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Facilitas and *héxis* in Latin rhetoric

Abstract – The concept of ἕξις is the starting point for the tenth book of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*. This concept had its origins in the philosophical field in the works by Plato and Aristotle but was also used by many other Greek and Latin authors. In my paper, I analyse some crucial moments in the history of this term in Greek and study its Latin translations (*habitus*, *facultas*, *facilitas*). In particular, my focus is on its use in the rhetorical field from Cicero to Tacitus, with specific attention to Quintilian, and on its meaning of facility of expression.

Keywords: *hexis*, *facilitas*, facility of expression, rhetoric, Quintilian

1. Introduction

The tenth book of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* opens with the key concept of ἕξις/*facilitas*. In his previous books, the author exposed the rhetorical precepts, but at this point, to create the strength of eloquence, he states that it is necessary to add “a *firma quaedam facilitas*, which the Greeks call ἕξις”.¹ This *firma facilitas* can be acquired through writing, reading and oral exercise (*scrivendo*, *legendo*, *dicendo*). Therefore, while the first chapter of the tenth book will be dedicated to reading and to authors to be read, the remaining chapters (2–7) will focus on writing and oral exercise. In particular, the topics covered will be imitation, writing, correction, activities for the enrichment of vocabulary and the facility of expression, reflection and improvisation.

This passage raises some questions at the semantic and interlinguistic level. In particular, it is worthwhile to clarify which relationship exists between ἕξις and *facilitas*, whether there is a direct correspondence between the two terms, and what is the best Latin translation of the Greek ἕξις. Quintilian did not choose the concurrent term *habitus*, but he used a word with different etymological origins, since the root of ἕξις is that of the verb ἔχω (to have), as the Latin *habitus* (from *habeo*), while *facilitas* is connected with

¹ Winterbottom (1970) prints *hexis*, whereas ἕξις is the correction introduced in the third *editio Ascensiana* (Coloniae 1527) from the reading *ex his* of G (the *supplementum* to the *codex Bambergensis* M.4.14 dated to the X saec.).

the verb *facio* (to do). Furthermore, it is possible to investigate whether there is a particular reason for choosing the adjective *firmus* in the alliterating expression *firma facilitas* and, in an even more technical context, whether it is possible to conceive a rhetorical specialisation of the terms ἔξις and *facilitas*.

The term ἔξις, well attested in Plato and Aristotle, is widely studied from the philosophical point of view.² It means possession, in a concrete and abstract sense (possession of objects/instruments or knowledge/reason), state or condition (physical or spiritual), in particular, a condition that is acquired, permanent and produced through practice (πράξις). More generally, the term means custom, experience, ability, skill. Therefore, the concept of ἔξις can refer to concrete realities, knowledge and human behaviour. In particular, the term emphasises the permanence of possession and acquisition through habitual action, a prolonged act.³ Since the concept can be applied to complex abilities, to τέχναι, its reference to rhetoric is also possible. It is, therefore, worth examining more closely some significant examples of the use of the term ἔξις among those we read in Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus and Lucian of Samosata.

2. Some examples of *hexis*

In Plato's *Phaedrus* (268e), Socrates imagines the conversation of a musician with a person who claims to be an expert in harmony. The real expert, the musician, affirms that the necessary preliminary knowledge of harmony is different from harmony itself.⁴ Therefore, the ἔξις, which the false expert is endowed with, is only equivalent to τὰ πρὸ ἁρμονίας ἀναγκαῖα μαθήματα (“the knowledge necessary for harmony”). Shortly after (269b), the same expression (τὰ πρὸ τῆς τέχνης ἀναγκαῖα μαθήματα) references the rhetoric as τέχνη. These expressions are comparable to those used by Quintilian at the beginning of the tenth book: *eloquendi praecepta ... cogitationi ... necessaria*. We are sure that Quintilian knew this passage of Plato because the Latin rhetorician quotes (*inst.* 2.15.30) this section of the *Phaedrus*, focused on the characteristics of speaking and

² In particular, I mention the contributions, not recent but still fundamental, of Gerhard Funke about the concept of *Gewohnheit* (the habit) and, above all, the extensive work in Funke 1961.

³ For the two meanings see in Quintilian the adjective *firma* referred to *facilitas* and the same noun *facilitas* from *facio* through the adjective *facilis* (“easy to do”).

⁴ ὦ ἄριστε, ἀνάγκη μὲν καὶ ταῦτ' ἐπίστασθαι τὸν μέλλοντα ἁρμονικὸν ἔσεσθαι, οὐδὲν μὴν κωλύει μηδὲ σμικρὸν ἁρμονίας ἐπαῖεν τὸν τὴν σὴν ἔξιν ἔχοντα· τὰ γὰρ πρὸ ἁρμονίας ἀναγκαῖα μαθήματα ἐπίστασαι ἀλλ' οὐ τὰ ἁρμονικά. “My friend, he who is to be a harmonist must know these things you mention, but nothing prevents one who is at your stage of knowledge from being quite ignorant of harmony. You know the necessary preliminaries of harmony, but not harmony itself.” Translation by H.N. Fowler.

writing well. It is worthwhile, however, to note a significant difference: Quintilian distinguishes between necessary *praecepta* and ἔξις, while Plato considered that the necessary (but not sufficient) teachings and ἔξις are equivalent.

