Note on Latin Grammar

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Chapter 1

Overview

1.1 Historical notes

This note is about Classical Latin and Ecclesiastical Latin. That's to say Old Latin, vulgar Latin (with prototypes of Romance articles), etc. are not discussed.

1.2 Phonology and the writing system

1.3 Parts of speech

1.3.1 Classification

Latin word classes can be defined easily via morphology, and these classes prove to have morphosyntactic significance. Traditionally speaking, word classes with none or poor morphology are called **particles**, and non-particle words can be divided into two large classes: those with similar morphology of prototypical nouns (i.e. **declension**) are **nominals**, while words with similar morphology of prototypical verbs (i.e. **conjugation**) form a uniform class rightfully called **verbs**. Nominals include **nouns** and **adjectives**, the distinction between the two can also be defined morphologically.

Latin particles include **prepositions**, **adverbs**, **interjections**, and **conjunctions**. The adverb class and the preposition class have a large overlap: often a preposition has an intransitive counterpart, which is similar to a prototypical adverb. Conjunctions may be seen as "prepositions for clauses". The functions and etymologies of particles are highly diverse.

Latin nouns, verbs, and adjectives are all open categories. They are able to head constituents, and so are correlatives (though correlatives can be listed in the grammar). The preposition class is closed and is a part of the grammar, just like conjunctions. However, conjunctions are purely functional, while certain prepositions may be argued to head attributive expressions: though prepositions are often said to be markers of a periphrastic case system, the semantics carried by certain Latin prepositions are too complicated for a case system. This is also the case of adverbs: some adverbs seem to be periphrastic markers of TAME categories and therefore may be considered as a part of the grammar, while others seem to carry "real" meanings. Fig. 1.1 is a visualization of the classification of Latin word classes.

> **Box 1.1: Lexical and function classes**
>
> In § 5.1.2 in this note, by words with "real category labels", I mean words that have"real" meanings and serve as lexical heads of constituents (i.e. being surrounded by function words and dependents). Certain adverbs and prepositions have "real category labels", and they appear at the left side in Fig. 1.1. Prepositions can be enumerated and therefore are considered as a part of the grammar, so they are always at the lower side in Fig. 1.1. Other adverbs and prepositions are light in their semantic and are purely functional, so they appear in the southeast corner of Fig. 1.1.

