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Construal and immersion
A cognitive linguistic approach to Homeric immersivity

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1. Introduction: Homer and immersion

All great poetry at its best transports us to the realms of gold. If for the moment we can put reason in abeyance, we are ‘enthralled’. The spell of poetry can make the hearer forget both himself and the poet and the real world about him. It can banish all awareness that an image of life is being presented, because of its magic power to make the image seem the only reality. The spell is the poetic illusion.

(Bassett 1938: 26)

The story [in Homer] seems almost to tell itself. The words which transport us to the world of the heroes come from a source so submerged from view that the heroic life seems to move of its own vitality.

(Bassett 1938: 27)

With these words Samuel Bassett described the well-known effect of Homer’s style to make the listener feel as if mentally present in the world of the story. This famous quality of the Homeric language has been praised by ancient as well as modern literary critics, and it is often associated with the term enángeía, ‘the power of bringing the things that are said before the senses of the audience’, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus defines it. In this chapter, I will approach this Homeric quality through the modern concept of immersion, a concept that has emerged in the study of virtual reality but has also found its way into cognitive approaches to art, drama, and film studies, literary studies, stylistics, and linguistics. Immersion is the feeling of being transported to a virtual world to the extent that one experiences it – up to a point – as if it were the actual world.

The concept of immersion was introduced into the field of literary studies by the cognitive narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan, who defines immersion as ‘the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated by live human beings’ (Ryan 2015: 9). ‘Immersion is a corporeal experience . . . it takes the projection of a virtual body . . . to feel integrated in an art world’ (Ryan 2015: 13). In her book of 2001, of which an updated edition appeared in 2015, Ryan identifies four aspects of the ‘Poetics of Immersion’: spatial immersion, a narrative’s ability to immerse readers in a...
sense of place; temporal immersion, the story’s creation of interest (suspense, curiosity, surprise) through the dynamics of the temporal unfolding of the told events; a combined spatio-temporal immersion, the reader’s imaginative transportation (‘recentering’) into the story world; and emotional immersion, which relates to the emotional involvement (such as empathy) with the fate of the characters.

Ryan also discusses a number of narrative strategies facilitating the experience of being immersed into the storyworld. In order to give a narrative an immersive quality, a narrator will tend to opt for the following narrative devices rather than their counterparts: (1) scene narration, rather than summary narration, (2) internal and variable focalization (representing characters as subjects), rather than external focalization (looking at characters as objects), (3) dialogue (direct discourse) and free indirect discourse, rather than indirect discourse, (4) prospective first-person narration, rather than third-person retrospective narration, (5) a totally effaced narrator, rather than a visible narrator, and (6) mimesis (‘showing’), rather than diegesis (‘telling’). Ryan also discusses a number of specific linguistic devices, such as adverbial deictic shift, speech and thought report, and (present) tense-marking, which serve to shift the deictic center toward the storyworld and assign it to the perspective of a character.4

Immersion should be thought of as a gradable phenomenon: the experience of being immersed can be more or less intense, depending on the presence of particular immersive features in the text or text segment: the intensity of the immersive experience may also vary through time while reading or hearing a text. The degree of immersion will be dependent on the number and diversity of textual features conducive to immersion (and the absence of features detrimental to immersion). Ryan distinguishes four degrees of immersion in the act of reading. From a low to high degree of readerly absorption these are: concentration, imaginative involvement, entrancement, and addiction (Ryan 2015: 68–69).

Often metaphors come into play to describe the immersive experience (the term ‘immersion’ itself being an obvious example). A well-known metaphor is that of a reader being ‘transported’ or ‘traveling’ to the world of the story, a metaphor also used by Bassett in the citation above. This metaphor has been the starting-point for the psychologists Victor Nell (1988) and Richard Gerrig (1993) in their pioneering work on the psychology of the immersed reader. Other common metaphors that appear in connection with narrative immersion involve a reader being ‘entranced’ (cf. also Bassett’s use of the words ‘enthralled’, ‘magic power’, ‘spell’), ‘absorbed’, ‘caught up’ in a story, or being ‘lost in a book’.

The immersive effect of literary texts is, of course, not a novel phenomenon: it has already been described by the ancient literary critics, in connection with such notions as enárgeia, enagónios, and ékstasis. Enárgeia is ‘the power of bringing the things that are said before the senses of the audience’, thereby creating the illusion of actually perceiving the objects and events described by the text (cf. Ryan’s spatial immersion). It is achieved, according to the ancient rhetoricians and commentators, by detailed sensory descriptions, by presenting character speech, and by turning the listener into a virtual eyewitness. As Ruth Webb (among others) has pointed out, enárgeia also has an emotional component (cf. Ryan’s emotional immersion): ‘Inseparable from this representational and informative function of enárgeia is its ability to move the audience and to make them feel the emotions appropriate to the events described’ (Webb 2009: 90).5 A narrative is enagónios if it is ‘vivid’, ‘actively involving’, ‘engaging’, and ‘full of suspense’ (Ooms and De Jonge 2013). According to Longinus (25–27), it can be achieved by using devices such as the historical present tense or by a switch to direct speech, and it gives the listener the feeling of being himself in the middle of danger. In other words, the listener is mentally transported to the narrated scene. Ékstasis (‘movement outward’, ‘displacement’) is the mental state, produced by sublime literary texts, of being out of one’s senses and no longer oneself (‘out of oneself’).6
The Homeric narrator also seems already well aware of the immersive power of narrative, using the metaphor of enchantment – which since then has become very prolific – to describe the effect of story-telling involving a loss of self-control and self-consciousness. The effect of Odysseus’ tale is that his audience is ‘spellbound’ (κηληθμῷ δ’ ἔσχοντο, Od. 11.334, 13.2) and Odysseus, who is compared to an epic singer (17.518–521), is able to enchant the listener with his tale (θέλγοιτό κέ τοι φίλον ἦτορ, 17.514; ὡς ἐμὲ κεῖνος ἔθελγε, 17.521).

