the cost of a metamorphosis in theatrical genre, which is precisely what happens in *Amphitruo*).³¹

It is not surprising, therefore, that the playwright chooses to represent a feigned threat by resorting to gestures while using words to reassure the audience that the infamous *culpa* (hinted at only in the gestural threat) will never materialise or even be evoked in verbal language. Indeed, the underlying communicative mechanism in the scene, where the wives, long left behind by their husbands, are tested by their father, seems to be based on the dispelling of an audience's anxiety. This becomes more plausible upon remembering that *Stichus* was first performed in 200 BC, in front of an audience that must have felt strongly about the Odyssean theme of veterans returning after years abroad at war. The 'proven fidelity' of the two wives—which had been anticipated at the beginning through Panegyris' line in the opening scene about their (self)identification with Penelope—has been extensively studied from this perspective.³²

In conclusion, our case of the *osculum* in Plautus' *Stichus* demonstrates how important it is to more thoroughly comprehend ancient drama by focusing to an equal degree on verbal and gestural language: in fact, we tend to be less

³¹ *Amph.* 59–63.

³² *Stich.* 1–6. Along with Fraenkel (2007: 71), see also Wagenvoort (1931); Arnott (1971–1974: 552, 1972: 57–64); Petrone (1977: 35–36); Owens (2000); Rossi in Questa (2005: 61–82); Papaioannou (2016).

vigilant and less trained in the critical perception of cultural difference when dealing with the gestures presented in ancient texts.

Translators who fall into the trap of imagining these to be affectionate kisses on the cheeks do not grasp the meaning of the scene: they focus on translating words but do not address the issue of also 'culturally translating' gestures. As a result, they modernise them by associating them with our social convention of kissing on the cheeks (perhaps due to the fact that from our cultural perspective we would consider it strange and quite morbid for fathers and daughters to kiss each other on the mouth). By doing so however, the ritual depth of the situation is lost, along with the ambiguity of Antipho's threats to his daughters with gestures rather than words.

In contemporary theatre studies, which are so attentive towards performative aspects as well as textual philology, the field of pragmatics of communication may offer a twofold contribution. On the one hand, it helps us better understand the dynamics of intersection and misalignment between the communicative levels of word and gesture and provides reliable tools in order to do so. On the other hand, it urges us to read both levels while paying critical attention to the anthropological contexts underlying the interaction, thus reminding us to culturally interpret not only words but also gestures in works of ancient theatre.

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