

ASPECTS OF SYNONYMY IN HOMERIC DICTION: AN INVESTIGATION OF DATIVE EXPRESSIONS FOR “SPEAR”

EGBERT J. BAKKER AND NINA VAN DEN HOUTEN

I. BACKGROUND

Milman Parry's 1928 dissertation,¹ insofar as it drew upon and continued the work of earlier scholars, provided a functional dimension to the findings of Düntzer, Ellendt, Witte, and Meister. Parry pointed out that the coexistence of semantically equivalent but metrically different forms in the Homeric diction was not only the creation of epic verse (cf. the notion of the epic *Kunstsprache* as a “hexametric” language),² but was also due to the need of the epic poets to have metrical alternatives for the sake of easy versification. In other words, many peculiarities of the Homeric language and diction could be shown to have not only a cause, but also a motivation.

As is well known, Parry's main concern was to show that by adding epithets to names or substantives, the epic poet had various, metrically different forms at his disposal for one and the same “essential idea.”³ The regularity in the use of epithets, on the basis of which they form a system, could be shown to lie in their economy: for each relevant metrical form, there was one and only one noun-epithet combination, which suggested that the point of epithets was metrical differentiation in the first place, rather than to contribute to the content of the sentence.

The idea that epithets are used in systematic ways for the sake of metrical diversity could be added to the observations made by Parry's predecessors, concerning the occurrence of morphologically and phonologically different alternatives (e.g., dialectal and even artificial forms) for a given word. To these, the same principle of economy applied. A third means to achieve metrical diversity was what can be called “functional synonymy,” that is, the use of synonyms, not for the sake of stylistic variation, but, again, for the sake of metrical diversity. Parry was aware of the importance of synonymy and introduced the concept in his discussion of noun-epithet

We would like to thank Prof. M. W. Edwards, Dr. C. Higbie, Prof. R. Janko, and Prof. C. M. J. Sicking as well as the two anonymous referees of this journal for their comments and suggestions.

1. M. Parry, *L'épithète traditionnelle dans Homère: Essai sur un problème de style homérique* (Paris, 1928); reprinted in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford, 1971), henceforth: MHV.

2. Cf. K. Witte, “Homerios, B) Sprache,” *RE* 8:2213–47; K. Meister, *Die homerische Kunstsprache* (Leipzig, 1921).

3. Parry, *Epithète*, p. 105 (= MHV, p. 84).

formulae for the Achaeans⁴ and for the human race.⁵ In both cases he followed Düntzer.⁶

The first systematic survey of synonymy in the Parryan context is offered by H. Paraskevaides.⁷ In his study, Paraskevaides gives the term “synonymy” a very broad sense, applying it whenever a group of formulaic expressions conveys the same or a similar idea. Paraskevaides’ treatment of the issue is strictly Parryan, in that synonymy is consistently viewed as *functional* synonymy. This means that whenever in any given group of synonymous expressions two expressions occur with the same metrical form and prosodic characteristics they are considered to be a violation of the law of economy.

In this article, we want to show that one can go too far in assuming the universal applicability of the Parryan framework for the study of synonymy in Homer. Paraskevaides has demonstrated the importance and scope of synonymy as a factor in Homeric formulaic diction, but in some cases more can be said about a given pair of “synonyms” than that they are either metrically different (and thus functional synonyms) or metrically equivalent (and thus a violation of economy). In other words, we will suggest that some of Paraskevaides’ alleged synonyms are not synonymous at all. Paradoxically, the consequence of this is that in the case of metrically equivalent pairs the case for functional (formulaic) synonymy is strengthened: when two metrically equivalent expressions can be shown to have a different meaning, they cease to be a violation of the “law” of economy, which can only be favorable to the notion of functional synonymy.

The case we are going to discuss is the set of dative expressions for “spear.” This formulaic set, which in itself is based on functional synonymy, displays a number of metrically identical pairs. Our argument to the effect that this duplication is motivated by various differences in meaning primarily applies, of course, to the expressions themselves, but in its general orientation it is applicable, we hope, to other aspects of Homeric diction.

II. SYNONYMY AND THE VIOLATION OF ECONOMY

The system of singular dative epithet-expressions for “spear,” to which we limit our discussion, can be given as follows, after Paraskevaides (p. 26):

(1)	ὄξέϊ δουρί	(V---)
	ἔρχεϊ μακρῷ	(V---)
	ὄξέϊ χαλκῷ	(V---)
	δουρί φαιινῷ	(C---)
	νηλέϊ χαλκῷ	(C---)
	αἰχμῇ χαλκείῃ	(----)
	ἔρχεϊ χαλκείῳ	(----)

4. Ibid., pp. 124–25 (= MHV, pp. 100–101).

5. Ibid., pp. 141–42 (= MHV, pp. 114–15).

6. H. Düntzer, *Homerische Abhandlungen* (Leipzig, 1872), p. 538.

7. *The Use of Synonyms in Homeric Formulaic Diction* (Amsterdam, 1984).

