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A discourse linguistic perspective

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Proceedings of *Anchoring Innovation in Antiquity*, 17-20 December 2015

'Anchoring' as a communicative device in Roman historiography: a discourse linguistic perspective

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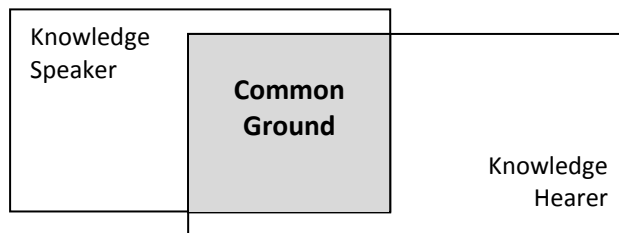
1. Anchoring and common ground management

This contribution will give a very brief impression of the way the linguistically oriented researchers in OIKOS attempt to contribute to the Anchoring Innovation program.¹ The input of the linguists centres around the concept of 'anchoring' from a communicative and cognitive point of view, and is based on the assumption that effective and successful communication, of whatever type and medium, depends to a large degree on what could be called 'common ground management'. Or more precisely: in order to communicate new information, ideas or opinions successfully, a speaker or writer will have to anchor these ideas firmly to the common ground that is shared between him or her and the addressee.

¹ For more information, see project II of the Anchoring Innovation Agenda, which focuses especially on discourse and rhetoric. The linguistic sub-project is called *Describing a Changing World: Classical Historiography and the Discourse of Innovation* (<http://www.ru.nl/oikos/anchoring-innovation/project-descriptions/project-ii/>). Project team: Rutger Allan, Lidewij van Gils and Caroline Kroon.

At the second Anchoring Innovation meeting in June 2015, Rutger Allan gave the following brief summary of common ground, based on Herbert Clark’s psycholinguistic Common Ground Theory²:

Common ground: ‘[...] the sum of [two people’s] mutual, common, or joint knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions’ (Clark 1996)



According to Clark there are two types of common ground. The first type is *communal* common ground and is based on cultural copresence, that is, on shared culture. It may involve shared expertise and shared attitudes, or depend on the fact that we are all human beings and therefore share certain mental attitudes and inclinations that are universal to humans.

The other type of common ground is *personal* common ground and is based on the copresence of the interlocutors in the speech event. This copresence may be physical and involving the things we perceive and experience together; or it may be linguistic and textual, and based on the fact that everything that has been previously said or written in a discourse automatically becomes part of the common ground of the interlocutors.

² See also the contribution by Allan & Van Gils (*Anchoring New Ideas in Common Ground. A Linguistic Approach*) for or a more extensive discussion of the concept of common ground, including more references to relevant literature.

In a schematized form, the two types of common ground can be characterized as follows (see Allan 2015):

Two types of common ground (Clark 1996)

(I) **Communal Common Ground (cultural copresence)**: shared cultural communities: nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.)

- shared expertise/knowledge about general concepts or specific practices: cognitive schemas/frames/scripts, cultural models, prototypes, genre conventions, shared vocabulary (jargon)
- shared attitudes (religious, political): beliefs, judgments, stereotypes
- being human: physical properties, emotions, rationality

(II) **Personal Common Ground** (personal relationships, shared between individuals)

- **Perceptual basis (physical copresence)**: what we perceive and experience together (what we are looking at, hearing, smelling, experiencing in general), while we perceive that we can both perceive it.
- **Discourse basis (linguistic copresence)**: what we are speaking about, joint attention to what is told by other (discourse context).

As Rutger Allan and Lidewij van Gils have already demonstrated at previous Anchoring Innovation meetings, there are a number of linguistic phenomena in Ancient Greek and Latin that may be directly related to the process of common ground management, for instance negation, word order, anaphoric reference, modality, and discourse particles.³ Especially interesting are the discourse particles,

³ See Allan (2015) for discourse particles; Van Gils (2015b) for negation; Allan (forthc.), van Gils (forthc.), and Allan & van Gils (forthc.; and also their present contribution) for adversative particles and negation. Kroon (forthc.) contains a discussion of the anaphoric use of the Latin pronoun *hic* in terms of anchoring new information into the discourse based personal ground.

which can be seen as instructions given by the speaker to the addressee as to how new information is to be cognitively anchored to the already established common ground. The Latin particle *enim* in example (1) may serve as an illustration:⁴

(1) Nunc **enim** vero ego occidi

(‘now – as you can see/imagine/understand – it is really all over with me’, Pl.

Capt. 534)

What a word like *enim* is doing here is pointing out to the interlocutor that the information given is assumed by the speaker to somehow belong to the common ground. In this respect Latin *enim* can be compared to, for instance, German *ja* or English *y’know*, which both are commonly used for seeking or confirming common ground, especially in situations where the speaker deems it opportune to bond with the interlocutor. See examples (2) and (3) for English *y’know*:

(2) But I guess that’s life, **y’know**?

(3) People in this world have gone crazy, **y’know**?

In their contribution to the Anchoring Innovation Conference in December 2015, Allan and van Gils showed that the communicative function of certain Ancient Greek discourse particles crucially revolves around common ground management. In this paper, I will focus on another linguistic device that may play a role in common ground management, namely the use of the present tense to refer to past events (the so-called historic present). By taking a particular narrative episode in Tacitus’ *Annals* as a case study, I will try to explain how the present tense may play a role in anchoring the information into the common ground, and, especially, how an

⁴ For an extensive discussion of the Latin particle *enim*, see Kroon (1995), 171-209.

historiographer like Tacitus may exploit this ‘anchoring’ use of the present tense for various communicative and rhetorical goals.

