A historical perspective on Latin proleptic accusatives

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article concerns the historical development of the Latin proleptic accusative. This construction has been much discussed, both concerning its syntactic structure and pragmatic conditioning.[1] Proleptic accusatives can further be connected to other pragmatically motivated constructions with non-standard case forms (the so-called *attractio inversa* and thematic constructions).[2]

In this article I shall address a question that to my knowledge has received little or no attention in previous research. This is the historical perspective on Latin proleptic accusatives. I will offer a preliminary sketch of the use and qualities of this construction throughout its written history in Latin. Futhermore, I raise the question of whether and how the construction changed during this time.

As is generally known, proleptic accusatives are attested mainly in the early period (especially in the comedies of Plautus). In the republican period the construction is used by writers who generally favour archaic expressions, most importantly by Varro. In later Latin, although sometimes used by archaists, the construction is also reported to turn up in texts that do not strictly follow the postclassical standard of literary Latin, e.g., the *Mulomedicina Chironis*.

Concerning the historical development of proleptic accusatives, the standard opinion seems to be that they remained a feature of the spoken language throughout Latin history, but were 'hiding' behind the literary standard during the classical period. Their attestation in later sources is routinely taken to be a reflection of this continuum. The view is further

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[1] TOURATIER (1980), CHRISTOL (1989), BOLKESTEIN (1981), MARALDI (1986), ROSEN (1992), BORTOLUSSI (1998), SZNAJDER (2003), BODELOT (2003), ALVAREZ HUERTA (2005) and (2007).

[2] ROSEN (1992), ALVAREZ HUERTA (2005).

supported by the fact that the construction is claimed to live on in old Romance (on the basis of Meyer-Lübke, vol. 3, 812-813). However, in the late Latin period, it is actually rather hard to find examples that would in essential respects be identical with the early occurrences. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to ask whether speaking of a continuum can be justified.

I begin by citing passages where the *communis opinio* of proleptic accusatives is stated. First, the standard grammar (Hofmann-Szantyr 1965: 471-472) gives the following account of proleptic accusatives in late Latin:

> « Im Spätlatein **weisen** namentlich **die Archaisten** (z. B. Sol. 6,3 *ceteras ... quoniam similes sunt dictas habemus*) und **die volkstümlichen Autoren Zahlreiche Belege auf**, so z. B. Chiron, Verflunchungsinschr., Eccl. wie Lact. opif. 16,11 Comm. apol. 363, Cassian. Nest. 3,7,1, Vitae patr., z. T. unter dem Einfluss des Griechischen. »

This statement reflects Hofmann's earlier views about the 'volkstümlich' nature of this construction.[3] But Hofmann is not the only scholar to think that proleptic accusatives in later sources are basically similar to their counterparts hundreds of years earlier. For example, the prominent late-Latinist E. Löfstedt (1962: 271-272) shared this opinion, stating that the construction belongs to *Alltagssprache*, and referring to frequent examples in comedy, archaic writers, and late texts (with an example from the *Mulomedicina Chironis*).

> « Ganz wie anderswo (vgl. z. B. schwed. vulg." de andra vet jag inte, vart de tog vägen" u. dgl.), **gehört sie** [sc. die Prolepsis] **auch im Latein vorzugsweise der Alltagssprache an, und die zahlreichsten und auffälligsten Beispiele finden sich demnach bei den Komikern** (...), **bei einem Schriftsteller wie Varro** (...), **und im Spätlatein** (...). »

In more recent accounts the same view (following Hofmann) continues to be found (Serbat 1996: 181)

> « Mais il est évité des autres auteurs classiques, **ne reparaissant en force que dans les textes tardifs et vulgaires** (Chiron), avant d'être attesté dans les langues romanes. C'est là **le "profil" typique d'un tour enraciné dans le parler populaire** mais refusé par la langue littéraire en raison de son insuffisante rigueur syntaxique (Cf. J. B. Hofmann, L.U. p.113 et 114). »

However, Serbat (1996: 182) also points out that there is a change in the construction in the late period (new governing verbs appear):

> « Très rare au second siècle, l'Ac proleptique **se manifeste à nouveau chez les auteurs vulgaires de la basse latinité**, ainsi

[3] HOFMANN (1926: 92) and HOFMANN (1951: 114).