ἔγχεϊ ὀξυόεντι	(~~~~~)
χαλκήρεϊ δουρί	(C~~~~)
ταναήκεϊ χαλκῷ	(C~~~~~)
ξυστῷ χαλκήρεϊ	(~~~~~)

The metrical diversity displayed by this set is effected by the use of epithets as well as by the functional synonymy of the two main words, ἔγχος and δόρυ, which are metrically unequivalent. In spite of their different archaeological denotation,⁸ ἔγχος and δόρυ are synonyms in the Homeric diction.⁹ This appears, among other things, from the fact that they are often used coreferentially, for instance:¹⁰

- (2) τοῦ δὲ βάδην ἀπionτος ἀκόντισε δουρὶ φαεινῷ
 Διήφοβος· δὴ γάρ οἱ ἔχεν κóτον ἐμμενὲς αἰεῖ.
 ἀλλ' ὄ γε καὶ τόθ' ἄμαρτεν, ὃ δ' Ἀσκάλαφον βάλε δουρί,
 υἱὸν Ἐνυαλίου· δι' ὧμου δ' ὄβριμον ἔγχος
 ἔσχεν· ὃ δ' ἐν κόνιῃσι πεσὼν ἔλε γαῖαν ἀγοσφῶ.
 (Il. 13.516–20)

In this passage, one and the same spear is referred to three times, twice with δουρί, once with ἔγχος. This shows that the two words are synonymous in the sense that they may be used indiscriminately from a referential point of view. The interchangeability of the two lexemes lies at the basis of the datives being part of a formulaic system. It is on account of their function within this system that δουρί and ἔγχεϊ have their specific force in the Homeric verse.

The function of the system in (1) may be described in terms of the notions “nucleus” and “periphery.” The distinction between nucleus and periphery is an extension of the original distinction made by Parry between the meaning and the form of a noun-epithet formula¹¹ and consists in restricting the term “formulaic” to the peripheral element. In this way it is possible to speak of “formulaic diction” in a convincing way also outside the limited domain of the noun-epithet formula. The distinction between nucleus and periphery can be called a constitutive feature of Homeric diction in that each type of nucleus has its own extensively systematized type of periphery.¹²

Now dative expressions for “spear” are typically “peripheral” with respect to a verb denoting killing, throwing/thrusting, or hitting (the

8. See H. Trümper, *Kriegerische Fachausdrücke im griechischen Epos* (Freiburg i/d Schweiz, 1950), pp. 51–52; and H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London, 1950), pp. 254–58, as well as section III below.

9. See also W. Whallon, “The Shield of Ajax,” *YCIS* 19 (1966): 16–18. Whallon contrasts the interchangeability of δόρυ and ἔγχος with the clear distinction between ἀσπίς and σάκος.

10. See also Trümper, *Fachausdrücke*, p. 53; and E. J. Bakker and F. Fabbricotti, “Peripheral and Nuclear Semantics in Homeric Diction: The Case of Dative Expressions for ‘Spear’,” *Mnemosyne* 44 (1991): 63–84.

11. E.g., Parry, *Epithète*, p. 105 (= MHV, p. 84).

12. In this way, T. Jahn (*Zum Wortfeld “Seele-Geist” in der Sprache Homers* [München, 1987]: *Zetemata* 83) discusses the numerous expressions for “in his heart” as peripheral extensions to verbs of feeling or thinking (a formulaic system in which functional synonymy plays a very important role); and E. Visser (*Homeric Versifikationstechnik: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion* [Frankfurt, 1987]: “Formulæ

“nucleus”).¹³ The peripheral status of the spear-expression implies that it is not primarily uttered for its own sake, but to adapt a nuclear element to the metrical circumstances. In example (2), for instance, the double occurrence of δουρί (φαιινῶ) is unnecessary from the point of view of information processing. But instead of being redundant without more ado, the datives have a verse-technical purpose: to extend the nuclear phrases (ἄκοντισε, βάλε), which on their own could have carried the meaning that the poet wanted to convey, to the end of the line.

The peripheral function of “with the spear” in Homeric discourse is due to the omnipresence of spears in Homeric warfare: what is generally present need not be mentioned as such, and when it is mentioned, it is a case of “semantic overkill,” which is exploited in Homeric diction for verse-technical purposes.¹⁴ Thus spears are often mentioned for a purpose other than the actual, deliberate reference to a spear. In being related to their nuclear verb in the same way as an epithet to its substantive, they serve a verse-technical, formulaic purpose, and this explains the metrical diversity effected by the functional synonymy of δουρί and ἔγχει.

The metrical diversity displayed by the list in (1), then, is motivated by the formulaic purpose of the system of which the expressions are a part. The list, however, contains a number of metrically and prosodically identical pairs: the two main words form such a pair (ὄξεϊ δουρί vs. ἔγχει μακρῶ); furthermore, every instance of χαλκῶ is consistently matched by an equivalent expression containing δουρί or ἔγχει: ὄξεϊ χαλκῶ vs. ὄξεϊ δουρί/ἔγχει μακρῶ; νηλέϊ χαλκῶ vs. δουρί φαιινῶ, and ταναήκει χαλκῶ vs. χαλκήρει δουρί. When we view the list in (1) as a group of synonymous expressions conveying the idea “with/by the spear,” these pairs are mere duplicates and, as such, violations of the law of economy, and this is the way they are treated by Paraskevaides (p. 23).

