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Filip Johannes De Decker. *Studies in Homeric Speech Introductions and Conclusions: Tense, Aspect, Augment, Mood, Modality, and Modal Particle*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso. 2022. 557 pp., 80,00 €, ISBN 8836133118.

In this impressive philological undertaking, De Decker conducts several studies on the speech introductions and conclusions in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (with occasional reference to the other texts of epic language). While such innocent-looking tags as 'so (s)he spoke' may hardly catch the notice of many readers of Homer, their careful examination reveals interesting patterns and raises difficult questions. Principal among these is the murky matter of what motivates the choice of tense-aspect stem or whether the verb has an augment or not. When all speech introductions/conclusions mean essentially '(s)he said', rather than having interpretations more easily recognizable as belonging to the imperfect/aorist distinction, such as '(s)he was saying' or '(s)he has said', it is difficult to explain why in some cases we find the imperfect and in others the aorist. Similarly, the augmentation of the verbs of speaking appears at first glance quite random, and defining a single rule that will explain the use and absence of the augment in all cases remains elusive.

To such daunting questions as these the author attempts to provide concrete answers that are grounded in careful

examination of the (often resistant) data. Other points of investigation involve the "double introductions" (those that have more than one verb of speaking) and the use of speech introductions/conclusions in modal contexts. While I cannot endorse many of the author's claims, as I will explain in what follows, this book is nonetheless an indispensable starting point for any scholarly inquiry into the topic of verbs of speaking in Homer. In addition, it provides such excellent discussions of tense-aspect, augmentation, and modality in Homer generally (i.e., outside the verbs of speaking), with accompanying tables of reliable and carefully collected data for the entire epic catalogue, that researchers working on any of these topics will be well served by consulting De Decker's book. Throughout the work, the quoted examples are treated with great care and are always accompanied by brief summaries of the context, which help orient the reader so that the author's claims can be more readily evaluated.

For considerations of space, I will focus in my critique on the two richest and most contentious chapters, 5 (tense-aspect) and 6 (augment). Before proceeding, I note here some of the general shortcomings of the book, beginning with presentational issues, followed by more substantial matters. Throughout the book, grammatical and typographical errors are legion (misspellings, omitted words, dittographies). The general conclusion leaves much to be desired, as it is largely a word-for-word repetition of the introduction. The book also lacks indexes, which would be extremely helpful in navigating a work of this scale, with so many cited examples. Particularly useful would be a word index and a *Stellenindex*. While the work is very rich in references to secondary literature, it is poor in cross references. This greatly increases the demands on the reader (typically we get no more than "cf. infra/supra").

The author explicitly states that his research "is not particularly guided by any specific linguistic theory or framework, but puts the research object first" (p.3). This decision is, in my view, much to the detriment of the work, both in the reliability of its findings and in the utility of its analysis as a contribution to the field. The treatment of the data has similar issues. There are absolutely no statistical methods applied to the data, which is presented in its raw form (always

token frequencies rather than type frequencies) with percentages for each category. So, for example, we are told that in the *Odyssey* there are 385 speech introduction verbs with (metrically) secure augments, and that this amounts to 70 percent of all speech introduction verbs with (metrically) determinable augmentation (p.218). On the basis of data so presented, the author makes claims about "significance," of the type: "the *verba invehendi* show a significantly lower degree of augmented than unaugmented verb forms" (p.270). The data may well support what the author claims of them, but, as the reader is given no means of evaluating statistical significance, all such claims must remain inconclusive.

Chapter 5 is a comprehensive study of tense selection in speech introductions/conclusions, followed by a separate section on the iterative forms in -σκ-. The study focuses "mostly, but not exclusively on the finite verb forms" (p.65). This decision is not explained, but it seems to me that much is missed by not undertaking a systematic consideration of participles and infinitives, since there are many non-finite forms that introduce or conclude speech, and the author does in fact base some of his claims on participles.

After a detailed literature review, the author settles on the standardly assumed values for the two past tenses (p.68), the aorist being used for "punctual" or "completed" events (perfective aspect), the imperfect for "durative" or "continuous" events (imperfective aspect), despite the various complications of this assumption pointed out by other scholars. The author stresses that the choice of tense-aspect stem is "not driven by meter alone" (p.78). The main differences between the two forms in speech introductions/conclusions are laid out on pp.87–88: The imperfect "expects and/or elicits a reaction of the audience or it describes the repeated efforts and attempts (*de conatu*) of the speaker(s) to obtain a reaction or response"; the aorist "refers to punctual and/or completed actions that do not have a lasting effect on the audience or that do not provoke a reaction by that same audience." The author then embarks on a systematic study of various lexical groups (verbs of speaking proper, verbs of shouting or calling, verbs of praying and begging, etc.). Each such group is shown to adhere to the general rules, though various additional (more-or-less *ad hoc*)

rules are invoked for particular categories. Broadly, the imperfect is revealed to be the "default verb form" among verbs of speaking (p.95) and is by far the most common. This is attributed to the fact that speeches most often involve the expectation of a reaction or reply from the addressee.

There are some basic issues with the author's approach. For one, it is not clear who the one "expecting" a reply is. Is it the subject? Is it the speaker (=Homer)? Often the former is assumed, as on p.125 ("Aiolos expects an answer to his question and that is why the imperfect is used"), but sometimes the latter, as at *Od.* 21.175: The suitor Antinous does not know (or believe) he is about to die, but the aorist is used to introduce his command, the author claims, as a prophetic indication of the fact that this is the final command he will ever utter, which makes it "by definition a single and completed action" and hence "a striking example of a grammatical form with a foretelling value" (p.133). So the choice of aorist here must be motivated by the poet's foreknowledge, not the subject's (lack of) expectation.

