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VERB-SUBJECT ORDER IN LATIN:
THE CASE OF EXISTENTIAL AND
LOCATIVE SENTENCES

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Summary: Using a sample of Latin texts from archaic to late period, I will try to show that the V(erb)-S(ubject) ordering is a complex phenomenon. An analysis from a functional point of view allows us to speak about a 'normal' order in the case of presentative, existential and locative sentences. In those cases, the VS disposition is due to the pragmatic function of Future Topic carried by the subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

Latin is generally regarded as a (finite) verb-final language and the 'deviant' initial (or not-final) position of finite verb forms has, as a consequence, drawn a lot of attention from linguists. The aim of this contribution is to examine a particular case of existential and locative sentences in which the subject of the clause often follows the finite verb form (VS). I will try to explain this disposition by using the concept of New – or better – Future Topic and to describe the properties of the sentences in question.

2. EXISTING EXPLANATIONS FOR THE VS ORDER

Although most linguists describe word order in classical Latin as rather flexible, or even 'free', with various explanations in more or less explicit pragmatic terms, it is most often described in syntactical terms and the S(ubject) – O(bject) – V(erb) pattern is usually considered the basic pattern.[1] This statement figures in the manuals (for example Kühner-

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1 The question concerning the basic Latin word order is not the aim of this contribution.

Stegmann, 1914: 590; Hofmann-Szantyr 1972: 397-410), but a similar conclusion can be found in Panhuis' basically pragmatically oriented monograph (Panhuis 1982). He calls SOV the 'unmarked, non-emotive order', while V(O)S represents the 'marked, emotive order'.

On the assumption that the final position of the finite verb is normal, the VS pattern is usually thought to reflect some form of 'emphasis' on the verb. It was for instance stated that the verb occurs in clause initial position when one of the following factors is present:

a) A property of the verb. The mood, the tense or some other property of the verb is 'focused' (Marouzeau 1953: 45 ff.). So, not only an imperative or a concessive subjunctive verb form may be given prominence by putting it at the head of a clause, but this position may also be chosen to give prominence to person or voice. An instance of contrast between a passive and active verb form is exemplified in (1):

> (1) *Neque regerentur magis quam regerent casus.* (Sall. *Iug.* 1.5)
> 'Man would not be governed by circumstances more than he would govern them.'

b) Foregrounded information. Another reason that is given for the initial position of a finite verb form is the desire to present the event as sudden or unexpected (see Marouzeau *ibid.*). Luraghi recently worked out this point (Luraghi 1995: 370) arguing that the VS order is used for rapidly developing events and marks a discontinuity of the discourse. According to her, it concerns mainly narrative sentences presenting foreground information. Such initial verbs are usually in the preterit or in the historical present, and appear in sequences.

> (2) *Consequuntur hunc centuriones eius cohortis quae in statione erat...*
> *Relinquit animus Sextium...* (Caes. *Gall.* 6.38.1)
> 'The centurions of the cohort on guard follow him... Sextius faints...'

c) Descriptions and accompanying circumstances. The initial verb is also found in descriptions of places (Luraghi 1995: 367 ff.), [2] or of accompanying circumstances. According to her, the VS pattern in this case marks a non-narrative sentence with background information, which is additional with respect to the main narrative line but important for understanding subsequent events. The initial verb is usually in the imperfect.

(3) *Augebatur auxiliorum cotidie spes.* (Caes. *Gall.* 6.7)
'Their hope of auxiliaries was daily increasing.'

d) Presentative sentences. Finally, it has been observed that the VS order is common in presentative sentences like:

(4) *Erat in Gallia ulteriore legio una.* (Caes. *Gall.* 1.7.2)
'There was in all only one legion in Further Gaul.'

Luraghi 1995: 370 argues that in the case of presentative sentences, the newly introduced material (*legio una*) is placed in focus position and the initial verb signals discontinuity in the discourse. Thus, the initial verb marks the sentence as non-narrative and calls more attention from the part of the reader.

This overview shows that the explanations given are heterogeneous. Some have to do with the internal structure of the clauses themselves (a, d), other have to do with the position and function of the clause in its surrounding context (b, c).