In what follows, we challenge this view, offering some considerations on synonymy and metrical equivalence in Homer. These fall into three parts, covering what we call three “aspects of synonymy” in Homer. The *diachronic* aspect, discussed in section III, applies to the pair ὄξεϊ δουρί/ἔγχει μακρῶ. It consists in the insight that two alleged synonyms may still be different in the diachronic dimension. The synchronic usage in Homer may reflect this former difference, in spite of the interchangeability of the expressions on other grounds.

In section IV we deal with the *semantic* aspect, which applies to cases in which two allegedly synonymous expressions turn out, under closer investigation, not to be synonymous at all. Our case here is ὄξεϊ δουρί vs. ὄξεϊ χαλκῶ. On the basis of a linguistic examination of the contexts in

or Single Words? Towards a New Theory on Homeric Verse-Making,” *WJA*, N.F. 14 [1988]: 21–37) discusses the peripheral status of the verb “kill” in verses in which a statement of the type “A killed B” is made. Also, particles can function as peripheral elements, of which an example is given in E. J. Bakker, *Linguistics and Formulas in Homer: Scalarity and the Description of the Particle “Per”* (Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 171–86.

13. Cf. Bakker and Fabbricotti, “Peripheral and Nuclear Semantics.”

14. The use of spears is usually implied by the verbs of spear-handling. In the (very frequent) case of ἄκοντιζεῖν, we may even say that “spear” is included in the lexical meaning of the verb.

which they occur, we show that the two expressions conform to entirely different distributional patterns.

Finally, in section V we discuss what we call the *poetic* aspect, which lies in the significant addition of an epithet to a nuclear noun. The specific value of the epithet may preclude the equivalence in meaning of two allegedly synonymous expressions. This section will be concerned with the difference between *νηλέϊ χαλκῷ* and *δουρὶ φαεινῷ*.

It should be stressed that these three aspects of synonymy are not necessarily distinct in that the presence of one of them excludes the other two. For example, the preservation of an older, metrically equivalent form may be motivated by semantic or poetic factors, and a semantic difference between two metrically equivalent expressions may be put to poetic uses. Our three aspects merely represent three vantage points from which to describe synonymy in Homer beyond the confines of formal analysis.

III. THE DIACHRONIC ASPECT: *ὄξεϊ δουρί* vs. *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ*

We stated that *δόρυ* and *ἔγχος* are functional synonyms in the Homeric diction. But on this basis, the co-occurrence of *ὄξεϊ δουρί* and *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* would be entirely *disfunctional* and would disrupt the economy of the system: both expressions have exactly the same metrical form and localization (at the end of the verse, after the bucolic diaeresis).

Ὅξεϊ δουρί and *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* seem to be wholly interchangeable in the following pair, where they are used as periphery to one and the same verb of wounding:

- (3) *βεβλήκει κεφαλῆς κατὰ ἰνίον ὄξεϊ δουρί* (Il. 5.73)

*Τληπόλεμος δ' ἄρα μὴρὸν ἀριστερὸν ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ
βεβλήκειν* (5.660–61)

We see no reason why *ὄξεϊ δουρί* should have been used specifically in the one case and *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* in the other.¹⁵ Consequently, examples like this one seem to suggest that the phrases *ὄξεϊ δουρί* and *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* are just as interchangeable as the lexemes *δόρυ* and *ἔγχος* in general (see example [2]). In the following pair, however, there is a difference:

- (4) *τόνδε δ' ἐγὼν ἐπιόντα δεδέξομαι ὄξεϊ δουρί* (Il. 5.238)

*ὅς τις δὲ Τρώων κοίλῃς ἐπὶ νηυσὶ φέροιστο
σὺν πυρὶ κηλείω, χάριν Ἕκτορος ὀτρύναντος,
τὸν δ' Αἴας οὐτασκε δεδεγμένος ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* (15.743–45)¹⁶

15. In the context of the second case the other lexeme is actually used: 5.656: *δοῦρατα μακρά*, and 5.664/66: *δόρυ*. Notice that the spear mentioned in 5.660 is used for throwing, not thrusting (cf. 5.657 *ἐκ χειρῶν ἤϊσαν*); this is a further indication that *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* is used arbitrarily here (see below).

16. Notice that Eustathius reads *ὄξεϊ δουρί* here, and that *ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ* is a variant. The latter can be explained on the basis of the juxtaposition with the middle perfect participle, see example (8) in section IV below.

The wider context of 5.238 makes it clear that the spear mentioned will be used by its owner (Pandarus) for throwing (5.280 *πρόει*; 281 *βάλε*; 282 *πταμένη*),¹⁷ whereas in 15.745 Ajax is keeping the Trojans away from the ships (15.730–31 *ἔγχεϊ δ' αἰεὶ* / *Τρῶας ἄμυνε νεῶν*), using his spear as a defensive weapon rather than as a missile.