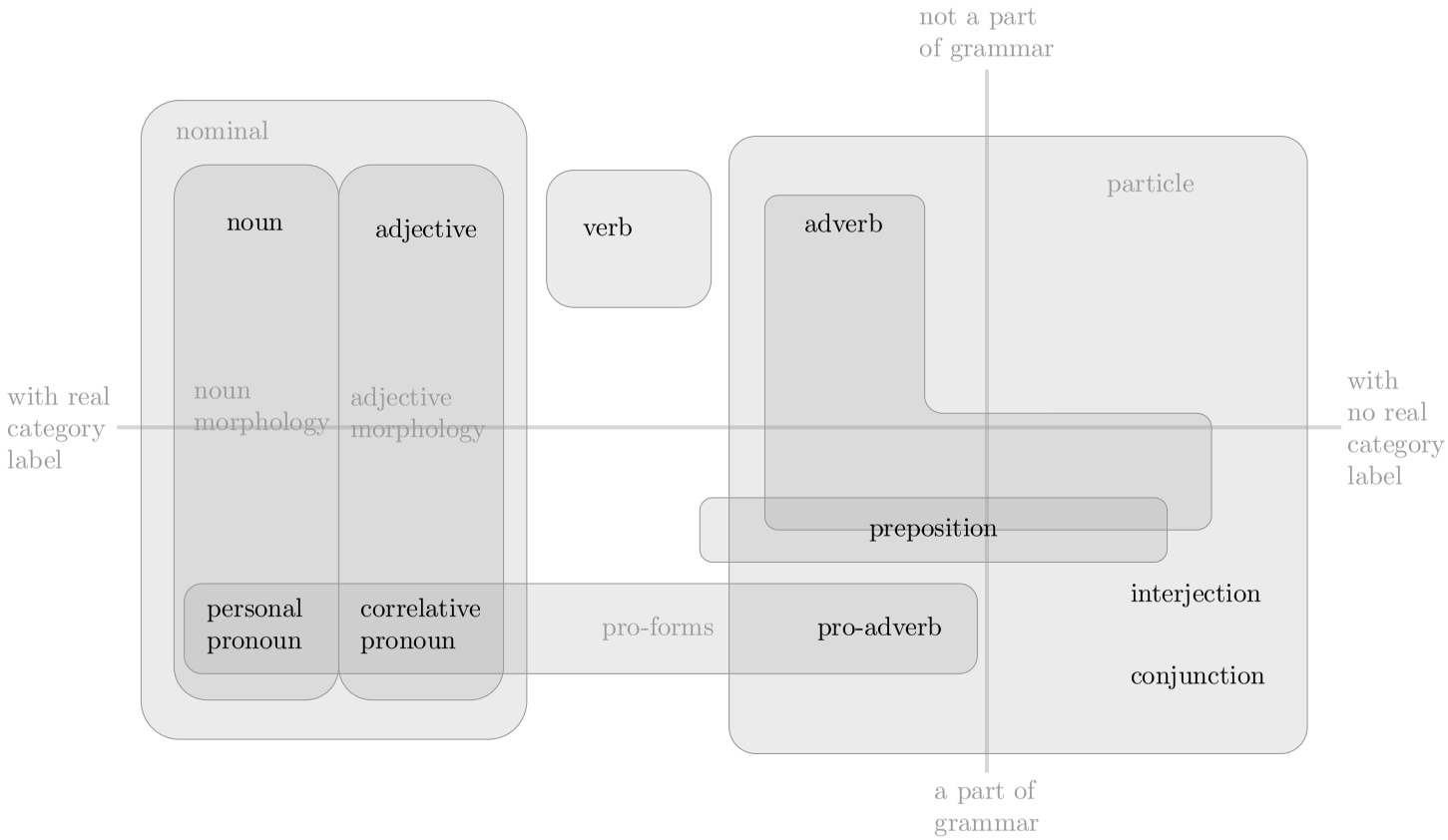

Figure 1.1: Latin word classes

Articles (English *a* or *the*), despite prevalent in other Indo-European languages, are missing in Latin. This, together with the fact that Classical Sanskrit and Old Persian didn't have articles and the Slavic languages still don't, is a strong indicator that proto-Indo-European (PIE) didn't have articles.

1.4 Morphology

Latin has rich morphology, which enables a rather free – but still not completely arbitrary – constituent order. Latin has a clear inflection-derivation distinction. Despite its richness, Latin derivation is largely historical, with meanings of derived forms having shifted and no longer regularly inferrable. Latin inflection is always suffixal, while derivation is predominantly prefixal. Concatenative morphology (affixation and compounding) is prominent but isn't the only morphological device: the following non-concatenative mechanisms are all attested:

- *Reduplication*: formation of the perfect stem (TODO: ref)
- *Subtraction*: dropping of first-conjugation stem-final vowel (§ **??**).
- *Infixation*: TODO: ref The imperfect *-ba-* is sometimes said to be an infix (as well as its counterparts like *-bi-*), though it fits in a concatenative picture of verbal morphology.

These mechanisms, however, are largely historical, just like their concatenative counterparts.

Box 1.2: Constituency deemphasized in Latin grammar

The largely free constituent order means description of Latin grammar is mostly dependency-relation based or BLT-based, because surface-based constituents other than NPs and clauses are hard to define. Still, generative (constituency-based, though the introduction of movements and the structure of Cinque hierarchy gives it certain flavor of dependency grammars) approaches exist for Latin constituent order. There is evidence suggesting Latin is configurational, i.e. has phrase structures (Danckaert, 2017). This is probably not surprising because even the most non-configurational languages show certain degree of configurationality (Niedzielski, 2017; Morris, 2018; Legate, 2002, among others). Then, *how* non-configurational Latin is is a question needing addressing. Is it closer to a typical non-configurational language, say Warlpiri, or is it closer to Japanese where we have more localized scrambling? I will address this question in TODO: ref , though unfortunately, we still does not have a very clear answer.

1.5 Noun phrases and nominal morphology

1.6 Verbal morphology and clause structure

Most clausal grammatical categories are marked on the verbal morphology. Sometimes a grammatical category is there but is not reflected in the morphology. For example, in English we have infinitive clauses, but strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "infinitive verb": the head verb of an infinitive clause has exactly the same form of a non-third person singular present tense verb. This is not the case in Latin. For example, the head verb of a infinitive clause in Latin indeed has a separate position in the paradigm. Thus, grammatical categories of the clause are listed in this section.

