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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

Aristotle on the Conventionality of Language: The Exegesis of an Anonymous Armenian Commentator

Geneviève Lachance

Abstract

The following article aims at studying the different ways in which Aristotelian commentators interpreted two passages of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* which pertain to the thorny question of language's conventionality: 16 a 26-8 (Chapter 2) and 16 b 33-17 a 2 (Chapter 4). The article gives special attention to the exegesis of an anonymous commentator whose commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* was only preserved in Armenian and, to this day, has never been studied nor translated in its entirety. The article intends to highlight the different interpretations defended by various commentators on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* living before the seventh/eighth century AD and to position the anonymous commentator among an already long and rich exegetical tradition. It will demonstrate that the anonymous Armenian commentary is probably not the fruit of a member of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, but rather the work of a scholar who was probably linked with the Peripatetics, or had access to sources linked with them.

The issue regarding the natural or conventional character of language had been debated in Antiquity since sixth century BC. In his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*, Proclus recounts that Pythagoras defended the thesis according to which names are natural, while Democritus contended the opposite on the basis of four dialectical proofs.¹ Less than two centuries later, Plato and Aristotle joined the debate and proposed new and innovative arguments. Plato, in his *Cratylus*, defended an intermediary position which amalgamated both conventionalism and naturalism: as the etymology of many words shows, names have a natural character, but they are also conventional as they do not represent the essence of their objects in a perfect manner. Aristotle, for his part, explicitly maintains in his *De Interpretatione* that names and sentences (or, speech [λόγος]) are the sole product of human agreement: "no name is a name naturally but only when it has become a symbol" (16 a 26-8) and "logos is significant not as a tool but by convention" (16 b 33-17 a 2).²

The contrasting position of Plato and Aristotle regarding the natural or conventional character of language had important repercussions on later philosophical debates, predominantly on the works of commentators, most of whom were Platonists (hereafter "Neoplatonists"). Indeed, as these commentators usually commented both on Plato and Aristotle, they had to deal with a burning, nay embarrassing question: why did Aristotle seem to contradict Plato about the natural character of language? The majority of commentators attempted to resolve this issue by harmonizing Aristotle with Plato, sometimes to the detriment

¹ Procli Diadochi *In Platonis Cratylum Commentaria*, ed. G. Pasquali, Teubner, Leipzig 1908, p. 16.21ff.

² L. Minio-Paluello (ed.), *Aristotelis Categoriae et Liber De Interpretatione*, OUP, Oxford 1949. J.L. Ackrill (transl.), *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1963.

of Aristotle's own philosophy. Neoplatonic scholars of Alexandria such as Ammonius and Stephanus were among these, and they often invented ingenious interpretative distinctions in order to expunge all apparent contradictions between both philosophers.³ A more limited number of commentators, for instance Boethius, rather acknowledged the contradiction without appealing to Plato's authority or using Neoplatonic interpretative tools. Boethius' exegetical position was quite astonishing as he explicitly admitted at the beginning of his commentary that he would follow as far as possible the exegesis of Porphyry.⁴

There is another commentator who did not follow the Neoplatonic harmonising route and defended a position reminiscent of Boethius': an anonymous commentator whose commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* was solely preserved in Armenian.⁵ The commentary composed by this anonymous writer, segmented in lemmata and intertwined with Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, was possibly made around the same time as the Armenian translation of the same text (around the 6th century). Both the Armenian translation and the commentary were written in the style of the so-called Hellenizing School (Yunaban Dproc'), namely in a style so overtly literal that it has prompted F.C. Conybeare to describe it as "little more than Greek written with Armenian words".⁶ Due to its overt literality, it has been suspected that the commentary was not originally written in Armenian but rather was translated from Greek at the same time as the *De Interpretatione*.⁷ To this day, no translation of the commentary has been made in any modern language, except for some very short passages and one chapter. Due to the absence of any modern translation, the commentary has inevitably escaped the attention of philosophy scholars.

Such an absence is unfortunate as the anonymous commentary often differs from all the other commentaries that have been preserved on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. These divergences are particularly visible in respect to the question of the natural or conventional character of language, namely in the exegesis of the second and fourth chapters of Aristotle's *De*

³ A similar tendency to harmonisation can be observed in the anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* from Codex Parisinus Graecus 2064 (hereafter, the Anonymous of Tarán), which relied heavily on Ammonius' commentary. The author is possibly associated with the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria or Constantinople (L. Tarán, *Anonymous Commentary on Aristotle's De interpretation [Codex Parisinus Graecus 2064]*, Verlag Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan 1978, p. XXV). It can also be observed in the comments made by an anonymous exceptor in Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Cratylus* (§58). The anonymous exceptor was probably a member of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria (B. Duvick, *Proclus. On Plato Cratylus*, Bloomsbury, London 2007, p. 3).

⁴ Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii *Commentarii in librum Aristotelis, Peri hermeneias* ed. K. Meiser, Teubner, Leipzig 1877-80, p. 7.5-7.

⁵ A. Topchyan, *Յաղագս մեկնութեան՝ Պերիարմենիաս, Մեկնութիւն Ստորագութեանցն Արիստոտէլի, Մատենադարանի հայոց [On Interpretation, Commentary on Aristotle's Peri Hermeneias and Categories]*, Matenagirk Hayots, volume XVII, Yerevan, 2016, p. 789-979.

⁶ F.C. Conybeare, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, A Collation with the Ancient Armenian Versions of the Greek Text of Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1892, p. v.

⁷ Only a thorough linguistic analysis could settle the issue regarding the original language in which the anonymous commentary was written. Conybeare avoided providing an answer and instead chose to present arguments on both sides. A. Topchyan, the editor of the Armenian text, also refused to answer the question but highlighted that it would be more probable that the commentary was originally written in Greek, then translated in Armenian (Topchyan, *Յաղագս մեկնութեան* [above, n. 5], p. 19). I follow Topchyan on that specific matter. Commentaries were composed in order to explain difficult texts. In itself, the Armenian commentary is almost unreadable without a proper knowledge of Greek. It would thus be surprising that an Armenian commentator would have written an unreadable commentary in his own language in order to explain a difficult text that needed clarification.

Interpretatione. In the following pages, I intend to highlight the anonymous commentator's treatment of the question by proposing a first-ever English translation of the related passages and studying their content from a comparative philosophical standpoint. My objectives are twofold: to shed light on the way the commentators interpreted the passages 16 a 26-8 (chapter 2) and 16 b 33-17 a 2 (chapter 4) of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and to position the anonymous commentator among these various exegetes.⁸ The analysis will demonstrate that the Armenian commentary diverges more than once from the commentaries written by scholars of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, raising the possibility that its author was probably not affiliated with it. It will also show that the anonymous commentator was probably not a Platonist as he never tries to conciliate Aristotle with Plato and even sided with Aristotle when treating the thorny issue of language's conventionality. This last result is particularly interesting as all the commentaries preserved on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* have an obvious Platonic/Neoplatonic overtone.

Preliminary remarks about the anonymous Armenian commentary

Around the sixth century AD, Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* was the object of intense translation efforts. In the Latin world, Boethius translated the treatise together with the other books of the *Organon* and offered two commentaries that would reflect Porphyry's teachings.⁹ A little further east, a Syriac translation was also prepared around the same time, although in an anonymous form. As indicated in the manuscript Mingana syr. 606, Proba – a possible student of Olympiodorus in Alexandria (6th century) –, may have been responsible for it.¹⁰ The Latin and Syriac translations of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, together with the commentaries accompanying them, were thus made by scholars who were influenced by or affiliated with what we now call "Neoplatonism".

The Armenian translation seems to follow a similar path. Made anonymously around the sixth century, it is part of a philosophical corpus containing not only Armenian

⁸ Given the probable date of the anonymous commentary, the comparative analysis will mainly focus on commentaries written before the seventh/eighth century. The following editions and translations will be used: Ammonius: Ammonius *In Aristotelis De interpretatione commentarius*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin 1897 (CAG 4.5), pp. 1-272; D.L. Blank, *Ammonius. On Aristotle On Interpretation 1-8*, Bloomsbury, London 2013. Boethius: Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii *Commentarii* (above, n. 4); A. Smith, *Boethius: On Aristotle On Interpretation 1-3*, Bloomsbury, London 2014. Stephanus: *Stephani In librum Aristotelis De Interpretatione commentarium*, ed. M. Hayduck, Reimer, Berlin 1885 (CAG 18.3), pp. 1-68; W. Charlton, *Stephanus. On Aristotle On Interpretation*, Bloomsbury, London 2014. Anonymous of Tarán: *Anonymous Commentary* (above, n. 3) (the commentary starts at the end of the second chapter of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*). Unfortunately, there is still no edition of Proba's commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. There exists however a partial edition and Latin translation (*De Hermeneuticis apud Syros Aristoteleis*, ed. J.G.H. Hoffmann, J.C. Hinrichs Bibliopola, Leipzig 1869, pp. 62-140), but it is based only on one manuscript. As highlighted by S. Brock, "a new edition of the *Commentary* (...) is a pressing desideratum" (S. Brock, "The Commentator Probus: Problems of Date and Identity", in J.W. Watt – J. Löss [eds.], *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, Routledge, London and New York 2011, p. 196).

