

## From Latin to Romance peripheries: discourse-driven change and typology.

Matteo Fiorini (University of Utah)

[matteo.fiorini@utah.edu](mailto:matteo.fiorini@utah.edu)

### 1. Introduction

- The paper discusses the change of Latin word order – from an underlying (canonical) SOV (1) to a generalized SVO word order in Romance Languages (2) – as resulting from discourse-related factors.

- (1) Paulus librum scripsit **LATIN**  
P. book.ACC write.PST  
‘Paul wrote a book.’
- (2) a. Paolo scrisse un libro **ITALIAN**  
P. write.PST a book
- b. Paul ha escrit un llibre **CATALAN**  
P. aux.3SG write.PST a book
- c. Pablo escribió un libro **SPANISH**  
P. write.PST a book
- d. Paul a écrit un livre **FRENCH**  
P. aux.3SG write.PRT a book
- e. Pavel a scris o carte **ROMANIAN**  
P. aux.3SG write.PRT a book  
‘Paul wrote a book.’

- The different orders attested in Latin convey different interpretations (see Vincent, 1998; Oniga, 2004; Polo, 2004; Devine & Stephens, 2006; Ledgeway, 2011, *i.a.*).  
→ The progressive crystallization of a VO ordering from the basic OV one stems from the discourse-configurational nature of Latin.
  - Pragmatically motivated structural and ordering variation is attested synchronically (É. Kiss, 1995, *i.a.*) and diachronically (Hinterhölzl, 2009, *i.a.*);
  - Change affected by information-structural factors results in the development of the so-called “peripheries” of the clause (Rizzi, 1997; Belletti, 2004; Frascarelli & Ramaglia, 2013), i.e., the area of the clause encoding pragmatically prominent/informationally-relevant/discourse-related information.

### 2. Premises

- The progressive establishment of the VO as the most frequent ordering in Romance is often investigated as resulting from interconnected morphosyntactic developments:
    - The gradual reduction of the Latin case system results in a more rigid word order;
    - The increased rigidity of word order makes the case system redundant.
- **Frequent claim:** the development of prepositions triggers a general shift from a synthetic to a more analytical system (Schwegler, 1990; Posner, 1996; Zamboni, 2000).

**2.1 Problematic interpretation of the phenomenon.** While there is consensus over the change, a number of issues in the way to account for the descriptive facts emerge.

- Typological issues for the lack of homogeneity within the Romance group;
- Several analytic features are already present in Latin; e.g., propositions; perfective passive constructions, and synthetic ones developed in Romance; e.g., clitics; diminutive forms (Ledgeway, 2011 for a comprehensive list of processes);
- Some constructions developed in the opposite sense (3):

- (3) a. habeo      a cantare    **LATIN**  
       have.1SG    to sing  
       ‘I will sing.’ Lit. ‘I have to sing.’  
       b. canter-ò                      **ITALIAN**  
       sing.have.1SG.FUT  
       ‘I will sing.’  
       c. canter-ai                      **FRENCH**

**2.2 Non-configurational to configurational.** Ledgeway (2011) proposes that these changes are not, in fact, interrelated but independent developments. The driving force for such changes is argued to be related to a parametric switch in the syntactic structure of Latin from non-configurational to configurational (see Danckaert, 2017 for a discussion of other proposals along this line; also, Ledgeway, 2012, for different conclusions and analysis).

- Supporting evidence signaling the lack of hierarchical structure in Latin:
  - (i) The freedom in the reorganization of the internal structure of constituents and their distribution within the clause;
  - (ii) It is attested the presence of individual phrases inflected or marked by case independently.
- Counterexamples and theoretical issues:
  - (i) Re-ordering within phrases is allowed and common (4):

(4) a. Puerile      specie /      aetas      puerilis                      **LATIN**  
       boyish.ABL aspect.ABL/ age.NOM    boyish.NOM  
       ‘Of boyish appearance.’/ ‘the age of boyhood.’ [Ledgeway, 2011. 390 (1e)]  
       b. Di infantile aspetto / età      infantile                      **ITALIAN**  
       of childish aspect / age    childish  
       ‘Of boyish aspect.’ [Lit. Italian] / ‘the age of boyhood.’ [Stand. Italian]  
       c. non est ista mea culpa /      praedia      mea      **LATIN**  
       not is this my.NOM guilt.NOM/ estates.ACC my.ACC  
       ‘This is not my fault.’/ ‘my estates.’ [*ibid.* (1d)]  
       d. non è mia responsabilità /      è colpa mia                      **ITALIAN**  
       not is my responsibility / is fault my  
       ‘It is not my responsibility.’/ ‘it is my fault.’

