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## WHY LATIN LANGUAGE IS FUNDAMENTAL IN STUDYING EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Submission Date: December 08, 2023, Accepted Date: December 13, 2023,

Published Date: December 18, 2023

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/ajps/Volume03Issue12-16>

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### ABSTRACT

The development of language is a fascinating study. The ancient Chinese and Egyptians used pictographic languages which took years for the priests and scholars to master. The common working citizen had no time for such study and so remained powerless and able to be exploited. About 1500BC the Phoenicians developed a phonetic alphabet which could be used by the common merchants to conduct their trading businesses. The Greeks learned it from them and further developed it by adding vowels. This phonetic alphabet made people think differently. It encouraged analysis and the development of a

whole written language of interchangeable components.

All the languages that developed from the Latin and Greek root vocabularies function like that. If we don't teach the root meaning of those components, we burden ourselves with the task of learning thousands of individual English words as wholes. By studying Latin can master the components of many languages, including English.

### KEYWORDS

Latin language, Romance languages, Roman Empire, Catholic Church, the spread of Christianity, Latin influence, the language of the Normans, the European syntax.

## INTRODUCTION

Latin language, Latin -lingua -Latina, Indo-European language in the Italic group and ancestral to the modern Romance languages. Originally spoken by small groups of people living along the lower Tiber River, Latin spread with the increase of Roman political power, first throughout Italy, and then

throughout most of western and southern Europe and the central and western Mediterranean coastal regions of Africa. The modern Romance languages developed from the spoken Latin of various parts of the Roman Empire. During the Middle Ages and until comparatively recent times, Latin was the language most widely used in the West for scholarly and literary purposes. Until the latter part of the 20th century its use was required in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.

Latin is a language which has been the most widely used in the entire world's history. More than any other language, it has influenced the languages of Europe and the Americas. Since Latin was the official language of the government of the Roman Empire, its knowledge and use meant promotion and social prominence; it thus became the common language of culture as the Empire spread.

The spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire greatly influenced Latin. Christianity was a religion for all men, rich or poor, and evangelizing went

hand-in-hand with translating. In 390AD, St. Jerome translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate (spoken Latin). Now the Vulgar (spoken by the people) Latin became united with the written language and gave Latin the strength to survive the collapse of the Empire.

For 400 years the Romans ruled Britain and found it necessary to build many military camps, which developed into towns. A form of the Latin word for camp, castra, can be found in a number of town names: Chester, Manchester, Worcester, Lancaster.

A very important period of influence was after the Norman conquest of England in 1066. The language of the Normans was an old form of French, itself descended from Latin. In the course of a few centuries, the English language underwent striking changes and adopted many French (Latin) words.

Because Latin for many years had been the language of learned men, it

became the basis of vocabulary of the sciences and law.

Latin has been the reference language of western Europe for centuries, serving as the source for recurrent waves of direct or indirect influence on the syntax, morphology and lexicon of many national languages. Solodow (2010) addresses the influence of

Latin on the lexicon and the morphology, but does not pay due attention to the role of Latin syntactic patterns in shaping European syntax. More than half a century after Blatt's (1957) seminal paper on "Latin influence on European syntax", an in-depth typology of the various Latinization strategies has yet to be proposed.

This article aims to take a step in that direction, identifying and explaining different types of contact between Latin syntax and the syntax of the western European languages from an historical and geographical perspective. Special attention will be paid to the type of contact and the level of linguistic analysis, the periodization of Latin influence and the role of translation, the actualization of new Latin-based constructions, the question whether the SAE Sprachbund is influenced or determined by Latin-based features, and the repercussions of the study of Latin loan syntax for functionalist explanations of language change.

Contact with Latin manifests itself in several ways. On the one hand, Latin constructions can be directly calqued in the modern languages, with additional morpho-syntactic changes ensuing (Timofeeva 2010; Drinka 2015; Cornillie & Octavio de Toledo 2015). On the other hand, syntactic innovation can also be the result of indirect Latin influence. Certain syntactic alternatives available in the vernacular languages are then favored due to the prestige of the Latin forms (Van de Pol 2012; Castillo Lluch & López Izquierdo

2010). In this case, there is convergence between vernacular structures and the syntactic patterns of Latin. Alternatively, it can be claimed that the syntactic structures of a given European language, although similar/parallel to the Latin ones, conform to the linguistic tradition of Europe, and, hence, are not contact-induced. Such views

are based on the notion of natural communicative strategies (Kuhn 1972), or on corpus studies of periods preceding the times of heavy Latinization (Axel 2007).

