

The Diachrony of Transitivity Prominence in Latin

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This paper explores to what extent transitivity prominence represents a stable feature through the history of Latin. Transitivity prominence is a measure for comparing the relative pervasiveness of transitive encoding in the verbal lexicon across languages, transitive encoding being understood as the morphosyntactic encoding characteristic of so-called core transitive verbs like *break*, *build* or *kill* (Haspelmath 2015). In recent years, several works have contributed to the understanding of this field of grammar (e.g., Haspelmath 2015, Say 2014, 2017, Creissels 2018b, Serzants et al. 2022). However, to our knowledge no study exists that deals with transitivity prominence in diachronic perspective and with this paper we attempt to partly remedy this situation.

In general, one would expect that languages show roughly the same degree of transitivity prominence through time. However, an examination of data from a selection of Indo-European languages indicates that there are significant differences even between genetically related languages as regards relative transitivity prominence. This fact suggests that transitivity prominence is a feature of grammar that may change significantly over time. In line with Creissels (2018), we utilize a sample of 30 verb meanings for collecting verbal predicates from three diachronic stages of Latin, Old, Classical and Late Latin. The lexemes are classified according to three morphosyntactic parameters:

- Whether they show active voice marking or not
- Whether they select canonical/nominative subject case marking and verb agreement
- Whether they select canonical/accusative object case marking

Predicates selecting for active voice, nominative subject and consistently accusative object are classified as canonically transitive, whereas predicates differing from the transitive prototype regarding one or more parameters are classified as having non-canonical voice and/or argument marking. Pinkster (2015: 283) notes that the number of verbs that select non-active voice morphology increases over time, a fact suggestive of a diachronic decrease in transitivity prominence (cf. also Flobert 1975). It remains to be explored, however, whether or to what extent analogous diachronic trends are present in the realm of subject and/or object marking, a problem that motivates the present contribution.

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