2. Grammatical tense and common ground management: the historical present tense as an anchoring device

Starting point of our project *Describing a Changing World: Classical Historiography and the Discourse of Innovation* is Hayden White’s influential view that all historiography is in essence rhetorical, a view that appears to be particularly applicable to ancient historiography.⁵ From a discourse analytic point of view this means that we are dealing here with inherently argumentative texts, which reflect an implicit dialogue between the historiographer and various different ‘voices’ and audiences. What we intend to show in our project is that the presence of implicit, non-authorial voices is crucial for how the message is formally presented: the historiographer shapes his message in accordance with the expected knowledge, views and values of his audience. In order to win his audience for his ideas, he will choose the linguistic and textual presentation that may serve his goals best. Common ground management appears to be of crucial importance for the author’s persuasiveness in this communication process. An important claim I would like to make in this paper, is that the use of the present tense for referring to past events (the so-called historic present) is one of the major linguistic devices in Tacitus’ historiography for anchoring information to the common ground.

The idea that the historic present tense is somehow involved in common ground management is not entirely new, and has partially been inspired by the work of a number of cognitive linguists working on what is usually called ‘temporal deixis’.⁶ Temporal deixis is considered by them as a phenomenon through which the

⁵ See especially White (1987). For Roman historiography, see e.g. Woodman (1988) and Laird (2009).

⁶ See e.g. Brisard (2002), Langacker (2011) and, most recently, Chovanek (2014).

speaker or writer positions a text with respect to his audience.⁷ In our own common ground management terms we might say that present tense indicates that the addressee (the reader or hearer) is supposed to have *direct access* to the information transmitted by the speaker, on account of their cultural or personal copresence: speaker and addressee are members of the same cultural community, and/or share the same physical or linguistic space, which enables them to visually or mentally perceive the same things *at the same time*.⁸ As such, the present tense implies a high degree of ‘givenness’, epistemic certainty and immediacy, where the notion of ‘immediacy’ attempts to capture the unmediated character of the knowledge that is expressed by the present tense.

When the present tense is used for referring to past events, which is a common use of the present tense in historiography and other narrative discourse, this means that the speaker or writer intentionally codes the message with respect to the anticipated time and place of its reception⁹, thereby firmly anchoring the message into the common ground: whereas in the case of past tenses the reader or hearer perceives or accesses the transmitted information expressly through mediation of the speaker, the information conveyed by the present tense is coded as being directly accessible for both the speaker and the addressee. In the remainder of this paper, I will demonstrate how this pretence of immediacy entailed by the present tense is exploited in Tacitus’ historiography for various communicative and rhetorical aims,

⁷ See e.g. Chovanek (2014) 6, who points to the fact that, in this sense, tense is an interpersonal element that co-constructs the interactive nature of the text.

⁸ The present tense might therefore be seen as a kind of intersubjective element, where I use ‘intersubjective’ in the sense of Verhagen (2005). Cf. also Chovanek (2014) 5, who with regard to news texts observes that “the fundamental principle on which news texts operate is the projection of certain temporal deictics to the anticipated time of the texts’ reception, whereby the impression of a shared context is constructed”. This description seems to be highly applicable to the ‘historic’ use of the present tense as discussed in this paper.

⁹ See e.g. Chovanek (2014), who describes the phenomenon in terms of deictic shift. Other non-present occurrences of the present tense referred to by Chovanek include present instead of future (referring to scheduled activities in the future); stage directions; recipes; photo captions; headlines in news texts; generic utterances.

pertaining to either the persuasiveness of the message, or the addressee's easy and successful processing of the message. The lengthy episode of Piso's conspiracy in book 15 of Tacitus' *Annals* will serve as a case study.

3. Tacitus' use of the present tense in the episode of Piso's conspiracy

3.1 *The narrative structure of the episode of Piso's conspiracy (An. 15. 47-74)*

In the episode of Piso's Conspiracy, which dominates the account of the year 65 AD, Tacitus tells us about the last feeble attempts of the Roman aristocracy to overthrow Nero's reign and to bring the principate to an end. It is significant that the episode is by far the longest continuous episode in the entire *Annals*.¹⁰ The very length of the episode becomes all the more significant when we take into account that conspiracies, by their very nature, are meant to be kept a secret, and that historical accounts of them will inevitably be based on a minimum of reliably documented evidence.¹¹ The format of a conspiracy narrative therefore seems to provide Tacitus with an ideal instrument for creatively turning a minimum of testimonial evidence into a rhetorically effective story, in accordance with any further-reaching goals he might have in telling the story. Stories codify in a meaningful way the norms and values that regulate social life, and this makes storytelling an excellent instrument of persuasion, also, and especially, in the hands of Tacitus.

I have analysed the Piso story with these facts in mind and by making use of a linguistic-narratological instrument that has been developed over the past few years in Amsterdam.¹² An analysis of the episode along these lines provides some

¹⁰ The episode of Piso's conspiracy takes up 17 pages in Fisher's Oxford edition.

¹¹ Or, as Victoria Pagán (2005) 89 puts it in her study on ancient conspiracy narratives, there are "limits on knowledge on conspiracy".