As mentioned earlier, the term ἔξις is well attested in the teaching of Aristotle, not only in the works on metaphysics, logic and ethics, but also in the *Rhetoric*.⁵ The presence of ἔξις in this work has probably contributed to the success of this word in the rhetorical field. Regarding the relationship between ἔξις and theoretical and practical knowledge, it is worthwhile to mention a passage from the *Problemata* (955b). Here, the author highlights a question concerning the sciences (ἐπιστήμαι)⁶: only for some sciences, it is possible to say “to have possession” (ἔξις ἔχειν),⁷ while for others, this expression cannot be used⁸. The author then moves from the lexical to the conceptual problem: the phrase ἔξις ἔχειν can be used for the sciences, in which we are εὐρητικοί, that is, creative, capable of discoveries, ingenious. Therefore, stable possession (ἔξις) produces innovations, but according to the *Problemata*, this argument is only valid for the sciences (ἐπιστήμαι), and not for the arts (τέχναι), as rhetoric. In other Aristotelian works, however, ἔξις can refer to the arts.⁹

A passage from Polybius (10.47.7-8, 11) is interesting because, here, ἔξις is related to reading, which is a fundamental theme in the tenth book of the *Institutio oratoria*. The author presents the case of an illiterate but intelligent man observing a boy who is accustomed (παιδάριον ἔξις ἔχον) to reading. The uneducated man is amazed by all the operations that are simultaneously carried out by the boy when he is reading. The teaching of the anecdote is that we must not reject anything that is useful simply because it presents difficulties; we must rely on habit (προσακτέον τὴν ἔξις): thanks to ἔξις, everything that is good is within reach of men. Therefore, ἔξις is conceived as a habit and an acquired ability to perform challenging actions such as reading.

⁵ Among the most recent studies see Allard-Nelson 2001; Deslauriers 2002; Oele 2012.

⁶ Διὰ τί κατ' ἐνίας μὲν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἔξις ἔχειν λέγομεν, κατ' ἐνίας δὲ οὐ; ἢ καθ' ὅσας εὐρητικοὶ ἐσμεν, ἔξις ἔχειν λεγόμεθα; τὸ γὰρ εὐρίσκειν ἀπὸ ἔξεως. “Why do we say we have a state (of the soul) in some of the sciences, but not in others? Are we said to have a state in those concerned with discovery? For making discoveries comes from a state.” Translation by W.S. Hett.

⁷ Note the *figura etymologica*.

⁸ The *Problemata* are a work of the Peripatetic school that probably preserves many original passages by Aristotle. See Louis 1991: XXIII-XXV.

⁹ For a survey on the τέχνη as ἔξις see Ortega Carmona 1965: 68-72.

We read another compelling case of the use of ἔξις in Diodorus Siculus (2.29.4-5), which was about the education of the Chaldeans, experts in astrology and mantic, based both on the flight of birds and on the observation of the entrails of sacrificial animals. This education was different from that practiced in Greece, since among the Chaldeans, training in these disciplines (μαθήματα) took place from childhood. This fact causes a great mastery (μεγάλην ἔξιν) because of the inclination to learning that is typical of young people and because of the length of time they dedicate to this activity. Conversely, in Greece, young people approached many subjects without adequate preparation; therefore, the Greeks studied philosophy at a later age, with the consequence that some renounced their studies, and others deepened theirs only to make money. It can be noted that Diodorus' observations regarding the learning of young people correspond with those of Quintilian (*inst.* 1.12.11) on their aptitude (*facilitates*) in knowledge.¹⁰

Returning to philosophy, Lucian's *Hermotimus* is a testimony to the fact that ἔξις was also present in the philosophical thought of the Stoics. This work, completed in approximately 165 A.D., is presented as a Platonic dialogue between Lycinus, the pseudonym of Lucian, and Hermotimus, a disciple of Stoic philosophy.¹¹ Near the end of the work (par. 81), Lycinus tell to Hermotimus the story of a philosopher who asked a student to pay him after a delay of fifteen days. The uncle of the young man, presented as an uncivilised and ignorant person (ἄγροικος ἄνθρωπος καὶ ιδιώτης), intervenes to strengthen his nephew's refusal. The old man complains that his nephew did not take advantage of philosophy; on the contrary, his behaviour had become considerably worse. Moreover, the young man is derided by his family for his attitudes and philosophical discourses (ἡμεῖς δὲ γελῶμεν), for example, when closing his ears, he repeats terms like ἔξεις, σχέσεις, καταλήψεις and φαντασῖαι. In this passage, therefore, we read the term ἔξις between keywords in Stoic philosophical terminology.¹²

3. *Hexis* and rhetoric

The proximity between ἔξις and rhetoric is significant, as the following cases demonstrate. Philodemus of Gadara, in a fragment from the second book of his *Rhetorica* (*PHerc.* 1674, col. XXXVIII, ed. Longo Auricchio 123) starts from the current definition

¹⁰ See below par. 6.

¹¹ See Pomelli 2011.

¹² For a detailed philosophical study on the idea of ἔξις in the Stoicism see Inwood 1986.

of art.¹³ Art is a faculty or disposition (ἕξις ἢ διάθεσις) derived from the observation of common and fundamental elements that pervade a majority of specific cases.¹⁴ Moreover, the characteristics of this faculty/disposition are defined with three adverbs, ἑστηκότως (permanently), βεβαίως (solidly) and οὐδὲ στοχαστικῶς (not hypothetically), which in Latin are well translated by the adjective *firma* in Quintilian. Philodemus discusses this definition in the following section, but the passage is relevant because it testifies to the use of ἕξις in the first century B.C., applied to τέχνη in a treatise on rhetoric.

The term ἕξις is also used in the rhetorical works by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. In his work on Lysias (*Lys.* 11), Dionysius admits that χάρις is the essential feature of the Attic orator.¹⁵ It can be a natural gift, a product of exercise and technique, a condition or faculty (ἕξις ἢ δύναμις) acquired through exercise and technique. In his work on Demosthenes (*Dem.* 52), Dionysius states that a significant ability (ἕξις πολλήν) derives from extended training (χρόνιος ἄσκησις).¹⁶ This process works for all the arts, including grammar (γραμματική), which consists in learning how to read, in a similar manner as what Polybius wrote in the passage analysed above. Finally, Dionysius emphasises that this procedure also concerns rhetoric.¹⁷

¹³ See Longo Auricchio 1977; Chandler 2004.

