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Argument structure, alignment and auxiliaries between Latin and Romance. A diachronic syntactic account

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Citation

Migliori, L. (2016, June 8). *Argument structure, alignment and auxiliaries between Latin and Romance. A diachronic syntactic account*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Utrecht. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/40052>

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Issue Date: 2016-06-08

Introduction

*Similia vocibus esse ac syllabis confitemur,
dissimilia esse partibus orationis videmus.*
[M. T. Varro, *De lingua latina* X, 7]

1. The Latin language and the definition of alignment

This work focuses on the Latin language with the aim of examining both its syntactic characteristics and the relation between syntax and morphology. The starting point for this investigation is the observation of systematic morphological alternations displayed by the Latin verbal system (see Table I and Table II):

Table I - Transitive verbs

	Active	Inactive
<i>Infectum</i> (imperfective aspect)	nec-o murder-1.sg "I murder"	nec-o-r murder-1sg-r "I am (being) murdered"
<i>Perfectum</i> (perfective aspect)	neca-v-i murder-perf-1.sg "I murdered/ I have murdered"	necatus sum murdered-PP BE-1.sg "I was/ have been murdered"

Table II - Deponent verbs

	Active	Inactive
<i>Infectum</i> (imperfective aspect)	*medito meditate-1.sg	medit-o-r meditate-1sg-r "I meditate/am meditating"
<i>Perfectum</i> (perfective aspect)	*medita-v-i meditate-perf-1.sg	meditatus sum meditated-PP BE-1.sg "I (have) meditated"

Table I and II show that the active and inactive paradigms differ as far as their morphology is concerned. The active paradigm includes active (transitive) forms, characterized by the presence of an agentive sentential subject.

Morphologically, these verbs exhibit a set of active endings in the *infectum* paradigm (cf. *-o* in Table I) and synthetic perfect forms in the *perfectum* (cf. *necavi* in Table I). Conversely, the inactive paradigm, generally characterized by the absence (or a low grade) of agentivity, displays *-r* endings in the *infectum* (cf. *neco-r* in Table I) and a periphrastic perfect formed by past participle + auxiliary ESSE “be” (cf. *necatus sum* in Table I) in the *perfectum*. Table II shows that deponent verbs always occur with *-r* morphology in the *infectum* (cf. *medito-r* in Table II) and with a periphrastic perfect in the *perfectum* (cf. *meditatus sum* in Table II). Therefore, these verbs morphologically look the same as passive forms, even though they are not passive. For this reason, deponents have often been defined in the literature as an anomalous class, having “passive” morphology and “active” meaning (Gildersleeve & Lodge 1895; Allen & Greenhough 1903; Palmer 1954; Kühner & Stegmann 1955; Leumann, Hofmann & Szantyr 1963; Panhuis 2006, among others).

This study will raise the issue of the nature of the morphological alternations exemplified in Table I and II: does different morphological marking reflect distinct syntactic configurations or is it just arbitrary? In particular, the investigation will examine the syntactic structure of deponent verbs, a widely debated topic in the literature thanks to their apparently heterogeneous character (Flobert 1975; Gianollo 2000, 2005, 2010; Baerman 2006, 2007; Embick 1997, 1998, 2000; Danckaert 2012a, Weisser 2014, among others). It will be claimed that inactive morphology on these verbs is syntactically motivated, as they consistently display the properties of non-agentive verbal items.

The proposed analysis of the Latin verbal domain will also allow the comparison of Latin with other related and non-related languages. More specifically, the issue of the definition of alignment in Latin will be raised, i.e. the way in which this language groups and marks arguments. The question will be whether Latin is entirely a nominative/accusative language or if it instead displays properties that can be related to other alignment types. On the basis of the observations made about the verbal domain, it will be claimed that Latin also displays the properties of an active/inactive system (cf. La Fauci 1997, 1998; Zamboni 2000; Ledgeway 2012). Finally, the analysis of the Latin verbal system will provide a more detailed understanding of the verbal spine, providing us with information concerning its syntactic structure.

2. Alignment, argument structure and auxiliaries between Latin and Romance

This study will also focus on a number of Latin constructions and their development from Latin to Romance. More specifically, the investigation will examine perfective periphrases (1), possessive constructions (2), and modal/deontic construals (3)-(4):

