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The Grammar of Immersion

A Cognitive Grammar Analysis of Immersive Narrative

In her influential book on narrative immersion (2015 [2001]), Marie-Laure Ryan discusses a number of narrative strategies facilitating immersion. Apart from the present tense and direct or free indirect speech, these narrative strategies are all of a narratological rather than linguistic nature. Building further on Ryan's work, this article explores the linguistic features of immersive narrative. Central to my analysis is the Cognitive Grammar concept of 'construal', the language user's capacity to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways. In close readings of two famous literary battle scenes – from the *Iliad* and from Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* – I demonstrate that construal can serve as a highly useful tool in stylistic and narratological analysis as it is closely linked to specific linguistic phenomena, such as tense and aspect, negation, deixis, speech representation, spatial and temporal markers, perspective, intonation units *qua* attentional frames, and vocabulary.

1. The Poetics of Immersion

In her seminal book on narrative immersion, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, of which the first edition was published in 2001, Marie-Laure Ryan 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 an embodied experience: "[…] it takes the projection of a virtual body to feel integrated into an art world" (Ryan 2015, 13). Ryan also discusses a number of narrative strategies that are responsible for an immersive reading experience, a set of textual features that together constitute what Ryan calls "The Poetics of Immersion". Ryan identifies three forms of engagement with narrative: spatial immersion, temporal immersion and emotional immersion.

Spatial immersion is concerned with the reader's sense of place: the feeling of being mentally transported to "a concrete environment invested with emotional value" (Ryan 2015, 86). Lengthy and detailed descriptions of spaces or landscapes are not the ideal means of transporting the reader into a narrated scene: "A description that merely accumulates details lets its object run through the reader's mind like grains of sand through the fingers, thus creating the sense of being lost in a clutter of data" (Ryan 2001, 124). A more effective way to immerse the reader spatially is to describe a place detail by detail, slowly feeding the reader pieces of spatial information that allow them to construct an idea of the topographical layout as well as a sense of atmosphere. A narrative strategy

that is both cognitively reader-friendly and immersion-enhancing is to present the description from the point of view of a character moving through the scene, who perceives, evaluates, and possibly interacts with, the objects or persons encountered along the way. Other effective devices to create a sense of place mentioned by Ryan are the use of proper names and place names familiar to the reader, and the mention of concrete details whose only function is to evoke a particular atmosphere, as also discussed in Roland Barthes's essay "l'effet de réel" [the reality effect].

Ryan's temporal immersion concerns

> the reader's involvement in the process by which the progression of narrative time distils the field of the potential, selecting one branch as the actual, confining others to the real of the forever virtual, or counterfactual, and as a result continually generates new ranges of virtualities. (Ryan 2015, 99)

Temporal immersion hinges upon an interplay between two temporal dynamics: the dynamics of the temporal unfolding of the told events and the dynamics inherent to the act of narration, "the revealing or withdrawing of the information that enables the readers to apprehend the logic of the story" (Ryan 2015, 99). Drawing on the work of Meir Sternberg, Ryan identifies suspense, curiosity and surprise as the three major effects of the interplay between narrating and narrated time.

Ryan also distinguishes an intermediate category, spatio-temporal immersion, which is a form of immersion in which the imaginative distance between the reader and the storyworld is reduced to "near zero" (Ryan 2015, 93). This is achieved through a projection of the reader's virtual body into the narrated scene. The most intense sense of presence can be achieved by having the virtual body participate actively in the scene: by the description of a character's bodily movement, readers are encouraged to mentally (but perhaps in some cases even physically) simulate these movements from a first-person enactive perspective, and to identify with the character's body, thus gaining "a solid foothold on the scene, as well as a sensory interface" (Ryan 2015, 95).

Ryan identifies several narrative techniques contributing to the imaginative transportation of the reader's virtual body into the scene of events: scene rather than summary narration, internal and variable focalisation rather than external focalisation, dialogue and free indirect discourse rather than (stylistically neutral) indirect discourse, simultaneous first-person narration rather than retrospective narration, a totally effaced or (the diametrical opposite) an aggressively visible narrator rather than a moderately visible narrator, mimesis ("showing") rather than diegesis ("telling"). A key technique to bring about the mental transportation of the reader to the narrative world is to shift the deictic centre from the world of narration to (a participant) in the narrated scene. Ryan (2015, 96–99) distinguishes two common ways to achieve deictic recentring, adverbial deictic shift as it occurs in direct discourse and free indirect discourse and the use of the historical present tense.

Emotional immersion, the affective involvement with the characters, is the third type mentioned by Ryan. In order of increasing affective intensity Ryan

(2015, 108) identifies the following types of emotional involvement: (1) subjective reactions to characters and judgements of their behaviour (such as like and dislike, admiration, contempt, pity, amusement, Schadenfreude, or exasperation); (2) empathetic emotions (such as sharing feelings of happiness or sadness with the characters); (3) emotions felt for oneself, such as fear, horror, disgust, or sexual arousal.

2. A Cognitive Grammar Approach to Immersion

Ryan's work has been of immense value in advancing our understanding of literary immersion. Also other lines and schools of research into related concepts have played a significant role in showing how the experience of presence in a represented world is generated through a work of art. Here we can think of the work that has been done in the study of notions such as aesthetic illusion (Wolf 1993), transportation (Nell 1988, Gerrig 1993), absorption (e.g., Hakemulder et al. 2017). However, despite the considerable quantity of studies of immersion-like phenomena, one aspect of immersive narrative appears to have been largely overlooked: its linguistic component. While Ryan acknowledges the use of the present tense and direct or free indirect speech as linguistic devices to enhance immersion, the majority of the narrative strategies she discusses are of a narratological, rather than linguistic nature. Similarly, other studies of immersion and related concepts (transportation, absorption, aesthetic illusion) dedicate minimal attention to actual linguistic devices conducive to an immersive readerly experience.

