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

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Conclusions

In this study, the Latin verbal system has been brought under analysis both from a synchronic and from a diachronic perspective. At a synchronic level, the properties of the Latin clausal domain have been examined, with special attention to the relationship between syntax and morphology. As for diachrony, the focus has turned onto the structural development of a number of periphrastic constructions between Latin and Romance. In light of the linguistic facts analysed in this study, it has been possible to argue that the Latin verbal domain was characterized by an active/inactive alignment opposition throughout, the role of which was crucial both for the properties of the Latin system in itself and for the rise of Romance periphrases. The contribution of the present investigation is thus multifaceted. On the one hand, it provided us with a better understanding of the Latin empirical evidence in syntactic terms; on the other hand, it shed light of the changes occurred during the passage to Romance. Finally, the observation and analysis of these linguistic facts brought theoretical insights as far as the internal structure of the verbal clause is concerned.

1. The Latin verbal domain

In the first section, the properties of the Latin verbal domain have been examined from a syntactic point of view. More specifically, the attention has been focused on the occurrence of Latin *-r* morphology and on its relationship to argument structure. The investigation has shown that this morphological marking has to be understood as a signal of an inactive syntactic structure, both in the durative paradigm, where it is shown up as *-r* endings, and in the perfective conjugation, where inactive structures are reflected by an analytic form. This study has illustrated that this holds for all cases in which Latin displays a non-prototypical agentive sentential subject, thus both for passive constructions and for deponents, which have been shown to be generally non-agentive as well (*contra* much literature which has argued in favour of a transitive structure for this verb class). Therefore, the Latin verbal domain consistently exhibits the properties of an active/inactive system as the

presence of an A/S_A is systematically distinguished from the occurrence of a S_O. Latin behaves thus like numerous several languages that display a dedicated morphological paradigm for marking inactive structures. Moreover, it has been observed that the verbal classes involved in inactive constructions share relevant syntactic similarities at a cross-linguistic level. The empirical evidence, both related and unrelated languages, seems thus to provide us with further support for this analysis of the Latin data. Finally, the linguistic facts under analysis have provided us with solid arguments to support the view of the *vP*-field as a functional domain encoding the properties of diverse verbal items. It is, in fact, within this field that the syntactic-semantic features of verbal roots are computed, determining the characteristics of the whole verbal clause, among which the compatibility or the incompatibility with the active functional head (Voice).

2. The development of Romance analytic perfects and of other periphrases: argument structure and auxiliation.

The detection of an active/inactive alignment contrast within the Latin verbal domain has also made it possible to understand its development between Latin and Romance. In particular, this investigation has focussed on a number of analytic construals: on the constructions expressing perfective interpretation, on the ones conveying the idea of possession and on verbal periphrases indicating necessity/obligation. The analysis of these periphrases has shown that the active/inactive alignment opposition was present and consistent in all these cases as well, confirming the pervasive character of this contrast within the Latin verbal domain. All these constructions, in fact, systematically exhibit a distinction between an active (generally agentive) construction *vs.* an inactive inagentive one. Moreover, it has been observed that this contrast is always morphologically expressed by the alternation of HABERE (active) *vs.* ESSE (inactive), which both display the properties of functional elements in Latin.

The diachronic development of these constructions between Latin and Romance is tightly related to argument structure as well. In chapter 3, it has been illustrated that the rise of Romance periphrastic perfects, and in particular the extension of HABERE as a perfect tense marker, has to be understood as a consequence of the syntactic reanalysis of experiential deponents. Thanks to this process a new active/inactive system rose, the border of which was at different syntactic height with respect to Latin. In other words, also in the clausal domain it is possible to observe relevant

alignment changes between Latin and Romance. This fact also seems to be confirmed by the development and distribution of nowadays perfective auxiliation patterns, which reflect different stages of a predictable diachronic path. The last step of this evolution can be identified in the stage where auxiliary HAVE functions as universal perfective element, reflecting the loss of salience of the inactive element.

Latin possessive and deontic constructions can be claimed to have followed an analogous development. In both cases, it is possible to observe the gradual disappearance of the Latin inactive counterpart: this suggests that the extension of the active domain first and the rise of the nominative/accusative alignment later on played a decisive role for the Romance outcomes of these periphrases as well. In this sense, these changes cannot be seen as isolated phenomena, but have to be considered as the various manifestations of a deeper change concerning the whole linguistic system in a consistent and systematic way. Finally, the analysis and investigation of these diachronic facts confirmed, once again, that syntactic reanalysis is one of the major forces at the basis of language change.

3. Concluding remarks and future research

In light of the analysed linguistic facts, it is possible to claim that the Latin verbal system displays systematic structural properties, as it exhibits a consistent opposition between agentive and inagentive contexts. This characteristic has been shown to have been decisive both at a synchronic and at a diachronic level. Latin can thus typologically be classified as a language characterized by the competition of different kinds of alignment: although the nominative/accusative opposition is predominant, numerous properties of an active/inactive system are present the language. A careful linguistic analysis of Latin linguistic phenomena should, therefore, take this relevant fact into account.

The conclusions reached in this study also open the path for future research concerning several topics in linguistics. The syntactic analysis of dedicated morphological marking of inactive contexts detected in Latin could be, in fact, be broadened in relation to a number of interesting cross-linguistic phenomena, which can deepen our knowledge of the verbal domain, like differential subject marking, non-canonical subjects and the syntax of middle constructions, just to mention some. The debate about these phenomena, widely attested in the languages of the worlds, mainly concerns their syntactic *vs.* morphological status. The properties of the Latin forms detected in this

study seems to push in the direction of a syntactic analysis of these facts. Moreover, the synchronic and diachronic analysis of Latin deponents makes it possible to make a more extensive comparative analysis with other languages displaying an analogous verb class, like Albanian and Greek, for instance. The development of verbal structures from Latin to Romance opens the way for the diachronic analysis of numerous connected aspects as, for instance, the changes concerning other non-finite verbal forms (*i.e.* infinitive, participles). The study of these related diachronic facts will also shed light on the mechanisms which play a crucial role as far as language change is concerned. Finally, the individuation of an active/inactive alignment contrast in Latin has put this language on a wider typological perspective which provides us with novel diachronic insights. This suggests the possibility of using this tool for several purposes like language classification, diachronic reconstruction and linguistic comparison both with related and with non-related languages.