The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

The Influence of the Imperative on Latin Idiom

Frank Granger

The Classical Review / Volume 31 / Issue 02 / March 2017, pp 47 - 51

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00008660, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00008660

How to cite this article:

Frank Granger (2017). The Influence of the Imperative on Latin Idiom. The Classical Review, 31, pp 47-51 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00008660

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

may now be allowed to say that *haud aliud* following *hoc unum*, a parallel expression, comes dangerously near to the *ἀσύνδετα* reprehended by Quintilian; and, if not exactly bathos (I will not dispute about a term), it is a forcibly

feeble expression that we should hesitate to impute to Caesar.

J. P. POSTGATE.

Liverpool,

February 14, 1917.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE IMPERATIVE ON LATIN IDIOM.¹

(i.) *Method of the Enquiry*.—Sufficient material has now been gathered in the study of Latin for us to exhibit in a systematic manner the development of the idiom of the language, and at the same time to deduce the idiom from general principles. In attempting this ambitious project we do not commit ourselves exclusively to the presuppositions from which we start. Yet in dealing with so complex a problem we shall do well to confine ourselves to a single line of enquiry. Other influences than those of the imperative were of course at work, but we may well be content for the time being to trace the far-reaching effects of this powerful factor.

The psychology of language has already taught us to lay special emphasis on ejaculations as expressive, first, of mere feeling, and secondly, of will. The interesting conclusion seems to follow that the notion of time was added to the verb when it already denoted something to be done at the bidding of another.²

(ii.) But we shall not lose ourselves in mere general considerations. The clues which psychology thus furnishes will be traced out and tested in the actual history of Latin.³ We shall be occupied more especially with the syntax and idiom in which isolated words appear.

But we shall be carried back also to morphology, to word-formation or rather the analysis of words that have been formed by agglutination. Now that some sort of order has been introduced into morphology, we shall look forward to finding some reasons of idiom behind the laws of word-formation.

(iii.) *The Origin of the Latin Period*.—Let us take two sentences: one from the XII. Tables, *si caluitur pedemue struit, manum endo iacito*, 'if he delays or takes to flight, a man is to lay hands upon him'; the other sentence is from the Lex Plaetoria B.C. 365, *praetor urbanus qui nunc est quique posthac fuat, duo lictores apud se habeto*. In the first place, we are dealing here with commands. And the natural position for a command in a sentence is at the end, after all the conditions under which the command is to be obeyed have been enumerated. This consideration comes home to one who has watched how, when men are being drilled, the instruction as to the action to be performed is completed before the individual is expected to move in obedience to the command. But there is a further consideration which arises out of the peculiar attitude of the Roman mind towards divine powers: every prescribed usage is to be exactly carried out in each given case, in order that these same powers, which are on the watch like a hostile lawyer, may not have the opportunity of declaring that, owing to some omission, the claim upon them is rendered invalid. It is probable that this primitive religious scruple—*religio*—found one of its many expressions in the close adherence to precedent which characterised Roman law. But since primitive religion was a communal matter, we must be very care-

¹ This article follows upon my article on 'The Development of the Sentence,' C.R., February, 1915.

² This order of development leaves the last place for the indicative mood, in which the time-notion first becomes clear.

³ Professor Sonnenschein refers me to Wundt for my psychology. I wrote a textbook of psychology, quarter of a century ago, in which full account was taken of Wundt. Cf. *Year's Work in Classical Studies*, 1915, p. 24. But I repeat here my obligations to Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (I³, 176).

ful lest we draw too strict a line between religion and law.¹ At any rate the Latin period is a vivid and not always observed revelation of the Roman spirit in its most characteristic attitudes. The more reflective temperament of Greek and Sanskrit is shown by the placing of a subordinate clause expressing purpose 'at the end of the sentence after the verb, so that it had the appearance of an addition or after thought.'²

(iv.) *The Subjunctive in Subordinate Clauses.*—I take from the *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* the following striking example: *Sei quæ esent quæi sibi deicerent necesus esse Bacanal habere, eis ut ei ad prætorem urbanum Romam venirent deque eis rebus, ubi eorum verba audita essent, ut ei senatus noster decerneret, dum ne minus Senatoribus C. adessent, quom ea res consoleretur . . . Censuere.*³

