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The priming act in Homeric epic

Abstract: Homeric epic today takes the form of a written text, but that text reflects a performance; it represents a discourse created in an exchange between performer and audience.¹ The success of this epic exchange depends on the efficient production and reception of a complex narrative composed in rich language. It is also predicated on the ability of the performer and the audience to navigate a large storyworld populated with numerous characters. This paper explores the use of fixed linguistic constructions in narrative that facilitate the cognitive process of moving from character to character and from scene to scene in Homeric epic.

The corpus of Homeric epic lends itself particularly well to a study of this phenomenon for two reasons. First, ancient Greek linguistically encodes the articulation of discourse into small steps more clearly than most western languages. Second, the Homeric corpus was composed and received in performance. The cognitive pressure involved in this process has made the discourse strongly formulaic, on a metrical, discursive, and structural level. I first present an analysis of so-called left-dislocation in Homeric Greek from a discourse perspective, with specific attention to short discourse units consisting only of a pronoun/name + particle, which I dub “priming acts.” The second part of the paper analyzes two recurrent complex constructions containing priming acts that serve specific functions of (re)establishing contextual frames or accommodating a change of viewpoint. The complex constructions demonstrate the usefulness of priming acts in navigating a vast story world.

1 Discourse acts in Homeric epic

Narrative is central in human experience and interaction, since it offers an efficient way to understand, predict, evaluate, and remember complex events.²

¹ For a relatively recent overview of the scholarship on the “orality” of the Homeric corpus, looking both back and forward, see issue 18.1 of *Oral Tradition* (2003), 52–86; cf. Robert Fowler, “The Homeric Question”. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. Cambridge 2004, 220–232 for a concise discussion of the Homeric question with extensive literature. See for the multimodality of epic performance Bonifazi (this volume).

² Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind*. Oxford 1996, 20. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York 2007 illustrates how central the narrative is in

Stories, as vehicles of tradition shaped by oral transmission, may therefore provide unique insights into the workings of the mind. In his 2002 book, Foley characterizes the language of oral epic as “language, only more so.”³ The Homeric performer composed his verses on the spot, always spinning new stories with a skill born of the experience of generations of performers. The nature of the performance, a potentially endless production of verses, meant that the cognitive pressure on both performer and audience was higher than in conversation. Thus: language, only more so. We expect to see the normal cognitive processes of language production reflected in the oral narratives, only more so.⁴

To accommodate the cognitive pressure on the performer, the traditional epic is made up of themes, stock scenes with a more or less fixed sequence of events.⁵ These in turn are constructed with metrical verses that accommodate small units⁶ that do not necessarily coincide with syntactic units, but rather with “intonation units” (and cognates) in contemporary linguistics.⁷ These intonation units are not just random subdivisions of discourse, but they actually correlate with the smallest steps in discourse; the unit was thus dubbed “discourse act” by Hannay and Kroon, among others.⁸ The ancient Greek corpus is especially relevant for research into how discourse is divided in small communicative steps, because

human’s understanding and prediction of the world, but according to Taleb this is to our own detriment.

³ John Miles Foley, *How to ‘Read’ an ‘Oral’ Poem*. Chicago, IL 2002, 127–128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 128 “oral poetry is more densely coded than everyday language, in order to promote economical exchange.” [my emphasis]

⁵ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA 2002, 2nd edition, 68–98.

⁶ A large number of these acts are recurrent, repeated in the same form or different forms of the same structure, and are called formulae. Application of the term “formula” is no longer uniform, but for Homer it goes back to the work of Milman Parry, collected in Adam Parry (ed.), *The Making of Homeric Verse. The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Oxford 1971. Note, moreover, that formulae do not necessarily overlap with discourse acts.

⁷ Cf. M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*. London 1976; Gilian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge 1983; Wallace L. Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing*. Chicago, IL 1994; for Homer, see especially Egbert J. Bakker, *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse*. Ithaca, NY and London 1997.

⁸ Cf. John McHardy Sinclair and R. Malcolm Coulthard, *Towards an Analysis of Discourse: The English Used by Teachers and Pupils*. London 1975; Eddy Roulet, “Échanges, interventions et actes de langage dans la structure de la conversation”. *Études de linguistique appliquée* 44 (1981): 7–39; Caroline H. Kroon, *Discourse Particles in Latin*, Amsterdam 1995; Mike Hannay and Caroline H. Kroon, “Acts and the Relationship Between Discourse and Grammar”. *Functions of Language* 12 (2005): 87–124; Kees Hengeveld and J. Lachlan Mackenzie, *Functional Discourse Grammar. A Typology-Based Theory of Language Structure*. Oxford 2008.

Greek word order roughly follows Wackernagel's law,⁹ which posits that a group of words, including a range of particles,¹⁰ tend to occur in the second position of a clause. Eduard Fränkel's adaptation of the law was that these words do not necessarily occur in the second position of a clause, but of what he called a *Kolon*, a part of the sentence that may coincide with a syntactical clause or a shorter phrase; his description of the *Kolon* can be linked quite happily to the contemporary term discourse act.¹¹

The group of boundary markers identified by Wackernagel is one of the linguistic cues that I use to establish discourse act boundaries in Homeric discourse. Functionally, I define discourse acts as verbalizations of a single focus of consciousness,¹² and in form they can vary greatly in length and content.¹³ I hypothesize that the emergent discourse division in the Homeric text represents

9 Jacob Wackernagel, "Über ein Gesetz der indogermanischen Wortstellung". *Indogermanische Forschungen* 1 (1892): 333–436; David Michael Goldstein, *Wackernagel's Law in Fifth-Century Greek*, doctoral thesis, UC Berkeley 2010, 9 offers a recent discussion.

10 ἄρα (ára), γάρ (gár), δέ (dé), δή (dē), μάν (mán), μέν (mén), μήν (mén), οὖν (oûn), ὃν (ôn).