Cases like 15.745 suggest what was already stated by Trümper and Lorimer:¹⁸ originally, *δόρυ* and *ἔγχος* did not designate the same type of weapon. **ἔγχος*, the older word,¹⁹ is the term for the long Bronze Age thrusting-spear, whereas *δόρυ*, the normal term for “spear” in post-Homeric Greek, refers to the lighter throwing-spear that came into use in the late Mycenaean era. The terms are (functional) synonyms in the Homeric diction, for reasons specified above, but when it comes to describing what one actually does with a spear,²⁰ or to singling out a truly heroic weapon, handled only by a special class of heroes (viz., Achilles and Ajax),²¹ *ἔγχος* can still have its proper, original meaning, which fully justifies the presence of the epithet *μακρῷ*. This would seem to be the case in the following example:

- (5) *τόν ῥ' υἱὸς Τελαμῶνος ὑπ' οὔατος ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ*
νύξ', ἐκ δ' ἔσπασεν ἔγχος
(Il. 13.177–78)

Here a typical *ἔγχος*-bearer does what one typically does with an *ἔγχος*: he thrusts (*νύσσω*) the weapon into his opponent's body.²²

The original difference between *ἔγχος* and *δόρυ* can be said to have two linguistic reflexes. First, *δόρυ*, and not *ἔγχος*, has an affinity with verbs denoting throwing (e.g., *ἀκοντίζω*).²³ Thus it would seem that the use of *ὀξεί δουρί* in the following example is no more accidental than that of *ἔγχεϊ μακρῷ* in example (5):

- (6) *τοῦ δ' Ἄντιφος αἰολοθώρηξ*
Πριαμίδης καθ' ὅμιλον ἀκόντισεν ὀξεί δουρί
(Il. 4.489–90)²⁴

17. It testifies to the general functional synonymy of *ἔγχος* and *δόρυ* that in the spear-throwing formula (*δολιχόσκιον*) *ἔγχος* is used: *ἦ ῥα, καὶ ἀμπεπαλὼν πρόει δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος*.

18. Trümper, *Fachausdrücke*, pp. 52–54; and Lorimer, *Monuments*, pp. 258–61.

19. **ἔγχος* is attested in Mycenaean: *e-ke-si* (PY Jn 829), see also C. J. Ruijgh, *L'élément achéen dans la langue épique* (Assen, 1957), pp. 91–93.

20. A passage where the poet probably had the long spear in mind is *Il.* 19.47–49, where wounded warriors use an *ἔγχος* to lean on.

21. See Trümper, *Fachausdrücke*, p. 53. It is precisely these two heroes, especially Ajax, that are also *σάκος*-bearers. *Σάκος*, the long shield, reaching to a warrior's feet, is another relic from the Mycenaean age. It may be used indiscriminately to some extent with *ἀσπίς*, which designates the younger type (*ibid.*, pp. 20–36), again for the sake of functional synonymy, but the difference between the two terms is never far away, owing among other things to the strong association of the *σάκος* with Ajax (see Whallon, “Shield of Ajax,” pp. 5–36).

22. This is not to say that *δουρί* does not or cannot occur with *νύσσω*. See for example *Il.* 11.95–96 *τόν δ' ἰθὺς μεμαῶτα μετόπιον ὀξεί δουρί* / *νύξ'* (said about Agamemnon).

23. *Δουρί* combines with *ἀκοντίζειν* sixteen times in the *Iliad* (out of twenty-two occurrences of the verb) and *ἔγχεϊ* two times. With the finite aorist form *βάλ(ε)(ν)*, *δουρί* combines twenty-eight times (out of 100 occurrences of the verb), and *ἔγχεϊ* four times. Notice that, conversely, *ἔγχεϊ* cannot be shown to have an affinity with verbs for thrusting: both *ἔγχεϊ* and *δουρί* combine five times with *νύσσειν* (out of eighteen occurrences of the verb).

24. This is in fact the only instance of *ἀκόντισεν ὀξεί δουρί*; normally *ἀκόντισε δουρί φαινῷ* is used. Apart from historical linguistic reasons (in the Aeolic phase, when nu-mobile was absent, **ἀκόντισε ὀξεῖ δουρί* was prosodically undesirable), the synchronic, poetic explanation for this preference seems to be the

Second, as Trümper has noted,²⁵ δόρυ is regularly used in the dual form (δύο δοῦρε, ἄλκιμα δοῦρε), explicitly designating a pair of light throwing-spears. Also, warriors regularly have a second δόρυ at their disposal when they have used their first one. None of these facts applies to the ἔγχος: ἔγχος never appears in the dual form, and it typically refers to a single weapon. The distinction is clearly brought out in the following passage, from the arming scene of Patroclus:

- (7) εἴλετο δ' ἄλκιμα δοῦρε, τὰ οἱ παλάμῃσιν ἀρήρει.
 ἔγχος δ' οὐχ ἔλετ' οἷον ἀμύμονος Αἰακίδαο,
 βριθὺ, μέγα, στιβαρόν· τὸ μὲν οὐ δύνατ' ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν
 πάλλιν, ἀλλὰ μιν οἷος ἐπίστατο πῆλαι Ἀχιλλεύς.
 (Il. 16.139–42)

The unusually clear distinction between δόρυ and ἔγχος in this passage is due, of course, to the particular significance of Achilles' ash spear.²⁶

We may conclude, then, that even though ὀξεῖ δουρί and ἔγχει μακρῷ may be used as genuine metrical duplicates, owing to the extensive functional synonymy of δόρυ and ἔγχος, they are not interchangeable without more ado: sometimes the original technical distinction between two kinds of weapons plays a role. The need for the poet to use ἔγχει μακρῷ, in full accordance with the meaning of its epithet, to designate a specific kind of spear, still motivates its occurrence in the diction, as the metrical equivalent of ὀξεῖ δουρί.

IV. THE SEMANTIC ASPECT: χαλκῷ vs. δουρί

We now turn to the discussion of the meaning of ὀξεῖ (ταναήκει) χαλκῷ with respect to that of ὀξεῖ (χαλκήρει) δουρί and ἔγχει μακρῷ. Of course, χαλκός may come to mean "spear" only by a possible metonymical extension of its meaning; there are cases where the use of χαλκῷ is irrelevant for our purposes. In *Iliad* 23.118, for example, it is used to refer to an axe, and it may also just denote the bronze of which the spear point is made (Il. 10.135, 14.12, 15.482). In these cases, obviously, even the alleged synonymy of χαλκῷ and the corresponding δουρί- or ἔγχει-expression is out of the question.

But in the cases where the reference to a spear is not ruled out, an investigation of the contexts suggests that ὀξεῖ (ταναήκει) χαλκῷ and ὀξεῖ (χαλκήρει) δουρί are used under entirely different circumstances. Ὀξεῖ χαλκῷ typically combines with predicates that denote states, such as (medio-) passive participles, for instance:

- (8) ὅστις ἔτ' ἄβλητος καὶ ἀνούτατος ὀξεῖ χαλκῷ (Il. 4.540)
 ἄψ ἀναχαζόμενον, βεβλημένον ὀξεῖ χαλκῷ (16.819)

value of the epithet φαεινός: a spear in its quality of being thrown (i.e., not yet entering a body) is typically "shining," and not "sharp." See Bakker and Fabbricotti, "Periphrasal and Nuclear Semantics," pp. 70–71, for reflections on the meaning of ornamental adjectives, as well as section V below.

25. *Fachausdrücke*, p. 54.

26. On which see R. S. Shannon, III, *The Arms of Achilles and Homeric Compositional Technique* (Leiden, 1975: *Mnemosyne* suppl. 36), pp. 31f.

- ὥς ἶδε Πάτροκλον δεδαϊγμένον ὀξεί χαλκῷ (19.283)
καὶ γάρ θην τοῦτῳ τρωτὸς χρώς ὀξεί χαλκῷ (21.568)

The verbs of the δουρί-expressions, by contrast, denote less “time-stable” phenomena, such as actions (consisting of killing, thrusting, hitting, or throwing), rather than states, for example:

- (9) οὐτασεν ὦμον ὑπερθεν ἐπάλμενος ὀξεί δουρί (11.421)
λαιμόν τῷψ’, ἐπὶ οἱ τετραμμένον, ὀξεί δουρί (13.542)
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ προσιόντα βάλλον χαλκῇρεϊ δουρί (11.743)

Χαλκῷ-expressions are not impossible with this kind of verb, but when they occur with it, the expression as a whole is still different from the contexts exemplified by (9), in which an action in combat is reported: instead of being factual and declarative, describing one specific killing or wounding, the context in which a χαλκῷ-expression occurs with an action-denoting verb is either nonfactual or generic in the sense that it does not describe one particular event. Typical environments for a χαλκῷ-expression used in this way are conditional and purpose clauses, which are by definition nonfactual, in describing what may happen or what has not yet happened:

- (10) εἰ καὶ ἐγὼ σε βάλοιμι τυχὼν μέσον ὀξεί χαλκῷ, . . . (Il. 16.623)
εἰ μὲν κεν ἐμὲ κείνος ἔλῃ ταναήκει χαλκῷ, . . . (7.77)²⁷
Ἔκτωρ μὲν Πάτροκλον ἐπεὶ κλυτὰ τεύχε’ ἀπηύρα,
ἔλχ’, ἴν’ ἀπ’ ὦμοιιν κεφαλὴν τάμοι ὀξεί χαλκῷ (17.125–26)

Another typical environment for ὀξεί (ταναήκει) χαλκῷ is the following generic (“iterative”) sentence, which does not refer to a particular killing:

- (11) τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ μάλα πολλὰ μάχη ἔνι κυδιανείρῃ
ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὄπωπα, καὶ εὖτ’ ἐπὶ νηυσὶν ἐλάσσεας
Ἀργείους κτείνεσκε, δαΐζων ὀξεί χαλκῷ.
(Il. 24.391–93)

Thus we see that ὀξεί δουρί is at home in contexts that describe one particular, factual killing, while ὀξεί χαλκῷ typically occurs in contexts that are characterized either by a stative verb, denoting a time-stable phenomenon, or by a nonfactual or generic modality.²⁸ Now what these contexts have in common in opposition to the sentences describing one particular killing or hitting is that they are less *transitive*.

