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THOUGHTS ON PLAUTINE STYLE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARCHAISM AND COLLOQUIALISM

ABSTRACT. de Melo Wolfgang David Cirilo, *Thoughts on Plautine Style, with Special Reference to Archaism and Colloquialism* (Przemyślenia na temat stylu Plauta ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem archaizmów i kolokwializmów).

This article aims to examine Plautine style systematically, based on distributional criteria and statistics. It looks at the various means that Plautus can utilize in order to characterize a passage as archaic or colloquial. When Plautus wants to sound old-fashioned, he relies on morphology, while he has more varied ways of marking a passage as colloquial. There is a reason for this asymmetry: speakers of any language have access to colloquial registers on a day-to-day basis and can draw on phonology, morphology, and syntax, but archaic registers are acquired from written sources, and here it is morphology that stands out to readers.

Keywords: distribution test; linguistic characterization; translation

My work on Plautine language and style began years before Richard Thomas from Harvard approached me with the question whether I would like to edit and translate Plautus for the *Loeb Classical Library*. I felt immensely honoured: I was an unknown entity at the time, a postdoc with more experience in translating English verse into Latin and Greek metres than the other way round. However, Richard believed that a solid grounding in language was more important for this task than any prior translation experience. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I agree.

Having a solid understanding of Plautine language and style is a must for anyone working on Roman comedy, but especially for a translator. We want to render the content of the plays accurately, but also convey the relevant registers, the jests and jokes, and something of the poetry. Where jokes are obscure, commentaries usually do a good job of explaining them, and for metre, we have Questa's magisterial treatment of the subject (Questa 2007). The problems begin when it comes to register. Some commentaries, written by scholars predominantly trained on the literature of the first century BC and the first century AD, have an unfortunate tendency to label every deviation from

Ciceronian standards as 'archaic' or 'colloquial'. But the fact that something looks archaic from the perspective of a Roman of the first century BC does not mean that it looked like that in Plautus' day, where it may or may not have been perfectly normal. And the term 'colloquial' is being thrown around too lightly, based on the naïve assumption that comedy is overwhelmingly colloquial. The discussions of Plautine language by Indo-European scholars tend to fare somewhat better, but all too often the goal here is to explain how older features of phonology or morphology relate to Indo-European, without necessarily trying to understand how they fit into the synchronic language system. As for other scholars of comedy, the more traditional ones tend to vacillate between the 'classicist' and 'Indo-Europeanist' positions; while the more modern ones, especially those from certain corners of the US, have given up on language altogether, make finger-wagging societal comparisons, and opt for slang on the rare occasions when they do have to translate.

In what follows, I want to look at a few features of Plautine language (text and translations taken from de Melo 2011–13) and examine how they fit into the language of the time; the 'classicist' and 'Indo-Europeanist' approaches will complement my findings, but the focus will be on synchrony. For this, we need to talk briefly about the distribution of linguistic phenomena and how to assess it.

1. THE 'DISTRIBUTION TEST'

To see whether a phenomenon is archaic, poetic, colloquial, or something else, we need to check its distribution over the corpus we are interested in as well as over a second, more neutral corpus. Ideally, the two corpora should differ in only one respect: for example, in our hunt for poeticisms, we could compare a corpus of poetry with contemporary prose. If, however, the prose was written considerably later, the features that might look poetic at first sight could simply be old-fashioned from the perspective of that prose corpus, while having been perfectly ordinary and non-poetic at the time the verses were written.

For a specific feature to be poetic (or to belong to any other special category), three criteria must be fulfilled: the feature should be restricted, or almost restricted, to one of the two corpora; it should be frequent enough to be statistically significant; and the second corpus ought to have a synonym for it. Hine (2005) illustrates this procedure for Seneca; Seneca is a great test case because he wrote substantial amounts of both prose and verse. In his prose, Seneca uses *gladius* for 'sword', while in his tragedies, the word is *ensis*. Here we have two synonyms, both quite frequent, and a neat distribution pattern, so we can confidently say that *gladius* counts as prosaic, and *ensis* as poetic. By contrast, *regina* 'queen' only occurs in Seneca's tragedies, but not in his prose. Are we dealing with a poetic word? There is no prose synonym in Seneca, which

means that the reason for this restriction is simply that Seneca does not discuss queens in his prose. Of course, other literature allows us to see that *regina* is not a poeticism, but if we only had Seneca, we would have to remain agnostic.

The distribution test works well if our corpus of texts is large and varied. Unfortunately, this is not the case for early Latin: Plautus makes up 60% of all the Latin before 100 BC, and Terence makes up another 15%. The other 25% of our early corpus is not unproblematic. Inscriptions are often short and hard to date, and the longer ones are often formal and deliberately archaizing. Cato's agricultural work is likely to have undergone some morphological modernization in the transmission process; the same happened to Plautus and Terence, but here metre can frequently help us to restore the original forms. And finally, the literary fragments of tragedy and comedy that have come down to us are often transmitted by grammarians and lexicographers, who were looking for oddities rather than regular usages; such fragments allow us to see what was possible in early Latin rather than what was normal.

