Morphosyntactic realignment and markedness change in Late Latin: Evidence from charter texts

La réorganisation de la structure d'actance et le changement de marquage dans le latin tardif

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Cet article examine comment l'accusatif latin devenait le cas par défaut/non marqué et comment ce coup de marquage s'associe à la réorganisation de la structure d'actance du latin tardif. Le nominatif est le cas par défaut/non marqué du latin classique, typiquement des langues nominatif/accusatives (N/A). Dans le latin tardif l'alignement nominatif/accusatif s'est transformé en un système sémantiquement motivé et, plus tard, en un système acasuel des langues romanes. Avec ce processus l'accusatif est devenu le cas défaut/non marqué, ce qui peut être conclu en comparant les noms utilisés dans des phrases nominales aux résultats d'une étude quantitative des sujets à l'accusatif dans le latin des chartes médiévales.

This paper discusses how the Latin accusative became the unmarked default case and how this markedness turn is related to the morphosyntactic realignment of the grammatical relations in Late Latin. In Classical Latin, the nominative was the unmarked default case, as is typical of nominative/accusative (N/A) aligned languages. In Late Latin, the N/A alignment changed to a semantically-based and further to a neutralised system of the Romance languages with no case contrast at all. In this process, the accusative became the unmarked default case. The present paper will bring forward evidence in support of this by comparing the extra-syntactic uses of accusatives and nominatives with the results of a quantitative study of the extended accusative in charter Latin. The change of the default case turns out to be subject to the same semantic constraints that determine the morphosyntactic alignment.[1]

1. Introduction

In Classical Latin, morphosyntactic alignment had been primarily of the N/A type with the nominative as the default case and citation form. As for Late Latin, several studies during the past fifteen or so years have postulated that the case system changed partially and temporarily into active/inactive aligned (semantically-based) before the neutralisation of the case opposition in the Romance (e.g. Plank, 1985, Cennamo, 2009, Rovai, 2012). This realignment likely involved a markedness change so that the accusative came to be the unmarked default case. In this light it seems natural that the majority of the Romance nouns derive from the Latin accusative form.

This paper begins by defining the terms "markedness" and "default case" in the Latin context (section 2). It continues by discussing the nominal clauses[2] and the morphosyntactic alignment of Latin by way of example sentences and a corpus study (sections 4 to 6). It will be shown that

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[1] I owe many thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments. I also thank Ansel Siegenthaler who revised my English as well as Hilla Halla-aho, Aleksi Mäkilähde, Tommi Alho, and Ville Leppänen who commented on the first draft of the paper.

[2] Note that, contrary to the convention of English grammar, in this paper "nominal clause" denotes a non-elliptic verbless construction with NPs only. See Schütze (2001) below.

markedness is tightly connected to the animacy and agentivity of the noun in a semantically-based alignment: personal names are typical *loci* of the marked case. The study shows how the markedness change and the morphosyntactic realignment are intertwined and proposes an approximate dating for the defaultisation of the accusative (section 7).

Previous studies explain the Latin realignment process from the N/A to the active/inactive marking by a semanticisation of the N/A case opposition as well as by the influence of the clause type (Plank, 1985, p. 291, Cennamo, 2009, p. 327–328, Rovai, 2012, p. 104). However, the scarcity of appropriate evidence weakens this appealing theory. There are only a few sources of non-literary Latin that are not transmitted through a textual history. Charter texts are practically the only substantial source that survives as originals and provides abundant information on non-standard language. This paper seeks to study the developments of the spoken early medieval Latin through the non-standard phenomena that surface in the conservative written Latin of charters. The scribes of LLCT apparently still shared most of the Classical Latin ideals of spelling and morphology but, despite it, let several spoken-language related phenomena creep into their texts.

I utilise the terms Classical and Late Latin as convenient periodising labels without any deeper consideration on the registers. In this paper, Classical Latin grammar means roughly the commonly accepted grammatical system of the Late Republican and Imperial Latin before the 4th century while Late Latin is used for the Latin of and after the 4th century. All the texts discussed are from non-literary registers.