11 Eduard Fraenkel, "Kolon und Satz II. Beobachtungen zur Gliederung des antiken Satzes". In: *Nachrichten der Göttinger Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse*, 1933, 319–354. The term *Kolon*, or colon, was originally (and still often is) used to denote metrical units, which is reflected in the idea of colometry, for example. See Frank Scheppers, *The Colon Hypothesis. Word order, discourse segmentation and discourse coherence in Ancient Greek*. Brussels 2011 for the most recent work on the colon as a subdivision of Greek prose, and e.g. Bruno Gentili and Liana Lomiento, *Metrica e ritmica: storia delle forme poetiche nella Grecia antica*. Milan 2003 for more on the metrical colon. Recent works that draw on Fraenkel are Helma Dik, *Word Order in Ancient Greek: a Pragmatic Account of Word Order Variation in Herodotus*. Amsterdam 1995 and *Word Order in Greek Tragic Dialogue*. Oxford 2007; Egbert J. Bakker, *Linguistics and Formulas in Homer: scalarity and the description of the particle "per"*. Amsterdam 1988 and *Poetry in Speech*; Goldstein, *Wackernagel's Law*; Nicolas Bertrand, *L'ordre des mots chez Homère: Structure informationnelle, localisation et progression du récit*. Unpublished thesis, Université de Paris-Sorbonne 2010; Scheppers, *The Colon Hypothesis*.

12 I take the definition from Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time*, 63, who applies it to intonation units: "...an intonation unit verbalizes the speaker's focus of consciousness at that moment."

13 This flexibility in form and content is paralleled fully in the intonation units Chafe finds in his *Pear Stories*: Wallace L. Chafe, *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*. Norwood, NJ 1980. For Homer, I posit that discourse acts are in principle never longer than one hexameter verse, and generally shorter. Verse end commonly coincides with discourse act boundary, and in those cases where it does not, the discourse act that carries over to the next verse never reaches as far back as verse beginning. Even in those cases, however, verse end may still have been noticeable; cf. Frederick Turner and Ernst Pöppel, "The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, the Brain, and Time". *Poetry* 142 (1983): 286 "[t]he LINE is preceded and followed by a distinct pause (...), which (...) divides the verse into clearly identifiable pieces" [capitals original].

the reality of performance: discourse act boundaries will have been accompanied by a pause or a discontinuity of intonation contour.¹⁴

2 Priming acts

Among the many forms that discourse acts can take, there is one kind that is often ignored or regarded as problematic. Consider the following example from the *Iliad*:

(1) *Iliad* 15.390–392

Πάτροκλος δ' |¹⁵ εἶος μὲν Ἀχαιοί τε Τρῶές τε
τείχεος ἀμφεμάχοντο | θοάων ἔκτοθι νηῶν, |
τόφρ' ὃ γ' | ἐνὶ κλισίῃ ἀγαπήνορος Εὐρυπύλοιο |

And Patroclus, | as long as the Achaeans and Trojans
were fighting around the wall, | far from the ships, |
all the while HE, | in the tent of pleasant Eurypylus, |

In line 390, we find a referent, activated with a name: Patroclus, followed by the particle δέ (dé). After this solitary name in the nominative follows a new discourse act, as is marked by the particle μὲν (mén), which is restricted to second position in the act. Syntactically, the nominative Patroclus is not the subject of a main verb, since in line 392 a new nominative is introduced: ὃ (hó), he, which will become the subject of the main clause to follow in line 393. With few exceptions¹⁶ independent nominatives like this have been called "pendant nominatives,"

14 Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, 101 argues that second-position words (also called postpositives) mark intonational boundaries, but he does not apply this criterium consistently (see the examples on pages 97 and 110). See Andrew M. Devine and Laurence D. Stephens, *The Prosody of Greek Speech*. New York, NY 1994 for an attempt at establishing how ancient Greek was rendered prosodically, and especially chapter 9 (409–455) for a discussion of what they call major-phrase boundaries.

15 The bars here and in all following examples mark discourse act boundaries, established because of the presence of boundary markers (as μὲν here) or because of the independence of a phrase or clause (θοάων ἔκτοθι νηῶν and ἐνὶ κλισίῃ ἀγαπήνορος Εὐρυπύλοιο are adverbial phrases, for example).

16 See Simon R. Slings, "Written and Spoken Language: an exercise in the pragmatics of the Greek sentence". *Classical Philology* 87 (1992): 95–109 on information status; Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, calls them "frames"; Bertrand, *L'ordre des mots*, proposes a pragmatic (in the narrow sense of Functional Grammar) approach.

while the (pro)noun is called “proleptic”¹⁷ if the referent is in another case than the nominative. This view has persisted up to present day, as illustrated by De Jong’s comment on a similar instance: “[οἱ δ’ is] a pendant nominative (or frame) (...). This is a fairly common phenomenon in the Homeric epics (...), a clear manifestation of their oral syntax.”¹⁸

Constructions of this nature would be treated under the header “left-dislocation” in contemporary linguistics.¹⁹ In such constructions, the subject of a proposition is presented as a separate intonation unit, followed by a proposition with the subject repeated or changed. Chafe observed the same phenomenon in his analysis of oral narrative: “It is not unusual for an intonation unit to verbalize little or nothing more than a referent,” and he calls the resulting short intonation units “isolated referents.”²⁰

17 E.g. Pierre Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique II: Syntaxe*. Paris 1963; Cornelis J. Ruijgh “La place des enclitiques dans l’ordre des mots chez Homère d’après la loi de Wackernagel”. In: Heiner Eichner and Helmut Rix (eds.), *Sprachwissenschaft und Philologie: Jacob Wackernagel und die Indogermanistik heute*. Wiesbaden 1990, 213–233; Irene J.F. de Jong, *Homerus: Iliad book XXII*. Cambridge 2012.