¹² For a more thorough analysis of the episode along these linguistic-narratological lines, see Kroon (2010). Useful other studies of the episode are Hauser (1967), Miller (1973), Suerbaum (1976),

interesting results, of which I can mention only the most striking ones in the present paper. The first observation is that the episode, despite the presumed lack of narrative material the historiographer could draw on, fully responds to the form and structure that modern scholarship has recognized as prototypical of natural storytelling. On the basis of a model originally developed by the sociolinguist William Labov (Labov 1972), this prototypical structure can be summarized as in table 1:

Table 1: Prototypical structure of a story/narrative episode (Labov 1972, Fleischman 1990, Fludernik 1991, Longacre 1996 ² , Toolan 2001 ²)	
1. <i>Abstract</i>	❖ Point of story, or summary of significant events
2. <i>Orientation</i>	❖ Identification of time, place, circumstances and participants
3. [<i>Incipit</i> +] <i>Complicating Action</i>	❖ [Starting point for the further development of the story or episode +] Build-up of tension: What happened and then what happened?
4. <i>Peak</i>	
5. <i>Evaluation</i>	❖ Climax of tension, pivot, or significant moment in course of events
6. <i>Resolution</i>	
7. <i>Coda</i>	❖ Narrator's comment ❖ Outcome/result ❖ Closure, bridge to time of narrating

Simple, natural stories are supposed to start with an Abstract. The Abstract is commonly followed by an Orientation to the story, which sketches the particulars of the situation within which the first Complicating Action is going to take place. This Complicating Action, or a series of them, usually build up to a Peak, often followed by some sort of Evaluation in which there is room for, for instance, moral or ideological reflections or comments.¹³ The Resolution contains the outcome and

Woodman (1993), and Pagán (2005). The linguistic-narratological framework referred to here is described and demonstrated in various chapters of Van Gils, de Jong & Kroon (forthc.). See also e.g. Allan (2009; 2011).

¹³ Although they often appear immediately after the Peak, Evaluations may in essence occur at any position in the narrative structure, and in a variety of forms.

consequences, after which the narrator may indicate, in an explicit Coda, that the story has come to an end.

This pattern, part of which, in longer narrative episodes, may obtain in a recursive manner, appears to be the main coherence creating device of the episode of Piso's conspiracy, and somehow seems to compensate for the fact that in this story the distinctive characteristic of narrative, the presence of sustained series of closely connected events, seems to be almost lacking.¹⁴ It seems as if Tacitus deliberately uses the prototypical format of storytelling to serve as a solid communal common ground into which to persuasively anchor his message, whatever this message might be.

Table 2 contains in an abbreviated form the results of my analysis of the Piso episode along the lines of Labov's model of natural storytelling.¹⁵

Table 2: Narrative structure of the episode of Piso's Conspiracy (Tac. A. 15.47-74)

47	Abstract , in form of the interpretation of a prodigy
48-50.3	Orientation : time, circumstances, participants, motivations of the participants
50.4-53	Complicating Action in three parts: <i>Part 1</i> : intensification of deliberations and Subrius Flavus' hesitations (c. 50.4)
	Evaluation : 1 st half of Epicharis episode (c. 51)
	<i>Part 2</i> : continuation of deliberations and Piso's hesitations (c. 52)
	<i>Part 3</i> : decisive deliberations, plan to murder Nero at the Circus Games (c. 53)

¹⁴ That we do not find many of such longer sequences of events, and explicit and precise locations in time of most of the recounted events are lacking, is quite understandable, given the scarce testimonial evidence the historian may have had at his disposal. In the episode of Piso's conspiracy we see a historian at work who knows perfectly well how to deal with the dilemma of creating a convincing story without losing his reliability as an historian.

¹⁵ See Kroon (2010) for the entire linguistic-narratological argumentation underlying this analysis.

54-56	Peak , in the form of a self-contained mini-episode with internal narrative structure:
	Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Peak Scaevinus' preparations for the murder at his home; Scaevinus' betrayal by his freedman Milichus; arrests and interrogations; <i>ADICIT DICTIS CONSTANTIAM</i> ; confessions and betrayal
57	Evaluation : 2 nd half of Epicharis episode
58-74	Resolution in three parts: <i>Part 1</i> : security measures by Nero. Further arrests, interrogations, penalties
(c. 59)	Evaluation + transition to 'exitus illustrium virorum': death of Piso
	<i>Part 2</i> : 'Exitus illustrium virorum'; e.g. death of Seneca, death of Vestinus (c. 60-70)
	<i>Part 3</i> : Fading out of death; cynical 'triumphus viventium'; thank-offerings (c. 71-74)
73.2	Coda : 'However, that a conspiracy had begun, had come to fruition, and had been suppressed was not doubted at the time by any with a care to discover the truth, and it was also later admitted by those who returned to the city after Nero's death'

The recognition of this prototypical narrative pattern is, I would argue, essential for understanding how the Piso episode may function as a vehicle for conveying certain ideological views and moral values that seem to play a role in Tacitus' work as a whole. The unambiguous identification of the Peak passage of the story may, for instance, provide us with important clues for constructing a 'meaning' out of the text. It is especially there that we, as analysts, expect any ideological or moral messages to come to the fore. The same holds for the Evaluation sections, albeit in a supposedly different way than in the Peak elements.

In my analyses of the Piso story these expectations appeared to be justified. I will not go here into the evaluation sections of the story (although these are also very interesting), but will confine myself to a brief discussion of the Peak section in chapters 54-56, since this will bring us back to the issue of the historic present tense, and its function in common ground management.