> dans la Mulom. Chironis 642, si eam facere uoles ne crescat, "si tu veux faire en sorte qu'elle ne croisse pas", cf. 708; 840, al. **La prolepse élargit même son domaine, s'employant avec les verbes qui l'ignoraient chez Plaute** (*sinere, desinere*, par exemple). »

Most studies on the subject do not even mention the historical perspective. This is mainly because they usually discuss only early examples, but even when later ones are cited, their identity is not taken into discussion.[4]

In order to analyze the later examples of proleptic accusatives, a short description of the phenomenon as it presents itself in early Latin is in place. Naturally, even in early Latin proleptic accusatives are a diversified phenomenon (with various subtypes and borderline cases), but there are nevertheless certain characteristics that are shared by a large set of typical examples.[5]

2. Properties of proleptic accusatives in early Latin

Of the verbs that govern proleptic accusatives, the most frequent is *facio*, followed by *scio/nescio, nosco, metuo* and *video*. Other verbs (from Lindskog 1896 and Rosen 1992) are:

> *aspicio aucupo audio censeo commemoro commonstro contemplo curo demonstro dico efficio eloquor enarro expecto experior indico inuenio inuestigo memini miror obseruo opperior ostendo perfero perspicio quaero rescisco rogo timeo uereor uolo uiso*

Many of these are attested with a proleptic accusative only once or twice. Therefore, perhaps even more important than the selection of governing verbs is to note the forms of the governing verbs that seem to be of certain types :

- the imperative
- 2nd person subjunctive
- 2nd person indicative in interrogatives
- less often in 1st person indicative or future
- practically no 3rd person forms
- practically no past tense forms

These verb forms dominate because the construction appears in dialogue rather than in narrative passages. A dialogic context is typical both of comedy and of the instructions in Cato's *De agricultura*. It may be asked whether dialogue, or more generally second person address is in some way essential to the use of this construction. Address in the second person

[4] See, however, Norberg (1943: 260-261).

[5] See Rosen (1992) on the properties of proleptic accusatives.

connects not only instructions and comedy but even letters where occasional examples of proleptic accusatives come up later.

The identification of a construction as a proleptic accusative is not always unambiguous. If a bare accusative object is possible as the complement of the verb, the construction can be analyzed as a sequence of the accusative object and a non-obligatory subordinate clause, as with e.g. *uideo* (Rosen 1992: 246) :

(1) *uiden tu* ***ignauom*** *ut sese* ***infer[a]t*** (Plaut. *Mil*. 1045)
« Do you see that useless man, how proudly he walks »

However, in the prototypical case the selection restrictions of the governing verb do not allow the proleptic accusative to function as an accusative object (either syntactically or semantically; e.g., *censeo* and *facio*) [6], cf. (2) below.

In most cases, the proleptic constituent is immediately next to the verb, usually preceding as in (2):

(2) ***uectes iligneos***, ***acrufolios***, ***laureos***, ***ulmeos*** *facito uti* ***sient*** *parati* (Cato *Agr*. 31, 2)
« Levers made of holm-oak, of holly wood, of laurel, of elm, take care that they are available »

Often the subordinate clause comes last, but not necessaril:

(3) *nunc ego* ***Simonem*** *mi obuiam* ***ueniat*** *uelim* (Plaut. *Pseud*. 1061)
« Now I would like Simo to meet me »

The subordination is most often a purpose clause as in (3) or an indirect question as in (1).

The proleptic constituent is in most cases pragmatically conditioned, i.e., motivated by the information structure of the sentence. Generally, the proleptic constituent has been connected with a thematic function, as in (4)[7] :

(4) ***patrem*** *nouisti ad has res quam* ***sit*** *perspicax* (Ter. *Haut*. 370)
« Father, you know him, how sharp-sighted he is in these things »

However, according to Alvarez Huerta (2005: 193-195) the proleptic construction is used to convey focus. I am inclined to think that in most cases the proleptic constituent is the topic of the whole predication (at least in comedy), but things may be different in another genre, namely Cato's

[6] See ROSEN (1992: 245). With some verbs, although the bare accusative object is possible, there is a semantic difference (e.g., *miror* 'to admire' vs. 'to wonder'; ROSEN 1992: 245-246).

[7] MARALDI (1986: 97), ROSEN (1992: 244), BORTOLUSSI (1998 : 211-215), BODELOT (2003 : 207-210).

agricultural guide, as in (2) above, and even in comedy when it mimics this genre, as in (5). The proleptic 'objects' in these instructions are not thematic, but are probably better characterized as focal information:

(5) pernam, callum, glandium, sumen facito in aqua iaceant (Plaut. *Pseud.* 166)
« The ham, the skin, the glandule, the udder, make them lie in water" »

After these remarks I now proceed to examples from the late republican period onwards.