These explanations are mainly intended for texts from the classical period. Concrete data showing the proportion of the VS order compared to the SV order are generally not available. Only Koll 1965: 246-7 provided data concerning, among other, SV ordering in late Latin texts and the position of *esse* (whether it is in absolute initial position or preceded by some other con-

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2 However, hers example concerning the description of places: *eorum una pars...; continetur... attingit... uergit...* (Caes. *Gall.* 1.1), with a series of verbs is not to me a verb-initial phenomenon. The sentence contains an explicit subject in initial position serving as topic to those verbs.

stituent).[3] I give some of his figures relative to classical authors (Cicero, Varro – first century BC) and postclassical (Tacitus, Petronius – first century AD), with late texts (*Itala/Vulgata* – 3-5th century AD; Lucifer, Egeria – 4th century AD; Gregorius Turonensis – 6th century AD) and early Medieval Latin (Fredegar – 7/8th century AD):

Table 1 Subject+Verb and other constituent+*esse* position
in classical, postclassical and late Latin.

Author	Subject-Verb/ Verb-Subject		Other const. + *esse*/ *esse* + other constituent	
Cicero *Catil.*	30/0	100/0 %	6/4	60/40 %
Cicero *Leg.*	32/6	84/16	15/11	58/42
Varro *Rust.*	24/13	65/35	11/9	55/45
Tac. *Ann.*	33/4	89/11	5/0	100/0
Petronius	51/7	88/12	15/5	75/25
Itala/Vulgata	8/11	42/58	4/0	100/0
Lucifer	37/22	63/37	25/16	61/39
Egeria *Itin.*	28/25	53/47	31/6	84/16
Greg. Tur.	32/2	94/6	10/5	67/33
Fredegar	34/4	89/11	15/3	83/17

Comparing those data, we can notice that the SV pattern is generally – and understandably – dominant (except in the *Itala/Vulgata*), but there is no evidence for a diachronic tendency (increase of the VS pattern, for example). The data present an extreme variation. Some texts offer a high proportion of VS ordering: Varro, Lucifer and Egeria. This account can provide us with a

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3 I must precise that the aim of Koll's article is not to provide an analysis of VS ordering, but an analysis of the position of the verb more generally. According to him (Koll 1965: 244 ff.), the figures are approximate and include sentences with explicit, pronominal or nominal subject. Interrogative and relative pronouns were not taken on account, neither imperatives nor 'imperative' subjunctives. Figures given for the VS/SV variation represent an overall account without distinction between main and subordinate clause. The position of the verb *esse* was calculated with respect to other sentence constituents (without further specification).

global view but given that VS ordering concerns various types of sentences exemplified in section 2, we need to restrict the field of analysis.

3. PRESENTATIVE SENTENCES

I will pay a special attention to the type of sentences number 4, to so-called 'presentative' sentences.

> (4) *Erat in Gallia ulteriore legio una.* (Caes. *Gall.* 1.7.2)
> 'There was in all only one legion in Further Gaul.'

The function of the 'presentative' constructions, defined by Hannay 1985: 10, is to 'introduce a subject entity into the world of the discourse'. One of the properties of this type of sentences is the early position of the verb and the late or final position of the subject (Dik 1 1997: 315). Moreover, fixed-word-order languages sometimes have particular syntactic constructions: Eng. *there is*; Fr. *il y a...,* also with 'dummy' pronoun-subject: Fr. *Il reste deux places.*

Verb-initial order has been discussed as a salient property of those sentences in Latin[4] by Pinkster 1991: 78 and 1995: 237 and recently by Rosén 1998, who provided a detailed analysis of 'Presentational sentences in Latin'. She observed that texts from the classical and postclassical period, show, for presentative sentences, verb-initial or rather subject-inverted order in the proportion of 74 %. In archaic Latin, however, the VS pattern is not dominant and the variation SV appears in this type of sentences as well (the percentage is not provided).

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4 See also Bolkestein 1995 who used the distinction worked out by Sasse 1995 between 'thetic' and 'categorical' sentences. However, the 'presentative' sentences can show 'thetic' character, when they present topical information, but also 'categorical' character when they are anchored in a spatial or temporal context and present a topical material. This distinction does not seem to have an incidence to the syntactic and/or pragmatic structure of the presentative sentence.

