

Some Homeric Speeches

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We here offer suggestions about the relations between some Homeric speeches. We bring to the subject a measure of the stylistic difference between two passages, based not on content words, which *carry* message, but on high-frequency connectives, which *articulate* message, but are not directly perceived by human readers.¹

Studies of single speeches are many; less has been said about *pairs* of speeches.² Our proposal is implicit in such narrator comments as:

Then *in answer again* spoke Achilles of the swift feet (1:84)

We suggest that such responses are sometimes part of a stylistically connected pair.

In Iliad 9, the speeches of Achilles are not stylistically close to each other. Instead, *one speech and its response* – Odysseus’ appeal and Achilles’ refusal – are stylistically close, forming, as it were, a single literary unit. Here is the opening of Iliad 9:

9a. 1-88 (88 lines) Setting the Watch
9b. 89-181 (93 lines) Consultation of the Leaders

<i>Iliad</i>	9a	9b
Words:	624	655
9a	~	0.39
9b	0.39	~

Stylistically, these are at the Low level, appropriate to their narrative continuity.

¹BIRD (the **B**rooks **I**ndex of **R**hetorical **D**ifference; see Brooks **C**hinese). Significant levels are **Low** (D = 0.50 or below; part of a continuous narrative, or the author of one “has in mind” the other, or is intentionally imitating it. Notice that the possibility of imitating another author’s style means that there can be *no test for authorship as such*. **Normal** (D = 0.51-0.75; different chapters, or someone writing in the general style of the text). **High** (D = 0.76-0.99, an authorial digression, or from another source). **Extreme** (D = 1.00 and up; too different to be from the same source. For Homeric Greek, the recommended minimum is 90 words; below that, there is increasing danger of false positives. Undersized passages are asterisked* in what follows.

²Minchin **Voices** 150-163, Beck **Conversation** 127-145, Lohmann **Komposition** 131-145. We are grateful to Ruth Scodel for this last reference.

Turning now to the speeches, we have these three possible instances of a speech and a closely related response. Of the three, one pair (bracketed) is stylistically close:

9d. 225-306 (82 lines)	[Appeal of Odysseus
9e. 307-431 (125 lines)		Achilles' Reply to Odysseus
9f. 432-605 (173 lines)		Appeal of Phoinix
9g. 606-622 (17 lines)		Achilles' Reply to Phoinix
9h. 623-642 (20 lines)		Speech of Aias
9i. 643-655 (13 lines)		*Achilles' Reply to Aias

The table for these six speeches is:

<i>Iliad</i>	9d	9e	9f	9g	9h	9i*
Words	592	923	1231	136	143	87
9d	~	0.48	0.68	0.69	0.70	0.69
9e	0.48	~	0.56	0.75	0.60	0.61
9f	0.68	0.56	~	0.70	0.51	0.59
9g	0.69	0.75	0.70	~	0.52	0.70
9h	0.70	0.60	0.51	0.52	~	0.51
9i*	0.69	0.61	0.59	0.70	0.54	~

The appeal of Odysseus and the reply by Achilles, are closely related ($D = 0.48$).³

Is Achilles equally similar to himself? So we might expect, if style is used by Homer to characterize individuals. To see this clearly, we extract Achilles' speeches:

<i>Iliad</i>	9e	9g	9i*
Words:	923	136	87
9e	~	0.75	0.61
9g	0.75	~	0.70
9i	0.61	0.70	~

The answer is No. All are within Normal range; they could be speeches by Achilles or anybody else. That conclusion is firm for the first two, which are sizeable passages. It is also of interest that the two closest are Achilles' replies to *Odysseus and Aias*.⁴

We now test this possibility on the Quarrel scene at the beginning of the *Iliad*.

Iliad 1

The quarrel is preceded by this exchange. All these speeches (and many to follow) are below the recommended minimum size, and we offer them with due caution.

The Muse has been invoked, and she has begun the story. As Homer picks up the narrative, we find ourselves on the beach where the ships are drawn up.

³The same can *almost* be said of the speech of Aias and its reply. The small size of the latter makes that interpretation uncertain.