1.6.1 The finite paradigm

1.6.1.1 Voice

Latin doesn't have rich valency changing devices: there is only one clause-wide valency decreasing device – passivization – and there is no valency increasing device. Causative constructions are realized by complement clauses, not any change in the argument structure. Whether passivization happens is recorded by the category of **voice**. A verb (and hence the clause headed by it) is therefore either in **active voice**, or in **passive voice**.

Box 1.3: Valency changing

See § 7.1 in this note. From a generative perspective, some languages realize valency changing by a series of *v*P structures, and then the case assignment of the arguments is trivial. Some languages use non-trivial cases of the structural case assignment mechanism to achieve valency changing ("suppressing the agent argument, and then the nominative probe has to choose the patient argument"). Of course, *v*P changes in the second type are still there, which may be a likely source of relevant verb morphology. Naturally, the second group of languages have more restricted valency changing devices; this is the case of Latin.

1.6.1.2 TAME categories

Latin has fused tense and aspect: the composition of three tense values and three aspect values gives nine options, but in Latin, there are only six morphologically distinguished options, as is shown in Table 1.1. When people talk about **tense** in Latin (and in many other Indo-European languages), they are often taking about things like the six options, instead of the past/present/future system.

Table 1.1: Latin tense and aspect

	past	present	future
imperfect	IMPERFECT	PRESENT	FUTURE
simple	PERFECT		
perfect	PLUPERFECT	PERFECT	FUTURE PERFECT

Similar fusion between categories is shown in the category of **mood**. It's the fusion of morphologically marked clause type (declarative and imperative) and morphologically marked modality. The verb morphology of interrogative clauses is exactly the same as declarative clauses: the interrogative clause type is marked by the existence of interrogative *pro*-forms. Thus, there are three moods in finite clauses in Latin: INDICATIVE, SUBJUNCTIVE, and IMPERATIVE. The INDICATIVE is the composition of the declarative/interrogative clause type and the realis modality. The SUBJUNCTIVE mood is the composition of the declarative/interrogative clause type and the irrealis modality. The IMPERATIVE is basically the imperative clause type: it doesn't allow modality marking. Sometimes people say the infinitive is the fourth mood, though it's a non-finite clause.

Box 1.4: The term *mood*

BLT only calls the first category *mood*. Different linguists use the term *mood* and *modality* in radically different ways. In this note I just focus on the common practice in Latin grammar study.

Box 1.5: Mismathc between TAME constructions and fine-grained categories

Atomic TAME features and packaged TAME marking constructions often show certain degree of discrepancy. As we see in Table 1.1, the PERFECT construction may have simple aspect and past tense. Following the example in Grimm (2021), in this note, I use small capitals for the names of attested surface realizations of TAME and the default font for TAME values. (Some other grammars, like Jacques (2021); Friesen (2017), use initial capitals for the former.)

1.6.1.3 Agreement

Latin is a typical nominative-accusative language, both morphologically and syntactically. In finite clauses, there is subject-verb agreement: the number and person of the subject is marked on the main verb (in the case of periphrastic conjugation, the features are marked on the copula).

1.6.1.4 Compatability of categories

There are compatibility problems of these categories. There is no FUTURE tense and FUTURE PERFECT tense in subjunctive clauses, probably for the semantic reason that the future tense already contains certain sense of modality (an event predicted to happen), and thus is not compatible with the SUBJUNCTIVE mood. The IMPERATIVE mood is not compatible with other TAME markings except the PRESENT tense and the FUTURE tense. It's still compatible with the voice category, and allowed persons are second person singular/plural with the PRESENT tense, and second/third person singular/plural with the FUTURE tense. The absence of first person is also probably from semantic origin.

In conclusion, the scheme of the finite verb paradigm of Latin is shown in Fig. 1.2. The exact realization is divided into four conjugation classes, and the details are too complex to show here.