The aim of this article is to explore how a Cognitive Grammar approach to stylistic analysis (as advocated by, for example, Harrison et al. 2014, Giovanelli / Harrison 2018, and Giovanelli et al. 2020) can help us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic characteristics of immersive narrative. At the core of my approach lies the Cognitive Grammar concept of construal, the language user's capacity "to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways".[1] The concept of construal is a powerful tool in stylistic and narratological analysis, as it directly links up with a number of specific linguistic phenomena, including tense and aspect, modality, negation, deixis, subject and object marking, temporal and spatial adverbs and adverbial phrases, perspective, attentional frames (intonation units), and lexical choices. Immersive narrative brings the five key dimensions of construal as distinguished by Ronald Langacker (perspective, selection, prominence, dynamicity, imagination) into play, in order to construct a rich sense of place, to project the reader's virtual body to the scene, to create suspense, and to stimulate feelings of emotional involvement and empathy with the actors. In section 3, I will present Langacker's five types of construal operations, connecting them to specific linguistic textual features. In section 4, these linguistic features and their particular immersive effect will be illustrated by examples from two celebrated – and highly immersive –

literary battle scenes from widely disparate eras and cultures: the duel between Achilles and Hector from the Ancient Greek epic *Iliad* (8th c. BCE) and Fabrizio's first encounter with Marshall Ney from Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* [*La Chartreuse de Parme*, 1839].

3. Construal and Immersion

A fundamental concept in Cognitive Grammar is construal, which can be defined as "our capacity to conceptualise and portray the same situation in disparate ways" (Langacker 2015, 120). The concept of construal can be elucidated by a comparison with vision, which is, after all, a subcategory of conceptualisation. The manner in which we perceive a scene or object in our immediate environment is contingent upon a number of factors, including the distance and angle from which we observe it and the specific area of the object or scene that is the focus of our gaze. Similarly, a linguistic expression represents a described situation from a particular vantage point and with a specific focus, selecting and emphasising certain elements while de-emphasising others. The concept of construal is not only fundamental to lexical semantics; it also pervades grammatical structure. Each lexical item and grammatical construction in a language is associated with a specific way of conceptualising its semantic content as part of its conventional semantics.

In Cognitive Grammar, a branch of cognitive linguistic first developed by Ronald Langacker in the 1980s and 90s, grammar is not regarded as an abstract formal system that is isolated from other domains of human cognition and life. Cognitive Grammar posits that grammar is meaningful. Grammatical categories such as tense and aspect are used by speakers to conceptualise the world in a specific manner. Grammatical constructions serve to combine component concepts into more complex and elaborate conceptualisations. In Cognitive Grammar, language is embodied; language use and understanding is fundamentally shaped by the way we bodily interact with the world around us, and linguistic meaning is grounded in bodily experiences. Grammar is regarded as "an essential aspect of the conceptual apparatus through which we apprehend and engage the world" and "it also reflects our basic experience of moving, perceiving and acting on the world" (Langacker 2008, 4–5). This fundamental embodied orientation of Cognitive Grammar makes it highly suitable for an analysis of narrative immersion, as it is an embodied experience.

In Cognitive Grammar, several more specific processes of conceptualisation, or construal operations, have been distinguished: perspective, selection, prominence, dynamicity, and imagination (Langacker 2015). In any given instance of language use, these five dimensions of construal are all operational, typically exhibiting a high degree of interconnection. As these aspects of construal are fundamental to linguistic conceptualisation in general, they are also highly relevant to an analysis of immersive narrative style.

3.1. Perspective

> Imagine yourself in the audience of a theater, watching a gripping play. All your attention is directed at the stage, and is focused more specifically on the actor presently speaking. Being totally absorbed in the play, you have hardly any awareness of yourself or your own immediate circumstances. (Langacker 2008, 77)

In Cognitive Grammar, linguistic conceptualising is often metaphorically likened to watching a scene. Perspective is the viewing arrangement, the relationship between the subject of conceptualisation (the 'viewer') and the object of conceptualisation (the 'viewed'). Linguistic expressions are employed to direct attention to specific portions of the world: they select and highlight some pieces of conceptual content (putting them 'on stage') while discarding other elements (leaving them 'off stage').
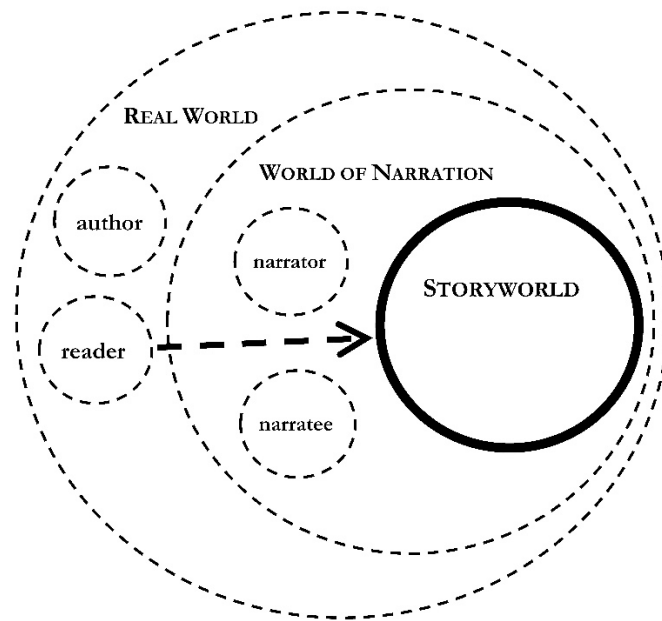

Fig. 1. Immersion: attentional focus on storyworld

Sustaining immersion is predicated on the reader's ability to maintain a strong and exclusive focus of attention on the storyworld (represented in Figure 1 by the dashed arrow). This means that there are minimal or no distractions that divert the attentional focus away to "off stage" elements such as the narrator and the discourse world, or the extradiegetic "real" world, inhabited by the historical author and by the readers themselves (dashed circles). This implies that the narrator rarely, if ever, enters the 'stage', or, in Cognitive Grammar terms, narrators preferably do not construe themselves objectively. The story, in other words, seems to tell itself.[2]

Furthermore, perspective is pertinent to the concept of immersion in a different sense, as immersive texts frequently demonstrate a shift in vantage point. This shift in vantage point can be broadly categorised into two distinct types. The first type of shift entails a deictic shift, whereby the ground is relocated as the deictic centre from the discourse world to the storyworld. The consequence

of this deictic shift is that the temporal and spatial coordinates of the narrator and narratee are relocated within the scene, thereby creating the impression that they are observing the narrated events as they unfold ('pseudo-eyewitness effect'). In this perspectival configuration, the conventional spatio-temporal distance between the world of narration and the storyworld is (construed as being) collapsed. The typical linguistic signals of this deictic shift are a serial use of the historical present and the use of proximal deictics ('here and now'), in place of the past tense and distal deictics ('there and then'), to refer to the storyworld. A related phenomenon is the switch to direct discourse, which, by definition, involves a deictic shift from the (retrospective) narrator to the vantage point of the speaking character within the storyworld.