- (1) a. multi mortales in carcere
many-m.3.pl.NOM. mortal-m.pl. in jail-m.sg.ABL.
necati sunt [Sall. *Iug.* 31,7]
murdered-PP-m.pl.NOM. BE-3.pl
“Many mortals have been murdered in jail”
- b. quid Athenis exquisitum habeam [Cato, *ad fil.* Frg. 1]
what Athens.f.pl.ABL. found-PP HAVE-pres.subj-1sg
“What I have found out in Athens”
- (2) a. est patri
BE-pres.ind-3.sg. father-m.sg.DAT.
meo domus [Pl. *Aul.* 187]
my-m.sg.DAT. house-f.3.sg.NOM.
“My father has a house”
- b. habet domum formosam [Sen. *Luc.* 87, 5]
HAVE-pres.ind-3.sg. house-f.sg.ACC. beautiful.f.sg.ACC.
“He has a beautiful house”
- (3) a. dicenda tibi sunt hodie [Liv. IV 40, 9]
say-GRDV-n.pl.NOM 2.sg-DAT. BE-3.pl. today-Adv.
“These things have to be said by you today = You have to say these things today”
- b. pugnandum habebam [Sen. *Contr.* 10,2]
fight-GRD.n.sg.ACC. HAVE-impf.ind-1.sg
“I had to fight”
- (4) a. nec sit mihi
and not BE-2.sg.subj.pres. 1.sg-DAT.
credere tantum! [Verg. *Ecl.* X, 4]
believe-pres.ind. that much-Adv.
“that I don’t have to believe up to that point!”
- b. de divis [...] habeo dicere [Cic. *Deor.* 1, 63, 25]
about gods-m.pl.ABL. HAVE-1.sg say-pres.inf.
“I could/have to add something about the gods”

As shown by these examples, all these construals have a periphrastic form, in which either the auxiliary *ESSE* (“be”)—see (1-a), (2-a), (3-a), (4-a)—or auxiliary *HABERE* (“have”) occurs. In this study, the syntactic structure of these constructions will be examined, along with the reasons that determine the distribution of these two functional elements. Secondly, the discussion will look at the forces that determined either their Romance outcomes or their disappearance in modern varieties. More specifically, the claim will be made that the properties of these construals as well as their diachronic change was the result of two interconnected factors: alignment and argument structure. The development of auxiliation, which appears to be consistent across Romance, can be seen as a consequence of the interaction between these two factors. The aim is to understand these diachronic developments within a coherent and broad picture taking into consideration the whole verbal system, instead of considering them as isolated phenomena.

3. The Latin language and linguistic studies

A significant proportion of the linguistic studies concerning the Latin language are based on a traditional philological approach, aiming principally to detect and describe a number of phenomena. This method is exhaustive as far as descriptive adequacy is concerned: it provides a comprehensive and detailed account of linguistic and stylistic facts, often with the robust support of relevant quantitative evidence. Moreover, these studies provide an enormous amount of highly reliable linguistic data, thanks to their highly accurate investigation of the philological component, with relevant historical and geographical facts also taken into account. On the other hand, this approach often does not aim to provide structural accounts of the linguistic facts that it reveals; it is therefore solid and reliable as far descriptive adequacy is concerned, but appears to be weaker from an explanatory perspective.

Many of the problems left open by descriptive grammars have been solved by the historical linguistic tradition which has attempted to provide an explanation for a number of phenomena by looking at Latin from a diachronic perspective. This holds both for works which have focused on the Proto-Indo-European origin of Latin (Leumann 1929; Meillet 1933; Palmer 1954; Cupaiuolo 1991; Clackson 2007; Sihler 2008, among others) and for studies which have looked at the diachronic development of Latin itself, with a Romance perspective (Rohlf 1956; Väänänen 1966; Serianni 2000; Clackson & Horrocks 2007, among others). These works have made a huge contribution to the field, especially in terms of the diachronic development of phonology

and morphology. As far as syntax is concerned, these studies have often looked at it on a purely descriptive basis. Consider, for instance, Bennet's seminal work on early Latin syntax (1910-1914), which provides us with an impressive amount of data concerning Latin constructions. On the other hand, the perspective adopted often looks at linguistic facts as isolated phenomena and not as sub-parts of a linguistic system characterized by a structural coherence. In this sense, many facts and possible correlations are overlooked, so that a coherent syntactic account is missing.

Nowadays the historical-philological approach is often used within linguistic studies of Latin and other ancient languages. Well-known older works still constitute the main reference point for most studies (Gildersleeve & Lodge 1895; Allen & Greenough 1903; Kühner & Stegmann 1955; Leumann, Hofmann & Szantyr 1963, among others), and the same method has also been adopted in numerous recent works regarding several aspects of the Latin language (Panhuis 2006; Clackson 2007, 2011¹; Pezzini 2015, forthcoming). This traditional method is essential to the accurate understanding of an ancient language, as it offers a detailed and frequently reliable description of the data set. Nonetheless, a broader look at the language from a formal perspective raises some questions that cannot be answered through the mere description of the data. More specifically, many issues concerning the syntactic properties and the development of Latin as a system have been left open by this approach. Even works which have looked at this language from a more structural perspective (e.g. Lehmann 1973), do not offer a formal explanation for the facts subjected to analysis.

More recently, Latin has been the subject of more theoretical studies that have tried to give a formal answer to a number of unsolved problems. A significant example in this respect is the work of Harm Pinkster (1971, 1984, 1987, 1990 *et seq.*), which has enriched the discussion on Latin linguistics with a novel examination of the empirical material with reference to a variety of phenomena. The most relevant fruit of his work to date is the *Latijnse Syntaxis en Semantiek* (1984), which deals for the first time with a number of problems from a formal perspective. The very same approach has been adopted in his new *Oxford Latin Syntax*, the first volume of which was published in 2015. This study looks at the whole Latin system from a broad syntactic point of view. Another work that should be mentioned in this regard is Bauer's structural analysis (2000), the aim of which is to analyse Latin syntactic constructions

¹ Note, however, that the chapter written by Horrocks for this volume is characterized by a more formal approach.

from a wide Indo-European perspective. The approach is thus comparative and diachronic at the same time.

