

Abstract

Albert Rijksbaron, The Imperfect as the Tense of Substitutionary Perception

Consider the following examples:

- (1) οἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Ὀλύνθου τοῖς Ποτειδαίοις βοηθοί (**ἀπείχε** δὲ ἐξήκοντα μάλιστα σταδίου καὶ ἔστι καταφανές) ὡς ἡ μάχη ἐγίγνετο καὶ τὰ σημεῖα ἦρθη, βραχὺ μὲν τι προῆλθον ... (Thuc. 1.63.2)¹
- (2) τὸ δὲ στράτευμα ὁ σῖτος ἐπέλιπε, καὶ πρίασθαι οὐκ ἦν εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ Λυδία ἀγορᾷ ἐν τῷ Κύρου βαρβαρικῶ, τὴν καπίθην ἀλεῦρων ἢ ἀλφίτων τεττάρων σίγλων. ὁ δὲ σίγλος δύναται ἐπὶ ὀβολοὺς καὶ ἡμιωβέλιον Ἀττικῶν· ἡ δὲ καπίθη δύο χοίνικας Ἀττικῶν **ἐχώρει**. κρέα οὖν ἐσθιοντες οἱ στρατιῶται διεγίγνοντο. (Xen. An. 1.5.6)²

In these three fragments from narrative texts we find in (1) an imperfect (bold type) coordinated with a present indicative (underlined), and vice versa in (2). How should these imperfects be interpreted?

In this paper I argue that these imperfects express what may be called Substitutionary Perception. This concept was introduced in literary studies by the Swiss anglicist Bernhard Fehr in a pioneering article from 1937, in connection with the progressive form *was coming* in sentence (3):

- (3) 'Look!' Fred turned round. Jack was coming across the street towards him

which he compared with two other ways of presenting information about Fred seeing Jack, viz.

- (4) 'Here comes Jack,' said Fred

- (5) On turning round Fred saw Jack coming across the street towards him

Sentence (3) 'is intended to express Fred's vision', in Fehr's words. "It is the reporter running in on the actor's vision and it is the actor lending his sight to the articulate reporter.' This interpretation crucially depends on the presence of the progressive form. After a discussion of similar progressives and their equivalents in some fragments from Dutch, English, French and German novels, I turn to a number of Greek narrative texts, starting with Homer's *Odyssey*, and argue that the Greek imperfect can be used in exactly the same way.

As for its *raison d'être*, Substitutionary Perception would seem to highlight the mental, especially cognitive, involvement of a character in the events he is

¹ 'Meanwhile the auxiliaries of the Potidaeans from Olynthus, which *was* about seven miles off, and *is* in sight of Potidaea, when the battle **began** and the signal **were raised, advanced** a little way ...' (transl. Crawley-Strassler, although they have 'is about seven miles off', perhaps reading ἀπέχει.) Classen-Steup *ad loc.* already observed: 'Impf., indem die lokalen Umstände in die Vergangenheit der Erzählung hineingezogen werden.'

² 'As for the troops, their supply of grain **gave** out, and it **was** not possible to buy any except in the Lydian market ..., at the price of of four *sigli* for a *capithê* of wheat flour or barley meal. The *siglus* is worth seven and one-half Attic obols, and the *capithê* **had** the capacity of two Attic choenices. The soldiers therefore **managed** to subsist by eating meat!' (transl. Brownson).

experiencing, the purpose being, we must assume, to enhance the reader's interest in, and understanding of, the character, just as free indirect speech and thought 'can be utilized to great effect in the detailed portrayal of characters' sentiments and feelings and thoughts' (Fludernik 1993: 79).

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