3. THE HISTORY OF PROLEPTIC ACCUSATIVES AFTER THE ARCHAIC PERIOD

3.1. The late republican period

During this time, the construction is found in archaist writers, popular historiography and letters,[8] and the traditional conclusion drawn from this is that the construction remained in full use in spoken language, but was not used in those genres where the emerging strict rules of classical Latin were applied:

« In der gleichseitigen Umgangssprache jedoch blieb der Staztypus in voller Entwicklung » (Hofmann-Szantyr 1965: 471)

Examples (6) and (7) are from Varro's work *Res rusticae* that is similar in genre to Cato's work on agriculture. In addition to this similarity, Varro is also known as an archaist, a writer that took over features from earlier phases of Latin:

(6) ***easque cellas*** *prouident ne* ***habeant*** *in solo umorem* (Varro *Rust.* 3.10.4)
« They should take care that these stalls do not have moisture on the ground »

(7) *alii* ***aquam mulsam*** *in uasculis prope ut* ***sit*** *curant* (Varro *Rust.* 3.16.28)
« Others take care that there is honey-water close by in small vessels »

The next two examples are from a historical work, the *Bellum Africum*,[9] whose writer did not always implement the standards of Classical syntax:

(8) *iam* ***me*** *qui sim intelleges* (*Bell. Afr*. 16.2)
« You by now understand who I am »

(9) ***sagittasque telaque*** *uti fierent complura curare* (*Bell. Afr*. 20.3)
« [...] to take care that there will be many arrows and javelins »

[8] See LAUGHTON (1960: 6) and HOFMANN-SZANTYR (1965: 471).

[9] See ADAMS (2005: 81-82 and 90) on the proleptic accusatives in the *Bellum Africum*.

While Caesar himself happened to use the proleptic accusative only once (*Gall*. 1.39), in Cicero's works, at least partly due to the varying genres of his literary output, we do find scattered examples of the construction:

(10) *nosti* ***uirum****, quam* ***tectus*** (Cic. *Att.* 14.21.2)
« You know how cryptic the man is »

(11) *haec* ***me*** *ut* ***confidam*** *faciunt* (Cic. *Q. fr.* 2.15.2)
« These things make me confident »

(12) *de hoc* ***cunctam Italiam*** *quid* ***sentiret*** *ostendere* (Cic. *leg*. 3.45)
« [...] to show what the whole of Italy thought about this man »

At first sight, this distribution — Varro, Cicero's letters and the *Bellum Africum*, all of which have been associated with colloquial language use — seems to justify Hofmann's view that at this time the construction lived on in spoken language. However, there is another explanation available. In Varro, given his archaistic taste (and the genre, an agricultural guide), the examples can easily be taken as conscious archaisms. Although not as evident, the same explanation is possible even for the occurrences in the *Bellum Africum*.[10]

In both Varro and Cicero, we may note the expansion of the construction into contexts where it had not been used earlier, with 3rd person governing verbs in (6), (7) and (11), an infinitive in (9) and (12), governing verbs placed after the subordination in most of these examples, and a hitherto unused verb, *ostendo* 'to show' in (12).

3.2. Archaist writers in the later imperial period

Studies on this topic do not usually cite any examples of proleptic accusatives from the early imperial period. In the later imperial period, there is a well-documented archaic movement in literary taste, and scattered examples of proleptic accusatives have been cited from these authors.

Examples (13) and (14)[11] are from Fronto who is a well-known archaist:

(13) *so<m>nus autem* ***Ulixen*** *ne patriam quidem suam diu* ***agnosceret*** *siuit* (Fronto *Ep*. 7.5 van den Hout)
« But sleep did not allow Ulysses to see his homeland for a long time »

[10] See ADAMS (2005) generally on archaisms and colloquialisms in the *Bellum Africum*.

[11] Both examples are taken from VAN DEN HOUT 's (1999) Grammatical and stylistic index, s.v. 'prolepsis'. See VAN DEN HOUT (1999: 18 and 418) for analysis and comments.

Again, the governing verb is placed well after the subordination (and not close to the proleptic constituent). The verb *sino* 'to allow' was not used with a proleptic accusative in early Latin. However, the proleptic constituent *Ulixen* is thematic.

In the case of (14), the same observations apply, namely that the verb *faueo* 'to favour' is not used with a proleptic accusative in early Latin. Similarly, the governing verb is not placed close to the proleptic constituent but well after the subordination:

(14) *et mihi* ***filiam*** *et tibi* ***uxorem****, ut recte* ***proueniat****,* <u>*fauebunt*</u>
(Fronto *Ep*. 178.9 van den Hout)
« May gods favour me with my daughter and you with your wife that she pulls through well »

But again, the proleptic constituents *filiam* and *uxorem* are thematic. We may ask how Fronto came to use these constructions. Did he use them because they had an archaic ring to him even though they are not identical to the archaic proleptic accusatives? If so, they can be regarded as a literary extension of the archaic proleptic construction.