4. EXISTENTIAL AND LOCATIVE SENTENCES.
DATA IN A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE

Assuming that the verb-initial order is expected in 'presentative' sentences, I tried to verify the concrete distribution of verbs and subjects in a diachronic perspective, in a sample of archaic, classical and late Latin texts. I limited myself to one type of these sentences, to existential and locative ones with the verb *esse*.[5] I took into account[6] only independent declarative sentences. In this type of sentences, the subject is obligatorily expressed because it represents the 'central' part of the message.[7]

My sample of Latin texts includes: Plautus for archaic Latin (3/2th century), Caesar, Sallustius and Nepos for classical Latin (first century BC) and Augustinus and Egeria for late Latin (4th century AD). The verb *esse* in the sequence (*esse* + subject) was counted in absolute initial or non-absolute initial position (when preceded by a connector) and after a locative expression.

Table 2 Place of the verb *esse*

Author	A. *Esse* + Subject		B. Subject + *Esse*		Total
Plautus	21	39 %	33	61 %	54
Caesar	26	74 %	9	26 %	35
Sallustius	10	62 %	6	38 %	16
Nepos	18	95 %	1	5 %	19
Augustinus (*Conf.*)	43	66 %	22	34 %	65
Egeria	8	28 %	21	72 %	29
Total	126	58 %	92	42 %	218

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5 Introducing a new entity into the discourse can be realised by a set of other verbs like *stare*, *relinquere*, *apparere* which seem to entail the initial as well as the final position. They require further investigation.

6 The existential and locative sentences were counted with the verb *esse* in 3rd person singular and plural. However, we can also find several occurrences with explicit *ego et tu* (for the 1st and 2nd person) in Plautus or Augustinus, for example.

7 It is well known that for the 3rd person once expressed, the subject is often maintained without repetition; for the 1st and 2nd person, his expression is due to an insistence – see Pinkster 1991.

As table 2 shows, the VS ordering is dominant in classical authors (Caesar, Sallustius, Nepos) and in Augustinus. However, in Plautus (but this is a non-narrative text), SV occurs more frequently (61 %), so and, surprisingly, in the *Itinerarium Egeriae* (72 %), a late Latin text with colloquial elements. It is interesting to note that a similar conclusion is drawn by Rosén (1998: 731 ff.) concerning the presentative sentences in classical and archaic Latin.

5. EXISTENTIAL AND LOCATIVE SENTENCES.[8] ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

5.1. Existential sentences

As existential sentences were taken into account the 'absolute existential' sentences following Lyons 1967: 390, containing the verb *esse* 'to exist' and a noun phrase with a noun referring to persons/animals (+animate) or to concrete/abstract entities (–animate):

> (5)   *Est autem C. Herennius quidam, tribunus plebis... is...*(Cic. *Att.* 1.18.4)
> 'There is one C. Herennius, a tribune.'

The function of existential sentences (and locative, as we will see bellow) is often to introduce a new referent which will be developed further. Thus, in the example (5), *Herennius* becomes Topic in the subsequent sentence and is resumed by the anaphoric pronoun *is*. The entity, introduced by the existential sentence (5), carries a special pragmatic function of New Topic (Dik 1 1997: 315) or better Future Topic (following Bolkestein 2000). The author usually gives some additional information about the Future Topic using a relative (adjective) clause, apposition, etc.:

> (5a)   *Est autem C. Herennius quidam, tribunus plebis, quem tu fortasse ne nosti quidem...Is...* (Cic. *Att.* 1.18.4)

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8 When the sentence is negative, the order does not obey the same rules because the negative word is often focused in the initial position.

'Next there is a certain tribune named C. Herennius, whom you, perhaps, do not even know... this person...'

Some existential sentences with *esse* + relative clause,[9] provide a piece of information, which could be expressed as a monoclausal sentence. The following example (6) could be reformulated as (6a):

(6) *Est quidam homo qui illam ait se scire ubi sit.... Ille...* (Plaut. *Cist.* 735)
'There is a certain man who says he knows where it is.... This person...'

(6a) *Quidam homo illam ait se scire ubi sit.*
'A certain man says he knows where it is...'