It is clear that the Greeks were no stranger to the phenomenon that literary texts are capable of making the audience feel as if present at the scene, and they describe this phenomenon in terms that are very similar to the modern concept of immersion. It is therefore worthwhile to see whether the modern concept of immersion can contribute to a better understanding of how texts are able to bring about this particular effect. Using the theory of immersion as a framework for the analysis of Ancient Greek (and, more specifically, Homeric) narrative may offer a number of benefits. First, since the notion of immersion is firmly grounded both in cognitive linguistics and in cognitive narratology, it opens up a large and diverse arsenal of well-established linguistic and narratological notions that can be brought to the analytical table. Linguistic categories that are relevant to the immersive qualities of a text are: tense-aspect, modality, deixis, and cognitive schemas/frames. Narratological concepts important to immersion include speed, order, focalization, narratorial visibility, suspense, and genre conventions. A second attractive feature of immersion is that it is also the subject of experimental psychological research, which offers insights into how immersion is rooted in our general cognitive, emotive, and sensorimotor capacities.7

Elsewhere I have proposed an inventory of linguistic and narratological features of texts that are conducive to the reader’s experience of immersion and I have discussed a number of issues relevant to immersion, such as the persuasive power of immersion, the relationship between immersion and experientiality, and the difference in immersivity between Herodotus’ and Thucydides’ narrative styles.8 In this chapter, the focus will be on the underlying cognitive phenomena on which the experience of narrative immersion hinges. Central to my approach to immersion will be construal and embodiment, which I will discuss in sections (2) and (3), respectively. In section (4), I will present an analysis of Odyssey 5.59–73 (Calypso’s Cave) and examine, from a cognitive linguistic point of view, which specific linguistic and narratological features of the text contribute to the listener’s feeling of being immersed in the described scene.

2. Construal

A central idea in cognitive linguistics is construal, ‘our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways’ (Langacker 2015: 120). The idea of construal can be illustrated by comparing it to vision. Since vision and conceptualization show a number of important parallels, vision can be seen as a subtype of conceptualization.9 When we look at a scene or object in the world around us, what we actually see is crucially determined by the distance and the angle from which we view it, at what part of it we choose to direct our gaze, and what elements we pay most attention to. In the same way, a linguistic expression construes a described situation from a certain distance and a specific perspective, and it selects and focuses on some elements of the situation while backgrounding others. Construal is not only fundamental to lexical semantics, it also pervades grammatical structure: each lexical as well as grammatical item in a language is associated with a particular way of construing (‘viewing’) its conceptual content as part of its conventional semantics.

In cognitive linguistics, grammar is not seen as an abstract formal system that is separated from other domains of human cognition and life. Instead, cognitive linguistics sees grammar as
meaningful: grammatical categories such as tense and aspect are devices employed by speakers to conceptualize (‘view’) the world in a certain way; grammatical constructions are used to combine component concepts into more complex and elaborate conceptualizations. In cognitive linguistics, in other words, grammar is ‘an essential aspect of the conceptual apparatus through which we apprehend and engage the world’ (Langacker 2008: 4).

A number of more specific processes of conceptualization, or construal operations, have been distinguished, such as specificity, salience, perspective, dynamicity, and attention focus. These construal operations are fundamental dimensions of linguistic conceptualization in general and they are therefore also helpful in understanding through which linguistic means texts are able to generate an immersive experience.10

(i) Specificity and salience. The construal operation of specificity concerns the level of precision and granularity with which a situation is portrayed. Expressions may vary in their degree of specificity. An example given by Langacker (2008: 56) is the following scale of specificity ranging from more schematic to more specific:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Something happened.} & \rightarrow \\
\text{A person perceived a rodent.} & \rightarrow \\
\text{A girl saw a porcupine.} & \rightarrow \\
\text{An alert little girl wearing glasses caught a brief glimpse of a ferocious porcupine with sharp quills.}
\end{align*}
\]

The more specific and concrete an expression is, the more immersive it will be. A text that describes a scene in highly fine-grained (perceptual) detail will be more effectively able to tap into the rich experiential (sensorimotor and emotional) resources stored in the listener’s or reader’s semantic memory (cognitive schemata and scripts) and it will thus evoke a more intense mental simulation of the described scene. Immersive texts will therefore tend to focus on psychologically salient entities: concrete, physical, preferably moving, visible, or otherwise perceivable animate beings or objects. I will return to the topic of mental simulation in section (3).

(ii) Perspective. An important aspect of perspective has to do with the relationship between the subject of conceptualization (‘viewer’) and the object of conceptualization (‘viewed’). When a listener or reader is immersed in the world of the story (cf. the arrow in Figure 3.1 below), the relationship between the listener or reader (conceptualizing subject) and the entities and events in the ‘onstage’ storyworld (object of conceptualization) is maximally asymmetric; that is to say, being completely absorbed by the story, maximal attention goes out to the storyworld and its inhabitants (indicated by the thick circle), while the listener or reader is only minimally aware of him or herself, the narrator (or his/her real-world counterpart, the author), and the real world surrounding him or her – they remain ‘offstage’ in the periphery of the listener’s or reader’s awareness (dashed circles).11 In immersive texts, in other words, the narrator remains, as much as possible, invisible: he or she does not draw attention to him or herself or to the fact that he or she is narrating. The story seems to tell itself.