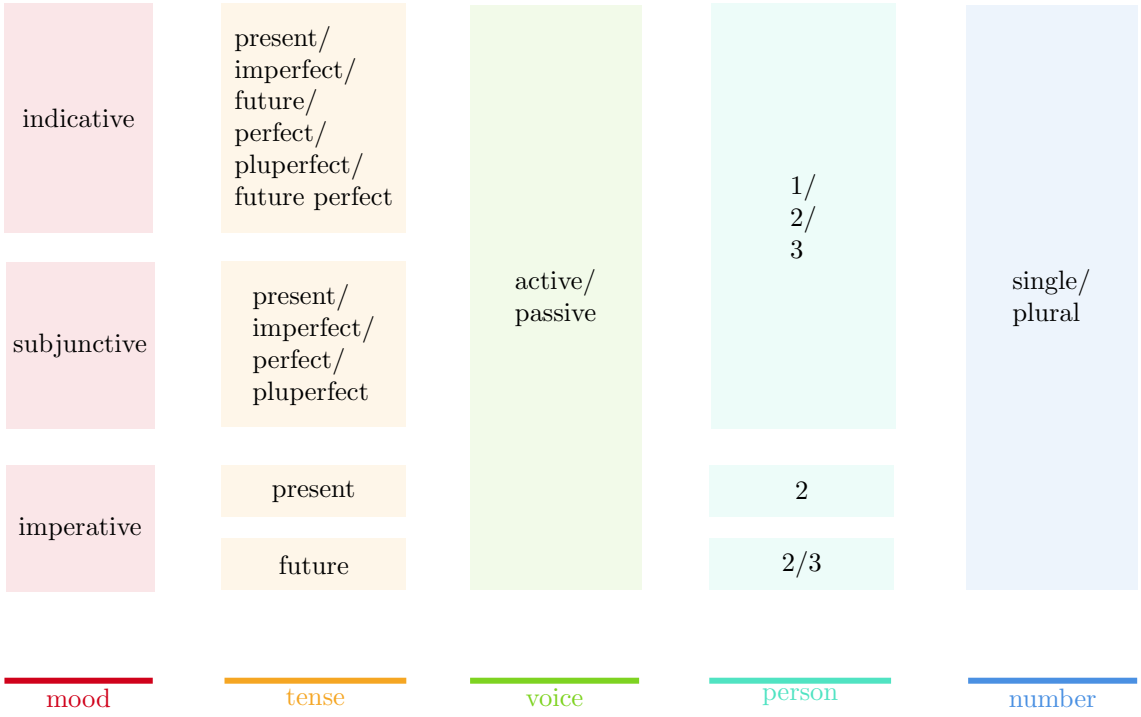

Figure 1.2: The scheme of the finite paradigm

1.6.2 Non-finite forms

1.6.3 Core, oblique, and peripheral arguments

1.7 Clause combining

1.8 Constituent order

Chapter 2

Phonology and the writing system

Chapter 3

Nominal morphology

> **Box 3.1: Testing**
>
> test

Chapter 4

Verb morphology

Box 4.1: About the number of conjugation forms

Different people use the term *conjugation forms* – and count them – in different ways. The most generous – and the most syntactically relevant – way is to view the realization of every possible CP-TP-vP projection as a form of the main verb – the verb root at the core of the CP-TP-vP domains. This results in a paradigm in traditional grammar. The problem with this approach is sometimes two cells in the paradigm are always identical, so recognizing them as two morphological forms is weird. (Also, this is not a good idea when dealing with languages like Japanese.) A stingy linguist may then stipulate that conjugation forms are literally about *forms*, and thus there is no such thing as "the subjunctive form" of English verbs, because in subject *clauses*, the main verb always has the same form as the infinitive.

The generous approach fortunately works in Latin because Latin is morphologically rich. The idea of the stingy linguist may lead one to reject the notion of supine in Latin grammar, but since sometimes a verb lacks TODO: argumentation for a separate supine form, for the same reason the infinitive is recognized as a form independent from the "default form" in English in CGEL, the status of supine as a separate form is recognized in this note.

The analysis of conjugation forms of the verb, theoretically speaking, is more about vocabulary insertion and readjustment rules, instead of the syntax proper.

Box 4.2: About the concept of stem

The notion of **stems** isn't really essential in the description of morphosyntactic: it can well be modeled by environment-dependent vocabulary insertion rules and/or post-syntactic operations. When suppletion rules are still synchronic, what happens may be analyzed as in Embick and Halle (2005), where certain stems receive morphophonological readjustment. When these readjustment rules are fossilized, suppletion – like the English *good*/*better* – may just be the result of conditional insertion, as is outlined in Siddiqi (2009).

This in return gives an predication about suppletion: conditional vocabulary insertion can create unlimited allomorphs, while readjustment rules are restricted in their computational capacity, so real lexical verbs are highly unlikely to have truly irregular suppletion; that is, if a verb is truly suppletive, then it's likely to be As is said in ,

Chapter 5

Valency classes

Chapter 6

Examples of texts

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