¹⁴ νοεῖται τοίνυν καὶ λέγεται τέχνη παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ἕξις ἢ διάθεσις ἀπὸ παρατηρήσεως τινῶν κοινῶν καὶ στοιχειωδῶν, ἃ διὰ πλειόνων διήκει τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους, καταλαμβάνουσά τι καὶ συντελοῦσα τοιοῦτον, οἷον ὁμοίως τῶν μὴ μαθόντων οὐδεῖς, ἑστηκότως καὶ βεβαίως οὐδὲ στοχαστικῶς. “Well then, among the Greeks, art is conceived and spoken of as a faculty or disposition derived from observation of certain common and basic elements which pervade the majority of specific cases, a faculty which apprehends something and achieves it in the kind of way which only some of those who have not learned it do, and does this firmly and securely and not by conjecture.” Translation by C. Chandler.

¹⁵ ταύτην μέντοι κρατίστην τε ἀρετὴν καὶ χαρακτηριστωτάτην τῆς Λυσίου λέξεως ἔγωγε τίθεμαι, εἴτε φύσεως αὐτὴν δεῖ καλεῖν εὐτυχίαν εἴτε πόνου καὶ τέχνης ἐργασίαν εἴτε μικτὴν ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἕξις ἢ δύναμις, ἣ πάντας ὑπερέχει τοὺς λοιποὺς ῥήτορας. “This charm, then, I am persuaded is the most important and characteristic virtue of Lysias’s style, (whether we are to call it a natural gift or the product of application and skill, or whether it is a condition or faculty which has been acquired through the mixture of these two), and one in which he surpasses all other orators.” Translation by S. Usher.

¹⁶ βουλοίμην δ’ ἂν καὶ ταῦτα ἐνθυμηθῆναι [διότι] τοὺς ἔτι δυσπεῖστως ἔχοντας πρὸς τὰ εἰρημένα, ὅτι μαιράκιον μὲν ἔτι ὄντα καὶ νεωστὶ τοῦ μαθήματος ἀπτόμενον αὐτὸν οὐκ ἄλογον ἦν καὶ ταῦτα καὶ τὰλλα πάντα διὰ πολλῆς ἐπιμελείας τε καὶ φροντίδος ἔχειν, ἐπειδὴ δ’ ἡ χρόνιος ἄσκησις ἕξις αὐτῷ ἐνεποίησε πολλὴν καὶ τύπους ἰσχυροὺς ἐνεργάσατο τῶν αἰεὶ μελετωμένων, τότε ἀπὸ τοῦ ῥάστου τε καὶ τῆς ἕξεως αὐτὸ ποιεῖν. “I should like those who are still unconvinced by my arguments to consider that it would not have been unreasonable to expect him, while still a young man and new to his studies, to have examined these and all other aspects of the subject with great care; but that after long training had imbued him with great empirical skill, and left in his mind a firm impression of whatever he had been studying, he then wrote with the utmost facility, drawing on his experience.” Translation by S. Usher.

¹⁷ Dionysius uses the same idea and the same words about Demosthenes in *De compositione verborum* (25): ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ χρόνιος ἄσκησις ἰσχὺν πολλὴν λαβοῦσα τύπους τινὰς ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ παντὸς τοῦ μελετωμένου καὶ σφραγίδας ἐνεποίησεν, ἐκ τοῦ ῥάστου τε καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἕξεως αὐτὰ ἤδη ποιεῖν. “but after long training had led to the acquisition of a greater mastery, and imprinted on his mind marks and impressions of all that he had studied, he henceforth produced his effects with the greatest of ease from sheer force of habit.” Translation by S. Usher.

Seneca the Elder (*contr.* 7 *pr* 2) also uses the word ἔξις, in Greek, about Albucius, a non-prolific declaimer who was famous for the philosophical thoughts contained in his discourses.¹⁸ He was characterised by the prolixity in his arguments (*argumentabatur moleste magis quam subtiliter*) and dealt with a plurality of themes in each of his declamations. According to Seneca, he was extraordinary for *splendor orationis*; he did not have a significant facility (*hexis*) but was endowed with excellence in style (*phrasis*). He spoke, in fact, in a fast and loose way, though as a result of preparation. Those who knew him well ascribed to him the ability to improvise, even if Albucius himself thought he did not possess it. He was able to move *adfectus*, use figures of speech and pretend to improvise. Seneca's analysis continues at length, but for our purpose, it is sufficient to note how the rhetorician uses the Greek terms *hexis* and *phrasis*, without translating them into Latin, through rhetorical specialisation. Moreover, the connection of these characteristics with the ability to improvise (*extemporalis facultas*) and a cleverly disguised preparation are evident.

In a letter dedicated to a young politician (*or.* 18.18), Dio Chrysostom offers suggestions on rhetorical education.¹⁹ In his opinion, this training must include readings and exercises; in particular, Dio advises not to write personally, but to dictate to a secretary. The dictation, in fact, is more similar to talking; it is less tiring than writing; it helps less for δύναμις and more for ἔξις. Moreover, Dio advises not to perform school exercises but to take a speech from Xenophon and compose an opposite discourse or the same speech in a different way. In this case, the term δύναμις indicates the strength of expression, while ἔξις is the expressive ease. This example is interesting because it is a contemporary testimony to Quintilian and concerns rhetorical language.

4. *Habitus*

The term *habitus* should be the closest translation, in terms of meaning and etymology, to ἔξις for the respective derivation from *habeo* and ἔχω. The word *habitus* can refer to the physical aspect of a body, in particular, its size and its way of moving, and may also concern single parts of the body. In the abstract sense, it can describe the condition of the mind and the human soul.²⁰ In general, it can express the idea of shape and appearance or

¹⁸ *Splendor orationis quantus nescio an in ullo alio fuerit. Non hexis magna, sed phrasis. Dicebat enim citato et effuso cursu, sed praeparatus. Extemporalis illi facultas, ut adfirmabant qui propius norant, non deerat, sed putabat ipse sibi deesse.*

¹⁹ About this work and its connection with the *Institutio oratoria* see Raschieri 2017.