What, then, can we compare Plautus with? The situation is not as hopeless as it may seem. Plautus is a linguistic chameleon, switching registers and styles with great ease. We can make internal comparisons: we can contrast spoken verse with song; simple dialogue with religious language and military reports; male speech with female, and so on. Although we need to tread carefully, such comparisons can yield interesting and valid results. We shall now move on to phonology and metre, then to morphology, and finally to syntax; more detail on these issues can be found in de Melo (2023).

2. PHONOLOGY

Impressionistically, it seems that women in comedy have fewer instances of iambic shortening and loss of final *–s*. But why would this be the case? I have not compiled statistics because of various methodological problems: first, most comedy metres, and especially so the iambo-trochaic ones, are very flexible; while there are many instances where, for example, final *–s* needs to be present, and many where it needs to be absent, there is also a considerable number of ambiguous cases. And second, often it is impossible to distinguish between loss of final *–s* and iambic shortening; if a word like *erus* 'master' stands in front of another word beginning with a consonant, and it counts as two light syllables, this could be because final *–s* has disappeared or because of iambic shortening.

Here I want to refer to two important studies on these issues, conducted very carefully. Dressler (1973) examines the register of forms undergoing iambic shortening by counting how many occur in cantica and how many in senarii (see now also Fattori 2022). Wallace (1982) does the same for forms losing final *-s*. It appears that both phenomena are connected with verse type: they are most

frequent in spoken verse, in iambic senarii, are less common in long verses, and least common in song, with the exception of anapaests. The phenomena are thus connected with register, since spoken verse has the largest number of colloquial features, while song contains the highest number of elevated features. Anapaests fall outside the regular correlation pattern because they constitute very inflexible metres with strict incisions, requiring a poet to use Procrustean methods to squeeze words in.

We can now return to our women. Correlation does not equal causation. Women do not make less use of iambic shortening and loss of final *–s* because of their sex, but because they are given disproportionately large amounts of song.

3. MORPHOLOGY

In this section, we shall first look at verbs, then at nouns and pronouns.

3.1. *SIEM* AND *SIM*

The present subjunctive of *esse* 'to be' continues an Indo-European optative, with a suffix that was subject to *Ablaut*. The inherited forms are *siem*, *siēs*, and *siēt*, with a full-grade suffix *$*-yeH_1-$*, and *sīmus*, *sītis*, and *sient*, with a zero-grade suffix *$*-iH_1-$* (Meiser 1998: 200–1).[1] Morphological levelling began to take place long before Plautus, and the forms with *–e-* were analogically remodelled based on *simus* and *sitis*. By the classical period, forms like *siem* are rare, occasional by-forms mostly employed for stylistic effects. What is the situation like in Roman comedy? In my count in Table 1, I ignore *simus* and *sitis* because for these forms there are no alternatives:

Table 1. The present subjunctive of *esse*

	siem etc.	*sim* etc.	Total	Old forms (%)
Plautus	170	785	955	17.80
Terence	74	215	289	25.61

What this table demonstrates is that already in Plautus, the modern forms predominate heavily. This means that inscriptions such as the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* (*CIL* 1^2.581, 186 BC), where only the older forms are used, give a misleading impression of the current language. In Plautus, the old

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[1] *Sient* does not contain a full-grade suffix; it ends in *–ent* because the personal ending contained *$*-e-$*.

forms are still frequent enough for us not to regard every token as stylistically significant; such forms are significant in their totality rather than in isolation. They contribute to Plautine *Kunstsprache*, but as a minor feature.

In Plautus, 87% of the old forms are found at line end. This indicates that they are at least partly a metrically determined archaism; monosyllabic forms are avoided at line end, though not very strictly, and forms like *siem* fit neatly at the end of iambo-trochaic lines. Had Plautus written prose, he would probably have used even fewer forms like *siem*.

It is remarkable that in Terence, the old forms are comparatively more common (with the same line-end restriction). Terence's language is normally more modern. It seems that this is one of the few instances where Terence is exploiting a metrical 'crutch' more than Plautus does.

3.2. MEDIO-PASSIVE INFINITIVES IN –*IĒR*

Next to the classical medio-passive infinitives in –*ī*, which go back to datives of verbal nouns ending in *-*ei*, Plautus also has forms in –*iēr*, of somewhat obscure origin (see now Fortson IV 2012). The latter are still used occasionally as metrical alternatives in classical poetry. In Plautus, such forms often occur side by side with the ones in –*i*:

Experiri istuc mauellem me quam mi *memorarier*. (Plaut. *Amph.* 512)
I would prefer experiencing it to just being told about it.

... lacerari ualide suam rem, illius *augerier*. (Plaut. *Merc.* 48)
… that his own estate was very much being torn to pieces, while that of the pimp was being increased.