The other type of shift in vantage point does not entail a complete deictic shift; rather, it involves the establishment of a secondary vantage point within the storyworld. The distance between the world of narration and the storyworld is not entirely eliminated, as in the first type, but rather 'bridged'. The listener or reader is encouraged to adopt a viewpoint within the scene. This secondary (or rather, *intermediary*) vantage point may be either a 'camera standpoint', a depersonalised standpoint registering the narrated events in a detached way, or it may be a story character or an anonymous spectator through whose eyes the events are observed and with whom the listener or reader may identify and, preferably, also empathise. Both types of vantage point shifts serve to enhance the listener's or reader's sense of being transported, and they prompt the listener or reader to "project one's virtual body into the fictional world and onto the scene of the events" (Ryan 2015, 95).

3.2. Selection

> Selection stems from the disparity between the vast complexity of our mental world and the severe limits on our processing capacity. It is therefore fundamental: if we had to describe everything, we could never describe anything (Langacker 2015, 125)

Linguistic expressions are employed to direct attention to a particular portion of the world: they serve to select some piece of conceptual content (putting it "on stage") as the focus of attention, while discarding (leaving "off stage") other elements. Selection also pertains to the degree of precision and granularity with which a situation is portrayed. Expressions may vary considerably in their degree of specificity. Langacker gives the following example of a scale of specificity ranging from rather schematic to highly specific:

> Something happened. →
> A person perceived a rodent. →
> A girl saw a porcupine. →
> An alert little girl wearing glasses caught a brief glimpse of a ferocious porcupine with sharp quills. (2008, 56)

The degree of specificity of a scene correlates with its immersive potential. A text that describes a scene with a high degree of visual detail will be more effective at tapping into the rich experiential resources (cognitive schemas) stored in the listener's or reader's semantic memory, evoking a more intense mental simulation of the described scene. Consequently, texts designed to be immersive tend to focus on perceptually salient entities, namely concrete, physical, everyday objects or animate beings. As previously discussed, there is a maximum level of specificity beyond which a narrative, by accumulating irrelevant details, loses its immersive quality and becomes difficult to process or simply annoying. In order to achieve the greatest degree of immersion, a narrative must steer clear of both under- and over-specificity. It is not possible to determine in advance the optimal level of specificity that will facilitate immersion, as this depends strongly on the context of the description, including the manner in which the protagonists interact with the described object or setting and with what particular goal, and how they subjectively perceive it (that is, character focalisation).

Another form of selection that is relevant to immersive narrative involves the imposition of a 'viewing frame' on narrated events. Languages very often have morphological means to distinguish between a construal in which the narrated action denoted by the verb is viewed in its entirety, that is, including its initial and terminal boundaries (perfective aspect), and a construal in which only an internal portion is focused on, while backgrounding its initial and final boundaries (imperfective or progressive aspect). This distinction between these two forms and their alternative construals is illustrated in Figure 2:
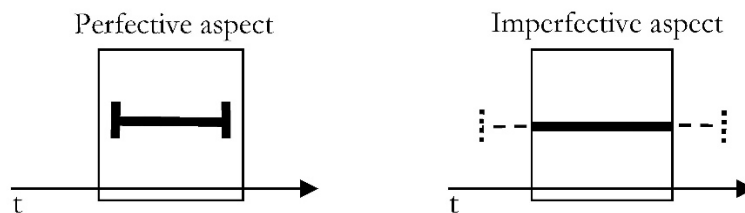

Fig. 2. Perfective vs. imperfective aspect: (un)bounded within temporal scope

The horizontal line represents the narrated event, the short vertical lines at either end represent the initial and final boundaries of the event. The thickness of the line indicates that the event is the focus of attention ('on stage'). The square represents the temporal scope ('viewing frame') imposed on the content designated by the verb. The arrow labelled with a t represents the progression of time. In an imperfective construal, the temporal scope only selects an internal part of the entire event, excluding the beginning and the end of the event that are left out of focus (dashed lines). In contrast, a perfective construal encompasses the complete event within the temporal scope. In languages that exhibit a grammatical distinction between perfective and imperfective forms, narrative texts typically demonstrate an alternation between these two forms.

There is certainly a correlation between the use of verbal aspect in a narrative text and its immersive quality. However, this relationship is far from straightforward. For one, the relation between perfective and imperfective aspect in narrative texts tends to be asymmetrical. Typically, the perfective variant is the default narrative verb form, conveying the main sequence of chronologically ordered events (foreground), while the imperfective verb forms provide background information about ongoing events or states simultaneous to the main sequence of events.[3] The particular effect of the alternation between perfective and imperfective forms on the immersive quality of a narrative should always be assessed in conjunction with other immersive features, such as narrative pace, descriptive detail, deictic recentring, and the creation of suspense, to name but a few.

One connection between verbal aspect and immersion I would like to mention here: the use of the imperfect aspect to evoke a cognitive or perceptual vantage point located within the narrated scene — a vantage point that may be identified with a character, or with an imaginary anonymous bystander (hypothetical focalisation), or even a depersonalised 'camera eye', located in the space of the scene.[4] It is evident that in this specific perspective-bound function of verbal aspect the construal types perspective and selection are both inextricably linked: the selection of a specific portion of reality reveals a certain perspective, and a certain perspective necessitates the selection of a specific portion of reality.