²⁰ *Gloss.* II 323, 51: ἦθος *mos habitus animi*.

refer to behaviours, but it can also express the state or condition of animate or inanimate beings. Finally, this word can simply correspond to dress.²¹

In Cicero's *De inventione* (1.34), we find the concept of *habitus* among the qualities of people, that is, between the conceptual categories through which the orator can construct arguments about people to make his discourse firm (*confirmare*). These attributes are *nomen, natura, victus, fortuna, habitus, affectio, studia, consilia, facta, casus* and *orationes*. The definition of *habitus* that Cicero provides just below (1.36) is interesting:²² *habitus* is the condition of the body or mind that has achieved stable and constant excellence in some field; moreover, it is not innate but derives from commitment and diligence. It is notable that this definition corresponds well with that of ἔξις; however, in this case, it is focused on men and does not concern ἐπιστήμη or τέχνη.

In Quintilian, the term *habitus* refers to the physical features of the body, the gesture of the orator, the disposition of the soul, the appearance, the qualities of painting and clothes (in a metaphorical sense). Unlike Cicero, the term is not used in a philosophical sense, as, for example, in Seneca.²³ Therefore, the word *habitus* in Quintilian concerns external elements not related to ἔξις; in fact, the Greek word is left in the original language or translated into other Latin words. Moreover, in Quintilian, *habitus* has no connection with rhetorical theory and might merely indicate the outward appearance or the gesturing of the orator.

The term *habitus*, instead, returns to be used by Marius Victorinus in a philosophical sense and with the meaning of ἔξις, which is due to the influence of Cicero. In the commentary on Cicero's *De inventione*, the late antique author employs the word *habitus* in the passages related to the Ciceronian lines commented above (*rhet.* 1.25 pp. 218-219). In an original way, he broadens the Ciceronian analysis (*rhet.* 1.2 pp. 163 concerning *Cic. inv.* 1.3).²⁴ Marius Victorinus states that, in many areas, perfection is achieved only by the possession of certain qualities and, in other areas, by possession and practice. In this

²¹ About the word *habitus* see *ThLL* 6.3.2482-2487 (in particular, about *habitus* as ἔξις 2486.53-75).

²² *Habitu autem [hunc] appellamus animi aut corporis constantem et absolutam aliqua in re perfectionem, ut virtutis aut artis alicuius perceptionem aut quamvis scientiam et item corporis aliquam commoditatem non natura datam, sed studio et industria partam.* The definitional attitude of *De inventione* is an element that derives from the speculative interest and the philosophical education of the young Cicero.

²³ *Sen. ep.* 117.16: *sapientia habitus perfectae mentis est.*

²⁴ *Sunt multa, quae solo habitu sui perfecta sunt, multa quae et habitu et usu: ut athleta si habeat corporis magnitudinem, non continuo perfectus est, nisi ei et usus accedat; ut orator concepto totius scientiae habitu non continuo perfectus est, nisi ei et usus accedat: sapientia vero habitu sui perfecta est nec indigent vocis, id est usus.*

regard, he proposes the comparison between the athlete and the orator:²⁵ the athlete possesses merely physical strength, while the orator must combine the possession of knowledge with practice. In a different way, in dealing with wisdom, only the possession is essential, while the practice is unnecessary. The passage is, therefore, interesting in terms of the comparison between *habitus* and *usus*, between *athleta* and *orator* and regarding the re-use of Cicero's philosophical language.²⁶

5. *Facultas* and *facilitas* in Cicero and Seneca

Cicero sometimes uses the term *facultas* in the rhetorical field, with a possible comparison with the concept of ἔξις. For example, in *De oratore* (2.218), we read Antonius' intervention in reply to Crassus on the definition of the orator and, in particular, on the question of whether he should possess all the sciences. According to Antonius, the oratorical ability (*facultas dicendi*) should not be without means (*ieiuna atque nuda*). On the contrary, this ability must be remarkable because of a great variety of knowledge that the orator can acquire through listening (*multa auribus accepisse*), seeing, thinking and reading (*multa etiam legendo percucurrisse*). The excellent orator, therefore, should not possess all the sciences, since Antonius presents the abilities acquired in other fields of knowledge as ancillary (*neque ea ut sua possedisse, sed ut aliena libasse*). In comparison with Quintilian, it is interesting to note that, according to Antonius, the rhetorical *facultas* is not characterised by a firm knowledge of a plurality of subjects. This learning can be acquired through listening and reading, as we read at the beginning of the tenth book of the *Institutio oratoria*, as well as through sight and reflection.

In a passage from the *Orator* (113), Cicero states that the perfect orator (*perfecte eloquens*) should not only have the ability to speak in a broad and developed way (*facultatem habere ... fuse lateque dicendi*) on the arguments that are proper to his art, but must also know dialectics. This discipline is a philosophical science (*dialecticorum scientiam*), but it is close to rhetoric because it is based on argumentation and reasoning. In this passage, therefore, as in *De oratore*, the term *facultas* has the generic meaning of “skill/ability” well circumscribed by the rhetorical sphere, as opposed to other forms of

²⁵ The comparison between the athlete and the orator is also frequent in *Institutio oratoria*. For example, Quintilian (*inst.* 10.1.4) states that he intends to teach the future orator to put his knowledge into practice, as the coach prepares for the fight the athlete who has already learned all the combat moves: *verum nos non quomodo sit instituendus orator hoc loco dicimus ... sed athleta qui omnis iam perdidicerit a praeceptore numeros quo genere exercitationis ad certamina praeparandus sit.*

²⁶ About the comparison between *habitus* and *usus* in connection with the *virtus* see Cic. *ac.* 1.38.

knowledge and science that may be part of the orator's competencies. Moreover, we should not forget that we read the pair *copia* and *facultas dicendi* three times in Cicero's speeches, once about Verres, twice regarding Q. Hortensius Hortalus.²⁷ It is therefore notable that, in Cicero, the term *facultas* has a particular specialisation in the rhetorical field, above all, through the specification *dicendi*.