18 De Jong, *Iliad book XXII*, 122 on *Iliad* 22.248–9: οἱ δ’ ὅτε δὴ σχεδὸν ἦσαν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισιν ἰόντες / τὸν πρότερος προσέειπε μέγας κορυθαῖολος Ἴκτωρ. Compare Ivo Hajnal, “e-ke-ge oder e-ke?—Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit in den mykenischen Palastarchiven”. In: Thomas Krisch, Thomas Lindner, and Ulrich Müller (eds.), *Analecta Homini Universalis Dicata. Arbeiten zur Indogermanistik, Linguistik, Philologie, Politik, Musik und Dichtung. Festschrift für Oswald Panagl zum 65. Geburtstag*. Stuttgart 2004, 245, who finds in similar constructions in Linear B “...Spuren mündlicher Syntax.”

19 The term goes back to Henk van Riemsdijk and Frans Zwarts, “Left dislocation in Dutch and the status of copying rules”. In: Elena Anagnostopoulou et al. (eds.), *Materials on Left Dislocation*. Amsterdam 1997 [1974], 13–31; more recent work in Ronald Geluykens, *From discourse process to grammatical construction: on left-dislocation in English*. Amsterdam 1992; and William Salmon, “Double Subjects and Verbal Demonstrations”. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42 (2010): 3431–3443; for a critique of the term see Elinor Ochs Keenan and Bambi Schieffelin, “A Reconsideration of Left Dislocation in Discourse”. In: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society 1976, 240–257 and more recently Simona Pekarek Doehler, “Emergent Grammar for All Practical Purposes: The on-Line Formatting of Dislocated Constructions in French Conversation”. In: Stefan Pfänder and Peter Auer (eds.), *Constructions: Emerging and Emergent*. Berlin and New York 2011, 46–88, with extensive bibliography.

20 Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time*, 67, and on 68: “Typically, such isolated referents (expressed as so-called free NPs) are subsequently included as participants in events and states. But intonation units like these show that it is quite possible for speakers to focus on a referent alone.” Chafe (*ibid.*, 108–119) also argues that each intonation unit can bring no more than one new idea (the one-new-idea constraint), so if there is a lot of cognitive processing involved in retrieving a referent, it makes sense that an intonation unit consists of no more than an isolated referent.

Chafe’s work forms an important source of inspiration for Bakker’s reading of Homer as a string of short intonation units. Bakker calls Πάτροκλος δέ in (1) a “framing unit,” which establishes the referents of the noun or pronoun as a “frame” for the upcoming discourse, “the demarcation of a frame limiting one’s field of vision for the next moments or speech units, the area within which addition of detail can meaningfully take place.” This construction is a manifestation of “the general movement of Homeric discourse (...) from the global to the specific, and from the framing to the framed.”²¹

What all these treatments of short referential discourse acts or intonation units have in common is that they describe them as forward-looking. It is a pendant nominative “waiting” for its verb, an isolated referent who will be in focus in the following, a unit dislocated to the left of (i.e. before) its host construction, or units “serving as frames for what lies ahead.”²² This tendency would appear to be a result of our bird’s-eye view of text, looking at discourse as a finished construct; we can identify different components and decide what lies in the center and what lies in the periphery of these components. However, in practice we receive discourses linearly, reading from left to right, or hearing it from beginning to end as in the case of the Homeric epics. When we are presented with a discourse act, it will add to our knowledge, trigger inferences about the upcoming discourse, but it will also have an effect *in situ*, and it is the latter element that I focus on. Irrespective of what follows, the cognitive processing involved in this narrative step justifies the devotion of an entire discourse act to no more than naming a character.²³ Such acts prime a character, and because of how the participants in a narrative are organized in our minds they also prime the time and place that the character is associated with—in the case of (1) the Greek camp—and it is because of this double potential that I call them priming acts. Semantically, the constituents do nothing more than retrieve or establish a referent, but the construction reveals some of the efficiency of the human mind in keeping track of a long narrative taking place in a complex storyworld.

21 Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, 86–111, both quotes from page 89. Note that De Jong refers to Bakker’s sense of frame in her commentary (De Jong, *Iliad book XXII*, 122).

22 Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, 110. Although it comes from a different approach, the term “anticipation” used by Matthew Clark, *Out of Line. Homeric Composition Beyond the Hexameter*. Lanham, MD 1997 for constructions like αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη at verse end might be added to this list, and compare Mark W. Edwards, *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm: Listening to Greek and Latin Poetry*. Princeton, NJ 2002, 44 on αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς: “...our attention is directed toward (i.e. the poet zooms in on) a particular individual upon whom will center the action to come.”

23 About similar instances, Bakker says (*Poetry in Speech*, 110): “In both cases a separate unit is devoted to the narrative act of returning to Odysseus and Achilles, reflecting the cognitive effort that is involved in the reactivation.”

3 Moving the mind's eye

In the quote above, Bakker describes the function of his “frames” in terms of the “field of vision.” The manipulation of viewpoint in narrative discourse is in fact an important instrument in the movement through the narrative space, a topic that has attracted considerable attention in recent decades.²⁴ I understand viewpoint in the sense of Talmy, as a real viewpoint experienced by the mind's eye:

[I]n a narrative, we can apply all our usual conceptions of spatial relations to understanding the location and motion of a viewpoint, the angle and direction of our sighting from that viewpoint to an entity to which we are attending, and the size and shape of this attentional projection.²⁵

In his 2002 *Story Logic*, Herman says: “framing representations of the where in a story is a major dimension of narrative processing. At stake is much more than simply filtering out descriptive detail to form interpretations of ‘core’ narrative elements.”²⁶

Priming acts form part of these “framing representations of the where in the story,” guiding speaker and hearer through abstract, often relative spaces in the storyworld. This framing is established and navigated much more through linguistic form than through propositional content, which correlates with the fact that explicit reference to space is so rare in Homeric oral epic.²⁷ For a narrative

²⁴ David Herman, *Story Logic. Problems and possibilities of narrative*. Lincoln 2002, 263–285 gives an overview of literature on space in narratology. For Homer, the most recent works are Alex C. Purves, *Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative*. Cambridge 2010; Jenny Strauss Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theater: Space, vision, and memory in the Iliad*. Cambridge 2011; Christos Tsagalis *From Listeners to Viewers: Space in the Iliad*. Washington, DC 2011; Irene J.F. de Jong (ed.), *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*. Leiden 2012.

