



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Asyndeton in discourse

*pragmatic constraints, narrative mode and discourse stylistic opportunities*

Risselada, R.

#### Publication date

2022

#### Document Version

Other version

[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Risselada, R. (2022). *Asyndeton in discourse: pragmatic constraints, narrative mode and discourse stylistic opportunities*. Paper presented at 21st International Colloquium of Latin Linguistics, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

#### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Asyndeton in discourse

### pragmatic constraints, narrative mode and discourse stylistic opportunities

Rodie Risselada, University of Amsterdam

[r.risselada@uva.nl](mailto:r.risselada@uva.nl)

#### Preamble

- When I sent in my abstract more than two years ago, I did not know that asyndeton would be more than fully dealt with in the two next two years, not only in a book by Jim Adams devoted exclusively to the very topic of asyndeton but also in more detail than I knew by then by Harm Pinkster in the second volume of his OLS, of which I had read by then only some parts.
- So if by now it seems to be a form of mere *hubris* to deal with this topic here today, I do hope that you are willing to accept my talk as a tribute to the memory of these two monumental scholars, who inspired me and all of us here present in our research, and who both died so suddenly and so sadly at the end of 2021.
- Adams' book – which is a very thorough and comprehensive study of asyndeton– unfortunately focuses almost exclusively on asyndetic combinations of two constituents within the clause (the so-called 'asyndeton bimembre'), and prefers to speak of 'parataxis' in the case of two related successive sentences that are asyndetically connected. His introductory chapters, however, were very useful for delineating the subject,
- Pinkster's observations, on the other hand, do form a very good starting point for my discussion of asyndetic relations between larger units, because he deals with asyndetic connection of larger units against the background of other forms of discourse connection,
- as did Hannah Rosén in two papers, viz. her influential paper on particles in the first Baldi & Cuzzolin volume from 2009 and a 2011 paper on asyndeton.
- A last study which I want to mention explicitly here, is a paper by Vatri (2020) on the notion of asyndeton in Greek rhetorical handbooks, and on some cognitive aspects of asyndeton.
- These studies form the framework of my paper today, in which I hope to build on their observations to deal with the use of asyndeton from a discourse pragmatic perspective.

#### Introduction: why study asyndeton ?

- Multidimensional notion, which combines syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic characteristics.
- Asyndeton of larger, pragmatic units is – apart from the work by Pinkster and Rosén – less systematically researched than particles / connectors / discourse markers are.
- Asyndeton is traditionally dealt with in stylistic terms ('vividness', 'speed') but what exactly are the effects of asyndeton and why it has these effects, is less clear.
- The notion of asyndeton is often invoked and referred to (as was also noted by Jim Adams) in commentaries on our Latin texts, as if the term were self-evident and its effects unequivocal – which is not at all the case.

**Therefore, the (modest!) aims of my paper (which is really ‘work in progress’) are to:**

- i. demarcate the types of asyndeton that are relevant from a discourse-pragmatic perspective;
- ii. briefly reflect on the relation between the use of asyndeton and the various linguistic means that contribute to discourse cohesiveness – i.e. not only connective particles and discourse markers, but also various expressions of topic and referent continuity, tense uses, lexical repetition, and the mechanisms of ‘enchaînement’ and ‘rupture’ discussed by Chausserie-Laprée;
- iii. identify some contexts where asyndeton is typically found – and why;
- iv. say a few words on the effects of asyndeton,
- v. and try to connect the use of asyndeton to narrative structure;

I have concentrated mainly on narrative discourse – although I acknowledge that that does create a certain bias on nature and use of asyndeton - mainly historiographical and epic narrative, but I occasionally also include non-historiographical narrative passages, viz. narrative passages from letters or speeches.

#### **Asyndeton: definitions, typologies and problems (cf. Torrego 2009; Adams 2021; Pinkster 2021)**

- Asyndeton is a very wide, diffuse notion.
- Can be defined as “a ‘zero’ form of (i) coordination OR (ii) sentence) connection”
- in which:
  - (i) **coordination** is (cf. Dik 1968: 25, quoted both by Torrego and by Adams) ‘a construction consisting of two or more members which are equivalent as to grammatical function, and bound together at the same level of structural hierarchy’.
  - (ii) **(sentence) connection** is the cover term used for the various connective particles and discourse markers (“connectors”) that are primarily used to mark the relation between units of discourse (cf. e.g. Kroon 1995, 2011; Rosén 2009; Pinkster 2021, ch. 24)

**Syntactic classifications** of asyndeton are usually based on the nature of the units that are coordinated, ranging from single words to full sentences and even larger units of discourse:

*words / constituents and phrases / predicates / clauses / sentences / paragraphs*

- two main of types of asyndeton:
  - words, constituents, predicates, subordinate clauses: *absence of overt coordinator*  
*non-subordinate, paratactic clauses*
  - sentences and paragraphs *absence of a connector*

- whereas asyndeton of sentence constituents on the one hand and of sentences or even larger units such as paragraphs on the other is relatively clear,
- the distinction between asyndetically linked paratactic clauses and asyndetically linked sentences is not unproblematic, as has been noted by both Pinkster and Adams, who also both point out differences in punctuation between text editions.