⁹ On the Latin translation, see: L. Minio-Paluello – G. Verbeke (eds.), *Aristoteles Latinus II 1-2, De interpretatione vel Periermenias. Translatio Boethii, Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, Desclée De Brouwer, Bruges - Paris 1965.

¹⁰ "What is uncertain, but likely, is that Probus was also the Syriac translator of the *De Interpretatione*" (Brock, "The Commentator Probus" [above, n. 8], p. 196). See also: H. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque*, Vrin, Paris 2004, pp. 58-69.

translations of Aristotle (*Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, together with an anonymous commentary on both treatises), pseudo-Aristotle (*On Virtues and Vices* and *De Mundo*), Porphyry (*Isagoge*) and Proclus (*Elements of Theology*), but also several commentaries on Aristotle's works which are linked with the philosopher David the Invincible (i.e. the so-called *Corpus Davidicum*), for instance, a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Prior Analytics*, a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and a treatise entitled *Definitions and Divisions of Philosophy*.¹¹ The Armenian philosophical corpus thus reveals a close bond with Neoplatonism, especially with the Aristotelian curriculum taught in the city of Alexandria.¹²

It would be reasonable to presume that the anonymous Armenian commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* was also linked with the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. However, this remains uncertain. In the oldest manuscripts which preserved it, the commentary is intertwined with the Armenian translation of the *De Interpretatione*.¹³ In other words, both texts were not separated from each other at the beginning, and it is highly probable that they were translated from Greek into Armenian at the same time, namely before the translation of the *Corpus Davidicum*.¹⁴ The commentary on the *De Interpretatione* and those of the *Corpus Davidicum* (which have a distinctive Neoplatonic flavour) thus appear as distinct. Moreover, although David the Invincible was often considered as the author of the Armenian version of Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, his exact role remains unknown, and even problematic. The biographical data about David are highly conflicting and it seems the famous Armenian translator named David (who was part of the translation team of Mesrop Mashtots [5th century]) differed from David the commentator (or, David the Invincible, who was a possible student of Olympiodorus in Alexandria [6th century]). Certainly, nothing prevents David the commentator from also being a translator. However, had David the Neoplatonic commentator indeed been the translator of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, it does not follow that he would have also been the author of this commentary. The commentary could have been written in Greek by another scholar and David could have been responsible only for its translation from Greek into Armenian.¹⁵

¹¹ It should be noted that these texts (including the commentaries, although with less certitude for some) are the product of translation from Greek to Armenian. Proclus' *Elements of Theology* is, for its part, an Armenian translation from Georgian. On the Armenian philosophical corpus, see: C. Zuckerman – M.E. Stone, *A Repertory of Published Armenian Translations of Classical Texts*, Institute of African and Asian Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1996; V. Calzolari, "L'école hellénisante", in M. Nishanian (éd.), *Âge et usage de la langue arménienne*, Éd. Entente, Paris 1989, pp. 110-30; V. Calzolari, "Philosophical Literature in Ancient and Medieval Armenia", in V. Calzolari – M.E. Stone (eds.), *Armenian Philology in the Modern Era, From Manuscript to Digital Text*, Brill, Leiden 2014, pp. 349-76. For the *Corpus Davidicum*, see the series *Commentaria in Aristotelem Armeniaca – Davidis Opera* (in five volumes), edited by V. Calzolari – J. Barnes at Brill.

¹² V. Calzolari, "The reception and the transmission of the Greek cultural heritage in Armenia: the Armenian translations of the Greek Neoplatonic works", in F. Gazzano, L. Pagani and G. Traina (eds.), *Greek Texts and Armenian Traditions*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, pp. 54-7. Five Platonic dialogues were also translated into Armenian: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Timaeus*, *Laws* and *Minos*. These dialogues do not coincide with the Platonic curriculum of the Neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria.

¹³ Conybeare, *Anecdota Oxoniensia* (above, n. 6), p. V.

¹⁴ It is generally accepted that Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* were translated before the *Corpus Davidicum*. On the Armenian translation endeavour, see: V. Calzolari, "David et la tradition arménienne", in V. Calzolari – J. Barnes (eds.), *L'œuvre de David l'Invincible*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2009 (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Armeniaca – Davidis Opera*), pp.16-20; B. Contin, *La version arménienne des œuvres grecques de David l'Invincible*, PhD thesis, Université de Genève, Università Ca' Foscari, Geneva - Venice 2001, pp. 21-7.

¹⁵ On the figure of David, see: A. Ouzounian, "David l'Invincible", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philo-*

That the Armenian commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* is not the product of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria is best shown by a thorough examination of its form.¹⁶ Ammonius Hermiae (5th to 6th century) – one of the most emblematic figures of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, whose commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* is the oldest to have survived in its entirety – divided the Aristotelian text in five distinct parts (κεφάλαια).¹⁷ This division, perhaps inherited from Proclus,¹⁸ was highly influential as it was followed by the majority of posterior commentators, including Stephanus, the Anonymous of Tarán, Proba, Al-Farabi, Psellus and Gennadius. However, such a division is not part of the Armenian commentary: the anonymous commentator instead segments the Aristotelian text into four sections.¹⁹ The fact that the Armenian commentary and translation do not follow the Ammonian division of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* suggests that it was not linked with the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria nor influenced by it.

There is another textual division that is highly indicative of the school of Alexandria. Indeed, David, Elias and Proba divided their exegesis in “lectures” (πράξεις), which were further segmented in a general discussion (θεωρία) and a clarification of individual points (λέξεις). Such a division, which is indicative of oral teachings, has its origin in Olympiodorus, a student of Ammonius and, in all likelihood, the last pagan head of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. Again, this division is not observable in the anonymous Armenian commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. The absence of such a division suggests that the anonymous commentator could not have been a student of Olympiodorus nor the famous David the Invincible.

The anonymous commentary, published together with the Armenian translation of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, has thus a form that distinguishes it from the commentaries written by members of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria and subsequent scholars, including Arabic and Byzantine authors. It also contains many other formal features that are original, including a specific segmentation of the Aristotelian text that is not otherwise observed in other commentaries.²⁰ As for its content, a preliminary comparative study of its first chapter had shown that it has much more in common with Boethius and Alexander of Aphrodisias than with the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria.²¹ Two examples will suffice

sophes Antiques (= *DPhA*), vol. 2, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 1994, pp. 614-15; B. Contin, *David l'Arménien et l'école d'Alexandrie. Recherches sur le vocabulaire épistémologique de la tradition textuelle grecque et arménienne*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2017 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 301), pp. 33-55; V. Calzolari, “David et la tradition arménienne” (above, n. 14).

¹⁶ On the form of the anonymous Armenian commentary, see: G. Lachance, “On Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* 16 a 1-18. The case of an Anonymous Armenian Commentary”, *The Classical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

¹⁷ First part: 16 a 1-17 a 37 (ch. 1-6). Second part: 17 a 38-19 b 19 (ch. 6-10). Third part: 19 b 19-21 a 33 (ch. 10-11). Fourth part: 21 a 34-23 a 26 (ch. 12-13). Fifth part: 23 a 27-24 b 9 (ch. 14).

¹⁸ Tarán, *Anonymous Commentary* (above, n. 3), p. xvi.

¹⁹ Section 1: 16 a 1-18. Section 2: 16 a 19-16 b 5. Section 3: 16 b 6-25. Section 4: 16 b 26-24 b 9. Boethius (a contemporary of Ammonius) also ignored the Ammonian division.

²⁰ For instance, in the Armenian commentary, 16 b 33-17 a 15 (ch. 4 and 5), 17 a 23-37 (ch. 5 and 6), 18 a 12-33 (ch. 8 and 9) and 21 b 33-22 a 31 (ch. 12 and 13) are treated as undivided lemmata. The anonymous commentator thus ignores the divisions that will give birth to the medieval segmentation of the text.