Perspective is also relevant to immersion in a different respect: immersive texts typically show a shift in vantage point. Two main types of shifts in vantage point that are associated with immersion can be distinguished. The first type involves a deictic shift (‘recentering’), in which the ground as the deictic center is moved from an external, distanced, retrospective, spatio-temporal location with respect to the storyworld onto the described scene. The effect of this

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A deictic shift is that the narrator and narratee are transported into the scene, as if observing the narrated events as they unfold ('pseudo-eyewitness effect'). In this perspectival configuration, the usual spatio-temporal distance between the world of narration and the storyworld is (construed as being) collapsed. Typical linguistic signals of this deictic shift are the use of the historical present and the use of proximal ('here and now') deictics, instead of the past tense and distal ('there and then') deictics, to refer to the storyworld.12

The other type of shift in vantage point, which is much more frequent in Greek narrative, does not feature a complete deictic shift but involves the setting-up of a secondary vantage point within the storyworld. The distance between the world of the narration and the storyworld is not reduced completely, as in the first type, but it is 'bridged'. The listener or reader is invited to view the described scene via a vantage point within the scene. This secondary vantage point can either be a 'camera standpoint', a depersonalized standpoint registering the narrated events in a detached way, or it can be a story character or an anonymous spectator through whose eyes we are observing the events and with whom we can identify ourselves and, preferably, also empathize.13 In narratological terms, the latter type of shift in vantage point is called secondary (or embedded) focalization (De Jong 2014: 50–56).14

Both types of vantage point shifts serve to enhance the listener’s or reader’s feeling of being transported and they stimulate the listener or reader ‘to project one’s virtual body into the fictional world and onto the scene of the events’ (Ryan 2015: 95). Apart from the shifted use of tense and deictic adverbs, another important linguistic phenomenon indicative of a shift in vantage point toward the storyworld is the use of direct or free indirect discourse, both of which present the character’s words or thoughts as if they are directly accessible to the narratee, without the interference of the narrator’s mediating voice.15

(iii) Dynamicity. A construal operation which is closely related to perspective is that of dynamicity, which has to do with the way in which the conceptualization unfolds over time.
Conceptualization is an inherently dynamic process: it occurs through time. More precisely, in the process of conceptualization, two times are involved: processing time, the time that is required for a conceptualizing subject to process an experience of some sort, and conceived time, time as the object of conception. There are two main types of relationship between processing and conceived time: coincidence and non-coincidence. When they coincide, we are dealing with direct observation (Figure 3.2a): ‘When an event is directly observed, its apprehension coincides with its occurrence: its temporal phases are accessed serially, each being fully activated just when it is manifested’ (Langacker 2015: 133). In normal language use (and certainly in narration), it is more usual that an event’s occurrence and its conception are non-coincident. In this case, processing and conceived time have to be clearly distinguished (Figure 3.2b). Since the occurrence and conception of the event are independent, they will tend to differ in duration. In Figure 3.2b, processing time is shorter than conceived time, which is indicated by the different distances between the dots on line $t$ and those on line $T$.

![Figure 3.2a](image)

*Figure 3.2a* Coincidence of processing and conceived time: direct observation

![Figure 3.2b](image)

*Figure 3.2b* Non-coincidence of processing and conceived time: retrospective narration
In everyday language, there is a natural tendency for ‘temporal iconicity’, in which processing and conceived time proceed in a parallel development; that is, the order in which the events are processed (narrated and conceptualized) corresponds to the order in which the conceived events have occurred (are ‘located on the time line’). This natural way of apprehending events is called ‘sequential scanning’ in cognitive grammar: temporal phases of an event are accessed (‘scanned’) sequentially so that conceived time correlates with processing time. ‘The sequential scanning of the event constitutes the mental simulation of its observation’ (Langacker 2015: 133).

Immersive texts tend to adhere to this natural tendency for temporal iconicity. The order in which events are narrated (narrating time) is aligned with the order in which the narrated events have occurred (narrated time). Anachronies, deviations from the chronological order such as flashbacks (analepses) or flash-forwards (prolepses), 16 are avoided since they disturb the natural order, causing an increased processing effort, and, instead, draw the listener’s or reader’s attention to the activity of the narrator – which is also detrimental to immersion.17

Another aspect of the relation between processing and conceived time relevant to narration is speed.18 In narratology, various relations between narrating and narrated time are distinguished: if narrating time (which can be equated with processing, i.e. hearing or reading, time) progresses at a lower speed than narrated (conceived) time, we are dealing with summary narration; if narrating time advances at a higher speed than narrated time, it is a slowing down (slow motion) or retardation; if narrating time proceeds while narrated time does not, it is a pause; if narrating time and narrated time (roughly) coincide and advance at an equal pace, we are dealing with scenic narration. Scenic narration is the most common narration type in immersive texts since it presents the events at a speed at which we also experience (observe) them in our everyday lives.

The scenic type of narration can be represented by Figure 3.2c:

In Figure 3.2c, the durations of the narrating time (T) and the narrated time (t) are (approximately) equal (note the equal distances between the dots on line t and T), as is typical of scenic narration; the narrated time is anterior to the narrating time (retrospective narration).

Besides specificity, salience, perspective, and dynamicity, other construal operations are relevant to immersion such as focus of attention. These additional construal types will be addressed in the analysis of the Homeric passage (section 4).

Figure 3.2c Retrospective scenic narration
3. Embodiment

The notion of immersion is also central to the Immersed Experiencer Framework, one of the leading cognitive theories in the research of language comprehension. In this theoretical framework, developed by the cognitive psychologist Rolf Zwaan (2004), language is conceived of as

a set of cues to the comprehender to construct an experiential (perception plus action) simulation of the described situation. In this conceptualization, the comprehender is an immersed experiencer of the described situation, and comprehension is the vicarious experience of the described situation.\(^\text{19}\)

In Zwaan’s theory of language comprehension, the psychological phenomenon of immersion is not restricted to the particular experience of feeling present in a virtual world as triggered by a (literary) text – it is a mental process that is fundamental to language comprehension in general.