Pinkster defines a sentence as in essence an independent ‘unit of communication’, but for practical reasons he takes it as a unit starting with a capital letter and ending with a period, while the clause is a syntactic unit containing a predicate plus its arguments and satellites, referring to a state of affairs (cf. Pinkster 2015, § 2.2-3).

cf:

**(\*1)** veni, vidi, vici (cf. Suetonius, *Diuus Iulius*, 37.2 )

- taking the three predicates as asyndetically linked clauses by Pinkster and Adams, is based on their interpretation as *veni, vidi, vici* belonging to one communicative unit (and hence to one sentence) – an interpretation that seems to contribute to the effect of the asyndeton (we’ll come back to that, later)

Note that we have in (\*1) three predications sharing the same subject, but that is not necessarily the case, as can be seen from ex. (\*2), which is quoted by Pinkster :

**(\*2) Plautus, *Amphitruo* 231-234** (ex. from Pinkster 2021: 610; text and translation De Melo 2011)

pro se quisque id quod quisque <et> potest et ualet edit, X ferro ferit, X tela frangunt, X boat caelum fremitu uirum, X ex spiritu atque anhelitu nebula constat, X cadunt uolnerum ui [et] uiri.

‘Each man inflicted for himself what he could and struck with his sword; lances broke, the heavens resounded with the uproar of men, a mist arose from their breathing and gasping, men fell under the force of their wounds..’

- note the difference in interpunction between the Latin text and the English translation, which are both taken from De Melo’s Loeb edition (2011);
  - should we consider only *edit – ferit* asyndetically linked clauses, sharing the same agent / subject (note the semi colon in the English translation by De Melo, 2011) ?
  - or should we see them all (as Pinkster does ) as asyndetically linked clauses, and not as a series of brief sentences ?
- distinction easier to make when clauses share a non-subject constituent or a subordinate clause, as in (\*3), where two asyndetically linked clauses share the same satellite:

**(\*3) Cicero, *De Finibus* 2.31** (example from Adams 2021: 8)

simul atque natum animal est, gaudet uoluptate et eam appetit ut bonum, X aspernatur dolorem ut malum

‘as soon as an animal is born, it rejoices in pleasure and seeks that as a good, but scorns pain as an evil’.

More at large, we can see this question of units in the famous Vesuvius letter by Pliny an example to which we will return later as well:

**(\*4) Plinius, *Epistulae* 6.16. 4-5; 7-9**

4. Erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens regebat. X Nonum Kal. Septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei apparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et specie. X 5. Usus ille sole, mox frigida, gustaverat iacens studebatque; X poscit soleas, X ascendit locum ex quo maxime miraculum illud conspici poterat. (6. ... *description of the nubes* ...). X 7. Magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro visum. X lubet liburnicam aptari; X mihi si venire una vellem facit copiam; X respondi studere me malle, et forte ipse quod scriberem dederat. X 8. Egrediebatur domo; X accipit codicillos Rectinae Tasci imminente periculo exterritae — nam villa eius subiacebat, nec ulla nisi navibus fuga -: X ut se tanto discrimini eriperet orabat. X 9. Vertit ille consilium et quod studioso animo incohaverat obit maximo.

My uncle was stationed at Misenum, in active command of the fleet. On 24 August, in the early afternoon, my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance. He had been out in the sun, had taken a cold bath, and lunched while lying down, and was then working at his books. He called for his shoes and climbed up to a place which would give him the best view of the phenomenon. (...) My uncle’s scholarly acumen saw at once that it was important enough for a closer inspection, and he ordered a fast boat to be made ready, telling me I could come with him if I wished. I replied that I preferred to go on with my studies, and as it happened he had himself given me some writing to do. As he was leaving the house he was handed a message from Rectina, wife of Tascius, whose house was at the foot of the mountain, so that escape was impossible except by boat. She was terrified by the danger threatening her and implored him to rescue her from her fate. He changed his plans, and what he had begun in a spirit of inquiry he completed as a hero

Units:

- clear sentences in § 4 (2 sentences); § 7 (4 sentences); § 9 (1 sentence)
- § 5: probably 2 sentences, of which the second one consists of 2 clauses (*poscit soleas* and *ascendit* ...)
- what about 8 ? probably 3 sentences ?

Why would be this be important or relevant for asyndeton ?

**Semantic classifications** : based on the nature of the relationship between asyndetically linked units, which in turn depends on their content, and on the wider !

- additive
- temporal
- causal / explicative / consecutive etc
- adversative / denial of expectation
- concessive
- ....

(\*4) Plinius, *Epistulae* 6.16. 4-5; 7-9

4. Erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens regebat. Nonum Kal. Septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei apparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et specie. X 5. Usus ille sole, mox frigida, gustaverat iacens studebatque; X poscit soleas, X ascendit locum ex quo maxime miraculum illud conspici poterat. (6. ... description of the nubes ....) . X 7. Magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro visum. X lubet liburnicam aptari; X mihi si venire una vellem facit copiam; X respondi studere me malle, et forte ipse quod scriberem dederat.

**relations:**

temporal : simultaneous and successive

causal/consecutive

adversative / denial of expectation

**pragmatics (i): alternatives for connectors** (e.g. Bolkestein 1986; Rosén 2002, 2009; Pinkster 2021, ch. 24; et alii!)

- o As has been shown by many colleagues, even in the absence of connectors, there can be other lexical and grammatical markers of cohesion relations between sentences and larger units of discourse:
  - anaphoric expressions (including so-called relative connection);
  - zero-anaphora of subject;
  - topic continuity, esp. if maintained over active /passive change also helps to establish coherence;
  - temporal satellites, ordering adverbs, etc. ;
  - various resumptive satellites : subordinate clauses and *ablativi absoluti* (esp. if they contain anaphoric expressions); conjuncts participles; other types of resumptive settings;
  - use of tenses.

The presence of these markers – and esp. combinations of them – weakens, if not the sense of asyndeton, at least its impact. But note that these factors are not on an equal footing, and in fact constitute a continuum, where e.g. the use of anaphoric pronouns, or combinations of various factors are more ‘syndetic’ than e.g. topic continuity on its own.