3.3. Prominence

Prominence can be defined as the degree to which a given element is perceived as being more important than other elements within a given situation. The central element constitutes the focus of attention, while more peripheral elements are regarded as less salient background information. Cognitive prominence can be inherent to a given entity, based on our everyday experience and interaction with it. However, prominence can also be conferred to an entity by linguistic means (Langacker 2015, 127). In other words, entities either attract attention by their very nature, or language is used to focus attention on them. As immersive narrative aims to capture the reader's undivided attention, it is likely to be rich in experientially prominent entities or events, and also to use a range of linguistic devices to mark certain entities or events as prominent. A useful inventory of such salient textual attractors (some experiential, some linguistic) is provided by Peter Stockwell (2020, 79): newness (the present moment of reading is more attractive than the previous), brightness, noisiness, largeness, height, fullness, proximity, agency, activeness (verbs denoting action, violence, passion, wilfulness, motivation and strength), riskiness, definiteness, negation, topicality (subject position), empathy (on a scale from specific human, animate, objects across to abstractions), and aesthetic distance (beautiful or ugly referents, alien objects, dissonance).

3.4. Dynamicity

Language and conceptualisation unfold through time. Dynamicity refers to the manner in which they evolve through time, their time course. In the process of conceptualisation, two aspects of time are involved: processing time, which is the time that is required for a conceptualising subject to process an experience of some sort, and conceived time, which is time as the object of conception. Between processing time and conceived time there can be a relation of coincidence or of non-coincidence. When we directly observe an event, processing and conceived time completely coincide.
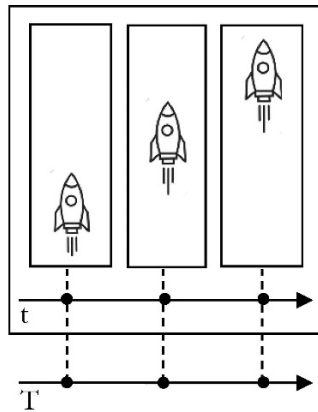

Fig. 3. Coincidence of processing and conceived time: *direct observation*

The time required to observe an event (indicated by the arrow labelled T) is necessarily concurrent — as it coincides — with the time in which the event occurs (arrow t).

In both everyday language use and in narrative, an event's occurrence and its linguistic conception are typically non-coincident, and processing and conceived time can be clearly distinguished (Figure 4). Furthermore, since the occurrence and conception of the event are separated in time, they will tend to differ in duration.
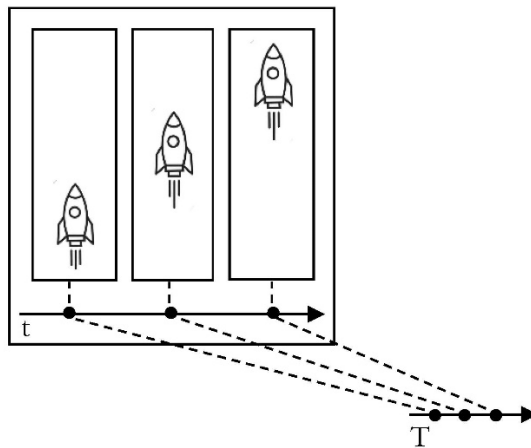

Fig. 4. Non-coincidence of processing and conceived time: retrospective narration

In narrative, there is often a discrepancy between processing time (narrating / reading time) and conceived time (narrated time): the time required to read a certain stretch of narrative is shorter than the actual duration of the narrated events. The speed of narrating time may be speeded up considerably (as in summary narration) or only slightly (accelerated narration).[5] In Figure 4, this difference is indicated by the different distances between the dots on line t and those on line T. Since immersive narratives aim to emulate real-life experiences, they typically exhibit a correlation between narrating time and narrated time that resembles that of direct observation: the pace at which narrating and narrated time advance is roughly equal (scene narration, isochrony), presenting the events at a speed that is consistent with how we experience them in our everyday lives.

The way we use language in everyday life shows a natural tendency for temporal iconicity. This means that the chronological order in which we process (narrate and conceptualise) them corresponds to the order in which the conceived events have occurred (are 'located on the time line'). This cognitively most effortless way of apprehending events is called 'sequential scanning in Cognitive Grammar: temporal phases of an event are accessed ('scanned') in sequence, so that conceived time runs parallel to processing time.[6] Given that immersive texts are designed to simulate real-life experiences, they adhere to our natural inclination towards temporal iconicity. Deviations from the chronological order such as flashbacks (analepses) or flash-forwards (prolepses) are avoided, as they disrupt the natural flow of events, and require additional processing effort. Furthermore, they draw the reader's attention to the mediating activity of the narrator.

In addition to isochrony and temporal iconicity, immersive narrative typically also incorporates another key element: a vantage point (such as a character-focaliser) situated within the scene. This constellation of isochrony, temporal iconicity and scene-internal vantage point is represented in Figure 5.
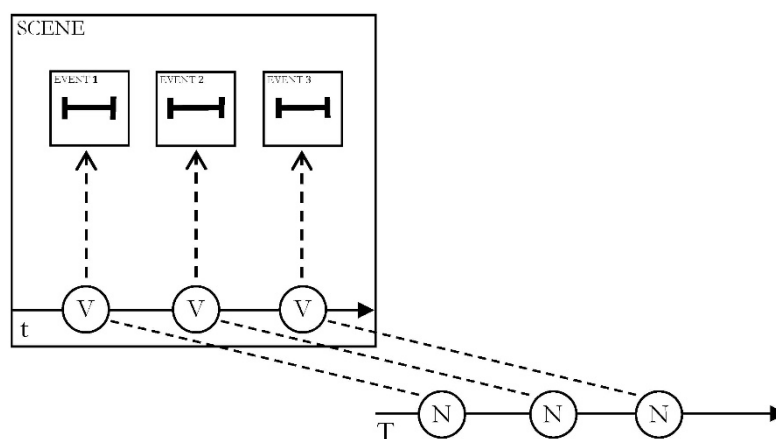