²⁵ Leonard Talmy, “A Cognitive Framework for Narrative Structure”. In: Leonard Talmy, *Toward a Cognitive Semantics 2*. Cambridge, MA 2000, 437.

²⁶ Herman, *Story Logic*, 270; note that *Space in Ancient Greek Literature* volume references neither Tsagalis, *From Listeners to Viewers*, nor Barbara Dancygier, *The Language of Stories: A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge 2012, Catherine Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension. A Discourse Perspective*. Oxford 1997, or Herman, *Story Logic*, in the bibliography, yet in the introduction De Jong (1) speaks of “the relative neglect of space in narratological theory.”

²⁷ De Jong (ed.), *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*, 22, with note 1; see also Theodore Murdock Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery: Homer, Virgil, and the Medieval Legacy*. Ithaca, NY 1976; Irene J.F. de Jong, René Nünlist, and Angus M. Bowie (eds.), *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*. Leiden 2004; but see Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theatre*, who shows convincingly that the (absolute) geography of the *Iliad* makes sense, despite claims to the contrary by other critics. The relevance of this geography to performer and audience is doubtful, however, see Marie-Laure Ryan, “Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Narrative Space”. In: David Herman (ed.),

action to take place we must presuppose a place, and for a longer narrative like the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* to happen we must presuppose a world, a storyworld, and the strength of this presupposition allows the author or performer to construct, adapt, and refer to it at will. The storyworld is encoded explicitly only when the narrator or performer needs it,²⁸ but the (implicit) spatial dimension of the narrative constantly determines its linguistic realization. It influences lexical choices (e.g. “coming” versus “going”) and syntax (e.g. active versus passive constructions), but it is also reflected in discourse progression. Priming acts, short discourse acts devoted to the activation of a referent, accommodate the journey through the visual representation of the narrative, establishing a path through the storyworld.²⁹ In terms of viewpoint, priming acts provide focal points around which the mind's eye navigates the epic world,³⁰ moving away from characters or toward them, and establishing them as anchors for their surroundings. One may

Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences. Stanford, CA 2003, 283 “...people read for the plot and not for the map, unless they are literary cartographers. We construct mental models of narrative space only as far as we find a cognitive advantage in this activity—only as far as is needed to achieve immersion in the textual world.” [my emphasis]

²⁸ This is the approach taken in De Jong (ed.), *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*: all contributions consider references to space or items-in-space first and foremost as narrative functions.

²⁹ This reflects the hodological (as opposed to cartographic) view of narrative, on which see e.g. Gabriel Zoran, “Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative”. *Poetics Today* 5.2 (1984): 309–335; Barbara Landau and Ray Jackendoff, “‘What’ and ‘Where’ in Spatial Language and Cognition”. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16 (1993): 217–265, Herman, *Story Logic*, and Ryan, “Cognitive Maps”; applied to classics by Anna Bonifazi, “Memory and Visualization in Homeric Discourse Markers”. In: E. Anne Mackay (ed.), *Orality, Literacy, Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman World*. Leiden 2008, 35–64; Anna Bonifazi, *Homer's Versicolored Fabric. The Evocative Power of Ancient Greek Epic Word-Making*. Washington, DC 2012; Elizabeth Minchin, “Spatial Memory and the Composition of the *Iliad*”. In: Anne Mackay (ed.), *Orality, Literacy, Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman World*. Leiden 2008, 9–34; Purves, *Space and Time*; Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theatre*. Consider also Christopher Collins, *The Poetics of the Mind's Eye: Literature and the Psychology of Imagination*. Philadelphia, PA 1991, 98 “the consecutiveness of speech accords with the consecutiveness of visual perception.”

³⁰ For narrative as a visual experience, cf. Monika Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*. London 1996; Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension*; Herman, *Story Logic*; Barbara Dancygier and Eve Sweetser (eds.), *Viewpoint in Language*. Cambridge 2012. For Homeric narrative, see Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, 43; Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, MA 1963, 188 “[epic] units of meaning are highly visualized in order that vision may lead on to vision”; David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes*. New York, NY 1995, 59 “oral traditions appear to be remarkably spatial”; Minchin, “Spatial Memory”, 10 “the narrative of oral epic has a very real spatial dimension”; Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theatre*, 110 “the poet sees his story, and his narrative translates what he sees into words that in turn evoke a vision of the events for his audience.”

compare Landau and Jackendoff's description of space in narrative as regions occupied by landmarks (reference objects).³¹

4 The Homeric priming act

The most versatile Homeric priming acts take the form of noun phrase in the nominative + δέ (see example 1) or αὐτάρ/ἀτάρ + NP in the nominative.³² The latter generally occurs at verse end, not infrequently just before direct speech,³³ but there are also cases where a boundary marker in the following discourse act shows intonational division, as in (2):³⁴

- (2) *Odyssey* 17.64–67
 τὸν δ' ἄρα πάντες λαοὶ ἐπερχόμενον θεῖντο. |
 ἀμφὶ δέ μιν μνηστῆρες ἀγῆνορες ἡγερέθοντο |
 ἔσθλ' ἀγορεύοντες, | κακὰ δὲ φρεσὶ βυρσοδόμενον. |
 αὐτάρ ὁ | τῶν μὲν ἔπειτα ἀλεύατο πολὺν ὄμιλον, |

And him [Telemachus], then, all the men admired as he came in. |
 And around him the proud suitors pressed together |
 saying good things | and pondering bad things in their minds. |
 But he | he then avoided their great multitude |

In (2) Telemachus is the one referred to by the combination of αὐτάρ + pronoun, even though he must be regarded as completely accessible in this passage. The narrator has just described how Penelope's suitors fuss about him, so there is

³¹ Landau and Jackendoff, "What and 'Where'", 223.