⁴The long speech of Phoinix has its own difficulties. Eliminating Phoinix altogether solves "the greatest problem in the whole of the *Iliad*" (Griffin *Iliad IX* 51-52, quoting Schadewaldt), by removing the problem of the dual verbs at the beginning of *Iliad* 9.

Here, then, are the first speeches in the Iliad:

- Ch1. 17-21 (5 lines) ⌈*Chryse appeals to Agamemnon, to return his daughter
 Ag1. 26-32 (7 lines) *Agamemnon's threatening refusal
 Ch2. 37-42 (5 lines) ⌋*Chryse prays to Apollo, to punish the Greeks

<i>Iliad 1</i>	<i>Ch1*</i>	<i>Ag1*</i>	<i>Ch2*</i>
Words:	34	56	43
<i>Ch1*</i>	~	0-68	0-40
<i>Ag1*</i>	0-68	~	0-66
<i>Ch2*</i>	0-40	0-66	~

Here, it is the two speeches of Chryse that are stylistically close, perhaps because of the generic similarity (both speeches are appeals).

We now turn to the first speeches of the Quarrel proper:

- Ac1. 59-67 (8 lines) ⌈*Achilles opens the council; calls for suggestions
 Ca1. 74-83 (10 lines) ⌋*Calchas' response, a request for safety if he speaks
 Ac2. 85-91 (7 lines) *Achilles assures his safety
 Ca2. 93-100 (8 lines) ⌈*Analysis by Calchas, suggesting return of Chriseis
 Ag2. 106-120 (15 lines) ⌋Furious response by Agamemnon
 Ac3. 122-129 (8 lines) ⌈*Achilles objects
 Ag3. 131-147 (17 lines) ⌋Agamemnon escalates his threat
 Ac4. 149-171 (23 lines) Achilles threatens to leave Troy altogether
 Ag4. 173-187 (15 lines) Agamemnon dares Achilles to do as he threatens

<i>Iliad 1</i>	<i>Ac1*</i>	<i>Ca1*</i>	<i>Ac2*</i>	<i>Ca2*</i>	<i>Ag2</i>	<i>Ac3*</i>	<i>Ag3</i>	<i>Ac4</i>	<i>Ag4</i>
Words:	71	75	50	58	118	54	129	173	120
<i>Ac1*</i>	~	0-46	0-78	0-59	0-75	0-67	0-71	0-74	0-46
<i>Ca1*</i>	0-46	~	0-62	0-88	0-82	0-67	0-76	0-62	0-61
<i>Ac2*</i>	0-78	0-62	~	0-66	0-54	0-59	0-83	0-40	0-59
<i>Ca2*</i>	0-59	0-88	0-66	~	0-42	0-41	0-60	0-66	0-60
<i>Ag2</i>	0-75	0-82	0-54	0-42	~	0-60	0-88	0-60	0-76
<i>Ac3*</i>	0-67	0-67	0-59	0-41	0-60	~	0-49	0-46	0-53
<i>Ag3</i>	0-71	0-76	0-83	0-60	0-88	0-49	~	0-67	0-58
<i>Ac4</i>	0-74	0-62	0-40	0-66	0-60	0-46	0-67	~	0-62
<i>Ag4</i>	0-46	0-61	0-59	0-60	0-76	0-53	0-58	0-62	~

Moving down the diagonal, so as to see the stylistic relation of each speech with the one next to it, we find three speech-and-response pairs:

- Achilles' speech opening the council is close to Calchas' speech in response to that invitation (D = 0-46). Achilles (Ac2) guarantees his safety in speaking, in a speech not close to those on either side; a mere introduction to the next pair.
- In his speech to the council, Calchas says Chryseis must be returned. Agamemnon, furious, responds in a stylistically close speech (D = 0-42).
- Achilles then intervenes, and draws an angry response from Agamemnon. These two speeches are also close (D = 0-49).