From a methodological point of view, the identification of Latinate syntax deserves our attention. We can speak of Latin loan syntax: whenever modern constructions can only be explained by a Latin model because of their special character, e.g. parenthetical that is / esto es / id est; when a construction appears under specific circumstances, e.g. *comme* (Fr.) or *como* (esp.), from the Latin *cum* + subjunctive, which do not appear before the 15th century; when a construction is frequent in translations or learned texts but rare in pre-contact literature, e.g. sentence-final position of the verb; or when the usage of a construction supposed to be of Latin origin is widened (from limited use to extended use), e.g. participles.

A further question concerns the level of analysis needed for the Latin syntax itself. Blatt (1957) gives numerous examples of how the structure of the clause of most written European languages goes back to the

Latin complex sentence (period), with a focus on complementizers and conjunctions. It is to be expected that lower-scale linguistic expressions such as specific auxiliaries and the organization of the noun phrase display a much greater variation across languages, although striking similarities among languages may appear.

Given that Latin has been present in Christian writings and the church hierarchy since their very beginnings, the question arises as to the timing of Latin-based syntactic innovations. Religious respect towards the Latin model was extremely strong in early periods, even in the face of resistance by the Church to the work of the translators as a consequence. Paradoxically, the focus on good Latin gave rise to the development of new vernacular languages (cf. the role of the Cluny network in Wright 1982, legal discourse in Kabatek 2005, etc.). Later bible translations into the national languages played an important role in the spread of Latinate constructions, but it is crucial to look also at literary, legal, and official documents. Of special interest is how writers, judges, and administrators tend to apply Latin syntactic constructs to their respective native languages. And so is the crucial impact that this influence had on the later development of standardized national languages in the Renaissance era.

The societal status of Latin forms varies through time (cf. Carolingian revolution in Drinka 2013; 2015), and the

rise of new forms in the vernacular languages is often found in periods of growing prestige of both Latin and the vernacular language, which indicates the importance of the social and cultural dynamics in language change. The social pressure of the elites to distinguish themselves cannot be ignored, but the creativity of the authors adapting Latin calques is also an important point of attention (cf. syntactic elaboration. Kloss 1967, Cornillie 2014). Thus, it is necessary to identify whether borrowings are literal or functional.

Many Latinate constructions that show up at a certain point in the history of a language are lost at a later stage, e.g. the Accusativus/Nominativus cum Infinitivo (Rabelais: Ils demandoient les cloches leur estre rendues) or the sentence-final position of the verb in subordinate clauses. By contrast, many other constructions survived. For instance, the present-day organization of the sentence by means of discourse markers such as English therefore, then, however, and but, or French donc, mais and or can be attributed to discourse strategies in Latin: at, ergo, autem. The correlation of clauses has also survived the centuries: plus l'âme est divine... plus ella a besoin. Happy the man whose wish and care a few paternal acres bound (cf. Latin beatus ille qui procul negotiis), or Der nehst kumet/, der darnach nehst kumet (cf. Latin proxime venturus, proxime subsequens). The very frequent parenthetical remarks such as that is to say, c'est à dire,

dass heisst, det vil sige go back to Latin id est. So as to explain the survival of these forms, special attention has to be paid to the syntactic forms that secure their position in the system of the language. Due attention should be paid to the possible distributional differences between the source expression in Latin and its counterparts in the European languages. Hence, questions like the following arise: what does it take for a new form to be considered part of the linguistic system? By means of which linguistic mechanisms does the actualization of a new form proceed? Is this process related to similar processes of standardization elsewhere?

Research on 'exotic' languages has shown that large European languages have idiosyncratic features as well and that Europe itself is a linguistic Sprachbund (cf. EUROTYPE project). European languages are converging in many respects, with Standard Average European (SAE) crossing language family borders (Hall 1944; Haspelmath 1998, 2001; Van der Auwera 1998; Heine & Kuteva 2006). The core of the SAE is found in French, German and Dutch, but the non-Indo-European languages of Europe also share a number of features. For instance, Old Hungarian did not have noun-clause complementizers such as quod, che, dass, that or que, but modern Hungarian has hogy (hallá, hogy meghal 'he heard that he should die'). Likewise Basque did not have a native perfect form, but developed a

periphrastic version on the pattern of the surrounding Romance languages (Haase 1992).

The Latin varieties evolved so differently from each other they became new languages. That's how the languages we know as the Romance languages came to exist. The big five, as they are known, are French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian. Great evidence reveals their relation; if you learn one, learning one of the others is fairly easy.

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