³² I have limited my analysis of the construction to NPs in the nominative that refer to a character. The examples of priming acts with αὐτάρ/ἀτάρ followed by a boundary marker or independent construction are: *Iliad* 5.29, 5.327, 5.849, 7.383, 10.488, 11.732, 15.630, 16.220, 19.15, 20.423, 20.484, 21.71, 21.205, 21.550, 23.1, 23.110, 23.798, 24.244; *Odyssey* 1.57, 6.2, 8.83, 9.431, 10.261, 14.42, 14.245, 14.480, 16.454, 17.67, 17.360, 18.66, 18.69, 19.209, 21.404, 22.116, 24.309, 24.367, 24.392. αὐτάρ followed only by verse end: *Iliad* 1.127, 1.348, 1.430, 5.308, 5.844, 8.268, 9.628, 10.154, 11.321, 11.326, 11.341, 11.489, 11.664, 11.759, 11.762, 12.78, 13.164, 15.405, 16.124, 16.728, 17.266, 18.148, 18.231, 18.314, 19.83, 19.188, 19.268, 19.351, 20.75, 20.283, 20.441, 21.520, 21.538, 22.3, 23.128, 23.257, 24.3; *Odyssey* 2.182, 5.370, 7.81, 8.40, 8.367, 8.521, 13.28, 13.367, 14.30, 14.171, 16.119, 16.177, 18.100, 18.394, 19.388, 19.479, 22.292, 22.493, 23.67, 23.181, 24.220. ἀτάρ followed only by verse end: *Iliad* 3.268, 11.153, 11.744, 17.580, 18.223; *Odyssey* 18.99.

³³ Priming acts regularly occur near the beginning of direct speech, which is no doubt connected to the importance of establishing the source of direct speech in an epic performed by a single voice.

³⁴ See Bakker, *Poetry in Speech*, 101.

little cognitive action involved in focusing on Telemachus. Still, the priming act must have a function beyond simply establishing the subject of the upcoming sentence, since the switch of subject could have been accomplished with simply a third-person singular verb form. Here, the priming act is not used to redirect attention to a new referent, but to change the viewpoint within the scene. The combination of the discourse marker αὐτάρ plus the nominative (after three accusatives: τόν, ἐρχόμενον, μιν) shifts the viewpoint from outside, regarding the scene from an external viewpoint, to looking over Telemachus' shoulder, or even through his eyes, as he ignores the suitors.³⁵ Regardless of its exact form, the priming act always has as its function the reorientation of the cognitive viewpoint, a movement of the mind's eye, be it toward a new character and/or narrative space as in (1), or a change of viewpoint within a narrative space as in (2).³⁶

Priming acts are a verbally economical way of redirecting attention, since they transport the narrative to a new place with only the mention of a character rather than "Meanwhile on the Olympus..." In her 1997 book, Emmott has done crucial work to illuminate the cognitive workings of such narrative transitions. She speaks of a narrative world containing "contextual frames,"³⁷ places in the storyworld that contain certain characters, who are "bound" to that place until they leave it.³⁸ As long as the current narrative takes place within that frame (A), the referents "bound" to it remain active. When the performer activates another contextual frame (B), the characters bound to frame (A) become inaccessible, but they remain bound to frame (A), and are immediately accessible if frame (A) is reactivated. For example, when in book 16 of the *Iliad* the Homeric performer tells of the battle between Sarpedon and Patroclus, then shifts to the Olympus where

³⁵ Bonifazi, *Homer's Versicolored Fabric*, 218–243 argues for αὐτάρ that rather than a marker of adversativity on a propositional level (to be translated as "but") it seems to work on the level of the presentation of narrative, adjusting the viewpoint by switching to a new referent or zooming in on one of a group. On page 222 she speaks of "the visual and presentational function of αὐτάρ."

³⁶ For the function of αὐτάρ in viewpoint switches, consider also *Odyssey* 17.254–255: ὡς εἰπὼν τοὺς μὲν λίπεν αὐτόθι ἦκα κίοντας, / αὐτάρ ὁ βῆ. . . he left them, αὐτάρ he went.

³⁷ Emmott's contextual frames are an application of the idea of [semantic] frames—interconnected semantic networks, on which see Charles J. Fillmore, "The need for a frame semantics within linguistics". In: Hans Karlgrén (ed.), *Statistical Methods in Linguistics* 12 (1976): 5–29—to characters in narrative discourse.

³⁸ Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension*, 121–122. Emmott's point can be linked directly to the observation by the psychologists Eugene Winograd and Vaughan E. Church, "Role of Spatial Location in Learning Face-Name Associations". *Memory and Cognition* 16.1 (1988): 6–7 (referred to by Minchin, *Spatial Memory*, 10), who claim that spatial information can cue the recall of associated material.

Zeus decides the fate of his son Sarpedon, the frame containing Patroclus and Sarpedon fighting remains intact, and available for reference after the scene on the Olympus. In fact, the transition back to the battlefield is accomplished by a priming act (16.642 οἱ δ' | And they [sc. Sarpedon and Patroclus], see example 4 below). Once characters are bound to a location, activating that character gives both performer and audience access to the entire contextual frame.