Fig. 5. Retrospective simulated observation: event sequence

The narrator (N) retrospectively reports what the scene-internal viewer (V) was perceiving, approximately at the same pace at which each of the consecutive bounded events occurred. A somewhat different configuration is illustrated in the following figure:
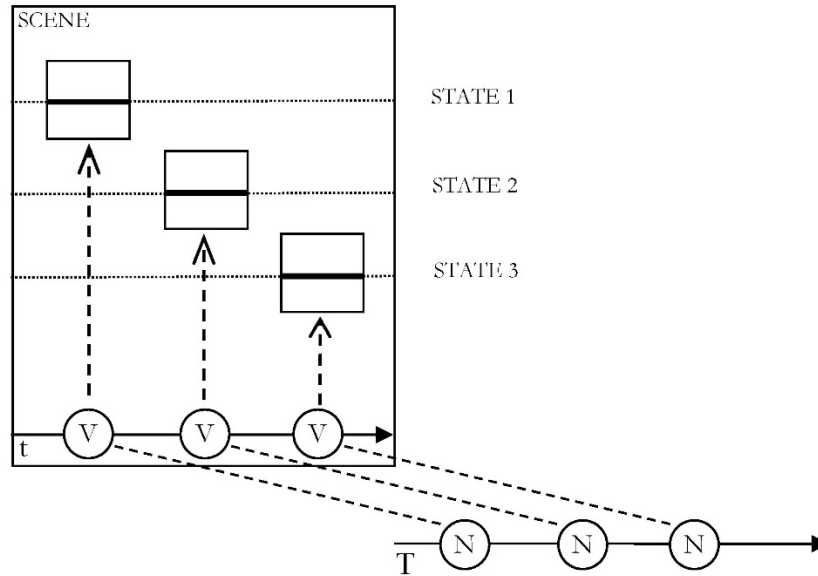
Fig. 6. Retrospective simulated observation: simultaneous states

The narrator (N) also retrospectively represents the perceptual experience of the scene-internal viewer. In this configuration, however, the viewer directs their sensory attention (typically their gaze) to one component state of the scene and then to another. In this particular configuration, the scene comprises a set of simultaneous states or unbounded activities. The progression of narrated time is therefore not inherent in the described situation itself (since it consists of simultaneous unbounded states or activities). Rather, it is inherent in the time taken by the viewer to move their gaze through the space of the scene, focusing their attention to each of the discrete component aspects that comprise the scene. This type of narration can be considered a form of narrativised description, in that it progresses both in time and space. The two variant modes of narration presented above should be viewed as prototypes, as two poles of a continuum. In actual narrative texts, a range of mixed types can be observed, situated at various points on the continuum between the two prototypes.

3.5. Imagination

Under the rather broad and unspecific header of "imagination", Langacker (2015, 135–138) discusses a number of cognitive phenomena involving the construction of alternative mental spaces (or text worlds, e.g., Gavins 2007), such as fictive, hypothetical, future or counterfactual worlds, abstract generalizations, the thoughts and beliefs of other conceptualisers, or metaphor. This more complex cognitive capacity is evidently of vital importance to the creation and comprehension of a textual genre as narrative. A comprehensive discussion of the mental space construction in relation to immersion is beyond the scope of this contribution. In section (4), a variety of mental spaces / text worlds will be

touched upon without always explicitly identifying them as such. Examples include discourse world, storyworld, scene-changes, modal worlds, flashbacks and flashforwards, direct speech, and negations. The following section will also address the specific literary figure of simile as a means of mental space / world building.

4. From Achilles to Fabrizio: a Close Reading of Two Battle Scenes

TEXT 1. Homer, *Iliad*, book 22, lines 317–27

> As the Evening Star moves among the stars in the darkness of the night, that is the fairest star set in the sky, such was the gleaming from the point of the sharp spear Achilles was shaking in his right hand, as he was intending evil for the godlike Hector, looking over his fine body, to see where it would most give away. All the rest of his skin was covered with bronze armour, the beautiful armour he had stripped when he had killed mighty Patroclus. But it showed where the collarbones separate the neck from the shoulders: the throat, where the death of the soul comes most quickly. Godlike Achilles drove in there with his spear as Hector charged him, and the point went right through his soft neck.[7]

Text 1, taken from the (originally orally performed) epic poem *Iliad*, book 22, forms the violent climax of the story of the *Iliad*. The two main characters of the story, the Greek Achilles and the Trojan Hector finally engage in a direct confrontation. Achilles is determined to kill Hector, given that Hector had just killed Achilles' dear friend Patroclus in combat. This passage is particularly immersive due to a number of linguistic and narratological properties.[8] First and foremost, it is a decisive turning point in the entire Trojan War narrative. The most prominent Greek hero vanquishes the most prominent Trojan hero, a pivotal moment that foreshadows the ultimate defeat and destruction of Troy. The passage demonstrates a careful and suspenseful build-up towards the actual moment of killing. Perspective plays a significant part in the construction of the passage.

The text segment begins with one of the famous Homeric similes. The source part (vehicle) of the simile describes the Evening Star, and contains the two verbs *eisi* [is moving] and *histatai* [stands]. Both verbs are in the (generic) present tense with an imperfective aspect. As we have seen in section (3.2), the imperfective aspect evokes a temporally internal vantage point on the scene.[9] The spatial vantage point is not made explicit, but can be inferred from one's experiential knowledge: normally one looks slightly up at the Evening Star, which is located relatively close to the nightly horizon. As is typical, a simile also conveys an emotional and evaluative stance towards the described scene. Here the Evening star is referred to as "the fairest star" [*kállistos*: "most beautiful"], suggesting that the gleam of the spear (the target) was equally beautiful. The internal vantage point is maintained in the target part (tenor) of the simile in the narrative: the Greek text has an imperfect form *apélampe,* which more literally can be rendered as "it was gleaming".

Similar to conceptual metaphors, similes can be regarded as a form of blending, whereby a source domain and a target domain are integrated into a blended conceptualisation.[10] One of the literary effects of similes as blends is that they serve to enrich the main narrative by reinforcing its perceptual and affective impact, thereby increasing its immersive power. The "as-part" of the simile (the source domain) describes a scene familiar to the reader or listener from their everyday lives, activating the audience's experientially rich, embodied knowledge. This experiential knowledge is then projected onto ('injected into') their mental simulation of the main scene (narrated in the 'so-part' of the simile). In this regard, similes do not function differently from metaphor. As with metaphors, they create a "double vision effect": "The double-vision effect of metaphor […] means that an understanding of the real-world situation of the author is retained, while the blended world of the metaphor adds complex detail to the mental representation of the discourse as a whole" (Gavins 2007, 155).