3.2 *The use of the historical present tense in the episode of Piso's conspiracy*

In the Piso episode, as elsewhere in Tacitus' historiographical work, the use of the historic present tense appears to be relatively rare, and could therefore be regarded as marked.¹⁶ In the text of chapters 47-60, added in the appendix to this paper, all present tense forms are underlined and printed in boldface, while the sentences in which they occur are set in capitals. Two things clearly stand out when we present the text in this typography.

The first thing to be observed is that there are a few instances of isolated present tense forms at major boundaries in the structure of the narrative. This is for instance the case at the beginning of chapter 47 with *fine anni vulgantur prodigia* ('at the end of the year there was much talk about prodigies') and in 48 with *ineunt deinde consulatum Silius Nerva et Atticus Vestinus* ('then entered their consulship Silius Nerva and Atticus Vestinus').¹⁷ These are instances of what is commonly called the 'annalistic' present tense. If we try to explain the use of the present tense here in terms of common ground management, we might say that the use of the present tense somehow creates the impression that the historiographer and his audience are together running through a fixed list or record of isolated historical data, in a joined

¹⁶ Tacitus is among the classical historians who, statistically, use the present tense least often: in book XV of the *Annals*, for instance, we find 268 perfect forms as main verbs, and only 131 presents. In *Caesar's Gallic War*, by contrast, we find 1320 presents, and 901 perfects (data taken from Longrée (2005)).

¹⁷ Cf. also *adiungit* and *sequitur caedes Annaei Senecae* in c. 60; outside the Piso episode e.g. *sequitur clades* in 15.38.

mental replay of events.¹⁸ These isolated present tense forms, which clearly stand out among past tense verb forms, seem to function as a kind of signpost for the reader, marking out the main steps in the annalistic narrative structure (which correspond to the main entries in the annalistic records that the text is pretended to reflect). Along these present tense forms, a line of bare, sequenced anchor-points could be drawn through the text, which may each be elaborated or filled in by means of ‘ordinary’ past tense events or participle constructions.

The communicative motive for using the present tense in this particular position is not so much rhetorical (as I will argue to be the case with a group of presents to be discussed below), as driven by generic conventions (the pretense of annalistic recording, see note 18), and the communicative requirement of processing ease. The effect of epistemic immediacy evoked by the use of the present tense seems to work here as a kind of alertness trigger for the reader, helping him to keep track of the main structure of the narrative at major transition points. The same motivation seems to underlie the use of the historic present at other, ‘non-annalistic’ transition points in the narrative structure, for instance at the beginning of a new Complicating Act. Instances of this latter use can be seen, for instance, in ch. 54 (*monet*) and ch. 57 (*iubet*).¹⁹

However, in the Peak section (ch. 54-56) the situation is different. In this self-contained mini-story about the senator Scaevinus, one of the conspirators, we see a remarkably high density of present tense forms as compared to the rest of the episode, which may count as a clear indication that we are indeed getting now at the

¹⁸ In terms of Clark (1996) this would be an instance of common ground based on personal copresence. The mental construction invoked here (cf. Langacker (2011)) is that of the annalistic recording. The descriptions do not directly pertain to the actual events, but rather to the virtual events that are mentally ‘replayed’ from the annalistic recordings.

¹⁹ *Monet* in c. 54 is a good example of what Fludernik (1991) 375 has labeled ‘Incipit’, i.e. the action that starts off the Complication element of the story: Scaevinus’ involves his freedman Milichus in the preparations of the murder, which will turn out to be decisive for the further course of the story. See also table 1 above, where the narratological function ‘Incipit’ is integrated as optional part of the Complicating Action.

core of the entire story. The Scaevinus-section has a clear internal narrative structure of its own, starting in ch. 54 with an Abstract, immediately followed by an Orientation section, after which we get the first Complicating Action, highlighted as such by the use of a historic present, *monet* (see above and note 19). Judging by the accumulation of present tense forms from ch. 55 onwards (*pergit, docet, adicit, incusat, accitur, interrogantur, fatetur, adicit*), we seem to be approaching the Peak, not only of the self-contained Scaevinus-episode in 54-56, but also of the Piso-story as a whole. The narrative pace slows down and the use of a series of present tense forms for closely connected actions contributes to the impression that we now get an unmediated, almost eyewitness-like account of the events, in which the narrator steps back as mediator, and narrator and narratee join, so to speak, in 're-living' the events, on account of the pretense of a physical copresence in which they both perceive and experience the things that happen on the spot.

What is noticeable here, however, is that in this series of historic presents there is one present tense form that seems to be a narratorial comment or reflection on the events, rather than the unmediated account of one of the events itself. I am referring here to the sentence *adicit dictis constantiam* at the end of ch. 55 (Scaevinus, while being interrogated, adds resoluteness to his words). We might have expected the perfect tense here, which is the common tense in Latin for authorial comments of this type. Tacitus, however, seems to intentionally make this comment part of the unmediated, objectivized account of the events in this section.

On account of the entire analysis of the episode, it is my conviction that this sentence *adicit dictis constantiam*, with its unexpected, rhetorical use of the historic present, forms the absolute core of the Piso episode as a whole, in terms of narrative structure and in terms of meaning. Scaevinus' steadfastness is positioned in the heart of what has been determined as the Peak passage, and immediately before the essential turning point of the story, which is recounted in the next sentence: the accusation against Scaevinus would have faltered (*labaret indicum*), and the

conspiracy saved, had not the wife of Scaevinus' freedman frustrated the entire thing, leading to the betrayal and eventual rounding-up of the conspiracy. The use of the historic present, as well as the central position of the sentence in the structure of the Piso story as a whole, makes it clear that it is the virtue of *constantia* what this story is primarily about.