Table 2 presents an overview of the forms according to conjugation classes:

Table 2. Medio-passive infinitive forms (morphology)

	Classical / archaic	Archaic	Translation
First conjugation	*amārī*	*amāriēr*	'to be loved'
Second conjugation	*monērī*	*monēriēr*	'to be reminded'
Third conjugation	*agī*	*agiēr*	'to be done'
Fourth conjugation	*audīrī*	*audīriēr*	'to be heard'

As we can see, there are alternative forms for every conjugation class. Table 3 now shows that the archaic forms are already rare in Plautus, and even more so in Terence:

Table 3. Medio-passive infinitive forms (statistics)

	Classical	Archaic	Total	Archaic (%)
Plautus	825	177	1002	17.66
Terence	261	39	300	13

The archaic forms are clearly on their way out, especially so in Terence. But that is only half of the story, because there is a striking difference in the distribution of such forms according to conjugation class. In Plautus and Terence, the archaic forms amount to 28% in the first conjugation; to 24% in the second; and to 25% in the fourth. By contrast, in the third conjugation, they only make up 8% of the total.

How can we explain such a remarkable discrepancy? The infinitives in –*ier* are even more strongly restricted to line end than *siem*. Again, we are dealing with a metrical archaism, and had Plautus written prose, such forms would be considerably rarer. And again, the *Senatus consultum* gives us a misleading picture of the language of the time. But if we are dealing with a metrical archaism, we should be looking for a metrical rationale for the discrepancy between conjugation classes. Such a rationale does indeed exist. The forms of the first, second, and fourth conjugation fit perfectly at the end of iambo-trochaic lines. However, in the third conjugation, word shapes like that of *agier* (u u -) do not fit at line end; *abigier* (uu u -) and *parcier* (- u -) do, but they are less frequent.

Just like *siem*, forms in –*ier* are too common to be stylistically relevant in each and every instance; they contribute to Plautine artistry in their totality rather than on an individual level.

3.3. THE SECOND PERSON SINGULAR MEDIO-PASSIVE

The second person singular medio-passive comes in two shapes: the older shape ends in –*re* and, in the present indicative, is thus homophonous with the imperative, while the more recent shape ends in –*ris*, an ending that is based on the corresponding active form. We can see the ambiguity of forms in –*re* in a passage from the *Curculio*:

Obloquere. - Fiat maxume. - Etiam taces? (Plaut. *Curc.* 41)

That's it, interrupt me. - Yes, by all means. - Won't you be quiet now?

Here, a young master is getting impatient with his servant and says *obloquere*, intending it as an indicative, 'you are interrupting me (but shouldn't)'. The

servant facetiously interprets the form as an imperative, 'interrupt me!', resulting in an angry outburst from the young man.

Quintilian comments on our forms, but misunderstands the historical relationship between them:

> Quod euitandae asperitatis gratia mollitum est, ut apud ueteres pro *male mereris male merere*. (Quint. *Inst.* 1.5.42)

> This (i.e. the perfect in *-ērunt*) has been softened (i.e. to *-ēre*) in order to avoid harshness, just as we find *male merere* 'you do a disservice' in the ancients instead of *male mereris*.

Not only is he wrong about *–ris* and *–re*, but he also fails to realize that the perfect in *-ērunt* is a conflation of earlier *-ēre* and and *–ĕrunt* (rare in Plautus and Terence, but with Romance reflexes). The ending *–re* is not restricted to the present indicative:

> Si *graderere* tantum quantum *loquere*, iam esses ad forum. (Plaut. *Pseud.* 1236)

> If you were to walk as much as you talk, you would already be at the forum.

Here we can see an imperfect subjunctive *graderere* next to a present indicative *loquere*. Let us now look at the distribution of the forms (Table 4):

Table 4. The second person medio-passive (statistics)

	-re	*-ris*	Total	*-re* (%)
Plautus	197	26	223	88.34
Terence	58	2	60	96.67

What this table shows is that the classical forms are still rare in both Plautus and Terence.

The older forms are stylistically unmarked. But why does Plautus use the modern forms more commonly than Terence does? This could perhaps have to do with manuscript modernization, and with such forms, metre can rarely help us to make a decision. However, it is possible that other factors are at play:

> Lapides *loqueris*. (Plaut. *Aul.* 152)

> You are talking rubbish (lit. 'stones').

Here we have a modern form in Plautus, in a phrase that looks like contemporary slang. Could it be the case that Plautus used more modern forms

because they had a modern, racy feel to them? The evidence is insufficient, but at any rate the older forms are still the norm even in Plautus.

3.4. IMPERFECT AND FUTURE OF THE FOURTH CONJUGATION

In the fourth conjugation, there are alternative forms for the imperfect and the simple future (discussion in de Melo 2009). Here is a pair of imperfects from Terence:

> Ea *seruiebat* lenoni impurissimo. (Ter. *Phorm.* 83)

> She served an absolutely filthy pimp.

> Feci ex seruo ut esses libertus mihi
> propterea quod *seruibas* liberaliter. (Ter. *Andr.* 37–8)

> From my slave I turned you into my freedman because you served me in a way appropriate for a free man.