²¹ In this paragraph, I draw the major conclusions from: Lachance, *On Aristotle's Peri Hermeneias* (above, n. 16). The anonymous Armenian commentary remains unfortunately understudied and was never translated in its entirety in any modern language. The only other study that was published about it in English is: Conybeare,

to illustrate this point. In the first part of the first chapter, which proposes an exegesis of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16 a 1-2, the anonymous commentator contends that "adverbs fall under the name, as anyone will find on examination" (1.1.5).²² In the anonymous commentator's opinion, adverbs could act as names, a position that Ammonius strictly rejected (*In De Int.*, p. 13.19-27 Busse).²³ The anonymous commentator was however not alone in defending such a position, as Boethius also believed that adverbs fall under the name (*In De Int.*, p. 15.3-5 Meiser). As for Alexander of Aphrodisias, we know from Ammonius that he held that adverbs could also act as names as they were made from them (*In De Int.*, p. 13.19-20 Busse). The anonymous commentator thus defends a position rejected by Ammonius (and Stephanus) but accepted by Alexander and Boethius. Moreover, in the third part of the first chapter, which proposes an exegesis of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16 a 9-13, the anonymous commentator contends that "combination and division are not, as some have thought, affirmations and negations. For, just as in an affirmation, there is a combination of a name and a verb, likewise in the negation" (1.3.4). In other words, the anonymous commentator regarded negations not only as divisions but more precisely as divisions of combinations. Such a position departs again from Ammonius, who treated negation only as a division (in *De Int.*, p. 27.1-8 Busse). It is however consistent with Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation which, according to Boethius, stipulated that every negation is a "division of what is combined and joined together" (*In De Int.*, p. 47.13-14 Meiser).²⁴

The anonymous commentator shares common exegetical positions with Boethius (who admittedly followed Porphyry) and Alexander of Aphrodisias, the last of the Peripatetics, who wrote a commentary on the *De Interpretatione* that is now lost. From an exegetical point of view, the anonymous commentator departs more than once from the interpretation of Ammonius, defending contrary positions and even ignoring his exegesis. Moreover, because Ammonius' interpretation had an enormous influence on subsequent scholars, namely Syriac, Arabic and Byzantine commentators, it also suggests that the Armenian commentary could not have been written after Ammonius' lifetime. It is thus highly probable that the anonymous commentator was not affiliated with the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. As a matter of fact, the manner in which the anonymous commentator addresses the question of the conventionality of names and *logos* in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16 a 26-8 and 16 b 33-17 a 2 will further confirm this last hypothesis. Let us now turn to the anonymous commentator's interpretation and his relation with other commentators.

On the conventionality of names: a discussion of the second chapter of Aristotle's De Interpretatione

That spoken sounds and written words are by convention is a point contended by the anonymous commentator from the first chapter of his commentary. To support his position,

Anecdota Oxoniensia (above, n. 6). Conybeare, however, wrongly believed the commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* was incomplete.

²² The translation from the Armenian commentary is presented in agreement with a three-point system: the first number indicates the chapter; the second, the section; and the third, the paragraph (thus, here, 1.1.5 refers to the fifth paragraph of the first section of chapter 1).

²³ "Τῶ μὲν οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀφροδισιάδος ἐξηγητῆ ἰδοῦναι καὶ τὰ ἐπιρρήματα ὀνόματα εἶναι (...)"

²⁴ "*Divisio igitur quaedam negatio est, coniunctio adfirmatio. Compositi autem est coniunctique divisio*".

he presents a simple argument, which can be derived from Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16 a 5-8: what is the same for all is by nature.²⁵ Things and thoughts, being the same for every human being, are natural, whereas vocal sounds and written words, which vary from country to country, are conventional. Such linguistic variations are easy to observe. Ammonius, living in Alexandria, remarks that "Greeks use different vocal sounds from Phoenicians, as do the Egyptians" (*In De Int.*, p. 19.13-14 Busse).²⁶ As for the anonymous commentator, he simply notices that "Greeks and Romans do not have the same letters and the same vocal sounds" (1.2.2). What is by convention is thus secondary to what is by nature: it simply "comes afterwards" (1.2.1).

It is only in his exegesis of the second chapter of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* that the anonymous commentator hints at the fact that spoken sounds may not always be conventional. Indeed, some spoken sounds can "signify by nature", for instance, sounds emitted by "beings deprived of reason" (2.2.1), i.e. animals. The typical example for such natural spoken sounds is the dog's barking, which differs from any simple sound or noise, yet signifies the presence of a potential danger.²⁷ Like names and verbs, some spoken sounds emitted by animals are significant, but they differ from them as they are not the product of an agreement (θέσει). All commentators agree here on the following point: in the Aristotelian definition of the name (16 a 19-21), the expression "by convention" (κατὰ συνθήκην) is used as a *differentia* in order to discriminate between a significant natural spoken sound and a significant conventional one.²⁸

The anonymous commentator does not depart from other commentators in his definition of the expression "by convention" nor in his description of the various *differentiae* at play in the definition of the name. However, he does distinguish himself from the commentators of Alexandria in one important aspect. Like Boethius (*In De Int.*, p. 53.24-5 Meiser)²⁹ but contrary to Ammonius (*In De Int.*, p. 30.3-7 Busse)³⁰ and Stephanus (*In De Int.*, p. 7.6-14

²⁵ See also: Ammonius, *In De Int.* 19.4-6 Busse, and Boethius, *In De Int.* 37.25-29 Meiser. We know from the exceptor of Proclus's commentary on Plato's *Cratylus* that Proclus tried to refute this argument by contending that names can be the same for all (as Forms) and that natural things are not always the same (*In Crat.* §58).

²⁶ "(...) φωναῖς τε γὰρ ἄλλαις μὲν Ἕλληνας, ἄλλαις δὲ Φοίνικας, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ ἄλλαις χρωδῶνται (...)" Ammonius, however, does not use the argument of linguistic diversity in the same way as Boethius or the anonymous commentator. See: M. Chriti, "The Neoplatonic Commentators of Aristotle on the Origins of Language: A New Tower of Babel?", in P. Golitsis - K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *Aristotle and his Commentators, Studies in Memory of Paraskevi Kotzia*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2019 (CAGB 7), pp. 103-6.

²⁷ This example is given by Ammonius (*In De Int.*, p. 30.22-5 Busse: τοιαῦται δὲ εἰσιν αἱ τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων φωναί· ξένου γὰρ τινος ἐπιστάντος ὁ κύων ὑλακτήσας ἐσήμανε τὴν τοῦ ξένου παρουσίαν. ἀλλ' οὐ κατὰ τινὰ συνθήκην πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ ὁμολογίαν προῖενται τὴν τοιαύτην φωνὴν οἱ κύνες), Stephanus (*In De Int.*, p. 7.20-4 Hayduck: εἴρηται δὲ πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολήν τῶν ἄλλων ζώων [ὡς] τῆς τοῦ κυνὸς ὑλακῆς καὶ γὰρ ἡ τοῦ κυνὸς ὑλακῆ φωνὴ ἐστὶ καὶ σημαντικὴ (δηλοῦ γὰρ ἡ φίλων ἢ ξένων παρουσίαν), ἀλλ' οὐ κατὰ συνθήκην· ἀλλ' οὐ συνέθεντο οἱ κύνες ὅτι "τῆ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ ξένου ὑλακτῆσμεν") and Boethius (*In De Int.*, p. 31.24-27 Meiser: *animalium quoque ceterorum quaedam voces naturaliter aliquid ostendant, ut ex canum latratibus iracundia eorumque alia quadam voce blandimenta monstrantur*), but not by the anonymous commentator. The anonymous commentator simply says: "[Aristotle] consolidates his argument [according to which] not all vocal sounds are names by talking about beings deprived of reason, [saying] that the sounds of ferocious beasts, which are not written, can express something" (2.2.1). Al-Fārābī, citing Aristotle's *Book of Animals*, by contrast refers to birds (F.W. Zimmerman, *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, OUP, Oxford 1981, pp. 19-20).

²⁸ Amm., *In De Int.*, p. 30.21-3 Busse; Steph., *In De Int.*, p. 7.18-24 Hayduck; Boethius, *In De Int.*, p. 54.24-30 Meiser.

²⁹ "et vocem quidem nominis velut genus sumpsit".