The construction *esse* + relative clause serves here – rather than to assert an existence – to introduce a new referent, which would normally figure in a neutral topic position in the sentence (6a). If we compare the examples (5a) and (6), we can observe that the subject part in (5a) represents 'heavy' material and the verb *esse* has an introductory function; while in (6), the subject is not 'heavy' and the verb *esse* form, together with the relative clause, a cleft construction that serves to emphasize the subject.[10]

Another example of a 'split-up' sentence (the relative clause does not describe a quality of the subject nor contributes to its identification):

(7) *Erat idem temporis Sex. Pompeius frater, qui cum praesidio Cordubam tenebat* (*Bell. Hisp.* 3.1)
'Sextus Pompey, the brother of Cneius, commanded at this time at Corduba.'

9 The construction *sunt* + *qui* relative '*nominale*' clause (Lavency 1998) can be considered a grammaticalised structure because the anteposition of the relative clause is excluded. This syntactic constraint could also respond to a more general rule that being syntactically 'heavy material', this subordinating clause is placed to the right.
10 Cf. Löfstedt 1967 about the construction *c'est... qui* in Latin.

Also in Augustinus: [11]

(8) *Est liber noster qui inscribitur de Magistro: ipse ibi mecum loquitur.*
(Aug. *Conf.* 9.6)
'There is a book of ours extant called of the Master; it is a dia-
logue between him and me.'

5.2. Locative sentences

The locative sentences have a similar structure to existential sentences but
occur with a locative expression represented by an adverb or a prepositional
phrase. Following Lyons (1968) we can distinguish between two types of
locative sentences [12] with different pragmatic functions. Compare:

(a) *There is a book on the table.*

(b) *The book is on the table.*

(9a) *Fuere Sicyoni iam diu Dionysia.* (Plaut., *Cist.* 156)
'A long time ago there was a Dionysiac festival at Sicyon.'

(9b) *Herodotus Romae erat.* (Cic., *Verr.* 2.2.128)
'Herodotus was at Rome'.

Both describe the location of an entity in some physical space, but the first
one describes what is situated in a place (*Sicyoni*) and focuses on the new
entity (*Dionysia*); the second one indicates a position of a (given) referent
(*Herodotus*, already mentioned in previous context) and focuses on the local-
isation (*Romae*). In many languages, new referents, represented by an
indefinite nominal, occupy regularly the later or final position in the clause,
while referents, that were already given through previous mention (definite

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11 This type reminds one of constructions in spoken French like 'Il y a le téléphone qui
sonne.' (= Le téléphone sonne.) or 'J'ai un formulaire que je n'ai pas.' See Lambrecht
1988.
12 Cf. Clark 1978 who calls (a) existential, (b) locative.

nominals), figure in the initial position.[13] Only the first type (9a) is relevant to my analysis.

In classical Latin, in existential and locative sentences, the verb *esse* occurs often in the first position: *esse* + locative expression + subject, which represents 67 % of all locative sentences (10a). Nevertheless, a locative expression occurs in the initial position as well (10b).

> (10a)   *Erant in ea legione fortissimi uiri…. Hi…* (Caes. *Gall.* 5.44.1)
> 'In that legion there were two very brave men… These…'

> (10b)   *In hoc medio cursu est insula, quae appellatur Mona.* (Caes. *Gall.* 5.13.3)
> 'Here in mid-channel is an island called Man.'

The locative expression is represented by a locative anaphoric adverb (*ibi, inde…*) or by a prepositional phrase containing an anaphoric pronoun (*is* or *hic*). The locative constituent can refer to spatial or temporal entities.

The new referent introduced into the discourse is represented not only by a simple noun but also by a full noun phrase: it is often further developed by an adjective, apposition (or series of adjectives or appositions), or relative clause. The subject part of the sentence becomes thus 'heavy' material which is normally placed to the right.