And here is a pair of simple futures from Plautus:

> Ita est ista huius similis nostrai tua,
> siquidem non eadem est. - Vise ad me intro, iam *scies*. (Plaut. *Mil.* 519–20)

> That guest of yours is so similar to this girl of ours, if indeed it isn't the same person. - Go look inside at my place, you will know it at once.

> Si id facies, tum demum *scibis* tibi qui bonus sit, qui malus. (Plaut. *Mil.* 1365)

> If you do this, you will at last know who is good to you and who is bad.

From a classical perspective, *seruibas* and *scibis* are both old-fashioned. But that does not mean that they were already archaic in Plautus' time. My first impression when I read Plautus as a student was that such forms were equally normal in the early period. But this is not entirely true.

Let us begin with the imperfect. Historically, *seruībās* is older than *seruiēbās*; it is formed just like *amābās* or *monēbās*, with an imperfect suffix –*bā*- attached directly to the verb stem. *Seruiēbās* is an innovation that arose because *monē-bā-s* was reanalysed as *mon-ēbā-s*. This new suffix was then attached in other conjugations. In the first conjugation, no alternative forms were created, while in the third, the replacement process was complete long before Plautus, hence *faciēbās* rather than **facibās. In the fourth conjugation, we can witness the replacement process in progress. Let us look at the data (Table 5):

Table 5. The imperfect of the fourth conjugation (statistics)

	-ībam etc.	*-iēbam* etc.	Total	*-ībam* etc. (%)
Plautus	17	3	20	85
Terence	13	2	15	86.67

What is interesting here is that the new, classical forms are already attested, but the older forms are still the norm, making up around 85% of the total. They may be archaic from a classical perspective, but for Plautus they were unmarked.

From a classical perspective, *scībis* is archaic. But historically, it is an innovation, based on other futures like *amābis* or *monēbis*, while *sciēs* continues the inherited form, an Indo-European subjunctive formation. This raises the question whether *scībis* was still felt to be new in Plautus' time, or whether it was unmarked or perhaps even already old-fashioned. Table 6 presents the figures:

Table 6. The simple future of the fourth conjugation (statistics)

	-iam etc.	*-ībō* etc.	Total	*-iam* etc. (%)
Plautus	184	46	230	80
Terence	72	11	83	86.75

The data show that the future in *-ībō* is rare in Plautus and Terence (20% and 13% respectively)! We are used to both futures in *-ībō* and imperfects in *-ībam*, but this is simply because the future in general occurs more frequently in comedy than the imperfect. A comparison between Plautus and Terence indicates that such futures were considered old-fashioned and were already on their way out in Plautus, but even more so in Terence. An innovation they may be, but they were an innovation that was ultimately unsuccessful. There is further evidence that points in this direction: the classical future is used without any restrictions, while futures like *scībis* are disproportionately frequent with the verb I have chosen as my example, *scīre*. The reason for the better survival of *scībō* is undoubtedly that here the *–ī-* is part of the verb root, while for other fourth-conjugation verbs it is a stem formant.

In principle, then, futures like *scibo* could be used for characterization; in practice, however, there do not seem to be any special distributional patterns according to character types, metres, or other potential constraints.

3.5. *MĒ* AND *MĒD*, *TĒ* AND *TĒD*

The second-declension ablative in *–ōd*, found in all Italic languages, is inherited from Indo-European, but in Italic it was also the basis for other

ablatives, such as the first-declension ablative in *–ād*. Latin-Faliscan created the pronominal ablatives *mēd*, *tēd*, and *sēd* as well and began to employ them as accusatives, too, an important innovation that sets this branch apart from Osco-Umbrian. Inscriptions contemporary with Plautus still show the ablative *–d* on many nouns and also preserve *mēd*, *tēd*, and *sēd*. However, to some extent we must be dealing with conservative orthography here; final *–d* was lost after long vowel, and regular elision in Plautus proves that this process was complete in polysyllables. Final *–d* persisted somewhat longer in monosyllables in Plautus, as can again be proven metrically: sometimes the metre requires *med*, while sometimes it is *me* that is needed.

The Plautine evidence is thus particularly helpful for assessing final *–d* in inscriptional polysyllables, which seems to be little more than a spelling archaism. But if inscriptions can still have *med*, *ted*, and *sed*, and Plautus can be shown to have such forms next to those without *–d*, we must ask how common the older forms were compared with the more modern ones.

The manuscripts are not reliable on this issue. Whilst they do preserve some instances of *med* and *ted*, they also modernize and give us *me* and *te* where the metre requires final *–d*. However, metre is not an entirely safe guide either: in some positions, such as at the main caesura, hiatus is legitimate; if the pronoun stands before the caesura and the next word begins with a vowel, would Plautus have used *med* or *me*? And would he have been consistent?

Because of these uncertainties, I have not compiled statistics, but what evidence we have points in a very clear direction. Before a vowel, Plautus uses *me* and *te* if he wants either full elision or a light syllable (through shortening in hiatus); but he uses *med* and *ted* if he needs a heavy syllable. Before a consonant, *med* and *ted* would scan the same way as *me* and *te*, so the complete absence of manuscript forms with *–d* in such contexts indicates that Plautus only ever used *med* and *ted* for metrical convenience. Thus, *med* and *ted* are metrical archaisms; had Plautus written prose, he would presumably not have used them at all.