³⁰ "ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀποδεδομένῳ τοῦ ὀνόματος λόγῳ παρείληπται ἡ μὲν φωνὴ ὕλης ἔχουσα λόγον πρὸς τε τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὸ

Hayduck),³¹ the anonymous commentator considers the vocal sound as the genus of the name: “[Aristotle] says that the vocal sound is the genus of the name, because [the name] comes from that vocal sound, which is either significant or not” (2.1.3). That Ammonius and Stephanus do not accept vocal sounds as authentic genera of names can be easily understood in the context of the Neoplatonic exegetical tradition. Indeed, both Ammonius and Stephanus consider vocal sounds in themselves as natural.³² More precisely, vocal sounds are seen as “matter” (ὕλη) of the name, thus natural, whereas the name is in itself conventional. Therefore, vocal sounds cannot be authentic (κυρίως) genera of names as “it is impossible with genera and species that one should be due to nature and the other to laying down”.³³ Such a distinction between matter and form of the name is already suggested in Plato’s *Cratylus* and accepted by Proclus.³⁴ It cannot be found in the anonymous commentator nor in Boethius’ discussion of this passage. It clearly derives from a Late Neoplatonic reading of the Aristotelian text, which was influenced by the exegesis of Plato’s *Cratylus*.³⁵

When reading Ammonius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, more particularly his treatment of the conventionality of names, one element stands out more than any other: Ammonius is eager to harmonise Aristotle with Plato and to demonstrate that the student did not disagree with his master.³⁶ His eagerness is especially intensified in his commentary of the second chapter of the *De Interpretatione* as it contains questions that were frequently debated by ancient scholars and passages that hosted potential areas of contention between Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, as Ammonius remarks in his exegesis of 16 a 21-9, “it is worth asking how, when Socrates in the *Cratylus* argues against Hermogenes’

ῥῆμα καὶ τὸν ἐκ τούτων συγκείμενον λόγον ὡς γένος τῆς κατὰ τὸ ὄνομα φωνῆς, πρὸς διάκρισιν τῶν ἀπλῶς ψόφων, οὐ καὶ ἀπὸ ἀψύχων πολλαχίς γίνονται σωμαμάτων (...).”

³¹ “φωνῆν τοίνυν εἶπεν ἀντὶ γένους. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν κυρίως γένος ἡ φωνή [ἡ] τοῦ ὀνόματος, διότι τὸ μὲν ὄνομα θέσει, ἡ δὲ φωνὴ φύσει· ἀδύνατον δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν γενῶν καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν εἶναι τὸ μὲν ἐξ αὐτῶν φύσει, τὸ δὲ θέσει. ἀλλὰ τὴν φωνὴν ὡς ὕλην ἔλαβεν ἀναλογουσαν τῷ γένει· ὡς γὰρ πολλαχίς μεμαθήκαμεν, τῷ μὲν γένει ἀναλογεῖ ἡ ὕλη, ταῖς δὲ συστατικαῖς διαφοραῖς τὸ σχῆμα τὸ τοιόνδε ἦτοι τὸ εἶδος. ὥσπερ οὖν φαμεν ὅτι θεωρίς ἐστὶν ζῦλον τοιῶσδε κατεσκευασμένον, ἐκ τῆς ὕλης καὶ τοῦ εἶδους ποιούμενοι τὴν ὑπογραφὴν, ἐνταῦθα τὴν φωνὴν ὕλην οὖσαν τοῦ ὀνόματος ὡς γένος ἔλαβεν (...).”

³² Ammonius: “Vocal sounds are enunciative of thoughts and therefore are given to us by nature...” (*In De Int.*, p. 18.30-1 Busse: αἱ δὲ φωναὶ τῶν νοημάτων εἰσὶν ἐξαγγελτικαὶ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δέδονται ἡμῖν ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως); “For vocalizing (τὸ φωνεῖν) belongs to us by nature, just as seeing and hearing do...” (*ibid.*, p. 22.25-6 Busse: φύσει γὰρ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει τὸ φωνεῖν, καθάπερ τὸ ὄραν καὶ τὸ ἀκούειν). Stephanus: “... vocal sounds exists by nature...” (*In De Int.*, p. 7.8 Hayduck: ἡ δὲ φωνὴ φύσει).

³³ Steph., *In De Int.*, p. 7.6-9 Hayduck: φωνῆν τοίνυν εἶπεν ἀντὶ γένους. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν κυρίως γένος ἡ φωνή [ἡ] τοῦ ὀνόματος, διότι τὸ μὲν ὄνομα θέσει, ἡ δὲ φωνὴ φύσει· ἀδύνατον δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν γενῶν καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν εἶναι τὸ μὲν ἐξ αὐτῶν φύσει, τὸ δὲ θέσει.

³⁴ Plato, *Cratylus* 390 A (cf. R.M. van den Berg, “Smoothing over the Differences: Proclus and Ammonius on Plato’s *Cratylus* and Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*”, in R. Sorabji [ed.], *Aristotle Re-Interpreted. New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators*, Bloomsbury, London 2016, p. 356). Proclus (*In Crat.* §10): “But still, since names have form and matter, by the former they partake more of the natural, by the latter more of the conventional”. See also: Proclus, *In Crat.* §17, §49 and §58.

³⁵ Although he was familiar with this distinction, it is not known if Porphyry used it in his analysis of the name. The silence of Boethius on the matter could suggest that he did not. However, it would be an error to suppose that Boethius always follows Porphyry in his exegesis.

³⁶ Ammonius himself recognizes his own desire to harmonise Aristotle and Plato: “But we have gone on too long on these matters, since we wanted to show the agreement of the philosophers (τὴν συμφωνίαν τῶν φιλοσόφων ἐπιδειῖξαι βουλόμενοι) and since we decided not to leave fully unexplored this problem [i.e. the conventional or natural character of names] which was customarily discussed by the ancients” (*In De Int.*, p. 39.11-13 Busse).

assertion that names are by imposition and shows that they are by nature, Aristotle can insist (...) that no name is by nature” (*In De Int.*, p. 34.17-20 Busse).³⁷ Ammonius is recalling here the passage 16 a 26-8, in which Aristotle straightforwardly remarks, “I say by convention because no name is a name naturally but only when it has become a symbol”. In order to solve this issue, Ammonius employs an ingenious interpretative stratagem, which may have been the product of his own creation.³⁸ He first imposes a distinction between two meanings of the expression “by nature”, then notices that the expression “by convention” can also be said in two different ways. Next, he argues that one of the meanings of “by nature” is equivalent to one of the senses of “by convention”. In other words, to say that “names are by nature” according to one of the meanings of “by nature” is synonymous with saying that “names are by convention” according to one of the meanings of “by convention”. Without any surprises, these two synonymous meanings are attributed to Plato’s Socrates, who is perceived as a mediator between both positions.³⁹ Ammonius concludes by stating that there is no contradiction between Plato and Aristotle: both had the same referent in mind when they used two apparently opposing expressions.⁴⁰

Ammonius’ solution has the obvious flaw of making Aristotle’s text say what it does not say. In imparting the second sense of “by nature” to Plato and Aristotle and treating it as a synonym of the second sense of “by convention”, he suggests that Aristotle was of the opinion that “names are given by the namegiver (ὀνοματοθέτης) alone, who has the knowledge of things and states a name appropriate to the nature of each thing” (p. 35.15-18 Busse). There is no passage in the *De Interpretatione* suggesting this interpretation. Such an “interpretative leap”, which is also present in Stephanus, cannot be found in the anonymous commentator. Unlike Ammonius and Stephanus, the anonymous commentator does not raise any question regarding a possible contradiction between Plato and Aristotle. He also presents an interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* exempt of any Late Neoplatonic influence. In interpreting Aristotle, the anonymous commentator’s focus does not shift towards Plato’s *Cratylus* but definitely remains on Aristotle.

One might wonder at this point if the anonymous commentator ignored such an interpretative strategy because he was not entirely familiar with the exegetical tradition

³⁷ “κἀνταῦθα ζητῆσαι ἄξιον πῶς τοῦ ἐν Κρατύλῳ Σωκράτους ἀγωνιζομένου πρὸς τὸν Ἑρμογένην λέγοντα θέσει τὰ ὀνόματα εἶναι καὶ δεικνύντος αὐτὰ φύσει, δισχυρίζεται διὰ τούτων ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης μηδὲν τῶν ὀνομάτων εἶναι φύσει”. Cf. Steph., *In De Int.*, p. 9.8-10 Hayduck: “ζητήσεί τις πῶς εἶπεν Ἀριστοτέλης ἐνταῦθα φύσει τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδὲν ἐστίν· ὁ Πλάτων φαίνεται ἐν τῷ Κρατύλῳ λέγων φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα”.

³⁸ It is not known with certainty if Ammonius invented this distinction or if he was simply following Proclus. We can find a similar distinction in Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s *Cratylus* but it appears to be the fruit of the anonymous exceptor rather than the one of Proclus himself. Ammonius was however influenced by Proclus’ interpretation of the *Cratylus* as he uses one of his definition of “by nature”. See: Blank, *Ammonius* (above, n. 8), n. 159, p. 149; Duvick, *Proclus* (above, n. 3), n. 145, p. 130. R.M. van den Berg also highlights that the distinction between “natural likenesses” and “artificial likenesses”, on which the first distinction between “by nature” and “by convention” is based, is authentically Ammonian (van den Berg, “Smoothing” [above, n. 34], pp. 358-61).

³⁹ A similar distinction can be found in Stephanus (*In De Int.*, p. 9.7-27 Hayduck). Unfortunately, the passage of Stephanus’ commentary in which he presents a similar interpretation is corrupted.