27. In Il. 16.623 and 7.77, the χαλκῷ-expression occurs in the conditional clause proper (protasis); it may also occur in the apodosis, which, its truth depending on the fulfillment of a condition, is equally nonfactual: ἀτὰρ εἴ κε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη / ἔλθῃς ἐς πόλεμον, τὴν γ’ οὐταμεν ὀξεί χαλκῷ (5.131–32, 820–21).

28. For “time-(in)stability” as a criterion on the basis of which predicates may be differentiated, see Bakker, *Linguistics and Formulas*, pp. 125–31; T. Givón, *On Understanding Grammar* (New York, 1979), pp. 14, 320ff. For “factual,” “non-factual,” and “generic” as sentential modalities in Greek, see E. J. Bakker, “Restrictive Conditionals,” in *In the Footsteps of Raphael Kühner*, ed. A. Rijksbaron, H. A. Mulder, G. C. Wakker (Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 5–26; and in general, T. Givón, “Opacity and Reference in Language: An Inquiry into the Role of Modalities,” in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 2, ed. J. Kimball (New York and London, 1973), pp. 95–122; as well as T. Givón, *Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1984), chaps. 9, 11.

Following an influential article in modern linguistics,²⁹ we define “transitivity” as “the degree to which an action is ‘carried over’ from one person or entity to another.” The notions “transitive” and “intransitive” are thus not the members of a binary pair,³⁰ but the two extremes of a continuum of increasing transitivity. Transitivity is what may be called a “cluster-concept” in that it consists of a number of independent parameters. One of these is individuation of the object. By this criterion “Odysseus killed Pidytes” is higher in transitivity than “Odysseus killed fifty Trojans.” A second parameter is reality (or factivity): real events are more transitive than events that have as yet not occurred; by this criterion “Odysseus killed Pidytes” is higher in transitivity than “Odysseus will kill Pidytes.” A third parameter is volitionality: “Odysseus jumped” is more transitive than “Odysseus fell,” even though neither is transitive in the traditional definition.³¹

The degree of transitivity may be reflected by properties of the sentence, and this insight is, we suggest, the appropriate basis to differentiate ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ from ὄξεϊ δουρί. The contexts in which ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ typically occurs consistently display a lower degree of transitivity by one or more of Hopper and Thompson’s parameters than the contexts in which ὄξεϊ δουρί occurs. In (8) we have states with only one (nonvolitional) participant, a typical case of low transitivity. The conditional and purpose clauses in (10) are less transitive by the factivity criterion: no transfer of energy has yet taken place. The generic (“distributive-iterative”) sentence (11), finally, is less transitive, too. This is obvious, because a repeated act performed on new victims all the time, belonging to the same class (“every time he was killing Greeks”), has a considerably less individuated object than a specific act that occurs only once.

The preference for ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ in these contexts is now easy to explain in the light of the argument above. Being less specific by its lexical value (which denotes only the material), and as such not necessarily referring to a particular weapon, ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ has a natural affinity with less transitive contexts that favor noun phrases with a less specific denotation.³² Consequently, ὄξεϊ δουρί, being more specific, is blocked from these

29. P. J. Hopper and S. A. Thompson, “Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse,” *Language* 56 (1980): 251–99.

30. As in traditional grammar, where a verb’s (in)transitivity is determined on the basis of its having, or not having, an object.

31. In all, Hopper and Thompson distinguish ten transitivity parameters: number of participants (the exclusive traditional parameter), kinesis, aspect, punctuality, volitionality, affirmation, mode (reality), agency, affectedness of object, individuation of object. Obviously, the cases of highest transitivity are those in which most or all of the parameters converge. The clustering of parameters, furthermore, may have as a consequence that a sentence that is transitive by the traditional definition, in that it has an object (e.g., “Odysseus likes wine”) may be much less transitive than a one-participant event (“Odysseus jumped”): the object of the former is totally *unaffected* (in fact, it will not be coded as object at all in many languages), whereas the latter is transitive by at least four of Hopper and Thompson’s criteria (kinesis, aspect, punctuality, volitionality).

32. In less transitive, generic and/or nonfactual contexts, indefinite noun phrases tend to have a non-referential interpretation: in “Every time I entered he was reading a *book*” the constituent a *book* is most naturally read as not referring to any particular book. On the other hand, in “When I entered, he was reading a *book*,” the same constituent refers to a specific book. See also example (11).

contexts, occurring instead in the highly transitive sentences that report an actual killing.³³

Returning, after this linguistic investigation, to the system of dative expressions for “spear” (see example [1]), we have to conclude that on account of their different distributional patterns the χαλκῶ-expressions in fact do not belong to this system at all; they form a minisystem of their own. To realize that the χαλκῶ-expressions are not synonymous at all with the δοῦρι-expressions, but have a different function in the language, greatly enhances the economy of the system in (1), of course, as a number of violations have disappeared. In the new χαλκῶ-subsystem, metrical diversity is realized by the choice of different epithets (ὀξεί, ταναήκει, νηλεί). Metrical-prosodic considerations, however, are not always sufficient to account for the presence of these epithets, as appears from the use of νηλεί to which we now turn.