5 Analysis I: The character as a guide

The epic heroes are central in Homeric narrative, and their movements or perceptions guide us through the storyworld.³⁹ Even if it is not the physical movement of a character that leads the audience to a new scene or viewpoint, the act of activating them may be just as effective. This makes priming acts versatile tools in the navigation of the storyworld, which led to their inclusion in a number of specialized constructions in the Homeric epics. Homeric language is strongly formulaic, full of constantly recurring semantic and structural packages.⁴⁰ Little groups of words have come to function as hyperlinks to whole bodies of knowledge, so that an epithet of a hero can invoke a whole narrative on its own.⁴¹ A closer inspection of priming acts yields another kind of formulaicness, where a recurrent group of words does not invoke a body of meaning, but serves to accommodate a specific cognitive action. Not only the content of the epic storyworld but even the navigation through it has been formalized in Homeric language.⁴²

³⁹ Scott Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator*. Nashville, TN 1990, 110 "...the Homeric narrator, though he recognizes his privilege of unfettered movement, usually declines it and lets himself be led from scene to scene by one of his characters." See on this topic also Brigitte Hellwig, *Raum und Zeit im homerischen Epos*. Tübingen 1964, 88–115 and Edwards, *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm*, 52: "Smoothly and uninterruptedly, action follows upon action, with continuity, not division, being always the poet's aim."

⁴⁰ On a larger scale epic is "formulaic" too, consisting of recurring themes (Lord, *Singer of Tales*) and type scenes (Walter Arend, *Die typische Szenen bei Homer*. Berlin 1933). Elizabeth Minchin, *Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Oxford 2001 shows convincingly how "themes" in oral poetry might be analyzed with the terminology of scripts, which is set out in Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*. Hillsdale, NJ 1977.

⁴¹ See on such signs in Homeric language especially John M. Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park, PA 1999, 26–31.

⁴² Bonifazi [this volume] captures this aspect of epic language well, when she says: "Metanarration is as traditional as narration," that is, not only are the stories encoded in the traditional language, even the way of telling the stories is encoded in the traditional language.

In the following example, the priming act is incorporated in a larger construction that includes what is formally a temporal subclause. After hearing about the situation at the Greek camp, where Achilles is seething because Agamemnon has wronged him, the audience is brought to Odysseus on his way by ship to appease Chryses, priest of Apollo, by returning his daughter:

(3) *Iliad* 1.430–433

| αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς |
 ἐς Χρυσὴν ἵκανε | ἄγων ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην. |
 οἱ δ' | ὅτε δὴ λιμένος πολυβενθέος ἐντὸς ἵκοντο |
 ἰστία μὲν στείλαντο, | θέσαν δ' ἐν νηϊ μελαίνῃ, |

| And Odysseus |
 arrived at Chryses | bringing the sacred hecatomb. |
 And they | when they arrived within the deep harbour |
 they furl'd the sails | and put them away in the black ship |

The transition to a new location is accommodated by the priming act αὐτὰρ (autár) Ὀδυσσεύς, followed by a line which functions as a kind of abstract to remind the hearer of what Odysseus was supposed to be doing. Then follows the priming act οἱ δέ (hoi dé), as part of a longer verse that captures the moment of arrival at the place for the upcoming action. The pronoun οἱ is a nominative plural, which is instructive in two ways. First, it shows that the mention of only Odysseus has activated a whole group which can then be referred to with nothing more than a pronoun. Second, it explains why the priming act is necessary: here the pronoun does not retrieve a referent so much as create it. Odysseus and his unnamed crew are set up as a pool of accessible referents, and the verse as a whole serves to place Odysseus, his men, and Chryses' daughter on the shore for the crucial event of appeasing the priest of Apollo by returning his daughter and making an offering to the god.

In (3) the pronoun refers to an undefined collective, but more frequently it demarcates a specific number of referents, like in (4). Zeus has just decided the fate of his son Sarpedon who is fighting Patroclus, and in line 462 the narrative returns to the battlefield:⁴³

⁴³ As often, the movement to a new place in the storyworld is not completely independent. Along with the bloody rain, the audience moves from above (the Olympus) down to the battlefield. This is an inverse parallel of the tendency in Homer to accompany a transition from the battlefield to the world of the gods with an act of visual or aural perception (see note 58 below for some examples).

(4) *Iliad* 16.459–463

αἵματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας | κατέχευεν ἔραζε |
 παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, | τόν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἔμελλε
 φθίσειν | ἐν Τροίῃ ἐριβώλακι | τηλόθι πάτρης. |
 οἷ δ' | ὅτε δὴ σχεδὸν ἦσαν | ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἰόντες, |
 ἔνθ' ἦτοι Πάτροκλος

And bloody rain | he [Zeus] poured on the earth |
 honouring his beloved son | whom Patroclus would
 kill | in deep-soiled Troy | far from his fatherland. |
 And they | when they were close | bearing down on each other |
 right then Patroclus

The verse in line 462 above recurs eleven times (all in the *Iliad*) and De Jong notes rightly that it “typically introduces martial duels.”⁴⁴ Here it also marks the transition between two spaces in the storyworld: the Olympus where Hera and Zeus converse, and the battlefield in front of Troy. The performer smooths the transition by first mentioning Sarpedon and Patroclus as the objects of Zeus’ thoughts and then priming them as actants with οἷ δέ (hoi dé).

The function of this recurrent verse is to establish the two referents as the main actants in the upcoming narrative, but also to create a place of action. Being on the battlefield, it is hard to imagine an absolute location, so this verse serves to provide a temporary narrative space.⁴⁵ It sets apart a section of the battlefield for the fighters to finish their duel before the victor moves on. This temporary demarcated space functions as a contextual frame, set up by the verse-long construction.⁴⁶ The cue for the cognitive act of binding characters to this location

is also encoded linguistically, through the consistent use of a verb of arriving or coming to a place.⁴⁷ By combining priming acts with a specific kind of verb construction, this set of verses encode the establishment of a contextual frame.