⁴⁰ For a thorough discussion of this passage, see: A. Sheppard, “Proclus’ Philosophical Method of Exegesis: the Use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*”, in J. Pépin – H.D. Saffrey (eds.), *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des Anciens*. Actes du colloque international du CNRS Paris (2-4 octobre 1985), CNRS-Éditions, Paris 1987, pp. 137-51 and van den Berg, “Smoothing” (above, n. 34), pp. 353-66.

of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. Ultimately, we know nothing about the anonymous commentator: he was perhaps cut off from the world, living in a remote area of the Caucasus and had no access to rolls or manuscripts of Aristotelian works. The absence of any Late Neoplatonic influence in his commentary could thus be the repercussion of his remoteness from the philosophical or intellectual discussions of his time. However, many elements prompt us to reject such a hypothesis. First, it is worth noting that Boethius himself did not explicitly comment on the problematic sentence 16 a 26-8 (there is no lemma of this passage in his commentary), thus not raising questions about a possible contradiction between Plato and Aristotle. In his interpretation of the following passage (in which a scattered interpretation of 16 a 26-8 can be found), he also did not employ the same complicated distinctions as Ammonius and Stephanus nor did he make reference to Plato's *Cratylus*. As an active intellectual figure of the sixth century, Boethius was well aware of the philosophical debates of his time and highly familiar with Neoplatonic philosophy. His silence on the question would be difficultly interpreted as ignorance or remoteness.⁴¹ If the latter is the case with Boethius, one could ask whether the case would be the same with the anonymous commentator. Secondly, the anonymous commentator was familiar with other Aristotelian texts (mentions of the *Metaphysics*, *De Anima*, the *Categories* and the *Topics* are found in his commentary) and was well aware of the exegetical tradition of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* as he discussed similar issues to many other commentators. These issues are, however, not associated with theses defended by members of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. In fact, the elements discussed by the anonymous commentator seem to refer to debates and interpretations possibly predating Ammonius and Proclus.

In his discussion of the problematic sentence 16 a 26-8, the anonymous commentator clearly illustrates that he was highly familiar with the Aristotelian exegetical tradition. He asserts (2.1.6):

And by [the expression] “by convention” (κατὰ συνθήκην), the name is distinguished from the [significant]⁴² vocal sound that is by nature. Aristotle adds that “no name is by nature” (φύσει τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδέν ἐστιν [16 a 27]). He demonstrates here that [names] are not “by nature” but “by imposition” (θέσει) in four ways: 1) by the identity of names (ὁμωνυμία); 2) by the plurality of names (πολυωνυμία); 3) by the change of names (μετονομασία); and, 4) by [the fact] that for each nation different names [are used to describe] the same objects. [First of all], by “identity of names”, the term πῦρ [can refer both] to the sensitive limbs of the living body [i.e. the “legs”] and the inanimate objects deprived of reason and artfully manufactured [i.e., the “cushion”, the “bolster”, the “seat” or the “couch”];⁴³ the term

⁴¹ One possible way in which we could interpret Boethius' silence on the two-fold distinctions of “by nature” and “by convention” is to presume that it was absent in Porphyry. D. Blank suspects that the absence of any reference to the *Cratylus* in Boethius' scattered commentary surrounding 16 a 26-8 is “an indication that Ammonius' discussion is a particularly Proclan bit” (Blank, *Ammonius* [above, n. 8], n. 157, p. 149). Another possible explanation would be that Porphyry discussed the passage 16 a 26-8 but, for one reason or another, Boethius did not agree with his interpretation and decided not to comment on it.

⁴² Previously, the anonymous commentator stated that “Aristotle is saying that [the name is a] significant [vocal sound]. Among significant [vocal sounds], there are some which are by nature, others which come after” (2.1.3).

⁴³ This Armenian example has similarities with an argument mentioned in the fragments of an anonymous Greek commentary on the *Categories* (i.e. Archimedes Palimpsest), which relates to the difference between “animal” and “furniture”: the first one is said “with feet”, the other “without feet” (13.3-20). The term “feet” is am-

շու՛ն [i.e. κύων] [can refer] to the celestial dog [i.e. the constellation], the terrestrial dog or the aquatic dog [i.e. the otter or a fish]. The same also applies to other equivocal [terms]. [Second], examples of “plurality of names” are the terms “sword” and “saber”, which refer to one and the same thing, but are given different names. [Third], by “change of names”, Plato was once called Aristocles,⁴⁴ and other such examples. [Fourth], “according to nations”, because “human being” is the same for all, but the Greeks call him ἄνθρωπος and the Armenians մարդ.⁴⁵ Being elements of the same nature, they express a single nature, as Plato maintains, for example երկիր and γῆ or հուր and πῦρ.⁴⁶ It is then clear that name is by imposition and not by nature.

The majority of these arguments can be located in all Late Antique commentators on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* whose commentary has survived, namely Boethius, Ammonius and Stephanus.⁴⁷ In his exegesis of Plato’s *Cratylus*, Proclus also presents some of these arguments and links them to a more ancient source, the Greek atomist Democritus.⁴⁸

biguous: it can refer both to the limbs of an animal and to the parts of a piece of furniture, for example a couch. It is highly possible that these fragments come from the long commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* by Porphyry. (R. Chiaradonna – M. Rashed – D. Sedley, “A Rediscovered *Categories* Commentary”, in Sorabji [ed.], *Aristotle Re-Interpreted* [above, n. 34], p. 45).

⁴⁴ The Armenian text does not specify “Aristocles”, but “Aristotle”: “Aristotle was called Plato afterwards”. To make sense of this strange sentence, an Armenian scholiast has added in the margin: “To honor Plato after his death, they called Aristotle Plato, as they called Plato Socrates” (Topchyan, *Զառապա մեկնութեան* [above, n. 5], n. 256, p. 13). Following multiples ancient sources, including Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius and many Neoplatonic commentators such as Ammonius or Olympiodorus, and discarding the scholiast’s explanation as improbable (unless proven otherwise), I opted for “Aristocles”. The term “Aristotle” seems to be an old mistake: it is present in all the Armenian manuscripts used for the Armenian edition of the commentary.

⁴⁵ This specific passage can be seen as a proof that the anonymous commentator was indeed Armenian and that his commentary was originally written in Armenian (or perhaps translated by him from Greek into Armenian). It should however be noted that the Armenian translation of the *Ars Grammatica* by Dionysius Thrax contains numerous examples of Armenian words (of course absent from the original Greek text), probably inserted by the translator. A similar situation could thus have arisen with the anonymous commentary. I would like to thank Agnès Ouzounian for having pointed out this important fact to me.

⁴⁶ More precisely, երկիր and γῆ both mean “earth”, and հուր and πῦρ, “fire”. I take the noun տարեւր (στοιχεῖα [plural]) as the subject of նշանակէ (σημαίνει [singular]). This sentence, as many others, is an exemplification of the ancient Greek grammatical rule according to which a verb must be conjugated in the singular if its subject is a plural neutral name (i.e. Թձ Հ՞՞՞ տրջել). Such a rule does not exist in Ancient Armenian but is often present in Armenian translations from Greek.

⁴⁷ Boethius: linguistic differences, change of names and many names (*In De Int.*, pp. 55.7-56.14 Meiser). Ammonius: change of name, many names, prayers (*In De Int.*, pp. 37.28-38.26 Busse). Stephanus: change of names, many names, identity of names, linguistic differences and deafness by birth (*In De Int.*, pp. 9.27-10.3 Hayduck). We do not find the same arguments and examples in Al-Fārābī (Zimmerman, *Al-Fārābī* [above, n. 27], p. 16.19-20), Averroes (A. Benmakhlouf – S. Diebler, *Averroès: Commentaire moyen sur le De Interpretatione*, Vrin, Paris 2000, pp. 82-3) and Avicenna (A. Bäck, *Avicenna’s Commentary on Aristotle’s De Interpretatione*, Philosophia, Munich 2013, pp. 32-42). We however find the examples of “sword” and “saber” (many names or polyonymy) in Paul the Persian’s summary of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* (H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri Hermeneias* d’Aristote: Paul le Perse et la tradition d’Ammonius”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 3 (2013), p. 51).

⁴⁸ In order: identity of names, many names, change of names and deficiency of similar derivative terms (*In Crat.* §16). Against these arguments in favour of the conventionality of language, Proclus presents the answers of “some people” (τινες), possibly Syrianus (Duvick, *Proclus* [above, n. 3], n. 40, pp. 115-16.). We do not find these answers in the anonymous commentator nor in Boethius.