The Immersed Experiencer Framework is an embodied theory of language comprehension: it revolves around the idea that hearing or reading words activates the same brain regions that are active during the real-life perception of, and the motoric interaction with, the words’ referents. Language comprehension involves the construction of a mental representation of the described situation which is firmly grounded in the sensorimotor and emotional experiences (‘functional webs’) active in the experiencer’s brain. Thus, on an embodied view such as Zwaan’s, hearing or reading a narrative will activate experiential resources which are then used to construct a mental simulation of the narrated scene.\(^\text{20}\) Hearing or reading the word *cat*, for example, will activate our memory of previous experiences with cats and trigger an internal simulation of what a cat looks like, the sound it makes, how it moves, and how it feels to stroke it or to be scratched by it. Of course, the strength with which each of the various experiential aspects are activated is dependent on the particular context in which the word is used.

There is also empirical evidence that grammatical structures influence the strength of the mental simulation. For example, there is experimental evidence that aspechual marking and speech representation are sensitive to embodiment effects. Progressive (imperfective) sentences such as *John is closing the drawer* (portraying the action in progress) drives comprehenders to mentally simulate the process in action more strongly than perfect sentences like *John has closed the drawer* (Bergen and Wheeler 2010). Direct speech is more likely to give rise to perceptual (auditory) simulations than indirect speech (Yao, Belin, and Scheepers 2011). It is no coincidence that both imperfective aspect and direct speech are also important linguistic features of immersive texts.\(^\text{21}\)

Zwaan’s Immersed Experience Model distinguishes three components of language comprehension: *activation*, *construal*, and *integration*.

(1) *Activation*: a word activates a functional web (i.e. ‘the totality of experiences with a certain entity or event’ [Zwaan 2004: 39]) that is also activated when the referent is experienced in real life.

(2) *Construal*: the functional webs activated by subsequent words are immediately and incrementally integrated into a mental simulation of a specific event.\(^\text{22}\) The linguistic unit on which construal operates is the intonation unit. Intonation units are basic units of discourse, identifiable by phonological cues such as acceleration-deceleration, changes in overall pitch level, terminal pitch contour, pauses,\(^\text{23}\) and/or changes in voice quality (Chafe 1994).\(^\text{24}\)
Intonation units also have conceptual import: they express information that is, at some moment in time, active in a speaker’s or listener’s consciousness. Zwaan adopts Langacker’s conception of the intonation unit as an attentional frame: ‘Its conceptual value resides in the very act of making a single attentional gesture – imposing a single window of attention for the simultaneous viewing of conceptual content’ (Langacker 2001: 155). According to Langacker, each of these successive attentional frames which make up discourse serves as an instruction to update the current discourse space.25

Intonation units show a tendency to coincide with grammatical clauses (and therefore they tend to express one state of affairs), but they may also contain just one word, a noun phrase, or be fragmentary.26 The observation that intonation units do not clearly correspond with one particular type of semantic or syntactic unit has led Hannay and Kroon (2005) to the idea that intonation (or punctuation) units can be understood better when you see them as realizations of discourse acts, which often consist of a single word or a noun phrase. I will return to the role of discourse acts in section (4).

Zwaan’s notion of construal has a number of components, which show some similarities with the aspects of Langacker’s construal. In Zwaan’s model, a construal of a state of affairs involves the following:

- **Time interval**: comprehenders keep events active in working-memory as long as the state of events is ongoing.
- **Spatial region**: the state of affairs occurs in a certain spatial region, a section of space delimited by the human senses (vision, audition, smell, touch) and by their actions.
- **Perspective**: a spatio-temporal vantage point (location, distance, orientation) from which the construed state of affairs is experienced.
- **Entities and features**: grammatical markers such as word order or case markers signal which entities are construed as foregrounded entities and those which are backgrounded. Foregrounded entities are typically marked as subject (topics) or objects, while backgrounded entities tend to be referred to by prepositional phrases or oblique (genitive, dative, etc.) cases. Features are typically referred to by adjectives.

(3) **Integration**: when processing discourse, a language comprehender will have to mentally integrate successive construals of the state of affairs. Relevant components from a previous event construal will remain activated in working-memory and influence the current construal. Integration refers to the transition of one construal to another. Zwaan’s thesis is that these transitions are grounded in human everyday life experience (Zwaan 2004: 46, 48–49).

In descriptions of static scenes, the regulation of attention (through the flow of intonation units as attentional frames) is perceptual (typically visual) in nature, simulating the sensory (visual) experience of the scene. Examples of such transitions are zooming, panning, scanning, and fixating. This mode of discourse comprehension will also be relevant to our analysis of *Odyssey* 5.59–73 below. In descriptions of dynamic scenes/action sequences, transitions typically involve cause–effect or motivation–action relations. A language comprehender, as an immersed experimenter, will by default be invited to take a protagonist’s perspective (Zwaan 2004: 47–48).

Besides concordance with human experience, according to Zwaan, other factors influence the integration of event construals, such as the amount of conceptual overlap between successive construals – overlaps in time, space, causation, perspective, entities, and features, the degree of predictability of the transition from one event construal to another, and, finally, linguistic cues...
Word order and cases signal which entities have to be construed as foregrounded and which as backgrounded. Tense markers locate the event on a time line. Aspect markers construe the event as (un)bounded within a temporal frame. Prepositions indicate the location of entities within the mental simulation. Discourse markers specify the way in which one state of affairs (as expressed by an intonation unit/clause) has to be integrated with another into a more complex event sequence.

Zwaan’s model of language comprehension is summarized in Table 3.1, which shows the components of the process, the linguistic and representational units on which they operate, and the denoted referential units:

Let me sum up some of the intermediate conclusions regarding the relation between immersion, construal, and embodiment. The immersivity of a text can be defined as the degree to which a text has the capacity to evoke a mental simulation of the described situation in the mind of the listener or reader, and to transport the listener’s or reader’s virtual body into the scene. The intensity of the experience of immersion is dependent on the close interplay of a number of construal phenomena. In order to be maximally immersive, the described situation should possess the following features:

1. **Specificity**: it shows a high level of specificity (granularity) of perceptual details;
2. **Space**: it provides a strong sense of the spatial dimensions;
3. **Time**: it shows an iconic temporal organization (no deviations of chronological order or time compressions);
4. **Perspective**: it invites one to experience (‘view’) the situation from a spatio-temporal and emotional (affective-evaluative) vantage point (embedded focalizer) located in the scene;
5. **Focus of attention**: a strong attentional focus on the described situation: no distractions to ‘offstage’ elements such as the narrator and the world of narration;
6. **Experientiality**: it shows a general concordance with human everyday experience.