There is a similar use of the historic subjunctive, after *decrevit* and *iussit*, in a decree of Aemilius Paullus of three years before.⁴ If we were to translate the subjunctives in the first extract by the corresponding English phrases 'should' or 'were to,' we should suggest just that imperative element which is implied all the way through. 'If there were to be any who should say that they must hold a festival, they gave their decision that they were to come to the Praetor Urbanus, and when their statements should be heard, that the Senate should make a decree, while not less than one hundred Senators were to be present, when the matter was to be considered.' I think we have here at least a partial answer to the riddle of the subjunctive in subordinate clauses. The subjunctive makes a situation, here, in obedience to the will which is declared by the main verb *censuere*. These various conditions are created in obedience to the decision of the Senate. It seemed almost a rule that the dependent tenses after a historic verb

should be in the subjunctive, as though the main verb called the conditions into being.⁵ Some lines of Ennius show how early these subjunctive constructions were elaborated: *haec locutus vocat . . . tutoque locaret.*⁶ But what an instrument was created for the stylists who were later to employ it, Cicero, for example, and Caesar! They also can make conditions, especially the latter, at will. But they can also create conditions to satisfy the demands of thought and of feeling as well as of will. Caesar, like Thucydides, can employ reported speech to indicate the various tendencies and purposes of his characters; but by using the subjunctive, he can make clear what is the thought of his characters as distinguished from his own. Cicero, by a delicate use of the subjunctive, can track out the innermost turnings of his own mind. When we turn to Virgil, the subjunctive becomes one of his best means to light up the dramatic interplay of his characters—a means which he had first employed, like Cicero, upon himself:

atque equidem, extremo ni iam sub fine
laborum
vela traham et terris festinem advertere
proram,
forsitan et pinguis hortos quæ cura colendi
ornaret, canerem, biferique rosaria Paesti.

'Unless I am now to furl the sails, perchance I should be singing of the care which had to set in order rich gardens.' Here surely is an echo of those instructions which in the old books of farming still spoke in the commanding tones of Roman law.

(v.) We can now proceed to garner some conclusions, not perhaps because they are certain, but because they seem to follow with a certain plausibility from the above account of the subjunctive.

What is the origin of the long vowel which comes between the stem of the present subjunctive in Latin and the personal ending?

Let us note first that the verb precedes the subject: for example, in the plural *veniat* as in the English imperative 'come ye.' Let us consider, in the next place, that the long vowel in question may be regarded not only as a suffix to the stem, but along with the personal

¹ The primitive idea of holiness implies as its chief element, relation to the communal life (*Worship of the Romans*, 211).

² Monro, *Homeric Grammar*, § 242.

³ Wordsworth, *Fragments and Specimens of Early Latin*, p. 172.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 171. The reference to past time may not be due to the subordinate moods, but to their dependence on the main verb. Monro, *op. cit.* § 317.

⁵ *Infra* § 41.

⁶ Wordsworth, *op. cit.* p. 303.

ending. In the latter case we might fairly raise the question whether the long vowel is not analogous to an exclamation of address. 'Come, O ye,' would represent to us, awkwardly perhaps, the constituent parts of *veniatis*. The almost universal occurrence of this long vowel in the Indo-European¹ languages might even tempt us to inquire whether the hypothesis of the origin of the subjunctive which is offered above might not be extended somewhat further, so as to embrace some at least of the subjunctive forms in other languages than Latin.

In the next place, if the long vowel is a vocative sign, the personal endings will originally be pronouns used as *vocative cases*, at least in the subjunctive forms which we are considering.

In the third place, the long vowel *ō*, which so curiously appears in the ending of the first person of the present indicative in Greek and Latin, may be due to analogy from the subjunctive. The subjunctive thus deprived of the first person singular, is compensated by an analogous form. The substitution of *veniam* in the present subjunctive for *venio* may perhaps be explained if it is compared with the actual replacement of *faxo* by *faxim*.² But there is less doubt that the future indicatives in *ō* of both Latin and Greek may be traced in great part to subjunctive forms.³

Just as we found the forms which are nearest the exclamation—the vocative and the imperative—to furnish also some important primitive stems, so we have found the subjunctive by its nearness to the imperative influencing even the indicative, and to that extent demanding a prior treatment. Only in the indicative does the verb take on a quite definite reference to time, and since the reference to time is of a later stage than the reference to action, we are not surprised to find the future indicative developed from subjunctive forms.