Even Alexander of Aphrodisias (or one of his students) cites all four arguments in passing as if they were known by everyone.⁴⁹ The first argument, which pertains to the identity of names (ὁμωνυμία), is present in the anonymous commentator, Stephanus, Proclus and Alexander. The anonymous commentator is however the only one who provides examples to illustrate it. One of these examples, which pertains to the different significations of the word “dog”, harks back to Aristotle himself (*Rhet.* 1401 a 13ff., *Soph. El.* 166 a 15-16) and could be found in ancient authors as diverse as Philo of Alexandria, Galen or Sextus Empiricus.⁵⁰ Strangely, Boethius and Ammonius were also familiar with this illustrative example but did not use it in that particular section of the *De Interpretatione*.⁵¹ The second argument, which pertains to πολυωνυμία, is also of common knowledge among commentators. The anonymous commentator, Boethius, Ammonius and Stephanus all provide a similar example to illustrate it: different terms are used in Greek (μάχαιρα, σπάθη, ξίφος, ἄορ), Latin (*gladius, ensis, mucro*) and Armenian (սուտր, փրսի) to describe one and the same object, namely a weapon with a sharp blade. This particular example was already known to Dionysius Thrax, who used it somewhere between the second and first century BC in his famous *Ars Grammatica* to illustrate what a “synonym” (συνώνυμος) is (1.36).⁵² As for the third and fourth arguments, they were already present in Plato’s *Cratylus* thus known from Antiquity.⁵³ The example used to explain the third argument – Plato was once called Aristocles – was particularly common in Late Antiquity. It was declined in many other forms: for instance, Stephanus also discusses Paris having his name changed for Alexander (*In De Int.*, p. 9.30-1 Hayduck) and Boethius, about Theophrastus being called Tyrtamus (*In De Int.*, p. 45.1-5 Meiser). The anonymous commentator ignores these other examples as the one about Plato is sufficient to explain his point. He however hints at the fact that he was aware of the existence of “other such examples”.

In presenting arguments defending the conventional aspect of names, the anonymous commentator was thus part of an already long exegetical tradition. However, he departs from all the other commentators in one major respect: he is the only one who highlights the

⁴⁹ “But if names are by nature, the letters in terms of which they are drawn up have to be by nature; for there is no other [cause] of the difference of [names] that differ between nations, applied to the same things, besides the combination of letters and syllables in a certain way. And identity of names [for different things], and plurality of names [for a single thing] and changes of name are also sufficient to establish this” (Alex. Aphrod., *Quaestio* 3.11, pp. 100.25-101.8 Bruns [Reimer, Berlin 1892, *Suppl. Arist.* 2.1]; transl. Sharples, pp. 66-7). The authenticity of Alexander’s Ἀπορίαι καὶ λύσεις has been questioned. However, *Quaestio* 3.11 is considered by Bruns “as a summary of Aristotelian doctrine” (R.W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: Quaestiones 2.16-3.15*, Bloomsbury, London 1994, n. 311, pp. 137-8).

⁵⁰ Philo, *De Plantatione*, 151; Galen., *De methodo medendi* X, 128.4; Sextus Empir., *Adv. Math.* XI, 29.

⁵¹ Amm., *In Cat.* p. 38.10-14 Busse and *In De Int.*, p. 241.7-11 Busse; Boethius, *In De Int.*, p. 356.10-18 Meiser. Dexippus, *In Cat.*, p. 19.23-30 Busse (Reimer, Berlin 1888, *CAG* IV.2), Simplicius (*In Cat.*, p. 24.12-3 Heiberg [Reimer, Berlin 1894, *CAG* VII]) and Paul the Persian (*Treatise of logic*, § 8.23-34 Hugonnard-Roche [cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Sur la lecture” (above, n. 47), n. 9, p. 51] were also familiar with this example.

⁵² Ammonius gives another example of polyonymy (i.e. many names): τὸ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ μέρος and τὸ βροτός (*In De Int.*, p. 38.9-10 Busse) all signify the same thing, i.e. “man”. The terms ἄνθρωπος and μέρος are discussed by Proclus in his commentary of Plato’s *Cratylus* (§16), possibly in connexion with Syrianus (see above, n. 48).

⁵³ Third argument: *Cratylus*, 384 D-E. The fourth argument can be deduced from *Cratylus*, 385 D-E and 389 D-390 A. See: C.W.A. Whitaker, *Aristotle’s De Interpretatione, Contradiction and Dialectic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 12-13.

underlying philosophical postulate attacked by these four arguments and to link it with a precise philosopher, with whom he disagrees. Indeed, the first argument rejects the natural character of language by pointing out that a unique name like “dog” can refer to such different objects as a constellation or a fish, thus expressing a multitude of objects. The second argument also defends a similar position but does so conversely: it contends that language cannot be natural as many words can be used to name one and the same object. The third and the fourth arguments also rest on a similar position: if names were natural, Aristocles would not have been attributed a second name and the concept of “human being” would not have received different nouns according to different nations. In short, these four arguments are all based on the philosophical postulate that names can only express one and the same nature, which they reject. Now, the anonymous commentator links this philosophical postulate to a specific philosopher: “being elements of the same nature, they express a single nature, as Plato maintains” (2.1.6). It is not entirely clear if the anonymous commentator has here a specific Platonic text in mind or if he is targeting the interpretation of another commentator. What is clear, however, is that he considers these four arguments as anti-Platonic in nature and employs them in a conscious dialectical fashion: he refutes a Platonic position, namely that names are natural, by presenting cases (i.e. homonymy, polyonymy, the changing of names and the existence of multiple national languages) in which the Platonic philosophical postulate – on which the naturalist position is based – is invalidated. Indeed, these four arguments serve to sabotage the philosophical postulate according to which names can only express one and the same nature and, consequently, to refute the naturalistic position. By explicitly linking this philosophical postulate to Plato, the anonymous commentator clearly exhibits his disagreement with him. It would not be the first nor the last time the anonymous commentator adopts an overtly anti-platonic position. In fact, his discussion of a specific passage of the fourth chapter, which again pertains to the conventional character of language, will confirm that his approach is different from any Neoplatonist commentators, be they early or late.

*On the conventionality of logos:*⁵⁴ a discussion of the fourth chapter of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*

When discussing the second chapter of the *De Interpretatione*, more precisely the sentence 16 a 26-8, Ammonius and Stephanus underlined an apparent opposition between Plato and Aristotle, while Boethius and the anonymous commentator remained silent. In their commentary on the fourth chapter of the *De Interpretatione*, it is now Boethius and the anonymous commentator who emphasize a contradiction between Plato and his famous student, while Ammonius and Stephanus keep silent. This contradiction, which pertains to the sentence 16 b 33-17 a 2,⁵⁵ is not mitigated by both commentators: contrary to Ammonius and Stephanus in chapter 2, they simply present the contradiction without trying to find a way to dissipate it. Boethius however distinguishes himself from the anonymous

⁵⁴ I intentionally use the transliteration of the Greek word λόγος. In the fourth chapter of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, the term is usually translated by “sentence” or “phrase”. However, some commentators also used it in the sense of “speech” (see: Charlton, *Stephanus* [above, n. 8], n. 63, p. 20) or even “language”. See: Whitaker, *Aristotle* (above, n. 53), n. 1, p. 71.

⁵⁵ ἔστι δὲ λόγος ἅπας μὲν σημαντικός, οὐχ ὡς ὄργανον δέ, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ εἴρηται κατὰ συνθήκην (“All logos [i.e. sentence or speech] is significant, not as a tool but, as it has been said, by convention”, transl. Ackrill, p. 45).

commentator in naming the specific Platonic dialogue in which he sees an opposition with Aristotle. Discussing the passage 16 b 33-17 a 2 in which, he insists, it was clearly established that *logos* (*oratio*) is by convention, he remarks: “But Plato in the *Cratylus* thinks it to be otherwise and says that a *logos* is a kind of instrument and tool for signifying the things which are naturally conceived in ideas (...). Aristotle denies this (...)” (*In De Int.*, p. 93.1-9 Meiser).⁵⁶ Like Ammonius and Stephanus, Boethius thus sees an opposition between Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* and Plato’s *Cratylus*.

Is Boethius right in claiming that Plato defends such a position in the *Cratylus*? As a matter of fact, he is not. There is no passage in the *Cratylus* in which Plato contends that *logos* signifies as a tool. There is however a related passage in which he tackles a similar question, but this passage pertains to the name (*ὄνομα*) and not to the *logos*: “a name then is also a kind of instrument” (*ὄργανον ἄρα τί ἐστι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα* [388 A 8]). The contradiction perceived by Boethius is thus apparent: it is not the same object that is affirmed by Plato and denied by Aristotle. A similar stance can also be observed in Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s *Cratylus* (§ 49).⁵⁷ As for the anonymous commentator, he avoids committing such an error by not identifying the passage in which Plato is in opposition with Aristotle. In fact, as we will see very shortly, it is highly probable that he has another Platonic dialogue in mind when drawing attention to a contradiction between Aristotle and Plato.

