

Syntactic Problems in Plautus and Terence

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This term's seminar is dedicated to Plautus and Terence because during the last three years I have written a draft of a book on syntactic problems in these two authors, whose comedies make up 75% of the corpus of early Latin. The book is finished, but not yet submitted, and I am very keen on any feedback!

Week 1: Pregnant elephants: Agreement in gender, number, and person

In Latin, adjectives agree with their nouns in gender, number, and case. But what happens when gender and number are not straightforward? For example, *elephantus* is a masculine noun because it is in the second declension; but what happens when an elephant gets pregnant? And what happens when nouns of different genders or numbers are coordinated?

Week 2: An unnecessary luxury? The passive voice

Wackernagel famously described the passive as an 'unnecessary luxury'. In our second session, we will look at valency and voice. Besides the major patterns that will emerge, we will also be able to observe some curious phenomena: thus, *osculari* 'to kiss' is combined with *cum* 'with' for mutual, consensual kissing, but with the accusative for one-sided, more problematic instances; and for *dare* 'to give', when used in promises, the choice of voice depends on the personality of the speaker. Why should this be the case?

Week 3: 'Stupid' and 'insane': the moods in relative clauses

In early Latin, the subjunctive is not yet as common in relative clauses as it is in the classical period. In relative clauses that are to receive a causal interpretation, the subjunctive is particularly common if the main clause accuses the addressee of being stupid or insane. Why do we find such a strange pattern?

Week 4: Getting stuck in a rut: tenses in temporal clauses

In classical Latin, temporal clauses introduced by *postquam*, *ubi*, or *ut* typically take the perfect indicative, regardless of the tense of the main clause. But why shouldn't the pluperfect be used if the main clause is in the perfect and the subordinate clause refers to an event that precedes it? In early Latin, the classical system is not yet fully in place; we can observe how frequency patterns take on a life of their own and lead to the over-generalization of some tenses.

Week 5: Dealing in hypotheticals: problems of conditional clauses

In classical Latin, 'if you had done' takes the pluperfect subjunctive, and 'if you did' takes the imperfect subjunctive. In Plautus and Terence, such usages can be seen as well, but for 'if you had done', the imperfect subjunctive is still possible, and for 'if you did', the present subjunctive is quite common. How and why did these changes happen?

Week 6: Survival of the fittest? Case usage and case syncretism

Our sixth session is dedicated to the early Latin case system; it differs from the classical system in minor, but interesting ways. We will also look at frequency patterns, especially with prepositions, and try to explain how and why the Indo-European separative, instrumental, and locative merged into one case, the Latin ablative. Synchronically, separative usages are in the minority, so why do so many Latin ablative endings continue the Indo-European separative morphologically?

Week 7: Something of an issue: problems with pronouns

In week 7, we turn to personal and possessive pronouns, deictic pronouns, and interrogative and indefinite pronouns. We will examine some suppletion patterns, but we will also ask the question how *quod negotium* (agreeing pronoun) differs from *quid negoti* (pronoun followed by partitive genitive), since these are typically both translated as 'what business'. I will argue that the partitive type gets a 'kind of'-interpretation.

Week 8: More honoured in the breach than the observance? Word order rules

Our final session will deal with word order in the noun phrase. Since pragmatic factors like topic and focus, traditionally considered to be vital for word order, are very often impossible to assess objectively, I will instead concentrate on other factors. We will see that word class and syntactic complexity matter a great deal, but we will also examine the effect of metre. While these eight topics are superficially very different, they do share a common theme: they ask how and why syntactic change happens, and what this tells us about how we acquire and process language.