Thus, if we turn back to the letter of Pliny under (\*4) we note a stronger ‘sense of asyndeton’ in the case of e.g. 8, where we find a not explicitly marked topic switch (marked in green) at the story mainline between the uncle as subject of *accipit* and Rectina Tascius of *orabat* – even if this topic switch is facilitated by the explanatory parenthesis (marked in grey) about the villa, and also between this last sentence in 8 and *vertit ille* in 9, where the topic switch (marked in blue) back to the uncle is explicitly marked by *ille*, as it is at the beginning of 5.

In 4 on the other hand, the asyndetic transition transition from the first, background sentence with *regebat* to the mother’s intervention (marked in yellow) is softened by the combination of the tense switch from background to foreground and the temporal satellite.

The strongest sense of asyndeton is found in 7, with unmarked topic switches and where the relations between the various sentences are not straightforward temporal, or not temporal at all but consecutive and adversative.

while in .... the topic continuity of the uncles and the zero-anaphora of the same subject in successive active sentences weaken an interpretation in terms of asyndeton.

4. Erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens *regebat*. X Nonum Kal. Septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei apparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et *specie*. X 5. Usus *ille* sole, mox frigida, gustaverat iacens studebatque; X poscit soleas, X ascendit locum ex quo maxime miraculum illud conspici poterat. (6. ... *description of the nubes* ....) . X 7. Magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro *visum*. X *libet* liburnicam *aptari*; X *mihi* si venire una vellem facit copiam; X *respondi* studere me malle, et forte ipse quod scriberem dederat. X 8. Egrediebatur domo; X accipit codicillos Rectinae Tasci imminenti periculo exterritae — nam villa eius subiacebat, nec ulla nisi navibus fuga -: X *ut se tanto* discrimini eriperet *orabat*. X 9. *Vertit ille* consilium et quod studioso animo incohaverat obit maximo.

It should be noted – as was pointed out already by Machtelt Bolkestein in 1986 - that these cohesion markers, and esp. the anaphoric expressions, zero-anaphora, temporal satellites and tense use mainly express discourse cohesion within narrative texts. Narrative discourse is usually participant oriented, and the cohesion primarily takes the form of referential continuity of the human agents that are the main characters in the story, and is primarily expressed by the various referential means listed here (anaphora, zero-anaphora, topic continuity).

A second feature of narrative discourse is its default temporal order of events, which explains the connective force of temporal satellites and tense use.

In other text types, such as argumentative texts and speeches, the nature of the relation between units is predominantly non-temporal, and has another, more markedly semantic nature, involving causal, consecutive, adversative and concessive relations, that are more dependent on discourse markers and adverbs, than the default relation of temporal order. Topic continuity may still be important, anaphoric expressions are also relevant, but there are other types of satellites that will signal continuity, and tense use will be less relevant, or not relevant at all.

To give a brief impression, cf. nr. (\*13) on your hand out – from Cicero's second Philippica, where we find an **adversative asyndeton in the first line (yellow)**, facilitated by *potius*. The next sentence will illustrate and exemplify the *nequissimum genus levitates* introduced in the first line, a strong **asyndeton (marked in green)**, where the transition to the example is not facilitated, except by the fact that it is of course clear that this irresponsible behaviour announced is the addressee's. The next transition, to the speaker's evaluation of the **behaviour (marked in blue)** is again pretty strong, as is the asyndetic transition to the explanation of the **speaker's evaluation, marked in grey**. which consists of two sentences that are related by *vero* printed in bold. The transition to the last cluster of two sentences is not only facilitated by *haec*, but also marked by **sed**, and hence not asyndetic, but the adversative relation between them is again asyndetic (marked in yellow)

### (\*13) Cicero, Philippica 2. 63

**Sed** haec quae robustioris improbitatis sunt, **omittamus: (X) loquamur** *potius* de nequissimo genere **levitatis. X Tu istis** faucibus, **istis** lateribus, **ista** gladiatoria totius corporis firmitate tantum vini in Hippiae nuptiis exhauseras ut tibi necesse esset in populi Romani conspectu vomere **postridie. X O rem** non modo visu foedam sed etiam **auditu! X Si inter** cenam in ipsis tuis immanibus illis poculis hoc tibi accidisset, quis non turpe duceret? In coetu **vero** populi Romani negotium publicum gerens, magister equitum, cui ructare turpe esset, is vomens frustis esculentis vinum redolentibus gremium suum et totum tribunal implevit. **Sed haec** ipse fatetur esse in **suis sordibus: X veniamus** ad splendida.

**pragmatics (ii): typical contexts** (cf. Rosén 2009; 2011)

- closely connected to the preceding are some restrictions listed by Rosén (2009; 2011), who points out several ‘well-defined environments’ where we never find connectors, among which the following will turn out to be relevant here:

- in case of lexical repetition in two consecutive sentences, in various sorts cf. e.g. (ex. 2009: Rosén 138)

**(\*5) Plautus *Amphitruo* 243–244** (ex. from Rosén 2011)

ilico **equites** iubet dextera inducere. – **equites** parent citi

‘He immediately ordered to lead the cavalry ... .The cavalry obeys swiftly’

- in the unit following a presentational sentence, when the discourse participant thus presented is resumed, usually by a form of *is*, or *hic*, cf:

**(\*6) Ter.Andr. 221–222** (ex. from Rosén 2011)

*Fuit olim quidam senex mercator. – nauim is fregit*

‘Once upon a time there was an old man, a merchant. He became shipwrecked’

relatie leggen met Michal !!