As for existential sentences (5), the final position of the subject accounts for the pragmatic function Future Topic (10a), a new referent introduced into the discourse, whose character is (highly) focal. It has been observed (see for example Lambrecht 1988) that 'presentative' constructions are bipartite: introducing a Future Topic implies an existence of another, subsequent sentence in which the new referent reappears, resumed by an anaphoric pronoun (*hic* in example 10a). In my sample, the Future Topic is mainly followed by *is* in Plautus; the classical authors prefer *hic*; Augustine uses *hic* or *is* (anaphoric continuation is not very frequent). Egeria utilizes mainly anaphoric adverbs *ibi, inde* (because of descriptions), *is* appears in formulas *in eo (loco, uico…)*. *Ille* is not used for Future Topics. The anaphoric continua-

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13 Thus, word order is considered the main indicator for definiteness in languages in which there is no definite or indefinite article available. This is true for Russian, for example.

tion of Future Topics was analysed by Bolkestein 2000: 121 ff.).[14] Apart from anaphoric pronouns, the Future Topics can be antecedents of the relative pronoun *qui*, commutable with *is* (example 11), also when followed by a subordinator (example 12b). The commutability with *is* or *hic* guarantees the identification of function as a connector assuring 'free relative connection' (see Lavency 1998: 5). This type of relative clauses does not bring a quality of the referent or a specification of his identity, but expresses what happened next to him. It is a king of 'continuation' (12a). Compare:

(11)   *Erat cum eo Mithrobarzanes, socer eius, praefectus equitum. Is...*
        ad hostes transfugit. (Nep. *Dat.*, 6.3.)
        'He had with him Mothrobarzanes, his father-in-law, as commander of his cavalry, but he... deserted to the enemy.'

(12a)   *In his fuit Ariovistus qui nauiculam deligatam ad ripam nactus ea*
        profugit. (Caes. *Gall.* 1.53.3)
        'Among the latter was Ariovistus, who meeting with a small vessel tied to the bank, escaped in it.'

(12b)   *Cum eo quippe in foro fuit pedisecus. Quem posteaquam recoluit*
        Alypius, architecto intimavit. (Aug. *Conf.* 6.9)
        'For he had attended his master to the market-place. Whom so soon as Alypius remembered, he told the architect.'

The use of existential and locative sentences is not limited to introducing Future Topics; they can also present an element without further development (that is, with no subsequent clause). In this case, the sentence offers secondary information (10b) of a descriptive type. Nevertheless, the entity – indefinite noun – introduced through *esse* figures often at the end of the sentence.

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14 See Bolkestein 2000: 121. The reference to a Future Topic is operated by an anaphoric pronoun, in classical Latin *is* or more frequent *hic*. When the antecedent is an established topical entity, zero anaphora is preferred as a continuation. When it is focal, but not presented in a clause recognizable as presentative, *ille* is the most frequent anaphoric expression.

6. ANOTHER POSITION OF THE SUBJECT

We have seen that in existential and locative sentences (type 9a), the subject normally follows the verb *esse* and occupies the final position according to its pragmatic function of Future Topic. Thus the VS ordering is not to be considered 'deviant' or 'abnormal' because the final position of the subject is determined by a pragmatic purpose. Assuming that, conversely, the initial position of subject should be motivated. In this respect, two cases in which those Future Topics occupy another position than final will be examined: absolute initial position and preverbal position. As table 2, column B shows (see *supra*), those types are especially relevant for Plautus and Egeria.

6.1. Absolute initial position

Future Topics in absolute initial position (i.e. not preceded by some other constituent) can be found occasionally in classical, imperial and late Latin. They are often placed at the beginning of a new paragraph (13a) and they are often referred to during a whole section. In example (13b), a new, unexpected personage appears at the scene (NB. the adversative connector *uero*). [15] The function of *planities* and *puer* in (13a and b) as Future Topics is proved by following anaphoric pronouns.

> (13a) *Planities erat magna et in ea...* (Caes. *Gall.* 1.43.1)
>   'There was a large plain, and in it...'

> (13b) *Puer uero erat ante ostium... cum eo...* (Aug. *Conf.* 6.9)
>   'There, before the door, was a boy...'

However, the proportion of VS ordering is rather high in archaic Latin (61 %, table 2). This statement is in accordance with the observation of Rosén 1998: 733 about presentative sentences. She proposed, for frequent VS/SV variation in archaic Latin, an interpretation as 'vestige of an appositional-explicitating word order' arguing that 'the verb-initial order (i.e. for presentational sentences) has not yet become consolidated in pre-Classical Latin'.

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15 Cf. Bolkestein 1996: 20 about the low proportion of markers of coherence and cohesion in VS.