4. Calypso’s cave

These immersive features can be seen as conceptual dimensions that cooperate with and reinforce one another in order to engender in the listener or reader a feeling of being present at the narrated scene. It is therefore more insightful to approach these dimensions as a closely connected unity and analyze their synergetic interplay than to consider each of these dimensions in isolation. As a typical example of Homer’s immersive quality, I will discuss the description of Calypso’s cave in *Odyssey* (5.59–73). Hermes arrives at the cave and finds Calypso:

\[\text{πῦρ μὲν ἐπ' ἐσχαρόφιν μέγα καίετο, τηλόσε δ’ ὀδμὴ κέδρου τ’ εὐκεάτοιο θύου τ’ ἀνὰ νῆσον ὀδώδει (60) δαιομένων· ἢ δ’ ἐνδόν ἀοιδιάουσ’ ὀπὶ καλὴ ἱστὸν ἐποιχομένη χρυσείῃ κερκίδ’ ὑφαινε.}\]

Table 3.1 Comprehension process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process component</th>
<th>Linguistic unit</th>
<th>Representational unit</th>
<th>Referential unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>Word/morpheme</td>
<td>Functional webs</td>
<td>Objects and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construal</td>
<td>Clause/intonation unit</td>
<td>Integrated webs</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Connected discourse</td>
<td>Sequence of integrated webs</td>
<td>Event sequences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A great fire was burning in the hearth, and far over the island there was spread the scent of the cedar logs and citron-wood burning there. And she was inside, singing in a lovely voice and she worked to and fro at her loom weaving with a golden shuttle. Round the cave there was abundant growth of trees, alder and poplar and fragrant cypress and in the trees roosted wide-winged birds, owls and hawks and long-tongued cormorants, sea-birds whose work is on the water. And right there round the mouth of the hollow cave ran a golden vine in full glory, rich with clusters of grapes. And there were four springs running with bright water, close at their source then turning to flow each in its own direction. On either side soft meadows grew thick with violet and wild celery.

**Specificity.** The cave and its scenery are described in full detail. The description focuses on perceptible physical entities and it contains an abundance of nouns, adjectives, and verbs providing sensory (visual, olfactory, as well as auditory) information activating experiential information from semantic memory, which enable the listener to conjure up a fine-grained mental simulation of the described scene: the fire is large, there is a smell of cedar and juniper, Calypso is singing with a beautiful voice, her shuttle is golden, alder, poplar, and sweet-smelling cypresses are growing abundantly, the birds are wide-winged, the cormorants are long-tongued, the vine is in its prime, full of clusters of grapes, there are four springs with bright water, the meadows are soft and rich in violets and celery.

**Space.** The passage belongs to the text type description (descriptive mode); that is, the progression of the text is structured in terms of the dimension of space, rather than the dimension of time, as is the case in narrative proper. Descriptions are typically devoted to an object or a global theme, of which successively a number of component parts or subtopics are attended to. Of each of these component parts or subtopics an ongoing activity or property is described.

The spatial dimensions of the scene are specified by means of a considerable number of adverbs and adverbial phrases (59 τῆλος, 60 ἀνὰ νῆσον, 61 ἐνδῶν, 63 σπέος ἀμφί, 65 ἐνθα, 68 ἀμφί, 68 περὶ σπαίους, 70 ἐξίζης, 72 ἄμφι). These adverbial expressions serve to orient and guide the listener’s attention carefully through the space of the scene. I will return to the issue of space below when I discuss perspective, to which it is intimately connected.

**Time.** The various activities and states which are described do not reach an endpoint, which is marked by the use of imperfects (59 καίετο, 62 ὠδώδει, 65 εὐνάζοντο, 70 ῥέον, 73 θήλεον) and pluperfects (60 ὀδώδει, 63 περὶ σπαίους, 70 ἐξίζης, 72 ἄμφι) forms. These ongoing states and activities are to be understood as occurring simultaneously: there are no temporal adverbial expressions that indicate a shift in time. This means that, on the level of the described scene, there is no sequence of events and therefore no explicit temporal progress. However, on a different level, that of the observation of the scene, time does progress as the
observer (that is, Hermes as focalizer) fixes his gaze on each of the entities that are part of the scene. Since this touches on the issue of perspective, I will address it further below.

**Perspective.** As is usual in Homeric epic with characters arriving at a place, the description is focalized by the arriving visitor. In this passage, Hermes’ focalization is explicitly referred to in 75–76: ἔνθα στὰς θηεῖτο διάκτορος Ἀργεϊφόντης. The verb θηεῖτο cues us to the wonderful spectacle Hermes is witnessing, engages our attention and emotional involvement, and thus primes the audience’s mind to an immersive experience. We are invited to identify with Hermes’ amazement and to view the scene through his eyes, to smell with his nose, and to hear with his ears.

A second, more indirect, indication that the description is focalized by Hermes rather than the narrator is the use of the past tense. Since the topography of the cave, being the abode of a goddess, is of an everlasting and unchanging nature, it would have been a natural option for the narrator to use the omnitemporal-habitual present tense: the cave and its surrounding scenery are, after all, in the same state at the time of narration as they were when Hermes visited the cave. However, by the use of the past tense the narrator explicitly signals that the scene is not viewed from an omniscient narratorial perspective, but through the eyes of Hermes, at a specific moment in time located in the past.