The term *facultas* often appears in pairs with *facilitas* and *felicitas*, and sometimes, these words are confused in the textual tradition. In particular, the ancient grammarians had put the term *facilitas* and *facultas* in contact but, at the same time, distinguished these words according to their objects (behaviors and things) or meaning (*expeditio* and *copia*).²⁸ The word *facilitas* can indicate a condition, a way of being, the facility that concerns an object or an action. Moreover, it means the ability to perceive and understand something easily, and it can be said of men and things. It may also have a negative connotation and indicate negligence, credulity, levity, always about men and things. Moral meaning as a synonym for clemency, affability, courtesy and pleasantness of character is widespread, for example, in Terence, Cicero and Seneca.

Perhaps Cicero was the first to use the term *facilitas* in the rhetorical field. In fact, in a famous passage of the *Orator* (21) regarding the distinction of the three oratorical styles, after having described the high and low styles, he affirms that facility and stylistic uniformity characterise the middle style. Moreover, he continues that, in this style, it is possible to add only some modest embellishments (*ornamentis modicis verborum sententiarumque*). In the manuscripts, we read *facultas* and *aequalitas*, which Manutius had already corrected as *facilitas* and *aequabilitas*. In modern editions, there is ample oscillation between these forms. Since this passage is famous in Latin rhetorical theory, it is possible that Seneca and Quintilian read *facilitas* and that the rhetorical specialisation of this term began with Cicero.

The word *facilitas* returns with rhetorical meaning in a letter by Seneca (*ep.* 40.11-12). The philosopher states that the various languages need different styles and that there are differences between Greek and Latin. For example, Greek uses the *scriptio continua*, whereas Latin words are separated by punctuation marks. Moreover, Latin requires slowness, as demonstrated by Cicero, the source of Roman eloquence, which was a

²⁷ Cic. *Verr.* I 10, *Manil.* 52, *Quinct.* 8.

²⁸ About *facilitas* see *ThLL* 6.1.72-76, about *facultas* see *ThLL* 6.1.145-157.

gradarius, since it proceeded slowly in exposition.²⁹ At this point, Seneca inserts the example of his master Fabianus, who was excellent in *vita*, *scientia* and *eloquentia*. His oratorical style was characterised by *facilitas* because he spoke without impediment (*expedite*). In this passage, we find the contrast between the adverbs *expedite* and *concite*, between *facilitas* and *celeritas*. Therefore, we also read in Seneca a rhetorical specialisation of *facilitas*, which describes an unimpeded style.

6. *Facilitas* in Quintilian

As for Quintilian, it is worthwhile to analyse the passages in which the term *facilitas* occurs in the *Institutio oratoria*. In the first book (1.12.11), among the advantages of teaching young people, Quintilian mentions their readiness to follow teachers and the fact that they do not measure the work done. In the second book (2.4.17), Quintilian criticises the practice of improvisation by young students³⁰. The student must learn with care and commitment something that is probable (*aliquid probabile*) in order to acquire, so to speak, a second nature. At this point, Quintilian refers to the subsequent discussion regarding the acquisition of *facilitas* in the tenth book.³¹ Also in the second book (2.15.30), in the context of an extensive quotation from Plato's *Phaedrus* (260 ff.), Quintilian presents Socrates, who blames those who misuse the ability to speak.

In the fourth book (4.1.54), *facilitas* is the valuable characteristic in the improvised introduction, which is inspired by the discourse of the opposite part. From this feature, it is possible to understand the talent of the orator. In the fourth book (4.2.94), we find two competing readings in the textual tradition: *facilitate* or *felicitate*, which Meister corrected in *fallacitate*.³² The passage deals with the rhetorical colour that derives from dreams and superstitions but loses its importance because of its ease/happiness/fallacy. In the seventh book (7.2.55), Quintilian discusses the scholastic habit, in his speeches, of using elements not strictly pertinent to the cause. He concludes that this facility is no longer in the *forum*, since these elements are no longer in use. In the ninth book (9.4.145), Quintilian contrasts the positive elegance of the arrangement and the negative facility of the expression. He guards against changing suitable words because of the search for a more graceful

²⁹ About *gradarius* see Lucil. 476: *ipse ecus, non formonsus, gradarius, optimus uector*.

³⁰ About the improvisation in Quintilian see Celentano 2015.

³¹ For a commentary on this passage see Reinhardt e Winterbottom 2006: 96-99.

³² Winterbottom (1970) chose *facilitas*.

discourse (*gratia levitatis*) and states that no word is so complicated that it cannot be adequately inserted.³³

As we have already seen, at the beginning of the tenth book (10.1.1), Quintilian writes that *firma facilitas* (or ἔξις) must be added to *eloquendi praecepta* so as to have a strength of expression (*vis dicendi*).³⁴ It is possible to obtain *facilitas* through writing, reading and oral exercise. In this chapter (10.1.59), Quintilian also refers to the previous discussion on *firma facilitas* and states that only the best authors should be read, until this *facilitas* has been acquired. It is necessary to procure *mens* and *color* through much reading, not by reading many authors. A little further on (10.1.111), *facilitas* is used as a feature of the *oratio*: within the praise of Cicero, Quintilian states that all the merits of his oratory flow effortlessly and that his eloquence (*oratio*) appears to have a facility of expression (*felicissima facilitas*).³⁵ In the second chapter of the tenth book (10.2.12), *facilitas* is listed among the non-imitable characteristics of the orator. According to Quintilian, these essential qualities are natural intelligence, creative ability, strength of expression and sure fluency, but it is not possible to learn all these features. In the following chapter (10.3.7), the term *facilitas* is instead used in a negative sense, since it is the negative characteristic of written text and is equivalent to the excessive facility of writing. Quintilian says that, sometimes, we need to follow the rush of writing and he expresses this idea with the metaphor of explaining the sails when the wind is favourable. In a later time, however, these writings must be checked and corrected.