- In addition to these, I found a conventional pattern of asyndeton which I found in epic similes, and seems to be discussed anywhere (but I may have overlooked something, so I would be happy if someone could help me out here), cf: - note that Greek usually has *de* here

**(\*7a) Vergilius, *Aeneis* 2. 302-308**

excitior somno et summi fastigia tecti

ascensu supero atque arrectis auribus adsto:

in segetem veluti cum flamma furentibus Austris

incidit, aut rapidus montano flumine torrens

sternit agros, sternit sata laeta boumque

labores praecipitesque trahit silvas; **X** stupet inscius alto

accipiens sonitum saxi de vertice pastor.

tum vero manifesta fides, ....

I shake myself from sleep and, climbing to the roof’s topmost height, stand with straining ears: even as, when fire falls on a cornfield while south winds are raging, or the rushing torrent from a

mountain stream lays low the fields, lays low the glad crops and labours of oxen and drags down forests headlong, spellbound the bewildered shepherd hears the roar from a rock's lofty peak. Then indeed the truth is clear and..

But here we verge on the stylistic side (to be returned to later) – as we find this phenomenon also in later epic, and, quite interestingly, also in a simile in Eumolpus' *Bellum Civile* in Petronius, where the epic style is carefully copied (or mocked):

**(\*7b) Petronius 119 (*Eumolpus' Bellum Civile*, vv 233-237)**

ac velut ex alto cum magnus inhorruit auster  
et pulsas evertit aquas, X non arma ministris, X  
non regimen prodest, X ligat alter pondera pinus, X  
alter tuta sinus tranquillaque litora quaerit:  
hic dat vela fugae Fortunaequae omnia credit.

'They act like the fierce south wind when from the sea it rages and turns over the driven waves: riggings do no good for the crew, the rudder is useless, one ties together the heavy planks of pine, another seeks the safety of inlets and calm shores, and a third man sets sail for flight and trusts all things to Chance.'

### pragmatics (iii): function and effect

The usual starting point for almost everyone who discusses function and effects of asyndeton is Caesar's *veni, vidi, vici*, which is not transmitted by Caesar in his own work, but was written on an inscription which was carried in his triumph – as Suetonius tells us. As such no prototypical narrative mode, but still one of the shortest pieces of narratives in the literature. Suetonius immediately adds the effect of this famous asyndeton, viz. : speed.

#### (8) Suetonius, *Diuus Iulius*, 37.2

Pontico triumpho inter pompae fercula trium uerborum praetulit titulum VENI VIDI VICI non acta belli significantem sicut ceteris, sed **celeriter confecti notam**.

‘In his Pontic triumph he displayed among the show-pieces of the procession an inscription of but three words, “I came, I saw, I conquered,” not indicating the events of the war, as the others did, but the speed with which it was finished.’

- i. usual explanations: vividness, speed
  - ii. alternative explanations of asyndeton as representing the emotional state of the speaker/author and expressing ‘haste, agitation’ etc.
    - specifically in ‘peaks’ (NOTE: already Pinkster 1999: 710-712, in connection with Virgil, *Aeneid* II), cf. Rosén 2009.
    - clustered and often combined with the following features (Pinkster, *ibidem*)
      1. detailed reports
      2. sense of urgency
      3. clustered linguistic features that impression of orality :
        - historical present
        - finite verb on first position
        - brief, even elliptical sentences
- cf. Kroon (2002: 190-193), on the characteristics of the ‘mimetic narrative mode’
- Note that the idea of ‘orality’ is in line with Vatri’s (2020: 228) reference to the Aristotelian idea that asyndeton is typical for oral style (and indeed very frequent in argumentative oratory), and in written style gives an impression of ‘performance’. Not because of its imitation of ‘spontaneity’ but in view of the strong prosodic potential, either combining the asyndetic units in one breath (esp. clauses), or pausing in between them (cf. also Torrego, Adams Pinkster for similar remarks).

- Both Vatri and Adams point out that asyndeton usually does not appear alone, but favours combination with (other) stylistic features such as alliteration, ellipsis, brevity, and may instead of, or in addition to its own effect, act as a reinforcement of these other effects.
- but note Adams' interesting comment (2021, ch. 5.3), in a chapter that bears the suitable title: "**Supposed 'Effects' of Asyndeton**"  
'We have commented on a tendency among commentators to see the absence of coordinators as (apparently) in itself suggesting speed, agitation, emotion, and so on. But it is the meanings of the words in the asyndetic sequence that convey such ideas.'
- In line with this, Vatri (2020 - but cf. also Pinkster 2021: 1219 !) points to an interesting distinction in the case of clausal and sentential asyndeton between :

(i) in case of '**non-concomitant**' events: temporally consecutive → speed, swift accomplishment,  
cf. *veni, vidi, vici*

(ii) in case of '**concomitant**' events: coinciding details of complex situation/action (cf. Pinkster 2021: parallelism of simultaneous situations)

**(9a) Sallustius *Bellum Catilinae* 31** (*with clausal asyndeton, and without subject in the first series*):

Ex summa laetitia atque lascivia, quae diuturna quies pepererat, repente omnis tristitia invasit; festinare, trepidare, neque loco neque homini quoquam satis credere, neque bellum gerere neque pacem habere, suo quisque metu pericula metiri. Ad hoc mulieres, quibus rei publicae magnitudine belli timor insolitus incesserat, adflictae sese, manus supplices ad caelum tendere, miserari parvos liberos, rogare omnia, <omni rumore> pavere, <adripere omnia> superbia atque deliciis omissis sibi patriaeque diffidere.

In place of extreme gaiety and frivolity, the fruit of long-continued peace, suddenly gloom descended on all. They hurried about, did not quite trust any place or any person, were neither waging war nor in possession of peace, they measured the perils, each by his own fear. The women, too, who experienced the terror of war, one unfamiliar to them owing to the magnitude of the nation, beat their breasts, raised suppliant hands to heaven, expressed pity for their little children, kept asking about everything, trembled at every rumour, eagerly grasped at every scrap of information, and throwing aside haughtiness and self-indulgence, despaired of themselves and of their native land.