The reflexive pronoun provides further evidence that *med* and *ted* should be treated as metrically conditioned archaisms. Plautus uses only *se* as ablative and accusative, whilst *sed* never occurs in these functions. Why should this be the case? *Med* and *ted* are only ever used before vowels in order to have a heavy syllable; but when it comes to the reflexive pronoun, a heavy syllable before a vowel can be achieved by different means: there is a reduplicated form *sēsē*, which before a vowel would be subject to elision and count as a heavy monosyllable. No such reduplicated alternatives exist for *me* and *te*. But with the reflexive pronoun, Plautus had a choice between *sed* and *sese*, and he consistently chose the latter. This indicates that he only used *med* and *ted* when it was metrically unavoidable.

In inscriptions, final *–d* in polysyllabic ablatives was probably a spelling archaism. But while Plautus may not have fancied *med* and *ted*, he still used

the forms and pronounced them as such. To me, this indicates that inscriptional *med*, *ted*, and *sed* could conceivably be more than spelling archaisms, at least for some speakers.

3.6. THE FIRST-DECLENSION GENITIVE IN –ĀĪ

Originally, the genitive of the first declension ended in –ās, as in Greek χώρας 'of the country'. Livius Andronicus still uses such forms in his epic, but thereafter they only really survive in the fixed phrase *pater/mater familias* 'father/mother of the household'. Elsewhere, this archaic genitive was replaced by disyllabic –āī, an ending based on that of the second declension. This disyllabic ending then contracted, resulting in monosyllabic –ai/-ae.

Modern editions conveniently spell the disyllabic ending –ai and the monosyllabic one –ae. Plautus would have written –ai, regardless of scansion, as the unanimous testimony of contemporary inscriptions shows. By contrast, the manuscripts have modernized; regardless of scansion, the spelling is consistently –ae, and –ai is only transmitted once, in *Poen.* 51 (where, incidentally, the scansion is disyllabic).

Here I cannot provide a reliable table contrasting disyllabic –ai and monosyllabic –ae. There are two reasons for this. First, a fair number of forms in –ae are syntactically ambiguous between genitive and dative, but it is only the genitive which matters for our purposes. And second, scansion is not always unambiguous either. For example, at the main caesura, hiatus is legitimate; but this means that we could be dealing with –ae followed by hiatus, or with –ai with elision of the second syllable.

However, exact numbers are not crucial here because there are only between twelve and twenty disyllabic genitive endings, next to hundreds of monosyllabic ones. When something is so rare, it stands out, and indeed all these disyllabic endings occur in contexts that could be considered elevated. Two examples will suffice:

> Is publice legatus Naupactum fuit
> *magnai rei publicai* gratia. (Plaut. *Mil.* 102–3)

> He was sent to Naupactus on official business, on a matter of great importance for the state.

> Velim te arbitrari med haec uerba, frater,
> *meai fidei tuai*que *rei*
> causa facere, ut aequomst germanam sororem. (Plaut. *Aul.* 120–2)

> Dear brother, I'd like you to understand that I'm saying this out of my loyalty and for your benefit, as is appropriate for a true sister.

Our first passage is from a prologue; prologues tend to be more formal, and here the mention of state business could have led to further bombast. The second example is the opening of a dialogue; an elderly sister wants to advise her elderly brother finally to get married, and since this is a delicate subject, she starts the conversation stiffly and formally.[2]

3.7. SECOND-DECLENSION GENITIVES IN -*UM* AND -*ŌRUM*

As the Greek ending -ων indicates, the inherited ending of the genitive plural of the second declension was **-ōm*, which survives in Latin as -*om* or -*um*. In classical Latin, there are few traces of this old ending. It is used for coins and in a few fixed phrases, such as *aedis deum consentium* 'temple of the united gods'; Varro (*Ling.* 8.71) says explicitly that in this collocation one cannot say *deorum*. Elsewhere, the ending is -*ōrum*, taken from various demonstrative pronouns.

Cic. *Orat.* 155 provides several examples of the earlier ending from various poets and says that in certain expressions, it was normal. As an example of a 'rather harsh' phrase he gives us the following line from Pacuvius:

Consilium socii, *augurium* atque *extum* interpretes. (Pac. *Trag.* 80)

Fellows in counsels, interpreters of auguries and entrails.

Here there are three genitives in -*um* where Cicero would have expected -*orum*. Although he does not state it explicitly, Cicero seems to believe that the over-use of such forms is meant to create specific high-style effects in tragedy.

Let us look at Plautus. If we count second-declension nouns, numerals, and possessive pronouns, we have 119 genitives in –*orum* and 65 in -*um*. At first sight, then, the older forms could almost be argued to be in free variation with the newer ones, but a closer look reveals that this is not the case at all.