These are short speeches. The next two are longer, and are *not* stylistically close. There is plenty of hostility in them, but also a certain solidness. That change of tone has been noticed. Here is G S Kirk on Achilles (our emphasis, and our spelling):

- 151. “. . . reference to the journey to Chryse proposed by Agamemnon, with the rest of the verse as *transition to the idea Achilles wants to develop, namely the reasons for fighting.*”
- 167-168. “The note of *pathos, prominent from 161 on, continues. . .*”

Especially insightful is Kirk on Agamemnon’s speech, following:

- 172-177. Agamemnon begins *calmly*, by contrast, and is both sarcastic and *complacent*.

The length of these two speeches, and their stylistic independence, are consistent with Kirk’s sense of their different tone. They are less squabbles than pronouncements.

It is now established that Chryseis will be returned and Agamemnon will instead take Briseis for himself. It remains to get rid of the accumulated hostility. That is attempted by two outsiders. First comes Athena, who appears invisibly to Achilles:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Ac5 202-205 (4 lines) | [| *Achilles is about to draw his sword |
| At1 207-214 (8 lines) | | *Athena grabs him by the hair, dissuades him |
| Ac6 216-218 (3 lines) | | *Achilles briefly agrees; sheathes his sword |

<i>Iliad</i> l	Ac5*	At1*	Ac6*
Words:	28	65	23
Ac5*	~	0·34	0·54
At1*	0·34	~	0·45
Ac6*	0·54	0·45	~

The intimacy of this encounter is mirrored by the fact that the three speeches are stylistically close. They do not form consecutive pairs, one pair following another; they have their own continuity: B close to A, and C in turn close to B.

That consistency of tone, that mutual confidence, is also noted by Kirk:

- 207-214. “The short sentences . . . suit the urgency of the occasion, but also suggest an *effortless confidence.*”
- 215-217. “Achilles’ three-verse reply maintains the small scale and low key of Athena’s 8-verse speech of advice which precedes it. The whole episode, indeed, after Achilles’ initial violent impulse, is *kept severely in place . . . Achilles’ uncharacteristic reasonableness . . .*”

However, for all that moment of intimacy and agreement, the hard feelings continue. There will be one more intervention, before things come to an end.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the audience feels considerable excitement at this point. Is the quarrel going to be resolved, or are things going to escalate further? There is some hope of a resolution, since the next person to speak is Nestor, the aged but respected figure who appears frequently in the *Iliad*⁵ as a giver of sound counsel. He speaks, and what follows constitutes the second intervention.

⁵Though sometimes in passages which can be shown to be later additions to the text; the role of Nestor in the *Iliad* requires separate discussion.

Here are the speeches in that second intervention:

Ac7 225-244 (20 lines) ⌈*Achilles is still furious and accusatory
 Ne1 254-284 (31 lines) *Nestor, at length, urges that both be reasonable
 Ag5 286-291 (6 lines) *Agamemnon, outwardly respectful, ignores N's argument
 Ac8 293-303 (11 lines) ⌋*Achilles continues angry, with one concession

<i>Iliad 1</i>	<i>Ac7</i>	<i>Ne1</i>	<i>Ag5*</i>	<i>Ac8</i>
Words:	151	228	45	94
<i>Ac7</i>	~	0.57	0.55	0.33
<i>Ne1</i>	0.57	~	0.56	0.53
<i>Ag5*</i>	0.55	0.56	~	0.53
<i>Ac8</i>	0.33	0.53	0.53	~

After his outburst in 225-244, Achilles throws down his speaker's staff: For him, the council is over. This is mirrored in the D results by the fact that *no subsequent speech* is stylistically close to what precedes it. Of Agamemnon, for example, Kirk observes:

- 286-291. "... every single part of Nestor's speech is studiously ignored."

As for Achilles, his last speech makes one concession (he accepts the loss of Briseis). There is a nominal response to Agamemnon (Ag8, D = 0.53, the near end of normal), but he has chiefly in mind his own previous position in Ac7 (D = 0.33, the closest similarity of any two speeches in this part of *Iliad 1*). Discussion is indeed at an end.