In terms of viewpoint, the effect of the construction is perhaps best imagined as a slight zooming out of the mind’s eye from the individuals to create something of a boxing ring with clear boundaries. The effect created is one of slowing down and speeding up of time: as long as the duel lasts, the battlefield around it is completely out of focus and time seems to stand still. The transgression of the boundaries, often after the death of one of the combatants, will signal the dissolution of the contextual frame. Before the frame is dissolved, there may also be a final conversation between the victor and his victim, after which action is resumed. At this moment the victor leaves, or another character intrudes, such as the charioteer or the horses of the fallen hero. The contextual frame is discrete as long as it is needed, with a suspension of everything around it assumed, until the battlefield is allowed to intrude into the frame and time “speeds up” again.⁴⁸

6 Analysis II: Following the hero’s gaze

The role of priming acts in reorienting viewpoint emerges even more clearly from one final set of examples: transitions based on characters’ perceptions.⁴⁹ Richardson remarks that Homer prefers natural transitions, letting a character’s movements or perception guide the journey through the storyworld. The number of transitions implicitly or explicitly effected through sensory perception is very large, so it is not surprising that this very effect has been fixed in a verse-long construction.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The semantics of “coming” and “going” can be encoded in Greek verbs, but they need not be. In the examples in footnote 46 above the verb used is a form of ἰκνέομαι, *to arrive* in 7 out of 10 cases. In all other instances and in the 11 instances of the recurrent verse (note 44) the sense is one of characters coming nearer to one another (as marked by σχεδόν, *near* or ἐν/ἐντοσθεν, *inside*) in a specific place.

⁴⁸ One may compare the effect created at the moment of a successful assassination in the videogame *Assassin’s Creed*: the camera zooms in on the assassin and his victim, the surroundings are blurred, and the two protagonists have a final conversation.

⁴⁹ Compare Bonifazi’s “camera-in-the-mind” [this volume].

⁵⁰ Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator*, 100. Cf. Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers. The presentation of the story in the Iliad*. London 2004, 2nd edition, 105–107, where she argues that perceptions (105) “form the hinges of the story” and can be used (107) “to bring on stage

⁴⁴ De Jong, *Iliad book XXII*, p. 122. She comes to a total of 12 instances, but there are only 11: *Iliad* 3.15, 5.14, 5.630, 5.850, 6.121, 11.232, 13.604, 16.462, 20.176, 21.148, 22.248. The one other she adduces (23.816) is in an athletic contest, as she notes, but has the form ἄλλ’ ὅτε δὴ κτλ., i.e. without the priming act οἷ δέ.

⁴⁵ *Iliad* 21.148 is an exception, in that it locates the action clearly on the banks of the river Xanthus.

⁴⁶ Besides the recurrent verse (see note 44), compare these other instances where the referents are bound to a temporary location: *Iliad* 4.446 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἐς χῶρον ἔνα ξυνιόντες ἴκοντο; *Iliad* 10.526 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἴκανον | ὅθι σκοπὸν ἔκταν; *Iliad* 18.520 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἴκανον | ὅθι σφίσιν εἶκε λοχῆσαι. When the space is a geographic location, like in (3), the binding of characters to a certain place is even more explicit: *Iliad* 7.113 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ κλισίῃσιν ἐν Ἀτρεΐδαο γέροντο; 10.180 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ φυλάκεσσιν ἐν ἀγορμένοισιν ἔμιχθεν; *Iliad* 11.618 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ κλισίῃν Νηληϊάδεω ἀφίκοντο; *Iliad* 23.38 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ κλισίῃν Ἀγαμέμνονος ἴξον ἰόντες; *Odyssey* 1.126 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἔντοσθεν ἔσαν δόμου ὑψηλοῖο; *Odyssey* 16.324 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ λυμένος πολυβενθέος ἐντὸς ἴκοντο; *Odyssey* 24.362 οἷ δ’ | ὅτε δὴ ῥ’ ἴκοντο δόμους ἐὺ ναιετάοντας. Finally, there are five instances in the *Odyssey* where Penelope reaches a new place, binding her into that contextual frame: *Odyssey* 1.332, 7.3, 18.208, 21.42, 21.63.

At the beginning of book 3 of the *Iliad* the Greek and Trojan armies meet for the first time on the battlefield, setting up their troops across from each other. The narrator then tells us that Paris (Alexander) led the Trojans, and came forth from the army. While Paris is still in focus, the shift to the Greek army is established by making Paris the object of someone else's gaze:

(5) *Iliad* 3.21–22

τὸν δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησεν ἀρηϊφίλος Μενέλαος |
ἐρχόμενον προπάροιθεν ὁμίλου | μακρὰ βιβάντα, |

And him [sc. Alexander], | just as Menelaus, beloved to Ares, saw him |
coming in front of the crowd, | taking long strides, |

This act of perception leads us to the Greek army, where Menelaus is eager to do battle with Paris:

(6) *Iliad* 3.29–31

αὐτίκα δ' ἐξ ὀχέων | σὺν τεύχεσιν ἄλτο χαμάζε. |
τὸν δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησεν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδῆς |
ἐν προμάχοισι φανέντα, | κατεπλήγη φίλον ἦτορ, |

and at once from the car | in his armour he [sc. Menelaus] leapt to the ground.
And him, | just as god-like Alexander saw him, |
appearing among the vanguard, | he [sc. Alexander] was scared in his heart, |

Menelaus vaults from his chariot eager to engage the man who stole his wife, and pushes through the throng to the front of the army. The priming act τὸν δέ (tòn dé) in the accusative moves the viewpoint away from Menelaus and makes him in turn the object of Paris' gaze. Thus, the verse brings the audience back to the Trojans, where Paris retreats into the mass of Trojan soldiers, later to be scolded by his brother Hector (line 38).