The description is structured in such a way that we follow Hermes’ visual, olfactory, and auditory perception as it moves through the scene. A number of jointly operating linguistic devices are deployed to convey the impression that we are observing the scene through the sensory channels of a viewer present at the scene. These are: segmentation into intonation units, subject marking, and aspectual marking.

As we have seen, intonation units are attentional frames: they comprise the conceptual content to which a conceptualizer’s attention is directed at a given moment in time. For Homeric discourse, it has been shown by Egbert Bakker and Simon Slings that verse end and caesurae can be identified as boundary markers between intonation units.

In Table 3.21 present a segmentation of the passage into intonation units. As already briefly mentioned earlier, it is useful to analyze intonation units not only as basic cognitive units but also, with Hannay and Kroon (2005), as basic communicative units or discourse acts. In Functional Discourse Grammar, discourse acts are defined as ‘the smallest identifiable units of communicative behavior’ (Kroon 1995: 65; Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008: 60).

Discourse acts may have various illocutions, such as assertion, question, and order, and they can show a dependence relation; that is, some discourse act are treated as central to the communicative purposes of the speaker, while others perform a subsidiary (supportive) function with respect to the central discourse act. Relevant for my analysis of the Homeric passage are two types of subsidiary discourse acts: (1) Orientation, which as an instruction as to how to integrate the subsequent central discourse act into the current discourse space, and (2) Elaboration, which provides additional specifying or clarifying information about some element of the preceding discourse act.

Our passage contains eight main clauses. These are the central discourse acts, each of which is accompanied by a number of subsidiary discourse acts. In Functional Discourse Grammar, a constellation of a central discourse act with its dependent subsidiary discourse act is called a move. Each of these eight moves is introduced by the particle μέν, which prepares the listener for a subsequent equivalent unit with δέ, or by the particle δέ, which marks a switch to a new focus of consciousness (Bakker 1997: 63). The discourse units start off with an intonation unit with the function of orientation (πῦρ μέν ἐπ’ ὑσχαρόφιν, τηλόσε δ’ ὕβμη, ἡ δ’ ἐνδόν, ὡλ δὲ σπάος ἀμφι, ἔνθα δὲ τ’ ὄρνιθες, ἡ δ’ αὐτοῦ, κρήνα δ’ ἐξεί, ἀμφι δὲ λειμώνες) serving a double function: to direct the listener’s (visual) attention to a location in space (spatial adverb) and to focus it on a
Table 3.2 Intonation units and their discourse functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intonation units</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>μέν</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was burning</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiercely</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>Elaboration1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>namely of split</td>
<td>Elaboration2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cedar</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>namely of them</td>
<td>Orientation2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e. logs) being burned.</td>
<td>Orientation3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>She inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singing with a</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lovely voice</td>
<td>Orientation1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going to and fro</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at her loom</td>
<td>Orientation2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>Trees around the cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they were growing</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abundantly</td>
<td>Orientation1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>Elaboration2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alder</td>
<td>Elaboration3A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>Elaboration2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and poplar</td>
<td>Elaboration3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>και</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and fragrant</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cypresses</td>
<td>Elaboration1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>And there birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide-winged ones</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they were roosting</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>And that right there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was spread</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>and it was rich with clusters of grapes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>Springs in a row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four of them</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>close to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they flowed with</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bright water</td>
<td>(Tail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>turned in different directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δέ</td>
<td>On either side meadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soft ones</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τε</td>
<td>of violet and celery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they were growing</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luxuriantly</td>
<td>Central Discourse Act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

perceptually salient entity (grammatical subject). In cognitive linguistics, the grammatical subject is seen as the default topic: subject marking signals that the entity is in the center (‘spotlight’) of attention, serving both as a cognitive point of attachment to the already established discourse space and as a starting-point for the conceptualization of the subsequent information.

The order of the topical entities attended to corresponds to the path of Hermes’ visual (and olfactory) attention. After Hermes arrives, his gaze first focuses on the fire in the hearth first, which is central to the scene and is the most visually salient entity. The visual cue of the fire makes him realize that this fire is the source of the scent of split cedar and citron-wood which
he had already smelled as he came to the island flying through the sky and traveled the distance from the shore to the cave by foot.

Then, as she is illuminated by the fire, Hermes distinguishes Calypso, who is singing and working at her loom. At this point, his gaze starts to move from the center of the scene to the periphery: first he focuses on the trees around the cave, next he zooms in on the birds in the trees, then he notices the vine, the springs, and, finally, the meadows around the cave.

The successive descriptions of these topical entities also simulate the way in which Hermes’ visual observation is structured. A recurrent pattern is that a general entity is first focused on, followed by intonation units providing specifying information (elaborations), iconically representing the observer’s cognitive process as he zooms in on further perceptual details in the scene. For example, in lines 63–64, Hermes first directs his attention to the trees around the cave, of which he observes that they were growing abundantly; then he zooms in on them and identifies them as alders, poplars, and fragrant cypresses. The description of the vine (lines 68–69) constitutes a similar case. In 68, the observer’s attention is first drawn to the unnamed entity near the trees (ἡ δ’ αὐτοῦ ‘And that thing there’), which is spread around the cave. Only then is the species determined (‘an abundantly growing vine’), by means of an elaboration placed in enjambment. An additional visual detail about the vine is given in the next clause/intonation unit (‘it was rich in clusters of grapes’).

The path of Hermes’ visual attention through the space of the scene also has a temporal dimension. The temporal structure of the passage can be analyzed as a combination of the two types of narration mentioned in section 3. On the one hand, we are dealing with retrospective narration, which is signaled by the use of past tenses. On the other hand, as we have seen, there are many linguistic and narratological cues signaling that the passage should be understood as simulated observation. One of these cues is the pervasive use of imperfects and pluperfects, which are aspectual forms that suggest that the described states and activities are viewed from a temporal vantage point within the scene. This combination of narration is depicted in Figure 3.3.