- (ii) Albeit rare, sub-constituent case marking is attested (e.g., Wanyjirra, Bower, 2014). Possible explanations include agreement and case assignment properties unrelated to the (non-)configurationality of the language;
  - (iii) A Distributed Morphology account could explain the NP-internal case marking (see, Arregi & Nevins, 2012), and a minimalist approach predicts constituent-internal ordering variation of the type listed above (Gallego, 2014; Chomsky, Gallego, & Ott, 2019).
- An analysis based on discourse-configurationality can better account for the data (see Danckaert, 2017 for additional data and evidence in favor of this claim).

### 2.3 Latin is a Discourse Configurational Language.

- Canonical word order = SO(IO)V (Bauer [1995] for typological discussion; Oniga [2004] for corpus analysis; Devine & Stephens [2006] for extensive discussions; Ramat [1980] and Hermann [2000] for alternative typological categorizations).
- Rich ordering variation (5):

- (5) a. Puer puellam uocat  
 boy.NOM girl.ACC call.3SG.PRS  
 ‘the boy calls the girl.’  
 b. Puellam puer uocat  
 c. Puer uocat puellam  
 d. Puellam uocat puer  
 e. Uocat puer puellam  
 f. Uocat puellam puer

- Orderings that deviate from SOV = different pragmatic readings (Vincent, 1998; Salvi, 2004; Polo, 2004; Oniga, 2004), e.g., topics (6), and *foci* (7) can be fronted, arguably in (a) peripheral position(s) (Danckaert, 2017)<sup>1</sup>:

- (6) [Hoc qual-e si-t]], quaes-o, considera.  
 this.NOM.N.SG how-NOM.N.SG be.PRS.SBJV-3SG ask-PRS.1SG consider.1SG  
 ‘Consider what this is like, I ask you.’ [Cic. Att. 12.35.7 in Danckaert 2017, p. 20 (51)]
- (7) [Reliqu-um qu-od eri-t]], latitudin-i de-tur.  
 remaining-NOM.N.SG what-NOM.N.SG be-FUT.3SG breadth-DAT give.PASS.PRS.3SG  
 ‘What remains should correspond to the breadth.’ [Vitr. 4.7.1, in *ibid.*, (52)]

→ Languages where information structure-related factors directly affect the syntactic structure = “Discourse Configurational languages” (É. Kiss, 1995)

- Latin is a discourse-configurational language (In line with Danckaert, 2012; 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> I am ignoring here important facts regarding the exact position, which may vary depending on the stage of the language, characterizing the “V2” ordering of Latin. A comprehensive description and analysis can be found in Wolfe (2020).

Information structure can affect diachronic change in word order (Hinterholz, 2009, 2014; Ferraresi & Lühr, 2010; É. Kiss, 2014; De Bastiani & Hinterholz, 2020; De Bastiani, 2022; *i.a.*)  
 → worth investigating for the Romance group.

### 3. OV > VO results from the switch from discourse configurational to configurational languages with flexible peripheries.

- Since the Republican Era (509-29BC): frequent left-dislocation of thematic elements (Halla-aho, 2018).
  - Theme > Rheme distribution surviving in most early Romance languages (8), which exhibit V2-like properties (Haiman & Benincà, 1992; Ledgeway, 2011; but see Salvi, 2020; Wolfe, 2020 for V1 languages and constructions):

(8) a. lo cavaliere prese i marchi	OLD TOSCAN
the knight took the marks	
b. autre chause ne pot li roi trouver	OLD FRENCH
other thing not could the king find	
c. a questo resposse Iasone	OLD NEAPOLITAN
to this replied Jason	
d. d' algunas cousas me calarei	OLD PORTUGUESE
of some things myself I-shall-remain.quiet	
e. molt se marvellà tota la gent de la grandhumilitate	OLD CATALAN
muchself marvelled all the people of the great humility	

[Ledgeway 2011. (17)]

- “Informational V2” = the first element is interpreted as the topic of the structure.  
 → 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century: left edge pragmatically constrained and fix sentential core (theme-rheme/focus-background structures, see Lehmann [1992]).  
 → Consistently V > O unmarked order.  
 → Frequently dislocated: non-derived position for the subject in the sentential core (Ledgeway, 2011), possibly as a consequence of the emergence of the [epp] feature on T°.

**3.1 Development of specialized discourse-oriented position.** Cross- and intra-linguistic micro-variation is attested in the distribution of dislocated elements. In addition to the higher portion of the clause, arguably employed for the V2-ordering described above, around the 14<sup>th</sup>, Romance languages developed an area hosting information-structure items correspondent to the edge of the vP phase (Poletto, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The mechanism for the development of this area must be left for future studies, however, a plausible analysis based on frequent extrapositions is discussed in É. Kiss (2014) for the evolution of the left periphery of Hungarian.