The aorist is said to be used when the speaker's "words have no lasting effect" (p.101). But given that the aorist in general is resultative in meaning (e.g., *Il.* 3.439: νῦν…Μενέλαος ἐνίκησεν 'now Menelaus has defeated me'), which by definition has lasting effects (the result state), it is in fact surprising for the author to predict that the aorist is used precisely where there are no such effects.

Further, it is never clear whether the author believes that the tense-aspect forms are *marking* particular meanings, or that they are merely compatible with certain contexts. For instance, among the προσ- compounds of *verba dicendi* both the aorist and the imperfect are used "with an addressee, elicit a reaction, and introduce the first…or the last speech in an exchange" (p.93). The author therefore appeals to something else: co-occurrence with a participle of "exchange" ('answering' *vel sim.*), with which imperfects are more frequent. But if the imperfect itself indicates that a reaction is expected, why should the participle of exchange be needed at all?

Relatedly, the author sometimes motivates the choice of tense-aspect stem by the inherent lexical semantics of the verb. For example, the preponderance of aorists among the *verba*

clamandi is explained by the fact that 'calling out' is a punctual action (p.104). But if tense-aspect is lexically selected, this would make it analogous to, say, theta role assignment (how many arguments a verb takes), rather than to adverbial modification. Instead of adding a particular meaning to the lexical base, a tense-aspect form would simply reflect the lexical semantics of the base to which it is built. It is thus ultimately unclear what exactly the author believes the semantic contribution of tense-aspect forms to be.

We have, in addition, many lexical items for which only one form or the other is attested. In such cases, it is difficult to know how much of the observed distributional differences are to be attributed to tense-aspect, and how much to differences of lexical meaning. For instance, φημί 'say' is found only in the imperfect, while εἶπον and ἦ 'said' are exclusively aorist. How are we to determine the precise significance of tense-aspect selection in such cases? While, of course, we are ultimately at the mercy of the attested data, some sort of answer to this question seems to me essential.

A problem that pervades the work is the way in which apparently exceptional data is treated. For the most part, special pleading or lexeme-specific rules are invoked, which gives the reader the unsettling sense that the arguments are made *ex hypothesi*, positioned against the data rather than founded upon it. As a result, the motivations for the use of one form or another amount to a set of stipulations—often limited to only a subset of the verbs of speaking—rather than general, predictive grammatical rules.

One particularly difficult case is when the author claims that the aorist is motivated by an event's uniqueness (said to be complete and punctual) and the imperfect is motivated if the event is typical of its subject. Though the author does not say so, this in fact introduces a new dimension to tense-aspect selection. When Chryses prays to Apollo (*Il.* 1.450), his prayer is introduced by the imperfect, even though it is a single, complete event, because he is in the habit of praying to Apollo (p.121). But this is something distinct from the habitual imperfect (which would mean 'used to pray'). The imperfect is said to be used here because there are other events attributable to the subject that are of the same kind (viz. prayers to Apollo).

On the other hand, when Achilles prays to his mother, his prayer is introduced by the aorist (*Il.* 1.351), because "this verse is the only instance in which he prays to his mother." The uniqueness of the event *in the text* is thus held up as the reason for its being considered "punctual." We have, then, the senses of the terms *punctual* and *durative* stretched to their limits, and beyond, for the proposed semantics are, to my knowledge, unparalleled in other languages. Do tense-aspect forms in any language encode things like uniqueness (or unusualness) of the event, or whether or not the speaker is making his final speech before death (cf. pp.106–107)? The burden of proof rests firmly on the author.

Chapter 6 concerns the presence and absence of the augment in speech introductions/conclusions. A great virtue of this study is the author's diligence in determining what "counts" as being augmented and what does not, with explicit criteria for determining whether augmentation is secure in any given instance, based on meter and other considerations. The figures are thus exceptionally reliable, though what is made of them is more doubtful.

On the whole, similar issues to those described above for chapter 5 apply here. Despite the interesting observation that the verb is augmented much more frequently when there is an overt addressee than when there is not (p.258), the semantics attributed to the augment are hopelessly vague and, in my view, overly malleable, such that the author can explain away most problematic data on a case-by-case basis. The augment is used "to mark new information and/or interaction with the audience" (p.286, and cf. p.186), but neither of these concepts is particularly well defined by the author. Here we have a similar problem to that noticed above for the tense-aspect forms: If the augment on its own signals addressee involvement, would its co-occurrence with overt addressees not be redundant? Is the augment merely compatible with such contexts or does it contribute meaning to the sentence? Again, such fundamental questions as these are neither addressed nor raised.

Moreover, there is significant overlap in the supposed functions of the augmented vs. augmentless forms and the aorist vs. imperfect forms, namely that "the distinction foreground (focus, emphasis) versus background (topic, scene-

setting) is the main factor deciding on the use of the augment" (p.256), just as the imperfect was claimed to have a backgrounding function, in contrast to the aorist (see pp.170–171, 173, 176, 184). But this raises a difficult (and undiscussed) problem: Does it not imply a four-way hierarchy, with the augmented aorist being most foregrounded and the augmentless imperfect being the most backgrounded, and the other two forms somewhere in between? And, if not, how *does* it work? The same could be said for addressee involvement, which is claimed to interact with both tense-aspect and augmentation.

In all, the studies collected in this monograph reward careful attention, though they also require the reader to be on high alert, with more than the usual level of healthy skepticism. Despite some difficult claims and presentational shortcomings, the book is well worth having and will be regularly consulted in my own research on tense, aspect, and modality in Homeric Greek.

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