V. THE POETIC ASPECT: δοῦρι φαεινῶ vs. νηλεί χαλκῶ

It might seem tempting to assume that the relation between δοῦρι φαεινῶ and νηλεί χαλκῶ is analogous to that between ὀξεί δοῦρι and ὀξεί χαλκῶ, so that νηλεί χαλκῶ would be the prosodic counterpart of ὀξεί χαλκῶ (having an initial consonant instead of a vowel). In a system of functional synonyms in which each item has a reason for being precisely because of its metrical and prosodic properties this is to be expected and it is the reason which Paraskevaides³⁴ gives for the coexistence of the two expressions. It is indeed true that νηλεί χαλκῶ may function as what seems to be the prosodic duplicate of ὀξεί χαλκῶ in less transitive contexts where an initial consonant is needed, as in:

(12) πολλοὶ δ' οὐτάζοντο κατὰ χροᾶ νηλεί χαλκῶ (Il. 12.427)

ἀλλ' εἶ μιν ἀεικισσαίμεθ' ἐλόντες,
τεύχεά τ' ὥμοισιν ἀφελοίμεθα, καὶ τιν' ἐταίρων
αὐτοῦ ἀμυνομένων δαμασσαίμεθα νηλεί χαλκῶ. (16.559–61)

The first example (Il. 12.427) is less transitive because the agent of the act is not expressed, as well as because the subject is unspecified; in the second example, we have a conditional environment of the type exemplified in (10). In these cases the reasons for using νηλεί χαλκῶ instead of δοῦρι φαεινῶ seem to be the same as those for preferring ὀξεί χαλκῶ to ὀξεί δοῦρι in (10) and (11).

However, whereas ὀξεί χαλκῶ and ὀξεί δοῦρι differ only with respect to the main word, νηλεί χαλκῶ and δοῦρι φαεινῶ have different epithets as

33. It is important to note, though, that the converse does not always hold: ὀξεί χαλκῶ occasionally occurs in transitive sentences, for example, τὸν ῥ' ἔβαλεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ οὗτος ὀξεί χαλκῶ (Il. 15.433), where the context makes it clear that a spear is involved (429: ἀκόντισε δοῦρι φαεινῶ); see also 13.561.

34. *Synonyms*, p. 24.

well. And it is due to the force of its epithet that $\nu\eta\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\iota\chi\alpha\lambda\kappa\tilde{\omega}$ is not equivalent to $\delta\omicron\upsilon\rho\iota\ \phi\alpha\epsilon\iota\nu\tilde{\omega}$. In the context of functional synonymy and Parryan economy, when an alleged violation of the law of economy involves epithets, extra caution is in order: the epithets are more likely to have a specific “poetic” meaning precisely because they do not serve to differentiate two expressions metrically from each other.³⁵ In a number of instances, in any case, the metrical duplication seems to be motivated by the force of the epithets.

In a case not unlike ours, for example, Eide³⁶ successfully describes the (poetic) difference between the metrical duplicates *χειρὶ παχείῃ* and *χειρὶ βαρείῃ*: the former is used in neutral contexts where the instrument expression is more or less superfluous (“peripheral,” we would say), while *χειρὶ βαρείῃ* is used when the hand of someone is referred to as a frightening, threatening instrument. Within the set of nominative-accusative expressions for “spear,” the metrically equivalent pair *μείλινον ἔγχος/χάλκεον ἔγχος* seems to be “uneconomical,”³⁷ but Cosset plausibly argues against the treatment of the pair as equivalent:³⁸ *χάλκεον ἔγχος* is used to refer to a spear as a dangerous and heroic weapon with high killing power (e.g., see [2] above), whereas *μείλινον ἔγχος* is used when a spear misses its goal or when a given action is not forceful or heroic.³⁹

In a similar way, $\nu\eta\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\tilde{\iota}$ $\chi\alpha\lambda\kappa\tilde{\omega}$ may add an overtone of menace and imminent terror to the context that would be absent if the more neutral $\delta\omicron\upsilon\rho\iota$ $\phi\alpha\epsilon\iota\nu\tilde{\omega}$ were used, for example:

(13) ὁ δὲ Κύπριν ἐποίχετο νηλεῖ χαλκῷ (Il. 5.330)

ἵεντ' ἀλλήλων ταμέειν χρóa νηλεΐ χαλκῷ (13.501, 16.761)

Τρῶες δὲ περισταδὸν ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος
οὔταζον σάκος εὐρύ παναίολον, οὐδὲ δύναντο
εἶσω ἐπιγράψαι τέρενα χροά **νηλεῖ χαλκῷ**.