The genitive in -*orum* is subject to hardly any restrictions, but the genitive in -*um* is mostly found in collocations. Thus, among possessive pronouns, we have three tokens of *meorum* and six of *tuorum*. They contrast with four tokens of *meum* (and none of *tuum*), but all four tokens are in the phrase *maiorum meum*, a phrase in which *meorum* is found only once. Among the plural pronouns, *nostrum* is found eleven times, *uostrum* seven times, *nostrorum* three times, and *uostrorum* five times. Here, classical usage demands forms in -*orum* if we are dealing with possessive pronouns modifying nouns, but -*um* if we are dealing with a partitive genitive ('of us'). In Plautus, each of the forms is found in both functions.

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[2] Note also the scansions *rēī* (in both examples) and *fidēī* (in the second example), old-fashioned already in Plautus.

Among the nouns, *deum* occurs fourteen times, as opposed to nine instances of *deorum*. But *deum* is quite restricted: seven tokens are in the phrase *deum uirtute* 'thanks to the gods' and three are in the phrase *deum fidem* 'the good faith of the gods'. In these collocations, *deorum* is not attested. In classical Latin, *diuus* is an adjective ('divine'), but in early Latin the word can, in accordance with its etymology, still function as a doublet of *deus*. There are five attestations of *diuom*, but none of *diuorum*. Again, *diuom* is almost entirely restricted to the collocation *diuom atque hominum*, with just one exception in a deliberately pompous phrase (*quem te diuom nominem*, *Asin.* 716).

There are six tokens of *uerborum* and four of *uerbum*. Again, the older form is used for fixed collocations. Three of the four tokens are in the phrase *uerbum sat est*, 'it is enough (of) words'. The modern form is found only once in *uerborum satis est*.

Given that the genitive in *-um* is the norm for currency terms in classical Latin, we would expect that situation to reflect earlier usage. This is not entirely true. Plautus has one instance of *nummorum* and twelve of *nummum*. The instance of *nummorum* is in *Trin.* 152, *nummorum Philippeum ad tria milia*, 'around three thousand Philippic coins'. All twelve instances of *nummum* are combined with a numeral that is not modified by *ad* or anything else. We can assume that Plautus still had a choice in some instances, but that the combination of plain numeral with currency term had a regular genitive in *-um*. In the above example we can also see a genitive plural *Philippum*; this, or *Philippeum*, is attested seven times, always with a plain numeral, while we have no tokens of a genitive in *-orum* here.

It is hard to find other second-declension genitives in *-um*. In *Men.* 134, we have *nostrum salute socium*, 'with the welfare of our allies intact', in a mock-military passage. *Sociorum* is also attested once, in *Vid.* 56, in a more mundane context. In conclusion, then, it appears that Cicero got it right: the genitive in *-um* was common in certain collocations in early Latin, but outside these collocations it could be used for bombastic effects.

4. SYNTAX

We can now briefly look at syntax, a field in which much work remains to be done.

4.1. ELLIPSIS OF SUBJECT ACCUSATIVES

In any school grammar, the accusative and infinitive are described as a construction in which the subject of the infinitive has to be expressed in the accusative case, and in which this subject accusative is obligatory. In Plautus, on the other hand, the subject accusative often goes missing (data in de Melo 2006):

Pol si istuc faxis, haud sine poena feceris,
si ille huc rebitet, sicut *confido affore*. (Plaut. *Capt.* 695–6)

If you do that, you won't have done it without suffering for it if that man returns here, as *I'm sure he will*.

Here a traditional grammar would demand a subject accusative *eum* with *affore*. This kind of ellipsis is unlikely to be the result of Greek influence, where a bare infinitive is used when the subject of the infinitive is identical with the subject of the superordinate verb; in Latin, this kind of ellipsis happens regardless of whether the two subjects are identical or different.

Since colloquial speech is marked by frequent ellipsis, relying on the extra-linguistic context to retrieve what is merely implied, the ellipsis of subject accusatives has often been considered to be a colloquialism. A first problem with this approach is that in Latin the subjects of finite verbs are also dropped very easily, and no one would consider this a colloquialism; a second and even bigger problem is the fact that a closer look at early Latin reveals that this type of ellipsis also occurs in tragedy – in fact, it seems to occur, with different frequencies, in all authors, genres, and periods.

Already in 1906, Sjögren, in his study on future expressions in Plautus, realized that ellipsis of subject accusatives is more common with future infinitives than with those of the present. That does not chime with a colloquialism either; colloquialisms should not be dependent on tense. Intrigued by Sjögren's finding, I decided to examine all combinations of tense and voice in order to see how they would relate to ellipsis. My assumption was that noun phrases are more explicit than pronouns, and that pronouns are more explicit than ellipsis. Authors could choose how explicit they needed to be for the listener to figure out the subject: there would normally be a choice between a noun phrase and a pronoun, or between a pronoun and ellipsis, but not normally between a full noun phrase and ellipsis. I therefore only counted instances of pronominal accusatives and of ellipsis. Table 7 outlines my results (excluding the present with future reference):