Note that in the Plautus fragment (parodying epic style) : nr (\*2 on your hand out) concomitant action is combined with vividness, speed, and peak of the fight !!

BUT:

pragmatics (iii): narrative structure : peaks ????

(\*9a) versus (\*9b)

(\*9b) Sallustius *Bellum Catilinae* 31. 4 - 9

**At** Catilinae crudelis animus eadem illa movebat, tametsi praesidia parabantur et ipse lege Plautia interrogatus erat ab L. Paulo. **Postremo** dissimulandi causa aut sui expurgandi, sicut iurgio lacessitus foret, in senatum venit. **Tum** M. Tullius consul, sive praesentiam eius timens sive ira conmotus, orationem habuit luculentam atque utilem rei publicae, quam postea scriptam edidit. **Sed** ubi ille adsedit, Catilina, (...) postulare a patribus coepit .... (... long indirect speech) . **Ad hoc maledicta alia quom adderet**, obstrepere omnes, **x** hostem atque parricidam vocare. **Tum** ille furibundus “Quoniam quidem circumventus,” inquit, “ab inimicis praeceps agor, incendium meum ruina restinguam”.

**But** Catiline’s pitiless heart kept setting in motion those same projects, even though defences were being made ready, and he himself had been arraigned by Lucius Paullus under the Plautian law. **Finally**, in order to conceal his designs or to clear himself, as though he had been provoked by abuse, Catiline came into the senate. **Then** the consul Marcus Tullius, either fearing his presence or roused by indignation, delivered a brilliant speech of great service to the state, which he later circulated in written form. **But** when Cicero took his seat, Catiline, ... began to beg the senators ... **When he tried to add other insults on top of this**, everyone raised an uproar, called him traitor and assassin. **Then** in a rage he said: “Inasmuch as I have been cornered and am being driven to desperation by my enemies, I shall put out the fire besetting me with demolition.”



## Asyndeton in discourse

### pragmatic constraints, narrative mode and discourse stylistic opportunities

Rodie Risselada, University of Amsterdam

(\*1) veni, vidi, vici (cf. Suetonius, *Diuus Iulius*, 37.2 )

(\*2) Plautus, *Amphitruo* 231-234 (ex. from Pinkster 2021: 610; text and translation De Melo 2011)

pro se quisque id quod quisque <et> potest et ualet edit, x ferro ferit, X tela frangunt, X boat caelum fremitu uirum, X ex spiritu atque anhelitu nebula constat, X cadunt uolnerum ui [et] uiri.

‘Each man inflicted for himself what he could and struck with his sword; lances broke, the heavens resounded with the uproar of men, a mist arose from their breathing and gasping, men fell under the force of their wounds..’

(\*3) Cicero, *De Finibus* 2.31 (example from Adams 2021: 8)

simul atque natum animal est, gaudet uoluptate et eam appetit ut bonum, x aspernatur dolorem ut malum

‘as soon as an animal is born, it rejoices in pleasure and seeks that as a good, but scorns pain as an evil’.

(\*4) Plinius, *Epistulae* 6.16. 4-5; 7-9

4. Erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens regebat. Nonum Kal. Septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei apparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et specie. X 5. Usus ille sole, mox frigida, gustauerat iacens studebatque; X poscit soleas, x ascendit locum ex quo maxime miraculum illud conspici poterat. (... *description of the nubes* ...). X 7. Magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro visum. X lubet liburnicam aptari; X mihi si venire una vellem facit copiam; X respondi studere me malle, et forte ipse quod scriberem dederat. X 8. Egrediebatur domo; X accipit codicillos Rectinae Tasci imminente periculo exterritae — nam villa eius subiacebat, nec ulla nisi navibus fuga -: X ut se tanto discrimini eriperet orabat. X 9. Vertit ille consilium et quod studioso animo incohauerat obit maximo.

My uncle was stationed at Misenum, in active command of the fleet. On 24 August, in the early afternoon, my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance. He had been out in the sun, had taken a cold bath, and lunched while lying down, and was then working at his books. He called for his shoes and climbed up to a place which would give him the best view of the phenomenon. (...) My uncle’s scholarly acumen saw at once that it was important enough for a closer inspection, and he ordered a fast boat to be made ready, telling me I could come with him if I wished. I replied that I preferred to go on with my studies, and as it happened he had himself given me some writing to do. As he was leaving the house he was handed a message from Rectina, wife of Tascius, whose house was at the foot of the mountain, so that escape was impossible except by boat. She was terrified by the danger threatening her and implored him to rescue her from her fate. He changed his plans, and what he had begun in a spirit of inquiry he completed as a hero.

(\*5) Plautus *Amphitruo* 243–244 (ex. from Rosén 2011)

hoc ubi Amphitruo erus conspicatus est, ilico **equites** iubet dextera inducere. **equites** parent citi (..) 'When master Amphitruo saw this, he immediately ordered to lead the cavalry. The cavalry obeys swiftly'

(\*6) **Ter.Andr. 221–222** (ex. from Rosén 2011)

Fuit olim quidam senex mercator. – nauim **is** fregit

'Once upon a time there was an old man, a merchant. He became shipwrecked'

(\*7a) **Vergilius, Aeneis 2. 302-308**

excutor somno et summi fastigia tecti / ascensu supero atque arrectis auribus adsto: //  
in segetem veluti cum flamma furentibus Austris / incidit, aut rapidus montano flumine torrens /  
sternit agros, sternit sata laeta boumque / labores praecipitesque trahit silvas; **X** stupet inscius alto/  
accipiens sonitum saxi de vertice pastor. // tum vero manifesta fides, ....