Different informationally relevant items are organized as follows:

- Thematic elements:

(i) dislocated above the subject (8), in C, as in topic-prominent languages (see Wolfe, 2020 for a discussion of the precise landing site in a cartographic perspective);

(ii) dislocated via clitic left dislocation, as exemplified by the *placiti cassinesi* (9):

- (9) Sao ko **kelle terre** [...] trenta anni **le** possette parte Sancti Benedicti. **OLD ITALIAN**  
 ‘I know those lands [...] have been owned by St. Benedict’s abbey for 30 years’.  
 [placiti cassinesi, ca. 960-963]

(iii) attested topics (“shifting topic” in the sense of Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl [2007]) appearing in postverbal position (10):

- (10) Quando Febus intese la buona volontà **OLD ITALIAN**  
 when Phoebus understand.PST.3SG the good will  
 del pagano[...] parlò **Febus** col pagano di molte aventure  
 of-the pagan speak.PST.3SG Phoebus with-the pagan of many adventures  
 ‘When Phoebus understood the good intention of the pagan [...]. Phoebus spoke with the pagan about many adventures.’ [Palamedés pisano, in Ciconte 2018 (1d)]

- Rhematic elements:

(i) Preverbal (left-peripheral) focus position (11):

- (11) Sire, fait Gualehoz, qui estes vos?  
 Sir, make-PRES.3SG G. who be-PRES.2PL you  
 – Biaus sire, uns chevaliers sui.  
 fair sir a knight be-PRES.1SG  
 ‘Sir, said G., who are you? Fair Sir, I am a knight.’ [Lancelot du Lac, Ingham 2018. (13a)]

(ii) Postverbal one (low peripheral) focus position (12):

- (12) O volez vous aler? **OLD FRENCH**  
 Where want-PRES.2PL you go-INF  
 Dame, fait il, je voil aler jusqu’ en ce bois.  
 lady make-PRES.3SG he I want.PRES.1SG go-INF as-far in that wood  
 ‘Where do you want to go? Lady, he said, I want to go to that wood.’  
 [Lancelot du Lac, Ingham 2018. (15)]

- Emphatic particles:

(i) Clause-internal distribution (13):

- (13) ... car ce qu'il fet de bien si vient de la grace et  
 Since that what-he do.3SG of good SI come.3SG from the grace and  
 del conseil dou saint esperit  
 of-the advice of-the holy spirit'  
 'Since what of good he does does come from the grace and the conseil of the holy  
 spirit.' [Gaal, Wolfe 2018. (25a)]

(ii) Clause-initial distribution (14):

- (14) Si tenoit chascuns une hache  
 SI hold.3SG.PST each an axe  
 'Each held an axe.' [Charrette, *ibid.* (20)]

### 3.2 To sum up.

- 15<sup>th</sup> century = decline of V2 → emergence of pragmatically marked structures with different orders.
- Crystallization of OV and emergence of a dedicated position for subjects in [spec, TP]<sub>EPP</sub>
  - Positions hosting informationally-prominent elements developed externally to the clause and in the postverbal area (as observe, e.g., .
  - Cross- and intra- linguistic variation of number and distribution of elements in one area, the other, or both.

## 4. The development of “peripheries”

- Several factors affect the outcome of the change involving marked structures from Latin:
  - Within the Romance group → two-way typology of “peripheries” developing from Latin {Topic/Focus} > V > {Topic/Focus}
    - (Topic) {Focus} (Topic) > [TP V] > {Focus} > VP
    - (Topic) > [TP V] > Focus > VP
- Case study: Camuno, a Gallo-Romance variety spoken in northern Italy.

### 4.1 Gallo-Romance languages: sentential vs. lexical/syllable stress. Some additional typological considerations:

- (i) Higher acceptability and frequency of clause-internal/in-situ wh-phrases (Kaiser & Quaglia, 2015; Manzini & Savoia, 2015; Cheng & Rooryck, 2000; *i.a.*);
- (ii) Particularly articulated low periphery (Bonan, 2021);
- (iii) Presence of morpho-phonologically heavier elements in stress-shift structures (Neagu & Fiorini, *to appear*; Horváth, 2008; *i.a.*).

**4.2 Camuno.** The stress pattern is characterized by a sentence-final stress which is directly responsible for the higher development of the vP-phase (Chomsky, 2001) area, rather than the C one, in line with findings in Northern Italian Dialects (Ledgeway, 2020).