Table 7. Ellipsis of subject accusatives

	With pronoun	Without pronoun	Total	Without pronoun (%)
Perfect active	139	43	182	23.63
Perfect medio-passive	68	41	109	37.61
Present active	366	100	466	21.46
Present medio-passive	39	9	48	18.75
Future active	101	50	151	33.11
Future medio-passive	2	1	3	Not applicable

What we can see here is that ellipsis of subject accusatives is moderately common in the present, regardless of voice, and in the perfect active; for the future passive, we lack adequate data. However, ellipsis is significantly more frequent in the future active and the perfect passive. Semantically, future active and perfect passive have nothing in common with each other. Yet they do share an important morphological feature: they are formed with participles. Participles are marked for gender and number, and this marking helps us to retrieve a constituent that has been left out. Our ellipsis phenomena have nothing to do with register, but with retrievability and its interaction with morphological marking.

4.2. OTHER SYNTACTIC FEATURES

Many other syntactic features are correlated with stylistic levels. Here I do not have sufficient space to review them in detail. However, a few general remarks may be made.

In the first place, sentence length and sentence complexity in Roman comedy differ from other genres (de Melo 2007a). The overall length of sentences is shorter in Plautus and Terence than in, say, Lucretius or Cicero, and there are, on average, fewer subordinate clauses. These are statistical differences that can only be observed if we examine larger stretches of text; individual passages in Plautus may be marked by longer and more complex sentences, and not every sentence in Cicero is necessarily an intricate construction. Reduced sentence length and complexity are intimately connected with oral delivery; an inattentive audience distracted by alternative types of entertainment cannot handle Ciceronian periods. Simplified sentence length and complexity, then, are colloquial insofar as they reflect spoken language, but they are not substandard as such.

It has been noted for English and many other languages that the frequency of the passive is a good indicator of the degree of formality that is intended. The more formal a genre, the more passives there will be. The same is true for Latin: Plautus and Terence use the passive substantially less often than Cicero or Lucretius. The reason for this discrepancy seems to be that not all passives are created equal: almost all passives in comedy, and a fair few in Cicero or Lucretius, are used to demote the active subject, either because it is an unknown entity or because it is unimportant; but Cicero and Lucretius also use the passive for other reasons, less relevant in comedy: they employ it in complex sentences in order to maintain the same subject in main and subordinate clauses, as a means to retain clarity even when a sentence becomes very long. Since Plautus and Terence do not often have such complex sentences, they do not need to use the passive so frequently.

Other variation may seem to be stylistically relevant at first sight, but then turns out to be driven by other factors. Thus, in Plautine accusative-and-infinitive

constructions, the present infinitive can often be used where in classical Latin one would expect a future infinitive (details in de Melo 2007b):

> Sciui lenonem *facere* ego hoc quod fecit; saepe dixi. (Plaut. *Rud.* 376)

> I knew the pimp *would do* what he did; I've often said it.

A classical author would have had to use *facturum esse* rather than *facere* here. Is this a colloquialism? Probably not. The Latin future infinitive is a recent morphological innovation and still spreading in early Latin. In Plautus, it is almost obligatory if the verb (with its complements) is atelic, but there is still genuine variation between present infinitive with future meaning and true future infinitive if the verb is telic. Such semantic distinctions militate against a stylistic interpretation.

While many syntactic phenomena can be argued to have colloquial overtones, and many others turn out to be stylistically neutral, very few are in fact connected with deliberate archaism. The ablative absolute is largely restricted to higher registers in Plautus; it occurs in parodies of military reports or religious language. These are conservative sub-genres, and the fact that Plautus restricts our construction to them is telling: our preconceived notion that the ablative absolute is typical of classical Latin is somewhat misguided, since it only really predominates in Caesar, who is writing military reports.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most important take-home message of this piece is that we need to examine all linguistic phenomena individually. If we take three different pieces of morphology that look archaic from a classical perspective, the second person medio-passive ending found in *loquere* 'you speak', the ablative/accusative forms *med* 'me' and *ted* 'you', and the future *scibo* 'I will know', then a study of distribution patterns reveals that they behave very differently from each other. A form like *loquere* is still entirely normal in Plautus; in fact, it is possible that its classical counterpart, *loqueris*, was still considered a modern form with a colloquial ring to it. *Med* and *ted*, on the other hand, can be shown to be employed entirely for metrical reasons. Their frequency is too high to make each and every instance stylistically significant, but the fact that they would not have been used in Plautine prose means that they must have sounded somewhat old-fashioned and must have been stylistically significant when considered as a group. The usage patterns of fourth-conjugation futures like *scibo* indicate that they were already on their way out as early as Plautus. Since there is no straightforward metrical rationale for using them, they matter more than *med* and *ted* do in stylistic terms.