(13.551-53)

35. This is not to say that when two epithet-expressions are prosodically or metrically different, the epithet is entirely subservient to this difference. It is more correct to assume, it seems, that an epithet is used for its specific (poetic) value as long as the metrical-prosodic context does not require its use. Thus *δοῦρι φαεινῷ* typically refers to spears as gleaming objects and combines “poetically” with *ἀκόντισε*. But it can also be used in contexts that poetically favor sharp spears but prosodically require an initial consonant (*Il.* 6.32 *ἐνήρατο δοῦρι φαεινῷ*).

36. T. Eide, "Poetical and Metrical Value of Homeric Epithets: A Study of the Epithets Applied to χείρ," *SO* 61 (1986): 5-17.

37. Paraskveaides, *Synonyms*, p. 23. See also D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), pp. 276–77.

38. E. Cosset, "Choix formulaire ou choix sémantique? La désignation d'Ulysse et de la lance (ἔγχος) dans l'*Illiade*," *REA* 85 (1983): 191–98. See also R. Schmiel, "Metrically Interchangeable Formulae and Phrase-Clusters in Homer," *LCM* 9 (1984): 34–38.

39. Notice, however, that Page's diachronic treatment (χάλκεον vs. [μ]μείλινον) remains valid in that Cosset's "semantic" approach is strictly synchronic: it deals only with the use of the pair in Homer, but it does not follow that this use also motivates the existence of the pair as such.

One might argue here that νηλέϊ χαλκῷ is used, not because of νηλέϊ, but because of χαλκῷ, in view of the nonfactual context (complement of ἔμαι in the case of 13.501 and 16.761; negation in the case of 13.551–53). It is true that these contexts are different from factual contexts like “He killed/hit him with the spear” (see [9] above), but that does not mean that νηλέϊ χαλκῷ is a mere prosodic alternative to ὀξεί χαλκῷ. We repeat that the difference between δουρὶ φαεινῷ and νηλέϊ χαλκῷ lies both in the opposition between “spear” and “bronze” and in the difference between the two epithets. Besides, νηλέϊ χαλκῷ is sometimes used in factual contexts that seem to be the domain of the δουρί-expressions:

- (14) Ἴδομενεὺς δ' Ἑρύμαντα κατὰ στόμα νηλέϊ χαλκῷ
 νύξε· τὸ δ' ἀντικρὺ δόρυ χάλκεον⁴⁰ ἐξεπέρρησε
 νέρθεν ὑπ' ἐγκεφάλαιο, κέασσε δ' ἄρ' ὀστέα λευκά·
 ἐκ δὲ τίναχθεν ὀδόντες, ἐνέπλησθεν δὲ οἱ ἄμφω
 αἵματος ὀφθαλμοί· τὸ δ' ἀνὰ στόμα καὶ κατὰ ῥίνας
 πρῆσε χανών· θανάτου δὲ μέλαν νέφος ἀμφεκάλυπεν.
 (Il. 16.345–50)

The force of the epithet νηλής, as opposed to that of φαεινός, is particularly suited to the gory detail in which the wound is described, which is another way of saying that νηλέϊ χαλκῷ is not just a prosodic alternative to ὀξεί χαλκῷ, or a duplicate of δουρὶ φαεινῷ.

VI. CONCLUSION: STRUCTURALISM VS. FUNCTIONALISM

Insofar as our discussion of the “duplicates” in the system for “spear” in the dative has implications beyond that system, it shows that the issue of synonymy in Homeric diction involves more factors than metrical-prosodic ones only. The Parryan approach to synonymy is functional insofar as it is concerned with the similarity in function of two or more expressions with different metrical forms. But to the extent that this similarity is subservient to a system, the Parryan approach had better be called structuralist, in that the emphasis is on the function of expressions within the system to which they belong rather than to their actual contexts.

To recognize the existence and importance of formulaic “systems” in Homeric diction is of course wholly legitimate and indeed the only way to make progress in understanding Homeric discourse.⁴¹ Formulaic systems are indispensable for oral verse-making, but essentially they are no more than the adaptation of language to the verse, not language itself. The function a given element has in a given system does not tell us anything about the function of that element in actual contexts, for the simple reason that “context” is much more than “metrical-prosodic environment.” Our discussion of the set of dative expressions for “spear” has shown, we hope, that the structural and “systematic” discussion of a set

40. N.B.: not δόρυ μείλινον (see above).

41. The systems consisting of peripheral material with respect to a given nucleus are especially important in this respect. See note 14 above and the discussion of ἐγχεῖ/δουρί as a peripheral element.

of synonyms can never replace the study of its constitutive members in their actual contexts. Not only may a closer study of “context” be necessary for determining, on a linguistic basis, the extension of the set (as in the case of *δοῦρί* vs. *χαλκῷ*); it can also reveal that “context” may acquire the value of “poetic significance.” Both aspects, the meaning of language and the meaning of poetry, cannot be captured by the rigor of any system, but it cannot be anyone’s intention to rule them out.

University of Leiden