I shake myself from sleep and, climbing to the roof's topmost height, stand with straining ears: even as, when fire falls on a cornfield while south winds are raging, or the rushing torrent from a mountain stream lays low the fields, lays low the glad crops and labours of oxen and drags down forests headlong, spellbound the bewildered shepherd hears the roar from a rock's lofty peak. Then indeed the truth is clear and..

(\*7b) **Petronius 119 (Eumolpus' Bellum Civile, vv 233-237)**

ac velut ex alto cum magnus inhorruit auster / et pulsas evertit aquas, non arma ministris, /  
non regimen prodest, **X** ligat alter pondera pinus, **X** / alter tuta sinus tranquillaque litora quaerit: **X** /  
hic dat vela fugae Fortunaequae omnia credit.

'They act like the fierce south wind when from the sea it rages and turns over the driven waves: riggings do no good for the crew, the rudder is useless, one ties together the heavy planks of pine, another seeks the safety of inlets and calm shores, and a third man sets sail for flight and trusts all things to Chance.'

(\*8) **Suetonius, Diuus Iulius, 37.2**

Pontico triumpho inter pompae fercula trium uerborum praetulit titulum **VENI VIDI VICI** non acta belli significantem sicut ceteris, sed **celeriter confecti notam**.

'In his Pontic triumph he displayed among the show-pieces of the procession an inscription of but three words, "I came, I saw, I conquered," not indicating the events of the war, as the others did, but the speed with which it was finished.'

(\*9a) **Sallustius Bellum Catilinae 31. 1 - 3**

Ex summa laetitia atque lascivia, quae diuturna quies pepererat, repente omnis tristitia invasit; **X** festinare, **x** trepidare, **x** neque loco neque homini quoiquam satis credere, **x** neque bellum gerere neque pacem habere, **x** suo quisque metu pericula metiri. **Ad hoc** mulieres, quibus rei publicae magnitudine belli timor insolitus incesserat, adflictae sese, **x** manus supplices ad caelum tendere, **x** miserari parvos liberos, **x** rogare omnia, omni rumore pavere, **x** adipere omnia **x** superbia atque deliciis omissis sibi patriaeque diffidere.

In place of extreme gaiety and frivolity, the fruit of long-continued peace, suddenly gloom descended on all. They hurried about, did not quite trust any place or any person, were neither waging war nor in possession of peace, they measured the perils, each by his own fear. The women, too, who experienced the terror of war, one unfamiliar to them owing to the magnitude of the nation, beat their breasts, raised suppliant hands to heaven, expressed pity for their little children, kept asking about everything, trembled at every rumor, eagerly grasped at every scrap of information, and throwing aside haughtiness and self-indulgence, despaired of themselves and of their native land.

(\*9b) Sallustius *Bellum Catilinae* 31. 4 - 9

**At** Catilinae crudelis animus eadem illa movebat, tametsi praesidia parabantur et ipse lege Plautia interrogatus erat ab L. Paulo. **Postremo** dissimulandi causa aut sui expurgandi, sicut iurgio laccessitus foret, in senatum venit. **Tum** M. Tullius consul, sive praesentiam eius timens sive ira comotus, orationem habuit luculentam atque utilem rei publicae, quam postea scriptam edidit. **Sed** ubi ille adsedit, Catilina, (...) postulare a patribus coepit .... (... long indirect speech) . **Ad hoc maledicta alia quom adderet**, obstrepere omnes, **x** hostem atque parricidam vocare. **Tum** ille furibundus “Quoniam quidem circumventus,” inquit, “ab inimicis praiceps agor, incendium meum ruina restinguam”.

**But** Catiline’s pitiless heart kept setting in motion those same projects, even though defences were being made ready, and he himself had been arraigned by Lucius Paullus under the Plautian law. **Finally**, in order to conceal his designs or to clear himself, as though he had been provoked by abuse, Catiline came into the senate. **Then** the consul Marcus Tullius, either fearing his presence or roused by indignation, delivered a brilliant speech of great service to the state, which he later circulated in written form. **But** when Cicero took his seat, Catiline, ... began to beg the senators ... **When he tried to add other insults on top of this**, everyone raised an uproar, called him traitor and assassin. **Then** in a rage he said: “Inasmuch as I have been cornered and am being driven to desperation by my enemies, I shall put out the fire besetting me with demolition.”

(\*10) Cicero, *Pro Milone* 28 – 29

Milo autem cum in senatu fuisset eo die, quoad senatus est dimissus, domum venit; **x** calceos et vestimenta mutavit; **x paulisper**, dum se uxor (ut fit) comparat, commoratus est; **dein** profectus id temporis cum iam Clodius, si quidem eo die Romani venturus erat, redire potuisset. **x Obviam fit ei** Clodius, expeditus, in equo, nulla raeda, nullis impedimentis; nullis Graecis comitibus, ut solebat; sine uxore, quod numquam fere: **cum** hic insidiator, qui iter illud ad caedem faciendam apparasset, cum uxore veheretur in raeda, paenulatus, magno et impedito et muliebri ac delicato ancillarum puerorumque comitatu. **x Fit obviam Clodio** ante fundum eius hora fere undecima, aut non multo secus. **Statim** complures cum telis in hunc faciunt de loco superiore impetum: **x** adversi raedarium occidunt. **Cum autem** hic de raeda reiecta paenula desiluisset, seque acri animo defenderet, illi qui erant cum Clodio, gladiis eductis, **partim** recurrere ad raedam, ut a tergo Milonem adorirentur; **partim**, quod hunc iam interfectum putarent, caedere incipiunt eius servos, qui post erant: **ex quibus** qui animo fideli in dominum et praesenti fuerunt, **partim** occisi sunt, **partim**, cum ad raedam pugnari viderent, domino succurrere prohiberentur, Milonem occisum et ex ipso Clodio

audirent et re vera putarent, fecerunt id servi Milonis—dicam **enim** aperte, non derivandi criminis causa, **sed** ut factum est—nec imperante nec sciente nec praesente domino, quod suos quisque servos in tali re facere voluisset.