At closer inspection, we see that the theme of *constantia*, as opposed to *metus*, permeates through the entire episode. It seems to be announced already in ch. 49.1, where in a proleptic remark we read the following with regard to the military tribune Subrius Flavus and the centurio Sulpicius Asper:

promptissimos Subrium Flauum tribunum praetoriae cohortis et Sulpicium Asprum centurionem extitisse constantia exitus docuit. (A. 49.1)

'Its most fervent supporters proved to be Subrius Flavus, tribune of a praetorian cohort, and the centurion Sulpicius Asper, as *their resolve in facing death demonstrated*'²⁰

Constantia is also the theme of the inserted story of the freedwoman Epicharis, who clearly serves as a foil character and whose inserted story (which has been assigned the function of Evaluation in my analysis of the Piso episode as whole) provides a contrast with the faltering (*metus*) displayed by most of the aristocratic male conspirators.²¹ Moreover, *constantia* is the theme of the extended episode of Seneca's death which will follow in ch. 60-65, and which is foreshadowed in our core passage 54-56 by *adicit Annaeum Senecam* (ch. 56).²² In ch. 56 Seneca's name is mentioned for

²⁰ Translation: Yardley (2008).

²¹ The inserted story of Epicharis is not told in a continuous way, but has been adroitly split up into two separate parts (ch. 51 and ch. 57). Note that the *constantia* theme seems also present in the other Evaluation section of the Piso episode (ch. 50), which deals with the end of Piso. For the *constantia-metus* theme, see also Hauser (1967).

²² *Constantia* also plays a role in ch. 60, concerning the death of *consul designatus* Plautius Lateranus (*plenus constantis silentii nec tribuno obiciens eandem conscientiam*).

the first time in relation to the conspiracy, and the significance of this so-called ‘narratological seed’ is – again – clearly underlined by the use of the historic present tense.²³

4. Concluding remarks

Although I had to make my point about *constantia* a bit quickly, and more arguments could be adduced for this conclusion, I hope to have made clear that in the episode of Piso’s conspiracy Tacitus uses the anchoring/common ground managing capacities of the present tense in two different ways: for processing ease, in order to highlight major transitions in the macrostructure of the narrative; and, perhaps more interesting, for clear rhetorical purposes. The theme of *constantia* as a virtue of true leadership, and the failure of most of the Roman aristocrats to live up to expectations in this respect, is not commented on or judged very explicitly by Tacitus in the Piso episode.²⁴ The historian rather seems to drive his point home in a quite objectivized (but presumably all the more effective) way, by means of a well-considered narrative structure and a subtle and rhetorically effective use of the present tense in the episode’s core section.²⁵

²³ For the term ‘narratological seed’, see e.g. De Jong (2014) 86-7.

²⁴ The most explicit narratorial comment can be found in the second Epicharis section in c. 57: ... *tenem iam spiritum expressit, clariore exemplo libertina mulier in tanta necessitate alienos ac prope ignotos protegendo, cum ingenui et viri et equites Romani senatoresque intacti tormentis carissima suorum quisque proderent* (A. 15.57) (‘... [she] choked out what little life she had left. Thus a freedwoman set all the more brilliant an example in such dire circumstances, protecting people unrelated, indeed almost strangers, to her – and that when male free persons, who were Roman knights and senators, were all betraying their nearest and dearest, without being subjected to torture.’, translation Yardley (2008))

²⁵ Schofield (2009), in an article on republican Roman virtues, argues that talk about virtues is inevitably harnessed to some particular intellectual or political agenda (p. 201). As to the republican virtues of *gravitas* and *constantia*, he draws attention to the fact that Cicero consistently represented these virtues in his oeuvre as “the qualities typically exhibited by great political actors in their defense of the common goods against attempts to subvert it” (p. 210). Hence, according to Schofield, *gravitas* and *constantia* may imply commitment to republican virtue and the republican cause. Nawotka (1993) adduces evidence from Tacitus’ *Histories* and *Agricola* for the view that Tacitus valued *constantia*

More in general, I hope to have given a brief impression of how the linguists in OIKOS aim to contribute to the Anchoring Innovation enterprise. I do not think that I have to convince my audience of the societal relevance of discourse linguistic and rhetorical research on strategic narrative, like the narrative on Piso's conspiracy that Tacitus presents us in book 15 of his *Annals*. But for those who still have their doubts I would like to end my paper by referring to a column by the historian and counter terrorism expert Beatrice de Graaf, which appeared last year in the Dutch journal *NRC Handelsblad* under the telling title 'Weapon of mass narration'.²⁶ Strategic narrative is indeed as important a field of research as bred tomatoes.

highly as a virtue of a good *princeps*. My own analysis of the Piso episode may adduce further support for this view from the *Annals*.