The idea of *facilitas*, together with that of *copia*, is also present a little further on in the tenth book (10.5.1), where the author illustrates the main subjects on which those who want to obtain ἔξις must write. In particular, Quintilian focuses on ways to achieve the richness of vocabulary and the facility of expression through translation and paraphrase. Ample space is given to *facilitas* in the seventh chapter of the tenth book. Quintilian states (10.7.8) that *facilitas* comes from *consuetudo* and *exercitatio*³⁶. By contrast, with the interruption of the training, the speed of speech is lost, and the mouth remains closed.

³³ In the ninth book, other three occurrences of *facilitas* concern the *compositio* (the placement of words) and, in particular, the rhythm of prose with metrical feet to avoid. Quintilian emphasises the weakness of the clause with a spondee that is preceded by a tribrach as in *facilitates* (9.4. 47). The rhetor, then, is against the end of the verse in paeon as in *facilitas* (9.4.110); finally, he writes that the final paeon can be extended by placing two short syllables, as in *mea facilitas* or *nostra facilitas*, but better feet exist.

³⁴ The alliteration in the pair *firma facilitas* is remarkable.

³⁵ It is worthwhile to note the alliteration in this case too.

³⁶ About the double *exercitatio* in Quintilian see Celentano 2011.

Even if an orator has *facilitas extemporalis*, the ability to improvise (10.7.18), he must not trust his talent (*ingenium*). As for *cogitatio*, through regular training, this skill is perfected and preserved by practice (*usus*).³⁷ Quintilian again discusses the relationship between *facilitas* and *cogitatio* (10.7.19) and states that improvisation does not only concern prose but also poetry, as the examples of Antipater of Sidon and Archias demonstrate.³⁸ The facility of expression must not be separated from being attentive to what must be said (*cogitatio*), which is always necessary for forensic causes (10.7.20), but which, according to Quintilian, is also essential for declaimers (10.7.21).

The *facilitas* is also a physical feature of the orator (*oris facilitas*): together with the rhetorical training in front of an audience, silent exercise is also useful. However, loud practice has better results concerning the robustness of the voice, the ease of pronunciation and the movement of the body (10.7.26). As Cicero himself recommended, the orator must never speak negligently (10.7.28), but must maintain an artistic decorum (*pondus*) and bring the *immontans facilitas verborum* (the superficial verbosity) back to the depths.³⁹ In the eleventh book, the word *facilitas* (affability), as in Cicero, is one of the moral characteristics of the orator, along with *humanitas*, *moderatio* and *benevolentia*. In a later passage, the technical-rhetorical meaning returns: *prompta facilitas* is the ability to improvise (11.3.12). In particular, those who lack memory and *prompta facilitas* cannot give excellent speeches.

The word *facilitas* also returns in the twelfth book but, for the first time, with a negative connotation (12.3.11). Quintilian is against the *legulei* (specialists in legal matters) and false philosophers. These men make simpler choices disguised as more useful for their laziness. Further on, as a positive example, Quintilian takes Cicero who, after his debut

³⁷ In this context, the theme of *facilitas* can be linked to that of *dissimulatio artis*, as discussed in Cic. *de orat.* 2.153 and 156. In these passages, Antonius affirms that the orator is more appreciated, giving the impression of avoiding formal artifices and not having a Greek culture (*semper ego existimavi iucundiorum et probabiliorem huic populo oratorem fore, qui primum quam minimam artificii alicuius, deinde nullam Graecarum rerum significationem daret; opinionem istorum studiorum et suspicionem artificii apud eos, qui res iudicent, oratori adversariam esse arbitror*); cfr. Arist. *rhet.* 1404 b 18-21, Cic. *Brut.* 139, *rhet. Her.* 1.17, 2.47, 4.32, Quint. *inst.* 2.17.6, 12.9.5 (who quotes the opinion of Antonius); see Calboli Montefusco 1979: 426; HWR s.v. *simulatio*, 8.919-923. More specifically, Quintilian, among the strategies to ingratiate himself with the audience, talks about a simulation of the ancient orators in concealing their eloquence (4.1.8-10, *illa veterum circa occultandam eloquentiam simulatio*) and about the need to avoid being considered arrogant (*fiducia ipsa solet opinione arrogantiae laborare*). Moreover, the orator must give the impression, especially in the beginning, of an *extemporalis oratio* (4.1.54-57); cfr. Lausberg 1998: 130.

³⁸ See respectively Cic. *de orat.* 3.194 and *Arch.* 18.

³⁹ Due to the negative connotation of *immotans*, it is possible to compare its use in Columella (4.1.7) in which the term refers to the root of the grapevine that comes to the surface.

in the *forum*, deepened his studies. In young people, in fact, there is an ease to dare, but work has a worthy reward when theory is integrated with practice (12.6.7). Quintilian also emphasises the variety of methods adopted by the orators (12.9.14): in some, *cura* (diligence) becomes *tarditas* (tedious slowness), in others, *facilitas* (readiness) becomes *temeritas* (easiness). Instead, the model proposed by Quintilian combines distinctive competence and improvisation skills (12.9.20-21). The forces for *facilitas* derive from *disciplina* (theoretical knowledge), *studium* and *exercitatio*. A final example of *facilitas* is present in the chapter, dedicated to the oratorical style (*genus orationis*), within a comparison of the different qualities (*virtutes*) of painters (12.10.6). They can stand out because of *cura*, *ratio*, *phantasia*, *ingenium*, *gratia* as well as *facilitas*, which is a peculiarity of the painter Antiphilus.

7. In the wake of Quintilian: Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius

As we saw in the previous section, in the *Institutio oratoria*, the term *facilitas* is mainly equivalent to the Greek ἔξις; however, for the writers in direct contact with Quintilian's teaching, the preference goes to the term *facultas*, as evidenced in the following examples from Pliny the Younger and Tacitus.⁴⁰

In the letter to Tacitus (Plin. *ep.* 1.20) on rhetoric and style, Pliny presents the example of Pericles (par. 18). After quoting a passage from the comedian Eupolis (Δῆμοι fr.194), which praised the Athenian politician, Pliny states that Pericles was endowed with an exceptional oratorical competence (*summa facultate*). Thanks to these qualities, the Greek rhetorician succeeded in achieving the ability of persuasion and seduction through *brevitas* and *velocitas*. Pliny notes, however, that stylistic abundance (*copiam dicendi spatiumque*) is necessary in order to *delectare* and *persuadere*.