‘Milo, on the other hand, after having been in the Senate that day until its dismissal, went home, changed his shoes and his raiment, waited for a short time while his wife made such preparations as ladies must make, and finally started out so late that Clodius might have already returned to Rome, had he ever intended to do so. He was met by Clodius, unencumbered, on horseback, no coach, no baggage, no customary Greek companions, without his wife (which he scarcely ever was); while our supposed conspirator, who (we are told) had planned the expedition with a view to murder, was driving with his wife in a coach, wrapped in his travelling-cloak, with a large, cumbersome, effeminate and dainty retinue of waiting-maids and pages.

He meets Clodius in front of his manor at about the eleventh hour, or not far off it. An attack is immediately made upon my client by several armed men posted on higher ground; others stand in the way of the coach and kill the coachman; but when Milo flung back his cloak, leapt from the vehicle, and defended himself with energy, Clodius’ party drew their swords, and either ran to the coach intending to attack Milo in the rear, or, under the impression that he had been already slain, began to cut down the slaves who were following. Such of these as showed presence of mind and loyalty towards their master were either slain, or, seeing that a fight was going on around the coach, and being prevented from coming to their master’s assistance, when they heard from Clodius’ own lips that Milo was killed and believed his report to be true, Milo’s slaves, I say,—and I shall only describe the event as it took place, without any idea of shifting the charge from my client,—did, without the orders or the knowledge or the presence of their master, what every man would have wished his own slaves to do in like circumstances.’

#### (\*11) Tacitus *Annales* 1.1

Vrbem Romam a principio reges habuere; **X** libertatem et consulatum L. Brutus instituit. Dictaturae ad tempus sumebantur; **X** neque decemviralis potestas ultra biennium, neque tribunorum militum consulare ius diu valuit. **X** Non Cinnae, non Sullae longa dominatio; **et** Pompei Crassique potentia cito in Caesarem, **X** Lepidi atque Antonii arma in Augustum cessere, qui cuncta discordiis civilibus fessa nomine principis sub imperium accepit.

‘Rome at the outset was a city state under the government of kings: liberty and the consulate were institutions of Lucius Brutus. Dictatorships were always a temporary expedient: the decemviral office was dead within two years, nor was the consular authority of the military tribunes long-lived. Neither Cinna nor Sulla created a lasting despotism: Pompey and Crassus quickly forfeited their power to Caesar, and Lepidus and Antony their swords to Augustus. who, under the style of “Prince,” gathered beneath his empire a world outworn by civil broils’.

#### (\*12) Cicero *Philippica* 2. 63

**Sed** haec quae robustioris improbitatis sunt, omittamus: **(X)** loquamur potius de nequissimo genere levitatis. **X** Tu istis faucibus, istis lateribus, ista gladiatoria totius corporis firmitate tantum vini in Hippiae nuptiis exhauseras ut tibi necesse esset in populi Romani conspectu vomere postridie. **X** O rem non modo

visu foedam sed etiam auditu! **X** Si inter cenam in ipsis tuis immanibus illis poculis hoc tibi accidisset, quis non turpe duceret? **X** In coetu **vero** populi Romani negotium publicum gerens, magister equitum, cui ructare turpe esset, is vomens frustis esculentis vinum redolentibus gremium suum et totum tribunal implevit. **Sed haec** ipse fatetur esse in suis sordibus: **X** veniamus ad splendida.

‘But let us leave aside such acts of sturdy wickedness, and speak rather of the lowest kind of irresponsibility. With that gullet of yours, that chest, that robust physique befitting a gladiator, you engulfed such a quantity of wine at Hippias’ wedding that the following day you found it necessary to vomit in full view of the Roman people. Disgusting to witness, disgusting even to hear tell of! Had this happened to you at dinner in those same monstrous cups of yours, who would not think it a shameful exhibition? But while conducting public business, in a gathering of the Roman people in his role as Master of the Horse, for whom it would be disgraceful to burp, he vomited, filling his lap and the whole platform with morsels of food stinking of wine! Ah well, he admits himself that this was one of his less creditable performances. Let us proceed to his shining deeds.’

(\*13) Vergilius, *Aeneis* 12. 929 – 952

Cunctanti telum Aeneas fatale coruscat,  
 sortitus fortunam oculis, **et** corpore toto 920  
 eminus intorquet. **X** murali concita numquam  
 tormento sic saxa fremunt nec fulmine tanti  
 dissultant crepitus. **X** volat atri turbinis instar  
 exitium dirum hasta ferens orasque recludit  
 loricae et clipei extremos septemplicis orbis; **X** 925  
 per medium stridens transit femur. **X** incidit ictus  
 ingens ad terram duplicato poplite Turnus. **X**  
 consurgunt gemitu Rutuli totusque remugit  
 mons circum et vocem late nemora alta remittunt. **X**  
 ille humilis supplex .. inquit ...