²⁶ See <http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/2015/01/10/weapon-of-mass-narration-1454799>

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Appendix: Tacitus *Annales* 15.47-59

[47] **Fine anni vulgantur prodigia imminentium malorum nuntia:** uis fulgurum non alias crebrior, et sidus cometes, sanguine inlustri semper Neroni expiatum; bicipites hominum aliorumue animalium partus abiecti in publicum aut in sacrificiis, quibus grauidas hostias immolare mos est, reperti. et in agro Placentino uiam propter natus uitulus, cui caput in crure esset;

ABSTRACT (*see also final sentence of book 14*)

Secutaque haruspicum interpretatio, parari rerum humanarum aliud caput, sed non fore ualidum neque occultum, quin in utero repressum aut iter iuxta editum sit.

ORIENTATION

[48] **Ineunt deinde consulatum Silius Nerva et Atticus Vestinus,** coepta simul et aucta coniuratione, in quam certatim nomina dederant senatores eques miles, feminae etiam, cum odio Neronis, tum fauore in C. Pisonem. is Calpurnio genere ortus ac multas insignesque familias paterna nobilitate complexus, claro apud uulgum rumore erat per uirtutem aut species uirtutibus similes. namque facundiam tuendis ciuibus exercebat, largitionem aduersum amicos, et ignotis quoque comi sermone et congressu; aderant etiam fortuita, corpus procerum, decora facies; sed procul grauitas morum aut uoluptatum parsimonia: leuitati ac magnificentiae et aliquando luxu indulgebat. idque pluribus probabatur, qui in tanta uitiorum dulcedine summum imperium non restrictum nec praeseuerum uolunt.

[49] Initium coniurationi non a cupidine ipsius fuit; nec tamen facile memorauerim, qui primus auctor, cuius instinctu concitum sit quod tam multi sumpserunt. promptissimos Subrium Flauum tribunum praetoriae cohortis et Sulpicium Asprum centurionem extitisse constantia exitus docuit. et Lucanus Annaeus Plautiusque Lateranus uiuida odia intulere. Lucanum propriae causae accendebant, quod famam carminum eius premebat Nero prohibueratque ostentare, uanus adsimulatione: Lateranum consulem designatum nulla iniuria, sed amor rei publicae sociauit. at Flauius Scaeuinus et Afranius Quintianus, uterque senatorii ordinis, contra famam sui principium tanti facinoris capessuere: nam Scaeuino dissoluta luxu mens et proinde uita somno languida; Quintianus mollitia corporis infamis et a Nerone probroso carmine diffamatus contumeliam ultum ibat.

[50] Ergo dum scelera principis, et finem adesse imperio diligendumque, qui fessis rebus succurreret, inter se aut inter amicos iaciunt, adgregauere Claudium

Senecionem, Ceruarium Proculum, Vulcacium Araricum, Iulium Augurinum, Munatium Gratum, Antonium Natalem, Marcium Festum, equites Romanos. ex quibus Senecio, e praecipua familiaritate Neronis, speciem amicitiae etiam tum retinens eo pluribus periculis conflictabatur; Natalis particeps ad omne secretum Pisoni erat; ceteris spes ex nouis rebus petebatur. adscitae sunt super Subrium et Sulpicium, de quibus rettuli, militares manus Gaius Siluanus et Statius Proxumus tribuni cohortium praetoriarum, Maximus Scaurus et Venetus Paulus centuriones. sed summum robur in Faenio Rufo praefecto uidebatur, quem uita famaue laudatum per saeuitiam impudicitiamque Tigellinus in animo principis anteibat, fatigabatque criminationibus ac saepe in metum adduxerat quasi adulterum Agrippinae et desiderio eius ultioni intentum.

COMPLICATION (Part 1)

Igitur ubi coniuratis praefectum quoque praetorii in partes descendisse crebro ipsius sermone facta fides, promptius iam de tempore ac loco caedis agitabant. et cepisse impetum Subrius Flauus ferebatur in scaena canentem Neronem adgrediendi, aut cum ardente domo per noctem huc illuc cursaret incustoditus. hic occasio solitudinis, ibi ipsa frequentia tanti decoris testis pulcherrima animum exstimulauerant, nisi impunitatis cupido retinisset, magnis semper conatibus aduersa.

EVALUATION (self-contained story about Epicharis part 1)

[51] Interim cunctantibus prolatantibusque spem ac metum Epicharis quaedam, incertum quonam modo sciscitata (neque illi ante ulla rerum honestarum cura fuerat), accendere et arguere coniuratos; ac postremum lentitudinis eorum pertaesa et in Campania agens primores classiariorum Misensium labefacere et conscientia inligare conisa est tali initio. erat nauarchus in ea classe Volusius Proculus, occidendae matris Neroni inter ministros, non ex magnitudine sceleris prouectus, ut rebatur. is mulieri olim cognitus, seu recens orta amicitia, dum merita erga Neronem sua et quam in inritum cecidissent aperit adicitque questus et destinationem uindictae, si facultas oreretur, spem dedit posse impelli et plures conciliare: nec leue auxilium in classe, crebras occasiones, quia Nero multo apud Puteolos et Misenum maris usu laetabatur. **ergo Epicharis plura; et omnia scelera principis orditur, neque senatui quidquam manere.** sed prouisum, quonam modo poenas euersae rei publicae daret: accingeretur modo nauare operam et militum acerrimos ducere in partes, ac digna pretia exspectaret. nomina tamen coniuratorum reticuit. unde Proculi indicium inritum fuit, quamuis ea, quae audierat, ad Neronem detulisset. accita quippe Epicharis et cum indice composita nullis testibus innisum facile confutauit. sed ipsa in custodia retenta est, suspectante Nerone haud falsa esse etiam quae uera non probabantur.