Even though Ammonius, Stephanus and the Anonymous of Tarán do not explicitly mention an opposition between Plato and Aristotle in regards to 16 b 33-17 a 2, they do hint at the fact that Aristotle sought to refute a specific naturalist argument, of which they curiously conceal the name of its author.⁵⁸ The argument, or syllogism, supposedly attacked by Aristotle develops as follows:

(Major premise) Every instrument of a natural capacity is itself natural (for instance, the eye is the *ὄργανον* of the vision)

(Minor premise) *Logos* is an instrument of the [natural] capacity of emitting sounds

(Conclusion) Therefore, *logos* is natural⁵⁹

Ammonius and Stephanus contend that Aristotle accepts the major premise but rejects the minor one.⁶⁰ The major premise is nowhere to be found in the *De Interpretatione*, but it

⁵⁶ “*Plato autem in eo libro, qui inscribitur Cratylus, aliter esse constituit eamque dicit supellectilem quandam atque instrumentum esse significandi res eas, quae naturaliter intellectibus concipiuntur, eorumque intellectuum vocabulis dispertiendorum. quod <si> omne instrumentum, quoniam naturalium rerum, secundum naturam est, ut videndi oculus, nomina quoque secundum naturam esse arbitratur. sed hoc Aristoteles negat (...)*”.

⁵⁷ The anonymous exceptor first reports the words of Aristotle in *De Int.*, 16 b 33-17 a 2, then remarks that Proclus has tried to contradict (*ἀντιλέγει*) him. In trying to refute Aristotle, Proclus only discusses names (*ὀνόματα*) and vocal sounds. No mention is made of *logoi*.

⁵⁸ The passages discussed in this paragraph are Amm., *In De Int.*, pp. 62.21-63.26 Busse, and Steph., *De Int.*, pp. 15.27-16.15 and 18.19-25 Hayduck. The Anonymous of Tarán attributes for his part the syllogism refuted by Aristotle to “some people” (*τινες*) (*In De Int.* 16.1-19).

⁵⁹ (1) ὁ λόγος (...) ὄργανόν ἐστι τῆς φωνητικῆς ἐν ἡμῖν δυνάμεως φύσει οὐσης; (2) πᾶν ὄργανον φυσικῆς δυνάμεως καὶ αὐτὸ φύσει (...); (3) ὁ λόγος ἄρα φύσει ἐστίν (...) (cfr. Amm., *In De Int.*, p. 62.22-28 Busse). For a similar syllogism, see: Steph., *In De Int.*, p. 15.29-30 Hayduck (with corruptions however) and Anonymous of Tarán, *In De Int.* 16.5-8.

⁶⁰ As for the Anonymous of Tarán, he claims rather that “we” (*ἡμεῖς*) must reject the second premise (*In De Int.* 16.8-10).

can be deduced from the fact that Aristotle seems to equate “instrument” with “natural”. As for the minor premise, it is true that a part of it is rejected by Aristotle when he states that “*logos* is significant not as a tool but by convention”. However, Aristotle never specifies of what object the *logos* is an instrument, thus never proposing that it is an instrument of the natural capacity of emitting sounds. The syllogism described by Ammonius, Stephanus and Anonymous of Tarán is not discussed by Boethius nor by the anonymous commentator.⁶¹ In the case of the latter, such an absence can be explained by a simple fact: the syllogism reported does not interest the anonymous commentator as it pertains to an interpretation that he does not share. Indeed, as the following passage clearly indicates, the anonymous commentator is not of the opinion that Aristotle rejected the thesis according to which *logos* is naturally in us because it is an instrument of a natural capacity of emitting sounds, but rather because it is an instrument of the rational faculty.

It seems to me that there is a conflict here with Plato. As Plato maintains, the *logos* is in us by nature because it is the instrument of the rational faculty (λογικὴ δύναμις), as the eye is the organ of sight and similarly for each of the organs of sensation. However, his words are false (ψευδῆ τὰ λεγόμενα) because he mixes up what is in actuality (ἐνεργεία) and what is in potentiality (δυνάμει). The rational faculty is not in us in actuality at the origin, but in potentiality. Thus, the *logos* is not in us by nature nor [the rational faculty] itself.⁶² For, [it is] senseless [to think that] what [the *logos* is] by nature an instrument of [is] not already a thing according to nature.⁶³ [Of course], it is possible that some instruments are according to nature and [others] according to chance. For example, the hands of human beings have been shaped according to nature for exchanging [things], but the act of counting or writing is not yet natural. Some [are also of the opinion] that [breath] continually preserves life in us by cooling down the inherent warmth (ἔμφυτος θερμότης) [of the body]. In this case, [these things] are natural, but as far as the *logos* is concerned, it is indeed useful [to us] but does come after [what is natural] (4.2.1).

In his commentary of *De Interpretatione* 16 b 33-17 a 2, the anonymous commentator distinctly emphasizes an opposition between Plato and Aristotle. This opposition concerns two specific theses: on the one hand, Plato argues that *logos* is an instrument, more precisely of the rational faculty (λογικὴ δύναμις); on the other hand, Aristotle contends that *logos* is not an instrument. Now, there is only one passage in the *Corpus Platonicum* in which Plato’s Socrates defends such a position. It is not found in the *Cratylus* but in the ninth book of the *Republic*. Indeed, in 582 C, Plato’s Socrates describes the *logos* as the instrument

⁶¹ Boethius however reports the following syllogism by Alexander, which refutes a part of the minor premise of the argument reported: every means (tools) of natural acts is natural (i.e. eyes/vision); *logos* is by convention (as the different national languages show); what is by convention is not by nature; therefore, a *logos* is not a tool (*In De Int.*, pp. 93.22-94.11 Meiser). For another syllogism (used in a dialectical way) also attributed to Alexander but absent from Boethius and the anonymous commentator, see: Amm., *In De Int.*, p. 39.16-17 Busse. On this last syllogism, see: R.B. Todd, “Alexander of Aphrodisias on *De Interpretatione* 16 a 26-29”, *Hermes* 104 (2), 1976, pp. 140-6.

⁶² Literally: “This is why the *logos* is not in us by nature, nor is that for which [it is] itself a natural instrument [i.e. the rational faculty]”.

⁶³ In other words, it would be ridiculous to assume that the tool (i.e. *logos*) of a capacity (i.e. rational faculty) that is not by nature would be itself by nature.

par excellence of the philosopher (λόγοι δὲ τούτου μάλιστα ὄργανον), namely as the tool that helps him think and judge (κρίνεσθαι). Plato's description of *logos* as an instrument is intimately linked with his threefold division of the soul as rational, appetitive, and spirited. When he presents *logoi* as instruments used in the process of reasoning (λογίζεσθαι), he clearly refers to the rational part of the soul, which he calls λογιστικόν (439 D-E). For Plato, thus, *logoi* are the instruments of the rational soul and not, as Ammonius and Stephanus proposed, of the simple capacity of emitting sounds. The anonymous commentator is thus right in attributing to Plato the position according to which *logos* is an instrument of the rational faculty. He is also original as he is the only commentator who makes such a connection. Even Boethius, with whom he shares many elements in common, does not associate Plato's position with this passage of the *Republic*.

Yet the originality of the anonymous commentator does not stop there. The manner in which he treats Plato's position is – to say the least – highly striking, especially in comparison to other commentators. Proclus, Ammonius and Stephanus were Platonists. That is, they considered themselves as heirs of Plato's philosophy, which they held in the highest esteem. In their opinion, Plato carried an indisputable precedence over Aristotle. The Neoplatonic teaching cursus clearly illustrates this aspect: Aristotle's philosophy was first taught as a propaedeutic to Plato's philosophy as it was judged less profound than the philosophy of the “divine” Plato. When these commentators encounter an opposition between Plato and Aristotle, they often had no difficulty choosing sides: Plato was the supreme authority. In his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*, Proclus' position towards Aristotle is often antagonistic: he gives precedence to Plato and defends him energetically against Aristotelian competing positions.⁶⁴ Ammonius and Stephanus, for their part, choose a more conciliatory position. They seek to harmonise Plato and Aristotle in order to resolve the differences. However, such a stance is not devoid of violence: in trying to conciliate Plato and Aristotle, they often disfigure Aristotelian philosophy to the point where it is barely recognizable. As for Boethius, even though he clearly states his desire to harmonize both philosophers (*In De Int.*, p. 80.1-9 Meiser),⁶⁵ in regard to the question of the conventionality of language, he opts to keep silent.⁶⁶ Now, the anonymous commentator not only highlights a contradiction between Plato and Aristotle, he also chooses to take Aristotle's side. Additionally, not only does he take Aristotle's side, but he also states what is unthinkable for a Neoplatonic commentator: Plato was wrong and Aristotle was right. Indeed, in the anonymous commentator's opinion, Plato is wrong in thinking that *logos* is in us by nature because it is the instrument of the rational faculty. Plato makes such an error because he mixes up what is in us *in actuality* and what is in us *in potentiality*. In other words, he considers *logos* as natural because he thinks that the rational faculty is in us in actuality. However, *logos* is not an innate capacity: it has to be developed, it

⁶⁴ On Proclus' main critics, see: van den Berg, “Smoothing” (above, n. 34), n. 6, p. 354.