(direct speech Turnus)

stetit acer in armis 937  
 Aeneas volvens oculos dextramque repressit;  
**et iam iamque** magis cunctantem flectere sermo 940  
 coeperat, infelix umero **cum** apparuit alto  
 balteus **et** notis fulserunt cingula bullis  
 Pallantis pueri, victum **quem** vulnere Turnus  
 straverat atque umeris inimicum insigne gerebat. **X**  
 ille, oculis postquam saevi monimenta doloris 945  
 exuviasque hausit, furiis accensus et ira  
 terribilis: 'tunc hinc spoliis indute meorum  
 eripiare mihi? Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas  
 immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.'  
**hoc dicens** ferrum adverso sub pectore condit 950  
 fervidus; **ast** illi solvuntur frigore membra  
 vitaeque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

As he wavers, Aeneas brandishes the fateful spear, seeing a favorable chance, then hurls it from afar with all his strength. Never do stones shot from a siege engine roar so loud, never do such great crashes burst from a thunderbolt. Like a black whirlwind the spear flies on, bearing fell destruction, and pierces the corslet's rim and the sevenfold shield's outermost circle: whizzing it passes right through the thigh. Under the blow, with his knee bent down to earth beneath him, huge Turnus sank. The Rutulians start up with a groan; all the hills re-echo round about, and far and near the wooded slopes send back the sound. In supplication he lowered his eyes and stretched out his right hand

Fierce in his armour, Aeneas stood still shifting his eyes, and restrained his hand; and now, as he paused, these words began to sway him more and more, when high on the shoulder the luckless baldric met his gaze, and the belt flashed with its well-known studs—the belt of young Pallas, whom Turnus had wounded and stretched vanquished on the earth, and now he wore on his shoulders his foeman's fatal emblem. Aeneas, as soon as his eyes drank in the trophy, that memorial of cruel grief, ablaze with fury and terrible in his wrath: "Clad in the spoils of one of mine, are you to be snatched from my hands? Pallas it is, Pallas who sacrifices you with this stroke, and takes retribution from your guilty blood!" So saying, in burning rage he buries his sword full in Turnus' breast. His limbs grew slack and chill and with a moan his life fled resentfully to the Shades below.

## Bibliographic references

- Adams, J.N. 2021. *Asyndeton and its Interpretation in Latin Literature. History, Patterns, Textual Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Allan, R.J. 2007. 'Sense and sentence complexity. Sentence structure, sentence connection, and tense-aspect as indicators of narrative mode in Thucydides' *Histories*', in R.J. Allan & M. Buijs (eds), *The Language of Literature. Linguistic Approaches to Classical Text*. Leiden: Brill, 93-121.
- Bolkestein, A.M. 1986. 'Zand zonder kalk: cohesie en het proza van Seneca'. *Lampas* 19:3, 298-308.
- Chausserie-Laprée, J.-P. 1969. *L'expression narrative chez les historiens latins*. Paris: De Boccard.
- Denniston, J. D. 1952. *Greek Prose Style*. Oxford; Clarendon Press.
- De Melo, W.D.C. 2011. *Plautus. Amphitryon, etc.* Edited and translated by Wolfgang De Melo). Cambridge MA; Harvard University Press
- Dik, S.C. 1968. *Coordination. Its Implication for the Theory of General Linguistics*. Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Gils, L.W. & C.H.M. Kroon, 2017. 'Discourse-Linguistic Strategies in Livy's Account of the Battle at Cannae', in L.W. van Gils, I. de Jong & C.H.M. Kroon (eds), *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narrative. Thermopylae, Cannae and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 191-233.
- Hofmann, J.B. & A. Szantyr, 1965. *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*. München : Beck.
- Kroon, C.H.M. 1995. *Discourse Particles in Latin. A Study of nam, enim, autem, vero and at*. Amsterdam: Gieben.
- Kroon, C.H.M. 2000. 'Het ene verhaal is het andere niet. Een taalkundige kijk op teksttype in de Latijnse literatuur. *Lampas* 33:3, 211-234.
- Kroon C.H.M. 2011. 'Latin Particles and the Grammar of Discourse. In: J. Clackson (ed.), *A Companion to the Latin Language*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 176-195.
- Kühner, R. & C. Stegmann, 1912<sup>2</sup>. *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache, Zweiter Teil, Satzlehre* (2 vols). Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung.
- Marouzeau, J., 1935. *Traité de stylistique appliquée au latin*. Paris: Les belles lettres.
- Pinkster, H., 1998. 'Is the Latin present tense the unmarked, neutral tense in the system?', in R. Risselada (ed.), *Latin in Use*. Amsterdam: Gieben, 63-83.
- Pinkster, H. 1999. The present tense in Virgil's Aeneid', *Mnemosyne* 52, 705-717
- Pinkster, H. 2015. *Oxford Latin Syntax. I, The simple Clause*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pinkster, H. 2021. *Oxford Latin Syntax. II, The complex Sentence and Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rosén, H., 2002. 'Complementarity within the pool of cohesion devices?', in A.M. Bolkestein *et al.* (eds), *Theory and Description in Latin Linguistics*. (Selected Papers from the XIth International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics, Amsterdam 2001). Amsterdam: Gieben, 333-346.
- Rosén, H., 2009. 'Coherence, sentence modification, and sentence-part modification. The contribution of particles', in: Ph. Baldi & P. Cuzzolin (eds), *New Perspectives on Historical Latin Syntax, vol. I, Syntax of the Sentence*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 317-441.
- Rosén, H. 2011. 'Zeroing in on Latin asyndesis', *STUF, Language Typology and Universals* 64: 2, 136-147.
- Torrego, M.E. 2009. 'Coordination', in: Ph. Baldi & P. Cuzzolin (eds), *New Perspectives on Historical Latin Syntax, vol. I, Syntax of the Sentence*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 444-487.
- Vatri, A. 2021. Asyndeton, Immersion, and Hypokrisis in Ancient Greek Rhetoric", in J. Grethlein, LHuitink and A. Tagliabue. (eds), *Experience, Narrative, and Criticism in Ancient Greece. Under the Spell of Stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 210-232.