The simile of the Evening Star activates the audience's experiential knowledge (cognitive schema) of the Evening Star (the source), of which important elements are its brightness (in contrast with the darkness of the night, but also in comparison with the other stars), its relatively high position in one's visual field, and its splendid beauty. These sensory and affective elements are projected on the image of Achilles' spearpoint (the target), thereby highlighting some of its salient properties: its bright gleam, its impressive height, and its beauty, befitting a great – and soon victorious – hero such as Achilles.

The image of the brightly shining point of Achilles' spear suggests a spatial viewpoint somewhere in front of Achilles, close to (or identical with) the position of Hector, the other protagonist in the scene. Achilles himself, after all, would not have been able to see the gleaming of his own spear point. However, the perspective shifts significantly from this point onwards: Achilles is selected as the vantage point from which the scene is experienced. The first indication is the use of the deictic adjective "right" (hand), which implies Achilles himself as the deictic centre. One may also assume that the active verb 'was shaking' (past imperfective *pallen* in Greek) prompts an embodied simulation of that action in the mind of the reader or listener, encouraging them to identify with Achilles' body (a form of 'somatic empathy') and experience the action from a first-person enactive perspective.[11] The perspective shift towards character focalisation is marked explicitly by the use of the mental verb "intending" (Greek: participle with imperfective aspect *fronéōn*) and the perception verb "looking at" (Greek: participle, imperfective aspect, *eishoróōn*). Through Achilles' eyes (that is, retrospective simulated observation), we are scanning Hector's body looking for an unprotected opening in the brazen and beautiful armour.[12] The mentioning of the fact that Hector had stripped the armour from Patroclus need not be taken as a narratorial intrusion introducing a flashback (which potentially disrupts immersion). Rather, it can be interpreted as part of Achilles' thoughts (information focalised by Achilles) while he is visually scanning the armour. References to past events in narrative are not detrimental to the immersive quality of the text provided that this reference can be construed as a part of a character's thoughts

or memories: in that case, it is not the narrator who jolts us out of the scene to an earlier event (and back again); instead, the reference to a past event is part and parcel of a coherent mental experience of a character located in the scene. Indeed, the recollection of Hector's killing of Patroclus and subsequent appropriation of his armour serves as a poignant reminder of the underlying motivation behind Achilles' pursuit of retribution against Hector.

The majority of verb forms in the passage are marked by the imperfective aspect, which invites the reader or listener to view the scene from an internal vantage point. An illustrative example of this stylistic effect is the description of the moment an open spot in the armour becomes visible. The imperfect *faíneto* [was becoming visible] is used here to signal that the event is "caught" in the process of its realisation.

The moment of the killing, finally, is also described from the perspective of Achilles, who drives the spear point through the soft neck. The specific perceptual detail of the softness of the flesh can only be understood as a description of Achilles' sensory experience.

TEXT 2. Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, chapter 3

> At that point, the road ran into the middle of a clump of trees. The vivandière saw three of four of our soldiers come running towards her at full tilt. She jumped nimbly down from her vehicle and ran and hid fifteen or twenty paces from the road. She cowered in a hole that had been left after a large tree had just been uprooted. So, Fabrizio told himself, I'm going to see if I'm a coward! He stopped near the little vehicle the canteen-woman had abandoned and drew his sabre. The soldiers paid no attention to him but went running past alongside the wood, to the left of the road.
>
> 'They're some of ours,' the vivandière said calmly, returning all out of breath to her little vehicle . . . 'If your horse was capable of galloping, I'd say push ahead as far as the end of the wood, see if there's anyone in the open.' […] Soon both of them were out of the wood. On reaching the edge of the open country, they heard a frightful din, the cannon and the muskets were sounding on every side, to the right, to the left, behind them. And because the clump of trees from which they had emerged occupied a mound raised eight or ten feet above the plain, they had a clear enough view of one corner of the battle. But there was no one in the field beyond the wood. The field was bordered, a thousand paces away, by a long line of very bushy willow trees. Above the willow there appeared a white smoke that now and again rose swirling into the sky.[13]

Text 2 is an extract from the description of the experiences of the novel's hero, Fabrizio del Dongo, at the Battle of Waterloo, which is one of the most vivid episodes of Stendhal's novel. During a confused search for the actual location of the battle, Fabrizio and a *vivandière* (a military canteen woman) he had just become acquainted with are passed by a group of soldiers (one of whom was Marshal Ney, as they find out shortly later). They follow the group in the hope of reaching the battlefield. While not a particularly noteworthy scene, it effectively illustrates a number of typical immersive features.

In this passage, too, perspective is an important factor in creating a sense of presence at the scene. Upon reaching a small wood, the vivandière catches sight of a group of soldiers running towards her. The perspective switches towards

the focalisation of the vivandière. The speed of the event and the resulting perceptual imprecision is emphasised by her uncertainty about the exact number of the soldiers, "three or four". However, it is a perspective shift with a twist: the running men are described as "three or four of *our* soldiers". The subsequent events demonstrate that the vivandière was unaware that the soldiers were "ours", that is, French: she quickly jumps from her vehicle and hides in a hole among the trees. Nor does Fabrizio notice that they are French. He even draws his sabre in a heroic attempt to engage them. The insertion of the possessive pronoun "our" has to be ascribed to the narrator, intruding on the vivandière's perception.[14] By using the first-person plural, the narrator and the reader enter into an ironic conspiracy that is so typical of Stendhal. Now that we are aware that the approaching soldiers were actually friendly, the events that follow are viewed in a different light. In particular Fabrizio's naïve drawing of his sabre to show that he is not a coward becomes a rather grotesque and comic act. We imagine Fabrizio's astonishment once he notices that the soldiers completely ignore him.