The first generative works² on Latin (Calboli 1980, 1986 *et seq.*, Bertocchi & Orlandini 1995, Bertocchi, Orlandini & Maraldi 2001, Oniga 2004; Bortolussi 2006; Kroon 2010) represent a significant step towards the formal analysis of this ancient language. Moreover, the extensive work by Baldi and Cuzzolin (2009-2011) has provided a solid basis for a systematic syntactic analysis of different domains of the Latin language (even though not always in purely formal terms). Another important step is the *Blackwell History of the Latin Language* (Clackson & Horrocks 2007), in which significant space is given to syntax alongside the philological-historical account. In addition to the studies mentioned, which provide us with a comprehensive view of Latin, a number of theoretical papers and books have recently focused on specific aspects of the language, such as the left periphery (Danckaert 2014b), the nominal domain (Galdi 2004, Gianollo 2007; Iovino 2012; Giusti & Iovino in press; Giusti, Iovino & Oniga in press), word order (Danckaert 2012b), the verbal domain (Cennamo et al. 2015; Gianollo 2000, 2005, 2010 *et seq.*; Danckaert 2012a, 2014b), quantifiers (Gianollo 2013), verb/subject agreement (Migliori, submitted).

An analogous method has also been adopted in a number of studies focusing on the changes that occurred between Latin and Romance. A deeper understanding of the properties characterizing the Latin system has provided relevant information on the diachronic linguistic changes that occurred around the Late Imperial Age and the beginning of the Romance era. This can be seen in works that have looked at the internal organization of the language and at its morphological marking, for instance La Fauci (1997, 1998 *et seq.*), Zamboni (2000), Ledgeway (2012), and in studies that have mostly focused on the developments of the verbal and the pronominal domain (Adams 1991; Cennamo 1993, a,b *et seq.*). A seminal work in this domain is Adams' book about social variation in Latin (2013), which considers numerous aspects of the language from a broad and exhaustive historical perspective. This approach has also provided the basis for a cross-linguistic comparison which looks at syntactic structures from both a synchronic and a diachronic point of view (Bauer 2000; Barðdal & Eypórssón 2003, 2009; Barðdal et al. 2013; Kroonen 2014 among others).

² As this study mainly focusses on the study of syntactic structures, this literature review will not mention the many relevant works which have been focusing on Latin semantics.

The aim of the present study will be thus to combine the advantages of the philological-historical perspective with the new insights provided by formal approaches to linguistics. More specifically, the intention will be to obtain a more complete picture of the Latin language, with special attention given to the syntactic properties of its verbal system and the diachronic developments in this domain during the crucial transition to early Romance.

4. Outline of the present study

This dissertation is structured as follows. Firstly, this study will focus on the syntactic analysis of the Latin verbal domain (chapter 2). After a description of its key characteristics, the main hypothesis will be formulated and discussed, together with the supporting empirical evidence. In chapter 3, the development of perfective periphrases between Latin and Romance will be analysed from a syntactic and diachronic perspective. Moreover, the variation characterizing (Italo)-Romance perfective auxiliation will be examined in diachronic terms. Chapter 4 looks at the syntactic properties of other Latin periphrases (possessive and deontic periphrases) and the development of these constructions from Latin to Romance. The final chapter provides concluding remarks.

4.1 Corpus and methodology

For Latin data, the corpus mainly consists of a selection of prose works spanning from early Latin (II c. B. C.) to the early Christian Age (III-IV c.)³. Poetry has generally been excluded from this investigation because of the well-known major variation in the structure of this register of the language. However, comedy, although written in verse, has frequently been taken into account: despite the restrictions imposed by the meter, it can still be considered a fairly reliable indication of the language, at least as far as syntactic constructions are concerned. Since we are mostly interested in the development of auxiliation, which is generally not meter-related, some evidence from drama (in particular from comedy) has also been examined. This has been done with caution, always taking into account the caveat concerning the meter and the wholly literary character of the language of comedy.

With regard to methodology, it is clear that the syntactic investigation of a dead language imposes some significant restrictions on the set of data, in that

³ A complete list of all the sources mentioned is provided in the References.

it is not possible to collect synchronic data and check native intuitions. Nonetheless, a well-attested language like Latin still makes it possible to formulate quite reliable generalizations, as a number of patterns appear to be systematic. The core aim is to provide a reliable picture of the Latin verbal system and its properties. From this perspective, the symbol used in generative studies to signal ungrammaticality (*) will here be employed to indicate a consistent and regular non-attestation of a specific form/structure. This systematic negative evidence will be thus considered a strong (though not always conclusive) indication of its absence in the system and, therefore, of its ungrammatical character.

The editions used for this linguistic investigation are those by Teubner (*Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina*), except where otherwise indicated.