Indeed, the subject part contains a substantive (*mercator*) and an apposition (*senex*) or an adjective; the verb *esse* figures between them.

> (14)   *Mercator quidam fuit Syracusis senex; ei...* (Plaut. *Men.* 17)
> 'There was a certain old merchant in Syracuse who...'

However, it is important in this case to take into account also the type of texts in which SV order occurs: comedies, which are primarily intended for declamation. The Future Topic (*mercator*) in absolute initial position should be marked by a strong intonation stress. This aspect should appear in a larger measure in the dialogues than in the written prose.

The late Latin text *Itinerarium Egeriae* is well known for its frequent VS ordering.[16] In the case of existential and locative sentences however, the *Itinerarium* presents unexpectedly SV order in a high proportion (SV/VS 72 %: 28 %).[17] One of the SV order sentences in the *Itinerarium* is the type (15a) with subject at (absolute or non-absolute) initial position focused by the particle *et*.[18] (NB. also the position of the anaphoric adverb *ibi* which normally should be placed at the head). *Et* does not appear if the subject is placed at the end of the sentence (example 15b).

> (15a)   *Nam et ecclesia est cum presbytero... ibi... inde...* (Eger. *Itin.* 3.1)[19]
> 'There is a church there with a priest...there...'
> (15b)   *Ibi enim est ecclesia.* (Eger. *Itin.* 4.1)
> 'There is a church there.'

This ordering could reveal a certain tendency for placing the salient element in the beginning of the sentence.[20] In accordance with the rather subjective

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16 See Haida 1928. Concerning chapters 1-20.4, Adams 1976 pointed out high frequency of passive verbs in initial position (VS/SV 54:34); as for active, transitive verbs, the VS/SV ordering occurs in the proportion of (35:45). Väänänen 1987 adds that the inversion for passive verbs is even more frequent in the second part of the texts (which describes phases of ceremonies).

17 A number of occurrences of VS in locative sentences is represented by the sequences substantive + *esse* + adjective: *(in eo ergo loco) ecclesia est pisina* (Eger. *Itin.* 10.9).

18 In Väänänen 1987 : 115, there is no further description of this function.

19 *Nam* is not always an explicative particle, but its principal use is as linking word, 'l'entrée de phrase' (see Väänänen 1987: 117).

style of this text, the variant SV may be used in the *Itinerarium* for presenting some noteworthy facts and events.

6.2. Preverbal position

The preverbal position is another (not very frequent) variant for placing Future Topics, if the verb occupies the final position. The Future Topic in example (16) is identifiable by the anaphoric continuation (*is*).

> (16a) *Epidamniensis quidam ibi mercator fuit; is...* (Plaut. *Men.* 32)
> 'A certain merchant of Epidamnus was there; he...'

Conditions for choosing this order (emphasis of *Epidamiensis*) are difficult to establish but the order of constituents obey other rules in dialogic text than in prose. However, in narrative texts, it seems that the subject is placed in preverbal position if there is no further continuation. Thus, the sentence like (16b) does not represent an introduction of Future Topic but its function is to give secondary, complementary information concerning a general description of the place.

> (16b) *Inter illos et frequentem Numidiam multi uastique loci erant.* (Sall. *Iug.* 78.5)
> 'Between them and the populous parts of Numidia lie vast and uncultivated deserts.'

7. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to show several aspects of VS order in Latin. First, this pattern encompasses heterogeneous phenomena and thus, global figures

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20 Furthermore, in both late Latin texts, I noted several occurrences of the presentative adverb *ecce* (Augustine 115x, Egeria 13x). Although its functions are various, we can find also a 'split-up' sentence with the verb *esse*; *ecce* introduces the most important element: *... quoniam ecce misericordia tua est, non homo..., cui loquor.* (Augustinus *Conf.* 1.6) '...since I speak to Thy mercy, and not to scornful man.'

are not very informative. Second, not each VS order is to be considered 'abnormal' or 'deviant'. In the case of existential and locative sentences, we can observe that VS ordering is often due to the pragmatic function of Future Topic, which entails normally the final position of the subject; SV ordering appears as a variant with various pragmatic explanations. Third, there is no evident diachronic tendency for VS order. The variations VS/SV seem to depend on the type of text and pragmatic purposes.

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