COMPLICATION (PART 2)

[52] Coniuratis tamen metu prodicionis permotis placitum maturare caedem apud Baias in uilla Pisonis, cuius amoenitate captus Caesar crebro uentitabat balneasque et epulas inibat omissis excubiis et fortunae suae mole. sed abnuit Piso, inuidiam praetendens, si sacra mensae diique hospitales caede qualiscumque principis cruentarentur: melius apud urbem in illa inuisa et spoliis ciuium exstructa domo uel in publico patratturos quod pro re publica suscepissent. haec in commune, ceterum timore occulto, ne L. Silanus exilia nobilitate disciplinaque C. Cassii, apud quem educatus erat, ad omnem claritudinem sublatus imperium inuaderet, prompte daturis, qui a coniuratione integri essent quique miserarentur Neronem tamquam per scelus interfectum. plerique Vestini quoque consulis acre ingenium uitauisse Pisonem crediderunt, ne ad libertatem oreretur, uel delecto imperatore alio sui muneris rem publicam faceret. etenim expers coniurationis erat, quamuis super eo crimine Nero uetus aduersum insontem odium expleuerit.

COMPLICATION (PART 3)

[53] Tandem statuere circensium ludorum die, qui Cereri celebratur, exsequi destinata, quia Caesar rarus egressu domoque aut hortis clausus ad ludicra circi uentitabat promptioresque aditus erant laetitia spectaculi. ordinem insidiis composuerant, ut Lateranus, quasi subsidium rei familiari oraret, deprecabundus et genibus principis accidens prosterneret incautum premeretque, animi ualidus et corpore ingens; tum iacentem et impeditum tribuni et centuriones et ceterorum ut quisque audentiae habuisset, adcurrerent, trucidarentque, primas sibi partes expostulante Scaeuino, qui pugionem templo Salutis [in Etruria] siue, ut alii tradidere, Fortunae Ferentino in oppido detraxerat gestabatque uelut magno operi sacrum. interim Piso apud aedem Cereris opperiretur, unde eum praefectus Faenius et ceteri accitum ferrent in castra, comitante Antonia, Claudii Caesaris filia, ad eliciendum uulgi fauorem, quod Cl. Plinius memorat. nobis quoquo modo traditum non occultare in animo fuit, quamuis absurdum uideretur aut inanem ad spem Antoniam nomen et periculum commodauisse, aut Pisonem notum amore uxoris alii matrimonio se obstrinxisse, nisi si cupido dominandi cunctis adfectibus flagrantior est.

PEAK

[54] [*Abstract*] Sed mirum quam inter diuersi generis ordinis, aetatis sexus, dites pauperes taciturnitate omnia cohibita sint, donec proditio coepit e domo Scaeuini. [*Orientation*] qui pridie insidiarum multo sermone cum Antonio Natale, dein regressus domum testamentum obsignauit, promptum uagina pugionem, de quo supra rettuli, uetustate obtusum increpans, asperari saxo et in mucronem ardescere iussit eamque curam liberto Milicho mandauit. simul adfluentius solito conuiuium initum, seruorum carissimi libertate et alii pecunia donati; atque ipse maestus et magnae cogitationis manifestus erat, quamuis laetitiam uagis sermonibus simularet. [*Complicating Action*] **postremo uulneribus ligamenta quibusque sistitur sanguis parare eundem Milichum monet**, siue gnarum coniurationis et illuc usque fidum, seu nescium et tunc primum arreptis suspicionibus, ut plerique tradidere. de consequentibus consentitur.²⁷ nam cum secum seruilis animus praemia perfidiae reputauit simulque immensa pecunia et potentia obuersabantur, cessit fas et salus patroni et acceptae libertatis memoria. etenim uxoris quoque consilium adsumperat, muliebre ac deterius: quippe ultro metum intentabat, multosque astitisse libertos ac seruos, qui eadem uiderint: nihil profuturum unius silentium, at praemia penes unum fore, qui indicio praeuenisset.

[55] [*Peak*] **Igitur coepta luce Milichus in hortos Servilianos pergit; et cum foribus arceretur, magna et atrocia adferre dictitans deductusque ab ianitoribus ad**

²⁷ Reading Müller.

libertum Neronis Epaphroditum, mox ab eo ad Neronem, urgens periculum, graves coniuratos et cetera, quae audiverat coniectaverat, docet; telum quoque in necem eius paratum ostendit accirique reum iussit. is raptus per milites et defensionem orsus, ferrum, cuius argueretur, olim religione patria cultum et in cubiculo habitum ac fraude liberti subreptum respondit. tabulas testamenti saepius a se et incustodia dierum obseruatione signatas. pecunias et libertates seruis et ante dono datas, sed ideo tunc largius, quia tenui iam re familiari et instantibus creditoribus testamento diffideret. enimvero liberales semper epulas struxisse, uitam amoenam et duris iudicibus parum probatam. fomenta uulneribus nulla iussu suo, sed quia cetera palam uana obiecisset, adiungere crimen, [cu]ius se pariter indicem et testem faceret. **adicit dictis constantiam; incusat ultro intestabilem et consceleratum, tanta uocis ac uultus securitate, ut labaret indicium, nisi Milichum uxor admonuisset Antonium Natalem multa cum Scaeuino ac secreta collocutum et esse utrosque C. Pisonis intimos.**