One may raise the question whether the ironic stance we are drawn into impedes an immersive reading of the passage, in the sense that the narrator moves us into adopting a somewhat distanced attitude towards the two protagonists and their actions. I believe this is not the case. The dramatic irony and our amusement about the scene do not impede our ability to empathise with the two characters (which would hinder immersion). On the contrary, it reinforces our emotional involvement and sympathy with Fabrizio and his naïve endeavours to become a real war hero. Another, more trivial, immersive effect of dramatic irony is its creation of 'What suspense', a source of a reader's temporal immersion (Ryan 2015, 102): when will the characters find out the truth? What (and how severe) will be the consequences of their ignorance?[15]

It is not only identification and sympathy with the protagonists that stimulate immersion in the scene. Our sense of presence is also prompted by the aforementioned focalisation by the vivandière of the running soldiers. The remainder of the scene also handles perspective in a subtle manner. Similarly to the imprecise description of the number of soldiers, the distance the vivandière runs to her hiding place is described as "fifteen or twenty paces from the road". The imprecise indication of the distance in this case suggests an embodied observer on the scene, quickly and therefore roughly estimating the distance, rather than an omniscient, retrospective narrator.[16] It creates the illusion that the narrator and we as narratees are present on the scene observing the events as they unfold, which entails that we sometimes cannot get the details sharp. The negated sentence "The soldiers paid no attention to him" is also relevant in terms of perspective. In general, as mentioned above, negations are attractors of attention; in narrative they either contradict an assumption or expectation of the narratee, or (when part of character focalisation) that of a character. In this case, it is difficult to decide between these two options, and it seems that the negation functions on both levels (and is thus a case of double focalisation, in Mieke Bal's terminology).[17] The negation contradicts our expectation as narratees that the

soldiers would notice Fabrizio. However, the negated sentence can also be interpreted as Fabrizio's (astonished) realisation that he has been ignored. (The latter interpretation admittedly results in a more interesting reading of the event.)

A more typical device beneficial to immersion is the use of direct discourse, which creates a feeling of immediacy; for example, "So, Fabrizio told himself, I'm going to see if I'm a coward!", which also suggests that we are spatially close to Fabrizio in order to be able to hear what he says to himself, and "they are some of ours etc.", said by the vivandière. This sense of presence in this small scene is also created by a few but carefully selected descriptive details facilitating our visualisation of the events: the vivandière jumps nimbly from her petit vehicle (nineteenth century readers will have had a vivid mental image of a typical vehicle of a vivandière), the hole was created by a recently uprooted tree. We also get an idea of the spatial layout: the hole is some fifteen or twenty paces from the road, Fabrizio takes up a position with his sabre close to the vivandière's vehicle, the soldiers run past on the left side of the road.

Fabrizio and the vivandière decide to ride to the other end of the small forest to see what is there. The following description of the situation is focalised through the two protagonists, signalled by the perception verbs "they heard" [*ils entendirent*] and "they had a clear view" [*ils aperçurent*], viewed from their cognitive, emotional and spatial vantage point on the scene. Through their sensory channels, we vicariously experience the scene. One indication of this scene-internal vantage point is the persistent use of the imperfective aspect [*imparfait*]. Whereas the embedding verbs of perception, *entendirent* and *aperçurent*, are in the *passé simple* [perfective aspect], as they are part of a successive series of events, the perceived events and states (the objects of focalisation) are consistently marked by the *imparfait*, which can often appropriately be rendered by the English past progressive to highlight its unbounded character: *tonnait* ["were sounding"], *sortaient* ["were emerging"],[18] *occupait* ["occupied"], *était bordé* ["was bordered"], *paraissait* ["was appearing"], *s'élevait* ["was rising"].

The textual order of the elements described corresponds iconically, in a cognitively realistic way, to the chronological order of the mental processes, or more precisely, to the order of the attentional frames, and can therefore be seen as a form of retrospective simulated observation. First, Fabrizio and the vivandière are overwhelmed by the noise of the cannons and muskets, which they experience as being "frightful". The deictic adverbials "to the right, to the left, behind them" make it clear that they are construed as the deictic centre of the description. The textual sequence "the cannon and the muskets were sounding on every side, to the right, to the left, behind them" is also suggestive of their mental processing. From a purely logical point of view, the addition "to the right, to the left, behind them" does not add any information to the phrase "on every side". Its function should therefore be sought elsewhere: as a representation of the protagonists' subjective experience. Linguistically, this sequence constitutes a series of four intonation units. (In written texts, their boundaries are usually marked by commas or other punctuation marks). In Cognitive Grammar, intonation units are seen as attentional frames: "successive windows of attention, each

subsuming a manageable amount of conceptual content" (Langacker 2008, 482). In this particular case, the series of attentional frames iconically and realistically reflects the successive foci of attention of the two protagonists. First, they perceive a terrible din "on every side": they are overwhelmed and are therefore not yet able to precisely identify the direction from which the sound is coming. Then, the granularity of their perception becomes more precise; they hear a sound coming first from the right, then from the left, and finally from behind.

Having processed the noise, they return to their primary objective: to find the location of the battle and, more specifically, to see whether there would be anyone on the plain. (Note that the height of the mound they are standing on is, again, only roughly estimated as "eight or ten feet"). They are only able to see a corner of the battle; on the plain before them "there was no one". In this case, the negated clause can confidently be assigned to the focalisation of the two protagonists: it is their expectation (or hope) that is contradicted. The following sentences (or, if you will, attentional frames), continue to represent the protagonists' perception in a realistic way. Having established that the field was empty, their gaze is fixed on the edge of the field. Its distance "a thousand paces away" is measured from the vantage point of the two protagonists as deictic centre. The field is bordered by a long line of very bushy willows. Once their gaze had reached the line of willows, they notice the white smoke rising above the willows into the sky. The willows and the swirling white smoke are described in considerable graphic detail, in keeping with the time it takes the protagonists to view the landscape attentively. The specific detail of the "very bushy willow" not only activates the reader's experiential knowledge (cognitive schema) of what a row of bushy willows surrounding a field typically looks like, it also has the function of priming the reader's mental image of the willows, in preparation for an event occurring shortly thereafter: "At that moment, a cannon ball struck the line of willows at an angle, and Fabrizio enjoyed the curious spectacle of all the small branches flying this way and that as if mown down by a scythe" (Sturrock 2007, 44).