In the second book (Plin. *ep.* 2.3), addressing Maecilius Nepos, Pliny praises the Greek declaimer Isaeus, who is endowed with *summa facultas*, *copia* and *ubertas* (par. 1).⁴¹ The passage is interesting because it emphasises the connection between reading, writing and improvisation, and it can be compared with similar statements by Quintilian in the tenth book of the *Institutio oratoria*. Isaeus, in fact, possesses a remarkable improvisation ability that derives from a long practice of writing (par. 1, *dicit semper ex tempore, sed*

⁴⁰ On the criticisms of Pliny the Younger and Tacitus against Quintilian see at least Cova 2003 and Alberte González 1993.

⁴¹ Juvenal (3.74) mentions this declaimer too; about this passage see Petrone 2003: 20-22.

tamquam diu scripserit) and assiduous reading (par. 3, *multa lectio in subitis, multa scriptio elucet*). In this letter, Pliny also uses the Greek term ἔξις (par. 4), which, similar to what Quintilian says, derives from *studium* and *exercitatio*. Moreover, the declamatory activity is a total commitment in the life of the rhetorician (*nam diebus et noctibus nihil aliud agit, nihil audit, nihil loquitur*), despite the fact that he is already sixty.

The term *facultas* also appears in a letter to Corellia Hispulla (Plin. *ep.* 3.3), where Pliny praises his friend Julius Genitor. Pliny recommends him as a tutor to the son of the matron (par. 4), since his rhetorical competence (*dicendi facultas*) is evident and clear to all (*aperta et exposita*).⁴² The relationship between *facultas* and *facilitas*, however, deepens in a letter to Quadratus (6.29). Pliny states that *usus* (practice) is the best teacher of oratory (par. 5, *usus et esse et haberi optimum dicendi magistrum*).⁴³ However, with a quotation from Pollio (or at least from a *sententia* attributed to this orator), he underlines that it is necessary not to exceed in oral practice and that quantity and quality are in contrast. In fact, excessive *adsiduitas* produces *facilitas* (easiness) and *temeritas* (temerity), which are the negative equivalents of *facultas* (oratorical competence) and *fiducia* (awareness of one's abilities).⁴⁴ In this passage, therefore, Pliny seems to distance himself from Quintilian's terminology. He strongly opposes *facultas*, which is considered the positive aspect of speaking ability, and *facilitas*, in which facility verges on negligence due to excessive practice.

To conclude with Pliny the Younger, we can analyse the letter to Arellius Fuscus (Plin. *ep.* 7.9.2), which contains advice on improving rhetorical skills. At the beginning (par. 2), Pliny recommends the exercise of translation from Greek into Latin and vice versa, since, from the imitation of the best models (*imitatione optimorum*), it is possible to develop the ability to find similar subjects (*similia inveniendi facultas*). In this case, the term *facultas* is used in a more general way, but its presence is still relevant, since it is inserted in a letter on rhetorical refinement, which is equivalent to the achievement of ἔξις, according to Quintilian in the tenth book of the *Institutio oratoria*.

⁴² About this letter see Carlon 2009: 80-84.

⁴³ About this statement cfr. Quint. *inst.* 1.6.3 (*consuetudo vero certissima loquendi magistra*) and Plin. *ep.* 1.20.12 (*adiciam quod me docuit usus, magister egregius*).

⁴⁴ Plin. *ep.* 6.29.5: *quia scilicet adsiduitate nimia facilitas magis quam facultas nec fiducia, sed temeritas paratur*. It is notable the chiasmic disposition and the strong alliteration of the words *facilitas, facultas, fiducia, temeritas*.

This discussion on the use of *facultas* also finds some echoes in the *Dialogus de oratoribus* and, in particular, in the section dedicated to the causes of the decline of oratory (20-40).⁴⁵ Tacitus, through the character of Messalla, focuses his presentation first on the education of children (28-29) and the orator (30-32) and, second, on the differences between ancient (33-34) and modern (35) rhetorical education. Like Pliny the Younger, the historian does not use the term *facilitas* but *facultas* (33.3-5).⁴⁶ Tacitus states (33.3) that eloquence is the product of *ars* (technical knowledge), *scientia* (theoretical knowledge), *facultas* (competence) and *usus* (practice), and emphasises that the two most crucial elements are *facultas* and *usus*. In particular, with regard to the exercises practiced by the ancient orators (33.5), he states that all techniques (*artes*) provide an apprenticeship (*exercitatio*). In the case of eloquence, this training is structured in a cognitive chain composed of *scientia* (theoretical knowledge), *meditatio* (personal reflection), *facultas* (competence/predisposition) and *usus* (practical realisation). This process allows the orator to know topics that are not evident and that have great heterogeneity (*percipere tot tam reconditas tam varias res*). In this way, therefore, Tacitus overcomes the aporia, expressed by Cicero in the *De oratore*, that the orator must possess a wide range of knowledge, including knowledge that goes beyond his rhetorical specialisation. From our point of view, however, it is necessary to underline not only the centrality of *facultas* in this process of theoretical and practical knowledge, but also the fact that *facultas* is key to completing the rhetorical *exercitatio*.

Unlike Pliny the Younger and Tacitus, Suetonius uses the term *facilitas* with a positive connotation. This author was appreciated and protected by Pliny the Younger, but was probably not a direct student of Quintilian, although it is possible that he knew the *Institutio oratoria*.⁴⁷ Regarding the grammarian Remmius Palaemon (Suet. *gramm.* 23.3), Suetonius writes that he was famous for his memory and *facilitas sermonis*, since he was able to compose poetry *ex tempore*. This statement, therefore, highlights the link between

⁴⁵ About the relationship between *Institutio oratoria* and *Dialogus de oratoribus*, it is remarkable to mention the statement of Alberte González (1993: 256 note 3): «El hecho de que la *disputatio* sobre las causas de la corrupción de la elocuencia entre los personajes del *Dialogus* esté situada en época anterior (*dial.* 17) a la publicación de la *Institutio* puede ser un buen expediente para evitar la sospecha de que pudiera constituir una crítica a dicha obra».