⁶⁵ “*hic peractis non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam eosque non ut plerique dissentire in omnibus, sed in plerisque et his in philosophia maximis consentire demonstrarem. haec, si vita otiumque suppetit, cum multa operis huius utilitate nec non etiam labore contenderim, qua in re faveant oportet, quos nulla coquit invidia*”.

⁶⁶ On Boethius' “harmonising tendencies”, see: S. Ebbesen, “Boethius as an Aristotelian scholar”, in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles: Werk und Wirkung*, Vol. 2, De Gruyter, Berlin 1987, pp. 286-311.

is *in potentiality*. In explaining Plato's false belief, the anonymous commentator utilises the Aristotelian concepts of ἐνέργεια and δύναμις. He is thus rejecting a Platonic position with the aid of Aristotelian concepts. Such a behaviour, coupled with his previous stance in chapter 2, clearly suggests that the anonymous commentator was definitely not a Platonist and that his allegiance was closer to Aristotle's side. If we are correct in our assumption, then the anonymous Armenian commentary would represent a rare example of a non-Neoplatonic commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*.

Was the anonymous commentator a possible follower of Alexander of Aphrodisias? In fact, although his commentary differs from what we know about the one written by Alexander (Alexander's commentary seemed longer than the one of the anonymous commentator), it would not be too audacious to presume that the anonymous commentator was influenced by the famous Exegete of Aphrodisias. According to Boethius' testimony, Alexander of Aphrodisias used many arguments in order to demonstrate that *logos* is not a tool (*In De Int.*, pp. 93.8-94.30 Meiser). One of the main arguments divulged by Boethius relies on the Platonic thesis according to which every means to natural acts is natural (for instance, the eyes are the means to vision). Alexander demonstrates that *logos* cannot be a tool, thus natural, because it is composed of names and verbs which are conventional (as the differences in national languages show): a natural object simply cannot be composed of elements which are not also natural. This first argument is not explicitly found in the Armenian commentary, although the anonymous commentator does hint at the fact that *logos* and the capacity for which it is a tool must have the same nature.

Boethius also presents a second argument attributed to Alexander, this time with numerous illustrative examples. This second argument shares some elements in common with the anonymous commentator's exegesis. According to Alexander, human beings are naturally able to acquire crafts, sciences or knowledge. However, they do not possess such knowledge by nature: they acquire it by learning and teaching. In other words, despite having the natural capacity to acquire skills and crafts, human beings have to work hard in order to develop them. For instance, human beings have naturally the possibility to move but, in order to be able to jump or to dance (*saltare*) in an effective way, they have to train and practice. Alexander offers another example: a piece of bronze is natural but a bronze statue is not natural but the result of application and skill. Thus, bronze is a natural object but it only develops into a statue with the intervention of craftsmanship.

The anonymous commentator provides a similar argument, which rests on the natural capacities of any individual being and the development of skills and knowledge. Presenting the example of human hands, he stresses the fact that they are naturally shaped in order to give and take. They can also be used to write or count, but these activities require learning and practice: any human being has to learn first how to write or to count in order to use his hands to do so. The argument presented by the anonymous commentator is not only reminiscent of the argument attributed to Alexander by Boethius but also of an argument found in Alexander's *Quaestiones* (3.11), which claims that "we are by nature capable of receiving knowledge, but we do not possess [the branches of] knowledge by nature".⁶⁷ It differs from the argument presented by Ammonius, Stephanus and the Anonymous of Tarán, which rely rather on a distinction between "instrument" (ὄργανον) and "result" (ἀποτέλεσμα), which

⁶⁷ See above, n. 49.

is absent from the Armenian commentary.⁶⁸ Moreover, the anonymous commentator is the only one to formulate his argument in terms of a difference between “what is in actuality” (ἐνεργεία) and “what is in potentiality” (δυνάμει). It should not surprise one that Alexander himself proposes an argument that relies on the same notions. The fact that Boethius reports that Alexander uses the example of a “statue” in order to illustrate the fact that *logos* cannot be a tool points precisely in that direction. Indeed, as any reader of Aristotle’s *Physics* would remember, Aristotle himself used this example to explain the difference between ἐντελεχεία and δυνάμει (II, 1).

Conclusive remarks

The Armenian commentary has never been thoroughly studied due to many factors. Its linguistic complexity (i.e. Hellenizing Armenian), its technicality (i.e. Aristotelian logic) and its anonymity have undoubtedly contributed to its escaping the attention of scholars. However, as the comparative analyses of chapters two and four have shown, the way the anonymous commentator addresses the thorny issue of language’s conventionality supplies us with many clues regarding his provenance. It is highly unlikely that its author was a member of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. Contrary to Ammonius, Stephanus and the Anonymous of Tarán, he never employs artificial Neoplatonic distinctions to interpret Aristotle’s text or harmonise Aristotelian positions with Plato’s philosophy. For instance, on the question of the natural or conventional character of language, he maintains that vocal sounds are conventional without making a distinction between matter and form; on the question of the natural or conventional character of names, he does not endeavour to harmonise Plato and Aristotle by distinguishing several meanings to the expressions “by nature” and “by convention”. The anonymous commentator’s position towards Plato also renders it highly unlikely that he was a pupil of Proclus in Athens or influenced by the commentaries written by Porphyry or Boethius. Proclus was a Platonist and when discussing a contrasting position between Plato and Aristotle, he did not hesitate to take Plato’s side. Boethius was also a Platonist but, contrary to Proclus, he did not explicitly take Plato’s side on the thorny issue of language conventionality. In fact, Boethius had the rare quality, when interpreting Aristotle, to refrain from using non-Aristotelian interpretative tools. He also did not hesitate to use Alexander of Aphrodisias’ interpretations. That being said, Boethius remained a Platonist and it would have been very difficult for him to admit that Plato was wrong or take Aristotle’s side. For instance, even though it is highly possible that Boethius was a partisan of conventionalism,⁶⁹ he never explicitly criticises Plato’s nor other Neoplatonic commentators’ naturalist positions. The results of the comparative analysis thus point in the direction of the anonymous commentator not being a Platonist. Given that he takes Aristotle’s side and uses Aristotelian concepts to refute Plato, the anonymous

⁶⁸ See: Amm., *In De Int.*, p. 63.7-13 Busse, Steph., *In De Int.*, p. 16.2-3 Hayduck and the Anon. of Tarán, *In De Int.* 16.10-11. However, it should be noted that we find a similar discussion in Ammonius, but this discussion relates to the second chapter of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*. According to Todd, “Alexander” (above, n. 61), it is highly possible that Ammonius reports here Alexander of Aphrodisias’ exegesis.

⁶⁹ As noted by S. Ebbesen, Boethius “repeatedly stresses that each word has its meaning thanks to a human decision and not by nature (i.e. *In Int.* 2 23; 54-6; 92-4; *Intr. Syll. Cat.* 763A; *Syll. Cat.* 795A; *Divis.* 886C)” (Ebbesen, “Boethius” [above, n. 66], p. 289).

commentator was probably linked with the Peripatetics – or had access to sources linked with them – or perhaps even a pupil of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Furthermore, Alexander is the only ancient scholar that the anonymous commentator cites by name, suggesting a direct influence or a possible filiation.⁷⁰ In its next step, the research herein started will aim at comparing the anonymous commentator's exegesis with the one attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias. It is only when such a study is done that we will be able to determine if the Armenian anonymous commentary is indeed a rare example of a work written by a follower of Alexander.

⁷⁰ The anonymous commentator cites Alexander of Aphrodisias while discussing the passage 20 b 12-30. The fact that he seldom discusses explicitly the position of other commentators indicates that the commentary was probably written for a public unfamiliar with Aristotelian logic (i.e., for beginner students). Also, the reference to Alexander indicates that the commentary could not have been written before the third century. Finally, it should be noted that the anonymous Armenian commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, which was transmitted together with the Armenian translation of the *Categories*, also cites Alexander by name (14.25 and 72.14). Again, Alexander is the only exegete cited by the anonymous author of the commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* (this commentary differs from the one attributed to David). It is not known if the author of the commentary on the *De Interpretatione* and the one on the *Categories* are the same, but it is highly probable.