This visual back-and-forth is a dynamic way of establishing the two antagonists facing off on the battlefield, both leaders at the same time representing their respective armies, but it also serves a function in the larger narrative. The reason for the Trojan War was the taking of Menelaus' wife Helen by Paris. In narrated time, we must assume that the two have met before (since the *Iliad* only covers the final weeks of a ten-year conflict), but in the plot of the *Iliad* this is the first moment that the two characters are in the same narrative space; it is in fact Paris'

first appearance. The moment that they see each other is thus drawn out in two constructions, where first Menelaus sees Paris and then Paris sees Menelaus. Their subsequent different reactions to seeing the other, extended by similes, are crucial ethopoetic moments for these characters in the *Iliad*.⁵¹

The form of this verse-long construction is always that of a (pro)noun + δ' ὥς οὖν (d' hōs oûn) + a verb of perception + the subject or object, and it recurs seventeen times in the narrator text of the *Iliad* and seven times in the *Odyssey*.⁵² Depending on the case of the (pro)noun, the mind's eye moves away from (oblique case) or towards (nominative) the referent in the priming act. It can mark a change of viewpoint within one contextual frame, or, as here, effect the transition from one contextual frame to another, when a character in one frame perceives one in another.⁵³

7 The priming act as a narrative tool

The priming act is indispensable when dealing with a storyworld conceived and imagined in performance. In Homeric epic it is a verbally economical⁵⁴ tool for the performer to manipulate the mind's eye of his audience in the storyworld, by directing attention to new places or offering a new vantage point within the same scene. The use of priming acts exploits the mind's capability of binding characters to places in the same way that whole semantic fields are bound together in semantic frames.⁵⁵ It emerges from the material that priming acts are inherent parts of a prevalent technique in the Homeric narrative to move the mind's eye through the storyworld. An initial analysis beyond Homeric epic has yielded that the priming act is quite common in spontaneous spoken English narrative (see

⁵¹ Note the silence on the importance of this passage in the larger narrative in Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* I. Cambridge 1985, 269; and Anton Bierl and Joachim Latacz, *Homers Ilias Gesamtkommentar* III.2. Berlin 2009, 22–26; Laura Slatkin, "Tragic Visualizing in the *Iliad*". In: Chris Kraus, Simon Goldhill, Helene P. Foley, and Jas Elsner (eds.), *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature, Essays in Honour of Froma Zeitlin*. Oxford 2007, 19–34 thematizes the importance of the gaze in guiding the narrative, though without discussing this specific scene.

⁵² *Iliad* 3.21, 3.30, 3.154, 5.95, 5.711, 7.17, 8.251, 11.248, 11.575, 11.581, 14.440, 16.419, 17.198, 18.222, 18.530, 21.49, 21.418; *Odyssey* 3.34, 8.272, 15.59, 17.492, 22.407, 24.232, 24.391; cf. Edwards, *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm*, 54.

⁵³ Consider especially the movements toward the sphere of the Gods by way of a perception of characters on the battlefield in *Iliad* 5.711, 7.17, and 17.198.

⁵⁴ Compare Foley's "economical exchange," in Foley, *How to Read*, 128, see note 4 above.

⁵⁵ See note 37 above.

characters necessary for the story." See also Hedwig Jordan, *Der Erzählungsstil in den Kampfszenen der Ilias*. Breslau 1905 and Hellwig, *Raum und Zeit*.

Chafe 1994), but also in Chaucer, the Grimms' *Märchen*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and Neapolitan folk tales.⁵⁶ These corpora know differing degrees of formulaicness, but what they have in common is that they were typically received by a listening audience. It is especially in this discourse situation that the priming act has its use.

The range of constructions containing priming acts, of which I have discussed two, suggests that they were an entrenched part of (narrative) language by the time of the Homeric performers. If such verses had become conventional enough, they may have served as landmarks in the event of the narration, equivalent to what Foley calls "boundary lines," "[separating] one narrative entity (scene, speech, or the like) from the next."⁵⁷ One kind of boundary line he distinguishes in Stolac performances is the "'position change' signal," which functions to "locate a character at or move a character to the next place of action."⁵⁸ This means that beyond the original cognitive and discursive function of establishing a transition from one contextual frame to the next, such verses may become a metanarrative signal to mark the beginning of a new scene, like the strongly formulaic verses that introduce or cap direct speech in Homeric epic.

An exploration of this syntactically anomalous construction in Homer from a discourse perspective demonstrates its potential in narration and performance. Although priming acts can indeed be described as "pendant nominatives" or "left-dislocated," such descriptions are neither sufficient nor productive. Priming acts fulfill the cognitive desire to hear about the "who" before the "what", a desire that is especially strong in—but not limited to—the context of performance. By establishing and using (groups of) characters as cognitive landmarks, the performer can guide his audience through an immense storyworld filled with countless protagonists. Studies of narrative tend to focus on content and structure, but the linguistic form is equally crucial and informative. Only with an eye for the smallest details can we figure out which elements of a discourse are instrumental in accommodating the audience's seemingly effortless understanding of a narrative. Homeric priming acts and the constructions that they partake in provide a unique insight in how narrative language accommodates the limitations and exploits the abilities of human cognition.

⁵⁶ The data is gathered in "Mobility of the Mind's Eye", a paper presented at the *Poetics and Linguistics Association* conference in Heidelberg, August 2013, and currently in preparation for publication.

⁵⁷ Foley, *How to Read*, 104–105. Bonifazi [this volume] adduces Sherzer's term "structuring" to describe this on-line process in epic performance.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

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