⁴⁶ The word *facultas* was already used in a couple with *vis* in *dial.* 30.5 (*oratoris vis et facultas*). Alberte González (1993: 267 and note 12) highlights the lexical consonances between *Dialogus de oratoribus* and *Institutio oratoria*.

⁴⁷ Suetonius was the recipient of three letters by Pliny (*ep.* 1.18, 3.8, 5.10) and was praised in a letter of Pliny to Trajan (*ep.* 10.94.1, *Suetonium Tranquillum, probissimum honestissimum eruditissimum uirum, et mores eius secutus et studia iam pridem, domine, in contubernium adsumpsi, tantoque magis diligere coepi quanto nunc propius inspexi*).

facilitas and improvisation, which finds some consonance with the explanation of ἔξις by Quintilian. It would be even more significant if we could trust the scholiast to Juvenal (6.452), according to whom Remmius Palaemon was the master of Quintilian (*Pal<a>emonis arte<m>': grammatici, magistri Quintiliani oratoris*).⁴⁸ However, the scholium could be an autoschediasm, which is derived from the cursory mention of Remmius Palaemon in Quintilian.⁴⁹

8. Conclusions: *hexis* and *facilitas* in the rhetorical lexicon

At this point, it is useful to summarise the elements of analysis and to propose some final observations. For Plato and Aristotle, the meaning of ἔξις depends on the works in which the term is employed, even if, in general, it indicates a disposition, a stable possession in the metaphysical, logical and ethical fields. In particular, I examined two cases in which the term was used in correlation with the relationship between science and technique. In Plato, ἔξις is the possession of the knowledge that is necessary and preliminary to τέχνη, while according to Quintilian, ἔξις follows the *praecepta necessaria*. For Aristotle, ἔξις also concerns the sciences and is a stable possession that produces discoveries. According to Polybius, ἔξις is a habit, a practical knowledge that makes performing difficult but useful actions.

According to Diodorus Siculus, ἔξις is only possible with early education and is facilitated by the predisposition of young people to learning and the length of time dedicated to it. For Philodemus of Gadara, ἔξις is present in the definition of τέχνη; it is intended as a faculty or disposition that comes from observation, it is provided by stability and is not hypothetical. Latin translates these characteristics with the adjective *firma*, which Quintilian associates with *facilitas*. In Seneca the Elder, ἔξις is mentioned among the features of the oratorical style and opposed to φράσις. The term ἔξις defines the rhetorical facility, the excellence of the expression. It does not have a Latin translation and is connected to the ability of improvisation. Dio Chrysostom compares the teaching utility of writing and dictation, which facilitates ἔξις. Therefore, there is a contrast between δύναμις and ἔξις, strength and facility of expression. Moreover, the term ἔξις is also part of the philosophical categories of Stoicism, as seen in a passage from Lucian of Samosata.

⁴⁸ Juvenal mentions Remmius Palaemon two times in the *Satires* (6.452, 7.215-219).

⁴⁹ Quint. *inst.* 1.4.20: *Alii tamen ex idoneis dumtaxat auctoribus octo partes secuti sunt, ut Aristarchus et aetate nostra Palaemon, qui uocabulum siue appellationem nomini subiecerunt tamquam speciem eius, at ii qui aliud nomen, aliud uocabulum faciunt, nouem.* About this issue see Scappaticcio 2015: 103 note 39.

The term *habitus* is the etymologically correct translation of ἔξις. Cicero uses *habitus* in the ethical/philosophical field and mentions it among the qualities of people. *Habitus* is a stable and constant excellence that derives not from nature, but from exercise, and concerns both the body and the mind. Quintilian uses this term, above all, for the physical characteristics of the body, the outward appearance. Instead, Marius Victorinus proposes its philosophical meaning in a rhetorical work: excellence sometimes comes only from *habitus* (from the possession of that quality), sometimes from *habitus* together with *usus* (from the practice). The word *facilitas* is often used to refer to the character and indicates affability, courtesy and pleasantness. Cicero often uses this meaning, but Quintilian also knows it (11.1.42). In the rhetorical field, Cicero is perhaps the first to use (in addition to *facultas*) even the term *facilitas*, but in the text of the *Orator*, the reading *facultas* has been corrected in *facilitas*. Its meaning would be that of ease and uniformity of the median style. Seneca continues its use in the rhetorical sphere concerning Fabianus' oratorical characteristics: *facilitas* corresponds to speaking in a loose way (*expedite*).

In Quintilian, the theme of ἔξις/*facilitas* is fundamental in the tenth book of the *Institutio oratoria*, in which we read twelve examples of *facilitas* that were mainly related to improvisation. In particular, at the beginning of the fifth chapter (10.5.1), Quintilian states that ἔξις derives from *copia verborum* and *facilitas*. Moreover, he emphasises the stability of its possession with the adjective *firma* (10.1.1, 10.1.59), whereas, in order to underline its connection with improvisation, *facilitas* is defined as *extemporalis* (10.7.18) or *prompta* (11.3.12). In Quintilian, it is possible to observe the attempt to specialise the term *facilitas* in the rhetorical field as corresponding to ἔξις. This attempt was perhaps successful, if Suetonius (*gramm.* 23.3) states that Remmius Palaemon was famous for his memory and *facilitas sermonis*, and therefore, he also composed poems *ex tempore*. However, this rhetorical specialisation does not seem to have had a long lifetime, since, on one hand, Pliny the Younger and Tacitus prefer the term *facultas*; on the other hand, in the *Rhetores latini minores*, and especially in Marius Victorinus, we find not *facilitas*, but *habitus*.

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