(vi.) *The Meaning of Subordinating Conjunctions*.—We consider the various conjunctions which introduce the subordinate verbs in the passage which we

quoted from the *S.C. de Bacchanalibus*. In so doing we will take from outside as a starting-point the classical use of *quamvis* with the subjunctive. According to Madvig, '*quamvis* properly signifies "however much you will," and the conjunctive by itself expresses the concession.'⁴ I wish to insist on the last point, that the subjunctive by itself, apart from the conjunction, expresses something other than the indicative, although it is unnecessary, I think, to go so far as Madvig in defining the meaning of the subjunctive. We might lay down the principle thus: the subjunctive expresses a subordinate command or permission, and the relation of this to the main verb is partly indicated by the conjunction, partly by the place of the subordinate clause in the whole period. For instance, *quamvis occultetur* (the example quoted by Madvig) may be translated, 'be it hidden as you will': the English imperative rendering shows the meaning of the verb. Nor, in order to express concession, need we go beyond this imperative meaning in translating the verb itself. *The concessive meaning comes from the context*.

Now let us turn to our quotation: it will be enough if we take two illustrations.

dum ne minus senatoribus C adesent: 'while there were to be present not less than one hundred senators'; here the meaning 'provided that' is given by the conjunction + the subjunctive mood + the context. It is inaccurate therefore to say that the conjunction alone furnishes the sense 'provided that.'

quom ea res consoleretur: 'when that matter was to be discussed,' here the subjunctive with *quom* appears along with other subjunctives following upon other conjunctions. Hence it is premature to deduce the occurrence of the mood simply from the conjunction *quom*. The sense again is partly given by the mood, and the mood is used because of the dependence of the verb on a verb of 'commanding' or 'getting done' in a historic tense.

We now come across a possible reason why *cum* in a purely temporal sense was used with imperfect and pluperfect subjunctives. It was the custom, as we

¹ Brugmann, *Grundriss*, II. § 918.

² Brugmann, *Grundriss*, II. § 824.

³ Giles, *Comparative Philology*, § 492. The whole problem most clearly appears in the relation of *ō* to *eiμ*.

⁴ Madvig, *Latin Grammar*, § 361, Obs. 1.

have seen, for the reports of decrees of the senate and other public statements to have the subordinate verbs in the subjunctive, that is, the indirect imperative, whereas in the actual statement itself the dependent moods after relative pronouns and conjunctions were in the indicative. Obviously, the decree was regarded not simply as reporting, but as constituting the cases proposed in the relative clauses.

(vii.) *The Accusative and Infinitive in Reported Speech.*—Apart from the infinitive after verbs of speaking and feeling, the Latin infinitive corresponds with the usage of the infinitive in Sanskrit, and denotes that something is proposed to be done.¹ We must therefore surrender the notion that in the Indo-European languages the accusative and infinitive naturally follows verbs of speaking and feeling. In Sanskrit reported speech is rarely admitted, and when it does occur it is introduced by a particle that may be compared with our English particle 'that' after verbs of speaking and the like. Hence in Latin the early construction of *inquam* with the exact words spoken, and the post-classical construction with *quod* or *quia* correspond to the two Sanskrit idioms. How, then, did the accusative and infinitive arise in Latin after verbs of speaking? The phrase in the inscription of Paullus² probably furnishes the clue: '*possidere habereque iousit*, 'he commanded to possess and to hold.' In the light of this usage, the fact that the imperative, *lauda*, *mone*, is identical with the stem of the infinitive, *laudare*, *monere*, takes a fresh significance. *Te habere iubeo* becomes equivalent to 'I bid you "hold."'

I now propose to show that the important verbs of speaking, *respondeo* and *dico*, were originally equivalent to verbs of commanding. *Respondeo*, of course, means at first 'to make a counter-declaration in a court of law,' that is, in the primitive assembly, and its other meanings are derived from this. In Greek ἀποκρίνομαι has precisely the same origin, and the lexicons of both languages require to be corrected in order to trace the history of the successive

meanings of these two words. So widespread is this derivation of the verb 'to answer' that it may be traced also throughout the Semitic languages.³ Hence we arrive at the notion of a declaratory sense which may be applied also to the indicative. The truth is regarded as something constituted by the decision of an assembly. Thus, to take a late example, the decrees of the councils of the Church are both authoritative in the sense of issuing a command, and declaratory in the sense of determining a fact.