Conclusion

The linguistic characteristics of immersive narrative merit greater attention than they have hitherto received. The conceptual apparatus of Cognitive Grammar is particularly well-suited to serve as a framework for analysing the linguistic dimension of immersion. First and foremost, its fundamentally embodied view on language understanding is able to penetrate to the core of what immersion is – the projection of a reader's virtual body onto the scene. A further reason for the utility of Cognitive Grammar in studying a phenomenon such as narrative immersion is its interest in, and alignment with, numerous central concepts within the field of (cognitive) narratology. The overlap between Cognitive Grammar's notion of perspective and the narratological notion of focalisation is a case in

point. Finally, the concept of construal and its connection to linguistic (stylistic) alternative ways of expression make Cognitive Grammar a valuable tool for analysing the immersive quality of texts, since this quality so strongly depends on a set of stylistic choices made by the text. In the two fragments analysed here especially tense-aspect alternation, spatio-temporal adverbial marking and their close connection to perspective-taking were shown to be of central importance to their immersive power. Other linguistic features that were found to be relevant were negation, speech representation, specific (perspective-bound) lexical choices, metaphor, and the effect of chunking into intonation units. The present study is only meant as a first exploration of what one might call the "grammar of immersion", based on only two relatively short text samples. More extensive future studies based on larger and more diverse text corpora will undoubtedly reveal additional linguistic features of immersive narrative.

It goes without saying that the two works from which the two passages are taken are very different in many respects. More than 2500 years separate them. There is also a considerable geographical distance between the cultures in which they originated, cultures which are very different in many ways. However, the limited aim of my close reading exercise has been to abstract from the very different historical contexts in which the texts were produced, and show how a linguistic – and more specifically, a Cognitive Grammar – theoretical framework can analyse the textual features that contribute to the immersive potential of the narrative. It turns out that some of the linguistic strategies that contribute to immersion reoccur across time and literary cultures. To be sure, this observation does not rule out the possibility that there are considerable differences in immersive strategies across time and cultures. Indeed, Werner Wolf has rightly emphasised the crucial importance of diachronically changing cultural-historical frames in the creation of aesthetic illusion (Wolf 2023), an observation that makes it clear that the study of literary immersion should also be an integral part of the larger project of the 'diachronization of narratology', as first advocated by Monika Fludernik (2003) and provisionally culminating in the recent *Handbook of Diachronic Narratology* (Hühn et al. 2023). Many narrative devices relevant to immersion merit a diachronically oriented study: from the use of tenses and aspects, focalisation, speech and thought representation, to dramatic irony and metalepsis.

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[1] See, e.g., Langacker 2008 and Langacker 2015. A good introduction on construal is given in Giovanelli / Harrison 2018, 31–59; for stylistic applications of construal, see, e.g., Harrison et al. 2014; Giovanelli / Harrison 2018; Allan 2019; Giovanelli et al. 2020; Stockwell 2020.

[2] It should be noted that even though an immersed reader will be strongly mentally absorbed by the storyworld, its inhabitants and their actions – even to the extent that a reader might experience a sense of presence in the storyworld –, a reader will never completely lose a sense of self-awareness, an awareness of the physical world surrounding them, and the recognition that the storyworld is, in the end, not the real world but an artificial world, a narrative construct mediated by a narrator. Being immersed in a storyworld is, after all, an illusion — not a delusion. See also Ryan 2015, 66–67; Tan 2017 ('dual awareness').

[3] See, e.g., Fludernik 1993, 195.

[4] See also Fludernik 1993, 195–198 (the French *imparfait* as the tense of "narrated perception"). A Cognitive Grammar account of the Ancient Greek imperfect is Allan 2017.

[5] See e.g., Fludernik 2009, 33–35.

[6] For the notion of sequential scanning (as opposed to summary scanning), see, e.g., Langacker 2015, 133.

[7] The translation is mine.

[8] There have been some previous studies on immersion in relation to Homeric epic: Allan et al. 2017, Allan 2019, Allan 2020, Allan 2022, Ready 2023.

[9] It should be noted that Ancient Greek provides a choice between two aspect forms (and therefore between two alternative construals): in similes, also a perfective aspect with generic meaning (traditionally called "gnomic aorist") is often used.

[10] A very good introduction to conceptual metaphor and blending is given by Stockwell (2020, 119–153).

[11] See for this enactive effect of descriptions of bodily action Kuzmičová 2012, Kuzmičová 2014, and Ryan 2015, 95. For the application of an enactive approach to Homer, see Grethlein / Huitink 2019.

[12] The observation that the armor is brazen (a visual detail) and is beautiful (an aesthetic judgement) can be attributed to Achilles' perspective (character focalisation). The description of Hector with the *epitheton ornans* "godlike" [Greek *Héktori díōi*], a very frequent formulaic phrase, is more accurately attributed to the narrator. (The same goes for the formulaic phrase "godlike Achilles" at the end of the passage.) Achilles is unlikely to consider Hector to be particularly godlike at this juncture. This type of narratorial intrusion does not disturb immersion since the narrator is only implicitly involved in the conceptualization of the scene (the narrator is "off stage"): the audience's full attention is still directed towards Achilles and Hector (who are "on stage"). For epithets as narratorial intrusion in Homer, see De Jong 2004, 140.

[13] Translation Sturrock 2007, 43.

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[14] In cognitive linguistic terms, this hybrid form of focalisation could be analysed as a form of blended viewpoint; see, e.g., Vandelanotte 2017.

[15] Narratorial intrusion upon the character's focalisation leading to dramatic irony is a phenomenon also found in Homer; e.g., in *Iliad* 16.278 we are told that the Trojans 'saw Patroclus', when in fact the Trojans think it is Achilles they see, as Patroclus had put on Achilles' armour. See also De Jong 2004, 104.

[16] This narrative strategy is part of Stendhal's "réalisme subjectif" in which the persona of the omniscient narrator with their view "de haut" [from above] is shed in favor of a view "from the ground", which necessarily involves a limited point of view (see also Blin 1953, especially his chapter "Les restrictions de champ"; more recently, Mariette 2017).

[17] For double focalisation, see Bal 2017, 144.

[18] Sturrock's translation given above is inaccurate to the extent that the *imparfait* in French suggest that they were still in the process of leaving the forest.