YES IN LATIN: ON REPETITIONS AND PARTICLES

Tomaž Potočnik, UCL

For a speaker of a modern European language the tiny word *yes* is so indispensable that it is hard to imagine a dialog without it. Among linguists, it is known that some languages, notably Irish, manage without it, using the echo response instead. The situation in Latin is more complicated. When asked how to say yes in Latin, a Latinist will usually come up with a Plautine or Terentian term, such as *ita vero* or *sic*, or they will say that repetition of the verb compensates for *yes*. Clearly, all of these options are present in the corpus. But what is the precise relationship between these competing constructions? Since yes typically occurs in spoken language and since historical linguists are forced to work with written sources, this question is a difficult one to answer. A careful reading of Latin comedies—while being aware of the limitations of using written sources to study a phenomenon which typically occurs in spoken language—reveals that these confirmation strategies—e.g., *ita*, *sic*, echo response, *maxime*—are not interchangeable, but rather depend on specific pragmatic conditions.

In the paper, I shall focus on the relationship between the echo response and several positive response particles. The corpora I am using, Plautine and Terentian, are robust enough to permit studying both intra-speaker and inter-speaker variation. Preliminary findings show a difference in usage between Plautus and Terence. How is one to explain the difference and what does it say about the diachronic development?

I will also address the following questions:

- To what an extent can the record of such a phenomenon in the works of literature be considered a reflection of the actual language use in the first place?
- Is it possible to form diachronic conclusions based on a synchronic study?
- What is the precise relationship between the echo response and the positive particles?

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