The third example, from a letter to Fronto by Marcus Aurelius, is clearly different:

(15) <u>*fac*</u> ***me*** *ut sciam* (Marcus Aurelius, in Fronto *Ep*. 52.10 van den Hout)
« Let me know »

This example is an 'archaic' proleptic accusative. It is clearly modelled on Plautus, as so many other expressions in Fronto's correspondence

I present example (16) here because it is used in Hofmann-Szantyr's grammar (1965: 471) as an example of late proleptic accusatives. The writer Solinus was an archaist (late 3rd or4th century):

(16) ***ceteras*** *Didymen Eriphusam Phoenicusam Euonymon quoniam similes* ***sunt*** <u>*dictas*</u> <u>*habemus*</u> (C. Iulius Solinus 6.3)
« We have said that others, Didyme, Eriphusa, Phoenicusa and Euonymos, are similar »

Ignoring here the odd perfect construction *ceteras ... dictas habemus*, we may note that the verb *dico* 'to say' is used with proleptic accusatives already in early Latin. But apart from this, there are many differences that separate this example from the earlier ones. The governing verb is in the 3rd person and in past tense as well as placed last in the sentence. Most importantly, however, the construction in fact looks like a replacement for the Classical *accusativus cum infinitivo* –construction. After the initial accusative it continues with a finite clause introduced by *quoniam*.

3.3. *Mulomedicina Chironis* (around AD 400)

We then move on to the late 4th or early 5th century. The *Mulomedicina Chironis* is famous above all for its nonstandard language that was noted even by contemporary writers. The *Mulomedicina* is, so to speak, the chief witness for proleptic accusatives in the late period.

(17) *desines* ***humorem*** *ut* ***decurrat*** (Mulom. Chir. 708)
« Remove the liquid, so that it flows »

We may note that although the verb, *desino*, is not used with a proleptic accusative in early Latin (cf. Serbat 1996: 182), the governing verb is in the second person singular and thus bears close resemblance to the early examples. In addition, the proleptic constituent *humorem* is thematic.

Similarly, in (18) and (19), the form of the governing verb (imperative) connects the construction to early Latin although the verb *sino* was not used with a proleptic accusative in early Latin. The proleptic constituent *eum* is not strictly speaking thematic (rather the *medicamentum* is) :

(18) *in os sine* ***eum*** *medicamentum* ***lambiat*** (Mulom. Chir. 840)
« Let it lick the medicine in its mouth »

(19) *sine* ***eum*** *medicamentum iam* ***bibat*** (Mulom. Chir. 910)
« Let it drink the medicine »

The fourth example from the *Mulomedicina* is again structurally similar to the early examples. The verb *facio* 'to make' is a familiar verb from early Latin with this construction, and although it is here in the infinitive, the infinitive is governed by a second person verb. Furthermore, the proleptic constituent *eam* is thematic in the contex:

(20) *et* ***eam*** *facere uoles ne* ***crescat*** (Mulom. Chir. 642)
« And you want to prevent it from growing »

These examples from the *Mulomedicina* thus show similarity to the older ones. One should, however, note that Greek influence from the source(s) cannot be ruled out here.[12]

3.4. The Vulgate

For the Vulgate the following example is representative:

(21) *et uidit Deus* ***lucem*** *quod* ***esset*** *bona* (Vulg. *Gen*. 1.4)
« And God saw the light, that it was good »

A full discussion of the phenomenon of prolepsis in the Vulgate (Old Testament) can be found in the article of L. Sznajder in this volume. Her study shows that most of the proleptic accusatives in the Vulgate are of a

[12] See ADAMS (1995: 10) for the sources and relationship of the late Latin veterinary treatises.

certain type. In contrast to the earlier constructions, we now find the proleptic constructions only occasionally with an indirect question or a purpose clause, but instead in most cases the subordination is a declarative clause and construed with a complement introduced by the conjunction *quod*, *quoniam* or *quia* (Sznajder, this volume). These are contexts which in Classical Latin would have taken the *accusativus cum infinitivo*, a type seen above in example (16). The most common governing verb in the Vulgate is *uideo*. Notable, furthermore, are the forms of *uideo* (and other governing verbs) : they are usually in the 3rd person and in the past tense. Nevertheless, the proleptic constituents (as *lucem* here) are often thematic.

In this new construction type, Jerome's translation was probably influenced by the syntax of the original Hebrew text. The underlying Hebrew construction was easily 'latinized' by Jerome, given the already existing model of the proleptic construction in earlier Latin literature.