However, the fact that we need to examine linguistic phenomena one by one does not mean that we cannot draw broader conclusions. It is noticeable that Plautine colloquialism can happen at every linguistic level, from phonology to morphology, from syntax to lexical choices, but that deliberate archaism, rather than archaism from the classical perspective, is virtually always restricted to morphology and the lexicon. Perhaps this should not come as a major surprise. If we ask English-speaking children who have read some Shakespeare at school to write one page in inner-city slang and one in Shakespearean style, we will notice what we have just concluded for Plautus: the piece of slang will imitate non-standard pronunciations through special spellings, and there will be non-standard features of morphology, syntax, and the lexicon; the 'Shakespearean' piece will differ from current English mostly in morphological archaisms, such as *thou hast* or *he hath*, and in old-fashioned words, such as *knave* or *rapture*. The reason for this difference is obvious: children have direct access to the colloquial language of our age and are competent in all its features; but most of them are blissfully unaware that words were pronounced differently in Shakespeare's time, and while they may notice 'odd' syntax, they will not be able to explain what is odd about it. Plautus, too, would have been constantly surrounded by everyday language, but would have known archaic language mostly through laws or religious texts, so that he would only be able to imitate their morphology and lexicon.

6. AFTERTHOUGHT: ADVICE FOR THE TRANSLATOR

As a translator, you get criticized whatever you do: you will be considered inelegant, not literal enough, not poetic enough, and so on. Ultimately, one translation cannot fulfil every single need. A professional weightlifter once said to me that at the higher levels, you are expected to be brutally strong, very lean (so as to fit into a lower weight class), and drug-free; but realistically, you can only have two out of the three, so you need to think about what matters to you and then choose wisely. The translator faces a similar dilemma: if your translation is meant to help students to understand the Latin, it will not always be elegant or poetic; if it is meant to be a piece of literature in its own right, it will not always be helpful to those who also want to work with the Latin text.

Whatever aims a translator has, it is important to have a keen understanding of rhythm and metre, language and style, and humour and the general cultural milieu of our plays. But then, difficult choices will have to be made. My Loeb edition was always going to have a highly diverse readership, so my translation is something of a compromise between different ideals, not quite fulfilling any of them. But since university students make up a disproportionately large section of my audience, my main goals were an accurate rendition of the content of the

comedies as well as clear syntax that follows the Latin as much as English idiom allows. A secondary goal was conveying the different registers reasonably well and coming up with jokes that are equivalent to the Latin ones; however, this normally meant giving up on my usual practice of remaining quite literal. Since my audience is not an audience as such, but a readership, I had no compunction about using explanatory footnotes in such cases. With goals such as mine, it was virtually impossible to convey the multitude of Plautine rhythms and metres; poetry is sometimes defined as that which gets lost in translation, and while this is true of mine, it is not universally true.

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THOUGTS ON PLAUTINE STYLE,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARCHAISM AND COLLOQUIALISM

S u m m a r y

This article discusses style in Plautus. In order to do so objectively, we need to look at distribution patterns; a phenomenon can be considered poetic or colloquial if (a) it is restricted to poetry or comedy, (b) a parallel corpus of the same time period has an equivalent expression, and (c) this distribution is statistically significant. The main problem with applying such an approach to Plautus is that he makes up 60% of early Latin (with Terence giving us another 15%); other texts are not always suitable for comparison: inscriptions may be short, highly formal, or hard to date, Cato's work on agriculture is extremely technical, and fragments of early drama are often quoted by grammarians who are more interested in what is possible than in what is normal. However, we can compare Plautus with Plautus, insofar as we can compare different stock characters, different metres, or different sub-genres within comedy.

Loss of final *–s* and iambic shortening seem to more common in colloquial passages, with a preponderance in iambic lines, a smaller number in long verses, and the smallest number in polymetric song.

Within morphology, subjunctives of the type *siem* and mediopassive infinitives ending in *–ier* are strongly preferred at line end, out of metrical convenience; they are already archaic in Plautus, but still employed so frequently that not every individual instance is stylistically significant. Pronominal accusative and ablative forms like *med* and *ted* are also already old-fashioned and used mostly for metrical reasons; they, too, occur so commonly that not every instance is significant.

Other morphological features look archaic from a classical perspective, but are still normal in Plautus; this is the case for the second-person medio-passive ending *–re* and the fourth-conjugation imperfect in *–ibam*. Genitive plural forms of the second declension mostly end in *–orum*; the older *–um* is largely restricted to fixed collocations, which are presumably stylistically unmarked.

On the other hand, disyllabic genitive endings of the first declension (type *familiai*) were already archaic in Plautus' day; they are rare and thus always used for stylistic effect.

Within syntax, not all features that have traditionally been described as colloquial really do form part of a lower register. The ellipsis of subject accusatives in the accusative-and-infinitive construction is driven by pragmatic and morphosyntactic factors rather than by stylistic considerations. Sentence length and complexity is lower in Plautus than in classical prose, but this is a feature of spoken language rather than of lower register. And finally, outside some common collocations, the ablative absolute is restricted to specific high-register contexts, such as prayers or battle reports.

When Plautus wants to be colloquial, he can use features from phonology to syntax, but when he wants to sound archaic, he limits himself to morphology (and lexical features). This should not come as a surprise: Plautus had access to colloquial language on a daily basis, but would encounter archaic texts mostly in written form; here, morphological and lexical features are the ones which are most noticeable and easiest to imitate.