[56] Ergo **accitur Natalis, et diversi interrogantur, quisnam is sermo, qua de re fuisset.** tum exorta suspicio, quia non congruentia responderant, inditaque uincla. et tormentorum adspectum ac minas non tulere: **prior tamen Natalis, totius conspiracy magis gnarus, simul arguendi peritior, de Pisone primum fatetur, deinde adicit Annaeum Senecam,** siue internuntius inter eum Pisonemque fuit, siue ut Neronis gratiam pararet, qui infensus Senecae omnes ad eum opprimendum artes conquirebat. [*Resolution*] tum cognito Natalis indicio Scaeuinus quoque pari imbecillitate, an cuncta iam patefacta credens nec ullum silentii emolumentum, edidit ceteros. ex quibus Lucanus Quintianusque et Senecio diu abnuere: post promissa impunitate corrupti, quo tarditatem excusarent, Lucanus Aciliam matrem suam, Quintianus Glitium Gallum, Senecio Annium Pollionem, amicorum praecipuos, nominauere.

EVALUATION (self-contained story about Epicharis part 2)

[57] **Atque interim Nero recordatus Volusii Proculi indico Epicharin attineri ratusque muliebri corpus impar dolori tormentis dilacerari iubet.** at illam non uerbera, non ignes, non ira eo acrius torquentium, ne a femina spernerentur, pericere, quin obiecta denegaret. sic primus quaestionis dies contemptus. postero cum ad eosdem cruciatus retraheretur gestamine sellae (nam dissolutis membris insistere nequibat), uinclo fasciae, quam pectori detraxerat, in modum laquei ad arcum sellae restricto indidit ceruicem et corporis pondere conisa tenuem iam spiritum expressit,
clariore exemplo libertina mulier in tanta necessitate alienos ac prope ignotos protegendo, cum ingenui et uiri et equites Romani senatoresque intacti tormentis carissima suorum quisque pignorum proderent. Non enim omittebant Lucanus

quoque et Senecio et Quintianus passim conscios edere, magis magisque pauido Nerone, quamquam multiplicatis excubiis semet saepsisset.

RESOLUTION (PART 1)

[58] quin et urbem per manipulos occupatis moenibus, incesso etiam mari et amne, uelut in custodiam dedit. uolitabantque per fora, per domos, rura quoque et proxima municipiorum pedites equitesque, permixti Germanis, quibus fidebat princeps quasi externis. continua hinc et uincta agmina trahi ac foribus hortorum adiacere. atque ubi dicendam ad causam introissent, laetatum erga coniuratos, sed fortuitus sermo et subiti occursus, si conuiuium, si spectaculum simul inissent, pro crimine accipi, cum super Neronis ac Tigellini saeuas percunctationes Faenius quoque Rufus uolenter urgueret, nondum ab indicibus nominatus et quo fidem inscitiae pararet, atrox aduersus socios. idem Subrio Flauo adsistenti adnuentique, an inter ipsam cognitionem destringeret gladium caedemque patraret, renuit infregitque impetum iam manum ad capulum referentis.

TRANSITION + EVALUATION

[59] Fuere qui prodita coniuratione, dum auditur Milichus, dum dubitat Scaeuinus, hortarentur Pisonem pergere in castra aut rostra escendere studiaque militum et populi temptare. si conatibus eius conscii adgregarentur, secuturos etiam integros; magnamque motae rei famam, quae plurimum in nouis consiliis ualeret. nihil aduersum haec Neroni prouisum. etiam fortes uiros subitis terreri, nedum ille scaenicus, Tigellino scilicet cum paelicibus suis comitante, arma contra cieret. multa experiendo confieri, quae segnibus ardua uideantur. frustra silentium et fidem in tot consciorum animis et corporibus sperare: cruciatui aut praemio cuncta peruia esse. uenturos qui ipsum quoque uincirent, postremo indigna nece adficerent. quanto laudabilius periturum, dum amplectitur rem publicam, dum auxilia libertati inuocat! miles potius deesset et plebes desereret, dum ipse maioribus, dum posteris, si uita praeriperetur, mortem adprobaret. immotus his et paululum in publico uersatus, post domi secretus animum aduersum suprema firmabat, donec manus militum adueniret, quos Nero tirones aut stipendiis recentes delegerat: nam uetus miles timebatur tamquam fauore imbutus. obiit abruptis brachiorum uenis. testamentum foedis aduersus Neronem adulationibus amori uxoris dedit, quam degenerem et sola corporis forma commendatam amici matrimonio abstulerat. nomen mulieri Satria Galla, priori marito Domitius Silus: hic patientia, illa impudica Pisonis infamiam propagauere.

RESOLUTION (PART 2): *exitus illustrium uirorum* (c. 60-70)

[60] **Proximam necem Plautii Laterani consulis designati Nero adiungit**, adeo prope, ut non complecti liberos, non illud breue mortis arbitrium permetteret. **raptus in locum servilibus poenis sepositum manu Statii tribuni trucidatur**, plenus constantis silentii nec tribuno obiciens eandem conscientiam.

Sequitur caedes Annaei Senecae ...

EPISODE (death of Seneca, 60-65)

EPISODE (death of Vestinus, 68-69)

RESOLUTION (PART 3):

[71-74] *Reactions and further measures*

CODA (?)

[73.2] ceterum coeptam adultamque et reuictam coniurationem neque tunc dubitauere, quibus uerum noscendi cura erat, et fatentur, qui post interitum Neronis in urbem regressi sunt.