A "lookback" effect may also be seen in the earlier speeches. Here they are again:

Ac1. 59-67 (9 lines) ⌈*Achilles opens the council; calls for suggestions
 Ca1. 74-83 (10 lines) ⌋*Calchas' response with a request for safety
 Ac2. 85-91 (5 lines) *Achilles assures his safety
 Ca2. 93-100 (8 lines) ⌈*Analysis by Calchas, suggesting return of Chriseis
 Ag2. 106-120 (15 lines) ⌋Furious response by Agamemnon
 Ac3. 122-129 (8 lines) ⌈*Achilles objects
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<i>Iliad 1</i>	<i>Ac1*</i>	<i>Ca1*</i>	<i>Ac2*</i>	<i>Ca2*</i>	<i>Ag2</i>	<i>Ac3*</i>	<i>Ag3</i>	<i>Ac4</i>	<i>Ag4</i>
Words:	71	75	50	58	118	54	129	173	120
<i>Ac1*</i>	~	0.46	0.78	0.59	0.75	0.67	0.71	0.74	0.46
<i>Ca1*</i>	0.46	~	0.62	0.88	0.82	0.67	0.76	0.62	0.61
<i>Ac2*</i>	0.78	0.62	~	0.66	0.54	0.59	0.83	0.40	0.59
<i>Ca2*</i>	0.59	0.88	0.66	~	0.42	0.41	0.60	0.66	0.60
<i>Ag2</i>	0.75	0.82	0.54	0.42	~	0.60	0.88	0.60	0.76
<i>Ac3*</i>	0.67	0.67	0.59	0.41	0.60	~	0.49	0.46	0.53
<i>Ag3</i>	0.71	0.76	0.83	0.60	0.88	0.49	~	0.67	0.58
<i>Ac4</i>	0.74	0.62	0.40	0.66	0.60	0.46	0.67	~	0.62
<i>Ag4</i>	0.46	0.61	0.59	0.60	0.76	0.53	0.58	0.62	~

We may now consider some remote relationships not previously noticed.

The speech here labeled Ac3, in addition to providing what Agamemnon will respond to, itself looks back (D = 0·41) to the speech of Calchas, Ca2, which said that Chriseis must be returned. The consequences for Achilles himself are now clearer, and it is not unnatural that Achilles, as he opens the next exchange, should have it in mind.

In his next speech, Ac4, he seems to have in mind his original guarantee to Calchas (Ac 2, D = 0·40) a speech which has no other close relations in this part of Iliad 1) Again, we may say that he focuses on the beginning of the quarrel.

And so does Agamemnon (Ag4), who responds not at all to the preceding speech of Achilles. He too reverts to an earlier matter: Achilles' speech opening the council (Ac1, D = 0·46). This is not unreasonable, since already in that speech, at line 109, Achilles had addressed, not the assembly he had called, but the "Son of Atreus."

•Kirk remarks, at 59-67, "It is worth noticing that Achilles' opening remarks to Agamemnon are perfectly unprovocative."

For once, we venture to disagree. In pointing the question at Agamemnon, and not at the assembly as a whole, Achilles initiates the series of heated exchanges between himself and Agamemnon which follow. This possibility seems the less unlikely in that, as we have seen above, the two drift apart stylistically at the conclusion of the quarrel. In his last speech, rather than respond to the speech of Achilles that directly precedes, Agamemnon instead "looks back" to the beginning of the quarrel.

Is any of this plausible for the historical Achilles and Agamemnon? We answer: There *are* no historical Achilles and Agamemnon. They are figments of the poet's imagination. What we are seeing here is rather the function which those speeches had, in the poet's conception of the nature, the progress, and the resolution, of the quarrel.

Conclusion

We suggest that stylistics, by seeing the text a little deeper than the human reader, can help identify a little-noticed poetic device: linking speeches for expressive effect. For that expressive effect to occur, no conscious effort is required. The poet need only "have in mind" the other speech, for a similar stylistic coloring to occur spontaneously.

Apart from a few soliloquies, Homeric speeches are not statements in a vacuum. They are part of a two-way interchange. That the more closely engaged interchanges should be *stylistically* similar should surprise no constant reader of the Homeric texts.

The device of pairing, on which we here chiefly focus, is of wide occurrence in early texts: the sayings of Confucius in the Analects, or the Questions of King Milinda. Perhaps to that list we can now add, "some Homeric speeches."

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