#### 4.2.1 Preliminaries.

- (i) Focus aligns with main sentence stress (Jackendoff, 1971; Chomsky, 1971);
- (ii) Stress falls on the right edge of the VP in unmarked structure;
- (iii) Sentential stress assignment:
  - i. In an interface-based (Reinhart, 2006) perspective: stress is assigned at phasal boundaries;
  - ii. In a syntactic account (Arregi, 2002; Samek-Lodovici, 2017; *i.a.*), topicalized material is dislocated so that the most embedded element can receive main stress (following Cinque, 1993).

**4.2.2 Data.** Informationally-prominent elements (in the wider sense) mostly occupy clause-internal and postverbal elements (15/18).

- Wh-phrases:

- (15) a. K' e-t dat (\*a Paolo) kwé a Paolo al sera?  
 what have.PRS=CL.2SG given to Paolo what to Paolo the evening  
 'What did you give to Paolo yesterday evening?'  
 b. E-t te scrit (\*esta letera) a ki esta letera se bé  
 have.PRS=CL.2SG you written this letter to whom this letter so well  
 'To whom did you write this letter so well?'  
 c. L' et ciapada **kwando?**  
 CL.3SG have.PRS=CL.2SG taken.PRS when  
 'When did you get it?'  
 d. Te metè-t do **ke?**  
 you put.PST=CL.2SG down what  
 'What did you plant?'

- Foci:

- (16) a. al la majat LA POLENTA ala ho kà al Piero.  
 cl.3sg.m det eat.prt the polenta at=det his house det P.  
 'It is polenta, that Piero ate at his place.'  
 b. l' a majat ALA HO Kà la polenta al Piero.  
 c. l' a majat AL PIERO la polenta ala ho kà.  
 d. \*/??la majat la polenta ALA HO KA' al Piero

- Discourse particles:

- (17) a. (\*po) al Piero (\*po) l' a (po) biit na bira!  
 po the P. po CL.3SG have.3SG po drink.PRT a beer  
 'He just drank a beer (nothing too serious).'
- b. e la ndada (??po) ndoe po?  
 is CL.3SG go.PRT po where po  
 'Where did she go?! (I have no idea!).'

- Negative elements:

- (18) a. al beker l' a mia dat la karne a la htfèta  
 the butcher CL.3SG have.3SG NEG give.PRT the meat to the girl  
 'the butcher didn't give the meat to the girl.'
- b. al Piero l' konoh nigu  
 the P. CL.3SG know nobody  
 'Piero doesn't know anyone.'

**4.2.3 Hypothesis.** Prosody-motivated preference for the lower periphery in Camuno: some evidence from attested asymmetries (19/20).

- Only phonologically heavier forms can attract a shifted stress:

- (19) a. koha/\*ke l' a dat a la htfèta gier hera  
 what/what CL.3SG have.3SG give.PRT to the girl yesterday evening  
 'What is the x such as he gave x to the girl last night?'
- b. ndoè ke l' è ndada ?  
 where that CL.3SG is go.PRT  
 'Where did she go?'
- c. ki ke l' a tfamat?  
 who that CL.3SG have.3SG

- WhPs distribution can be affected by informationally relevant items which, for scope reasons, must align with the stress, but only appearing in sentence-final position:

- (20) hkrie-l la letera a ki po?  
 write.prs= CL.3SG the letter to whom po  
 'To whom did you write the letter?! (...I wonder).'



## 5. Conclusions.

- The paper makes two basic claims:
  - (i) The word order change from Latin to Romance languages stems from the discourse configurational properties of the latter;
  - (ii) The progressive crystallization of the core structure of Latin triggers the development of the areas of the clause hosting pragmatically prominent/informationally relevant/discourse-related elements, i.e., the “peripheries.”

If on the right track, this analysis expands the current literature concerning the relationship between information structure and language change. In particular, the discussion presented here shows that the ordering properties of Latin directly affected Modern Romance. On the one hand, SVO in Romance crystalized for the decline of the central role of discourse-related factors in the organization of the clause. On the other, the pragmatic-driven reorderings within the clause left traces in Modern Romance peripheries.

Furthermore, the paper shows that investigating minority languages – mostly used in colloquial contexts and with no codified writing system – can provide insight into the overall typology of peripheries with no “interference” from codified systems. This is in line with the literature regarding spoken French, which, differently from the written one, often exhibits the properties of Gallo-Romance languages listed above, i.e., wh-phrase *in-situ*.

Future studies will further investigate the typology of the peripheral areas in different Romance groups. In particular, if the proposal for Camuno is correct, most Gallo-Romance languages should exhibit similar traits. On the other hand, languages with more flexible stress systems are expected to share the properties of, e.g., Italian and Spanish, which developed both areas (almost) equally.

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