

G. Nagy, When self-praise connects the speaker to the universe: A diachronic view of the word εὔχομαι in its Homeric contexts.

In translating Homeric Greek, speakers of English need to translate εὔχομαι as 'pray' or 'vow' in some contexts and as 'boast' in other contexts. Meanwhile there is an attestation of the third-person εὔχεται in a Linear B tablet from Pylos, e-u-ke-to (pronounced eukhetoi), but Mycenologists interpret the word in that context to mean not 'pray' or 'vow' or 'boast' but, instead, 'juridically declare'. And, exceptionally, this same interpretation applies once - only once - in Homeric diction. The unique context for such a meaning is a description of a scene of litigation in the ephrasis of the Shield of Achilles in Iliad XVIII, where an unnamed defendant makes a juridical declaration. So, how to reconcile the meanings 'pray' and 'vow' and 'juridically declare'? The basic solution has been formulated in a book by Leonard Muellner (1976), and I have reinforced his formulation in my own work. But how to reconcile, further, these meanings with that other meaning, translated as 'boast'? I will argue that the 'boasting' of Homeric personae is valued as cosmically true in Homeric poetry. That is to say, such 'boasting' can be explained as first-person self-praise that is validated by the third-person narrative of Homeric poetry, which claims for itself the inherent power to declare the absolute truth to its hearers.