Dico probably had a similar origin with *respondeo*, that is, in the common meeting. It is noteworthy that *dico* retained the meaning of making a speech.⁴ Hence the infinitive after *dico*, as after *iubeo*, follows upon the notion of commanding which is implied in the verb itself. For example, *dictum* in the phrase *dicto audientem esse* retains the original meaning 'to command.' There is a colloquial use of the verb in which the meaning 'to command' is also obvious: *dicebam, pater, tibi ne matri consuleres male*.⁵

(viii.) *The Forms of the Imperfect and Pluperfect in the Latin Subjunctive.*—We can now proceed to deduce the forms of the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive. We have already seen the imperative furnishing the stem of the verb, and by the addition of personal endings and a long vowel producing the present subjunctive: in the same way the imperative stem, with a locative or dative ending, forms the present infinitive. I postpone for the present the important question how far the identity of the imperative with the stem of the verb involves the complete identity of meaning.

One important piece of evidence as to the imperative implications of the infinitive has been overlooked. The accusative and infinitive in exclamations presents a resemblance to the deliberative subjunctive. For example, *mene incepto desistere victam?* is practically equivalent to *num desistam?* or perhaps *num desisterem?* I do not know why

¹ M. Williams, *Sanskrit Gr.*, § 868.

² Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

³ *Expositor*, May, 1916, p. 357, in my article on 'The Semitic Element in the Fourth Gospel.'

⁴ Cf. ἀγορεύω.

⁵ Plaut. *Asin.* 938.

we should shrink from putting *me* and *desistere* into comparison with the form *desisterem*. We have already of course seen the personal ending following the stem. But, however we are tempted, we must not suppose that the bare synthesis of the infinitive and the personal pronoun could represent the original process by which *desisterem* was formed. At the stage when the conjugation of the verb was elaborated, the sentence probably formed a single whole. It would be more correct, therefore, to regard the pronoun as first an inseparable suffix. All therefore that our illustration can do for us is once more to suggest the meaning of the constituent parts of the imperfect subjunctive. If this origin be admitted for the imperfect subjunctive, a similar origin may be admitted for the pluperfect subjunctive. I do not know why the personal endings should not be added to these nominal stems.¹ We are only concerned for the present with the possible relation of the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive to the imperative sense which may be traced in the infinitive,² and must leave questions of morphology for a fuller and independent treatment.

(ix.) It cannot be by mere chance that the imperative meaning of the verb-stem has helped us with so many problems. Our formula of 'commanding' or 'getting something done,' while it is far from being universally applicable, has at least an important place in the general scheme.

Now there are two ultimate types of sentence: the verb and the person on the one hand, the noun and adjective or complement on the other. The formula, subject and predicate, treats the latter type as if it were universal. But it ignores the verb and is misleading. Both Latin and Greek join noun and adjective or complement in a sentence, but the complement behaves like a verb: *parsimonia magnum vectigal*, ἀνθρώπος μέτρον. In other words, the formula, subject and predicate, is too vague

to grip the verb which is of the essence of spoken language. Not only so, since the complement in the examples quoted corresponds to the verb, the second type was originally analogous to the first. Only the intrusion of the copula, at a comparatively late date, gave rise to the logical proposition of the form S is P. The notions, subject and predicate, are borrowed from abstract logic which, as Bergson has shown, is incapable of including the rhythm and concrete movement of life within its categories. In a most unfortunate moment for the history of grammar, the traditional method of analysis was erected into a dogma. At any rate the analysis of the Latin sentence which is given above, if it fails to convince, should at least furnish occasion for thought. I will confess that I entered upon this discussion not in the interests of grammar in the narrower sense, but in the hope that by bringing once more into evidence the practical tendency of Latin idiom we might become more sympathetic with the Roman temperament and so understand it better. To quote a good European, Heine: 'The language of the Romans can never deny its origin. It is a language of commands for generals, of decrees for administrators, of law-courts for money-lenders, a lapidary style for the Roman people with its mind of flint.'³

(x.) *The Indo-European Sentence*.—German still retains in subordinate clauses the postponement of the verb, and—as compared with English—the greater use of the subjunctive. The infinitive is postponed to the end of its own phrase universally. These striking parallels justify the hypothesis that the laws of sentence formation which we have been tracing for Latin belong to a very early stage in the history of language, perhaps even to the Indo-European common speech. In that event, Latin of the Golden Age and the German of the present exhibit a primitive character which for quite different grounds in these two cases we had good cause for suspecting.

FRANK GRANGER.

¹ Dr. Giles has already suggested that the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctives are formed from a noun, *Comp. Phil.* § 515.

² Cf. the Homeric use of the infinitive as an imperative. *Monro, op. cit.* § 241.

³ qu. Schanz, *Röm. Litteratur*, II.