3.5. *Peregrinatio Egeriae* (4/5th century)

Another late witness that is usually cited for examples of proleptic accusatives is the *Peregrinatio Egeriae*. It is roughly contemporary with the *Mulomedicina*, dating from the 4th or 5th century. Both Väänänen (1987: 128) and Löfstedt (1962: 271-272) in their commentaries draw attention to proleptic accusatives in this text. In (22), *dico* is an 'old' verb but *lego* in (23) is a new verb. The governing verbs are in the 3rd person and in the 1st person (the examples come from the same episode):

> (22) *tunc ait michi sanctus episcopus : '**Nachor** autem cum suis uel **Bathuhelem** non dicit Scriptura canonis, quo tempore **transierint'*** (*Peregr. Eg*. 20.10)
> « Then the holy bishop said to me: 'Nachor with his people, or Bathuel, the canonical scriptures do not say when they passed this way' »
>
> (23*) tunc ego dixi: '[...] **Naor** autem uel **Bathuhelem** non legi quando in isto loco **transierint'*** (*Peregr. Eg*. 20.9)
> « Then I said: 'But Naor or Bathuel, I did not read when they passed this way' »

However, both proleptic constituents *Nachor* and *Bathuhelem* are thematic, and the subordinate clauses are indirect questions.[13]

[13] In the *Peregrinatio*, the genitive *Bathuhelis* appears in addition to the form *Bathuhelem*. Elsewhere, the name is in the nominative *Bathuel*, and may have a genitive *Bathuelis*. It therefore seems that *Bathuhelem* is meant to be in the accusative. *Naor* or *Nachor* is undeclinable.

3.6. *Vitae patrum* (6th century)

The last examples to be discussed come from the *Vitae patrum*. Example (24) presents what is in many respects an early type of a proleptic accusative, with *facio* as the governing verb, and a purpose clause in the subordination, even if *faciet* is in the 3rd person:

(24) *labor ipse faciet* ***eos*** *ut a semet* ***fugiant*** (Vitae Patr. 6.3.2)
« The work itself will make them escape from it »

But the other examples from the *Vitae Patrum* are again of the type that serves as a replacement for the *accusativus cum infinitivo*. In two of these, (25) and (27), the governing verbs are in the 3rd person and past tense. In (26) the governing verb is a present participle. Furthermore, examples (26) and (27) have the subordinate verbs in the indicative mood:

(25) *et sciebat* ***eum*** *quod vinum non* ***biberet*** (Vitae Patr. 3.151)
« and he knew him, that he did not drink wine »

(26) *uidens* ***eum*** *idem senex quia* ***cecidit*** *surrexit et expandit manus suas ad Deum* (Vitae Patr. 6.2.14)
« The same old man, seeing him, that he fell, stood up and stretched out his hands towards God »

(27) *intrantes autem inuenimus* ***eum****, quia* ***dormierat*** *in pace* (Vitae Patr. 6.3.1)
« But when we went in, we found out that he had slept away in peace »

These late constructions have got very little to do with the early proleptic accusatives. The *Vitae Patrum* has largely been translated from Greek, and it cannot be ruled out that the proleptic constructions in it may have been influenced or even directly caused by the Greek original.[14] However that may be, with the exception of (24) these examples seem to be of the biblical type (cf. (21) above). This new narrative type is best described as a finite counterpart of the *accusativus cum infinitivo* rather than a proleptic accusative. It seems possible that this declarative construction originated in the biblical translations and was then carried over to other Christian narrative texts, such as the *Vitae Patrum*.

[14] Examples (24)-(27) have been taken from HOFMANN (1926: 92-93), who argues that they do not show Greek influence.

4. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made from the observations made above about proleptic accusatives in late Latin:

- New verbs (*sino, desino, lego*) appear with 'proleptic' accusatives.
- The occurrences in the *Mulomedicina Chironis* resemble the early examples concerning their structure, pragmatics as well as text type although the governing verbs are new.
- A new construction that in essence is not a proleptic accusative can be recognized, with a selection of the following characteristics:

  -governing verb in past tense
  -governing verb in the 3rd person
  -present participle as the governing verb
  -governing verbs e.g., *video* used with a final complement, introduced by *quod*, *quia* or *quoniam*
  -subordinate verb in the indicative

- This 'narrative type' possibly originated in the Vulgate where the Hebrew original provided a model for the extension of the familiar construction into declarative contexts.
- It can be concluded that proleptic accusatives changed their shape in remarkable ways during the history of Latin. Consequently, proleptic accusatives in late texts seem to form a category of their own, without a direct (spoken) continuum with the early examples.

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