The narrated time (t) is anterior to the narrating time (T), retrospective narration. The speed of the narrating time and the narrated time is (approximately) equal, which is typical
of scenic narration and, more specifically, of simulated observation. The narrator (N) portrays (dashed lines) subsequent states of affairs as they are observed by the story-internal viewer (V). In the scene, the viewer (V) focuses his/her attention from one state of affairs to another at successive moments in time (upward-pointing arrows). For example, in our passage Hermes first observes the fire burning fiercely (State of Affairs 1); he then focuses his attention on the smell of the burning logs (State of Affairs 2); then he watches Calypso going to and fro while she is working at her loom (State of Affairs 3), etc. Each of the perceptions of the states of affairs has a certain duration. In the terminology of cognitive grammar, this is the **temporal scope**: the window of attention selected for focused viewing of the state of affairs (represented by the square boxes).\(^4\) Within this window of attention, the state of affairs is put in focus (indicated by the thickness of the line). The imperfect and pluperfect aspectual marking expresses that states of affairs are seen as unbounded: they had been going on before the temporal scope of view and continue afterwards (represented by the dotted lines left and right of the temporal scope). This special spatio-temporal organization of the text encourages the listener to position him/herself within the described scene and experience it as if actually present. It goes without saying that this type of simulated observation strongly contributes to the experience of being immersed in the scene.

**Conclusion**

A well-known quality of Homeric epic, as well as of many other literary works, is its capacity to make the audience experience a feeling of being immersed in the storyworld. To achieve this effect on the listener, Homeric discourse deploys a rich and varied arsenal of linguistic and narrative devices, such as lexical choices, tense-aspect marking, deixis, discourse particles, word order, intonation units, case marking, spatio-temporal organization, and perspective (focalization), in order to bring the storyworld to life and to make us feel part of it. Cognitive approaches to narrative that have emerged in the fields of linguistics, narratology, and psychology help us to better understand how these highly diverse textual phenomena tightly interact and jointly contribute to Homer’s immersive power.

**Notes**

1 I thank the anonymous reviewer for the many helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
3 In art, film, and literary studies, a number of concepts have emerged that are closely related to immersion, such as aesthetic illusion (Wolf 1993, 2004; Wolf and Mahler 2013) and transportation (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000).
5 Cf. also Plutarch’s characterization of Thucydides’ style in De gloria Atheniensium 347A, where he notes that Thucydides’ *enargeia* produces in the readers the astonishment and confusion which were experienced by those who witnessed the actual events.
6 Cf. Longinus 1.3. The relationship between *enargeia*, *enagónios*, and *êkstasis* and the modern concept of *immersion* is discussed in Allan, De Jong, and De Jonge (2017).
7 Examples of empirical research relating to immersion and transportation are: Green and Brock 2000 (Transportation Theory) and Zwaan (2004). Zwaan’s Immersed Experiencer Framework will be discussed in more detail below. A brief overview of recent cognitive psychological research on immersion is given in Chapter 3 of Ryan (2015).
8 Allan (forthc. a), Allan (forthc. b), Allan (forthc. c).

11 As Egbert Bakker has rightly pointed out, in Homeric poetry in performance the roles of the historical author and the fictional narrator collapse: the text–internal ‘I’ of the narrator refers to the text–external ‘I’ of the performing poet (Bakker 2009). This does not affect the point I make here: immersion requires that neither the performing poet nor the text–internal narrator draw the audience’s attention to themselves (rather than directing it to the narrated world) – whether they can be clearly conceptually separated or not. This entails, incidentally, that the epic proems (in which the singer-narrator explicitly refers to himself) are not immersive (see also Allan, forthc. c).

12 For the displacement of the deictic center to the past in Greek narrative, see Bakker (2005), Ch. 9.

13 On the role of empathy in immersion reading, see Keen (2007).

14 Linguistically, this type of vantage point shift is often (but not necessarily) accompanied by the use of the imperfect tense (see Rijksbaron 2012). It is worth noting that there is empirical psychological evidence that imperfective sentences show a significant embodiment effect in that they encourage the language comprehenders more strongly to mentally simulate the process in action than perfect sentences. I will return to this role of the imperfect in mental simulation and immersion below.

15 For the relationship between speech and thought representation (especially free indirect discourse) and immersion, see also Allan (forthc. b).

16 For the terms anachrony, analepsis, and prolepsis, see De Jong (2014: 78–87).

17 There are anachronies in Homeric epic. However, they do occur only infrequently and almost always briefly interrupt the general continuity of the main storyline, which typically proceeds in chronological order and is of a scenic character (De Jong 2007). Moreover, two important aspects of Homeric anachronies ensure that they do not generally affect the immersive quality of the narrative: (1) Homeric anachronies are a very common part of character speech (e.g. Odysseus’ tale in book 9–12) rather than interventions by the narrator himself (see De Jong 2007), i.e. they do not draw attention away from the storyworld to the primary narrator’s activity. (2) If anachronies in narrator speech do occur, they very often serve to produce a pathetic effect or to create suspense, e.g. the ‘obituaries’ of killed warriors, anticipations of the deaths of the Patroclus, Hector, and Achilles, and the fall of Troy (see De Jong 2007: 21–22, 25–26). In other words, these anachronies importantly contribute to the hearer’s ‘emotional’ immersion in the storyworld.

18 For the narratological concept of speed (also called rhythm) and the various types of narration associated with it, I refer to De Jong (2014: 92–98).


20 Psychological empirical evidence for embodied effect in language (and narrative) understanding is strong and ever growing. Some examples are: (motor simulation) Glenberg and Kaschak (2002), Taylor and Zwaan (2008), Bergen and Wheeler (2010); (perceptual simulation) Zwaan, Madden, Yaxley, and Aveyard (2004), Yao, Belin, and Scheepers (2011); (emotional simulation) Havas, Glenberg, and Rinck (2007). Overviews of the research on embodiment and language comprehension are: Barsalou (2010), Sanford and Emmott (2012: 132–160), and Kaschak, Jones, Carranza, and Fox (2014).

