

The Manifestations of the Augment in Homer: A Contextual Investigation

The augment is a morpheme (< **h₁e*) marking past tense in the indicative, together with the so-called secondary endings. It can be found in ancient Greek (ἐ-), Indo-Iranian (*a-*), Armenian (*e-*) and Phrygian (ε-). More specifically, it is extended to all the ‘historical’ tenses in classical Greek prose, classical Sanskrit and Old Persian. On the other hand, augmented and unaugmented forms coexist in the Homeric poems, early Greek poetry, Linear B, Herodotus, Vedic and Old Avestan. Specifically in the Iliad and the Odyssey, it is possible to identify contexts where augmentation tends to be more present (e.g. speech, similes, speech introductions) or absent (e.g. proper epic narration, background contexts, -σκ- iteratives, negation). Several scholars have explained this peculiarity through alternative original values of the augment, which all seem to have in common a reference to the speaker’s present situation, i.e. a ‘foregrounding’ value¹.

Context interpretations based on these hypotheses should be integrated with the analysis of the formulaic structure of the Homeric language, which has never been considered sufficiently in the study of the augment. I believe that its original ‘foregrounding’ value contributed to the semantics of traditional formulas, thus affecting their creation and shaping. On the other hand, it might also have been lost before the end of the oral composition phase, and therefore not considered in later ‘analogical’ changes. The aim is therefore to prove the affinity or incompatibility of augmentation with specific Homeric contexts, both situational² and morphological³, by observing the presence or absence of the augment in their traditional formulas and ‘later’ modifications. To do so, I will exhibit two types of case studies: those which show positive results and confirm the validity of the method, and those which rather present its possible limits as a matter of discussion.

¹ Suggestions for the function of the Homeric augmented forms have included an ‘emphatic’ value of *perfect aorists* (Platt 1891, pp. 221-9), or of *present-reference* forms, as opposed to unaugmented *true preterites* (Drewitt 1912, pp. 44-8). Basset (1989, pp. 10-4), by using the linguistic dichotomy between *récit* and *discours*, defined the augmented aorists in Homeric speeches and similes as past forms with respect to the source of utterance. According to Bakker (2001), the Homeric augment expressed ‘closeness’ to the speaker’s *hic et nunc*, by a process of proximal deixis. More recently, De Decker (2016, pp. 301-4) has suggested a function of evidentiality marker denoting the eye-witness/direct source of information, whereas Willi (2018, p. 348) has considered the augment as an original reduplication syllable of **h₁-* roots (i.e. **h₁e-*, e.g. from **h₁leudh-*), later marking ‘emphasised’ perfectivity, i.e. resultativity (p. 353)

² E.g. arming scenes, whose affinity with augmentation was first noticed by Basset (1989, pp. 15f.), and passages where the singer directly interprets mythical facts. For the ‘foregrounding’ value of the latter type of context and its affinity with augmentation, cf. Chiattelli 2019.

³ E.g. the occurrences of the so-called long augment (e.g. ἠείδη in *Od.* 9.206).

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