21 That both lexical items and grammatical structure can generate embodiment effects and thus are meaningful is, as we have seen, in accordance with a cognitive linguistic view on grammar. The idea that conceptual structure ultimately derives from embodied cognition is also a central tenet of cognitive linguistic theory from its inception (e.g. Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987, 2008).

22 Note that Zwaan uses the term construal in a different but partially related sense to Langacker. An important difference is that Zwaan’s construal seems to relate more emphatically to the (automatic) processing of incoming information (hearer/reader-oriented), while Langacker’s construal seems to leave room for a (conscious) choice of presenting information in one way rather than another (speaker-oriented).

23 Contrary to what one might think, pauses are not very reliable indicators of intonation units: they often occur within intonation units, and they are often absent at boundaries of intonation units (Chafe 1994: 57).

24 For intonation units in Greek, see Devine and Stephens (1994: 432–433) and especially Scheppers (2011).

25 The current discourse space is the cognitive common ground between the interlocutors ‘comprising those elements and relations construed as being shared by the speaker and hearer as a basis for communications at a given moment in the flow of discourse’ (Langacker 2001: 144).

26 Based on data from five languages, Croft (2007: 11–12) observes that around 50% of the intonation units are clauses. The rest of the intonation units are single words, noun phrases, and other grammatical units.
Construal and immersion

27 For Greek aspect, boundedness, and construal, see Allan (2017).
28 Subjects, spatial adverbial expressions, imperfects/pluperfects. The translation is by Hammond (2000).
29 Cf. Ameis-Hentze’s remark ad loc.: ‘ταυτήκωσαν zungenstreckend malt die Seekrähen im Moment des Schreitens für das Auge’.
30 For a typology of the main text types in Greek (i.e. the Immediate/Displaced Diegetic, the Descriptive, and the Discursive Mode), see Allan (2009) and Allan (2013).
31 Cf. De Jong (2001); De Jong and Nünlist (2004). Whether or not Hermes could actually see all the items standing near the entrance of the cave is a matter of some controversy. For discussion, see De Jong and Nünlist (2004) (with references). I do not see any compelling reason to assume Hermes could not see the springs or the meadows from his standpoint outside the entrance of the cave.
32 Note that the permanent character of the scene is also signaled by the use of ‘epic τέ’ in 65 (Ruijgh 1971: 270).
33 Only μέμηλεν in 67, which also refers to an omnitemporal fact (cf. the ‘epic τέ’), is a present (perfect) tense. A possible explanation for this shift to the narrator’s focalization may be that the sea-related activities of the cormorants are not visible at the moment Hermes is viewing the scenery.
34 See Bakker (1990), Bakker (1997), and Slings (1992). For verse lines as prototypical intonation units (major phrases), see also Devine and Stephens (1994: 424–425). See more recently also Bonafazi, Drummen, and de Kreij (2016: Ch. II.2.2).
35 Caesurae: 1F = diaeresis at the end of first foot, Tri = Trithemimeral, Tro = Trochaic, P = Penthemimeral, H = Hepthenimeral, B = Bucolic diaeresis, VE = verse end. According to West (1982: 36), these are the caesurae that most frequently coincide with sense pauses. The segmentation of the passage is based on the default assumption that verse end, the middle caesura, and the caesurae in the first and second half of the verse (if present) indicate boundaries between intonation units. Also the position of a particle (Wackernagel’s Law) can help to identify boundaries. Occasionally, a caesura does not seem to correspond with a conceptual (semantic or pragmatic) boundary (‘sense pause’). In that case, I have not represented it in my table. An example is line 67 (την τε / θαλάσσια / ξυρα μέμηλεν), in which the trochaic caesura and the bucolic diaeresis do not seem to indicate any clear semantic or pragmatic boundary.
37 That an analysis of Homeric discourse in terms of discourse acts can help us to understand the communicative dynamics of Homeric discourse has already been shown by Bonifazi and Eltner (2012) and Bonifazi, Drummen, and de Kreij (2016: esp. Chapter II.2).
38 A move is defined by Kroon (1995: 66) as ‘the minimal free unit of discourse’; cf. also Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008: 50–60).
39 In Functional Grammar terminology, these initial extra-clausal constituents perform two more specific orienting functions, that of a referentially orienting Theme (i.e. left-dislocated topic) and that of a spatio-temporally orienting Setting (see Dik 1997: 388; Allan 2014). An Orientation intonation unit may also consist of a subordinate finite or participial clause preceding the main clause (as in lines 61–62). These have the function of Settings serving to ground the subsequent central discourse act by specifying the spatio–temporal location and the other background circumstances.
41 In Homeric discourse, elaborations typically have the form of appositions or participial clauses following the main clause.
42 Note that each of these three types receive their own intonation unit (κλήθρη τε / αήθρος τε / και εύῳδης κυπάρισσοι). This analysis is supported not only by the location of the caesura, but also by cross-linguistic considerations. First, assigning each item to a separate intonation unit is in accordance with Chafe’s (1994) One New Idea Constraint, which states that every intonation unit should not contain more than one item of new information. Second, there is a very strong cross-linguistic tendency to divide parallel, coordinated items (note τε and και) over separate intonation units, even if they consist of only one word (Croft’s paradelian constraint; see Croft 2007).
43 In technical terms, this subtype of elaboration is a tail, a right-dislocated extra-clausal constituent (i.e. a separate intonation unit, cf. the enjambment), used to clarify the identity of a referent mentioned in the preceding clause (Dik 1997: 401–403; Bakker 1990: 13; Allan 2014).
44 See e.g. Langacker (1987: 258–262) and Langacker (2000: 224); for a cognitive grammar approach to Greek aspect, see Allan (2017).
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