2. Default case and markedness

Several studies of the Late Latin morphosyntactic realignment explain the extension of the accusative to nominal clauses and subject function as caused by the accusative becoming the default case (e.g. Cennamo, 2009, p. 327). The term "default" is often used to refer to a form that is somehow the most general and normal one. In the following, I will consider some definitions of being "default" and then explain how the term will be used in this paper.

"Default" is usually defined as the value which is chosen when no syntactic setting is specially assigned. This study is interested in default forms as far as the case is concerned. Default case occurs when there are no obvious criteria for selecting a particular case form. Schütze (2001) restricts "default case" only to nominal clauses:

> "The default-case forms of a language are those that are used to spell out nominal expressions that are not associated with any case feature assigned or otherwise determined by syntactic mechanisms."

It is easy to see that default form is tightly connected to another cognitively challenging concept, namely markedness. Frazier (2007) assimilates default case and unmarked case:

> "Default case appears when a [Determiner Phrase] cannot get case through normal syntactic mechanisms [--]. Default case is best analyzed as an example of emergence of the unmarked. When case cannot be assigned, the least marked case is used."

Markedness characterises a form which appears to be unusual or difficult in comparison to a more common or regular form. The dominant default or minimum-effort form represents the unmarked pole of the marked/unmarked dichotomy while the less common or irregular form is the marked one. To define the markedness status of a form, the researcher must resolve which unit of the dichotomy is "usual" or "normal" as opposed to the "unusual" or "abnormal" form (Andersen, 2001).

Several other terms are also related to markedness. Smith (2011) introduces the term "core value" and makes a finer distinction between the already mentioned concepts:

> "[T]he notion of 'core' value [--] is associated with one or more of at least the following: qualitative unmarkedness, quantitative unmarkedness (higher frequency) and default status. Often, these criteria will yield identical results; but not always."

Smith suggests that qualitative and quantitative unmarkedness and default status can all be subsumed under a single notion, namely "core value". Smith's qualitative and quantitative (un)markedness is more commonly known as formal and functional markedness. Formal markedness means that the marked unit is coded with more phonetic material than the unmarked unit. Functional markedness, instead, is defined as higher distributional restrictions of the marked unit with respect to the unmarked one.

It is well-known that in many Indo-European languages, Latin included, both the nominative and accusative cases are morphologically marked although cross-linguistically the nominative is expected to have no marker in a N/A alignment.[3] For example, the *o*-declension masculines have -*us* in the nominative and -*um* in the accusative. It is, however, functional markedness that is of the most interest in this paper. In spite of the theoretical complexity of the issue, it is sufficient for this study to consider the concepts of default case and unmarked case as synonyms that reflect the "emergence of the unmarked" in the functional sense.

3. Data

The data of this study come from three collections of Late Latin charters: 1) *Tablettes Albertini* (TA), 31 North-African private documents from between AD 493–496, published by Courtois *et al*., 1952, 2) Ravenna papyri (RP), 59 Italian private and public documents mainly from the 6th century, published by Tjäder, 1955–1982, 3) Late Latin Charter Treebank (LLCT), a machine-readable, morphologically and syntactically parsed corpus of 519 charters (198,714 words) from Tuscany from between AD 714 and 869. The LLCT documents, as well as those of TA and RP, deal mostly with buying or selling landed property. The technical description of LLCT can be found in Korkiakangas and Passarotti, 2011.

A cursory research will be sufficient for TA and RP, which contain only a few accusatives in the subject function, while a detailed corpus study will be performed on LLCT, which displays a considerable number of accusative subjects.

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[3] It is true that for example in Latin the 1st declension displays unmarked nominative forms (-*a* vs. acc. -*am*), which makes the system a mixed one.

4. Extended accusative

In Classical as well as Late Latin, the accusative appears in extra-syntactic positions, where it is not expected to appear in N/A systems. In Late Latin, the accusative is found even as the subject of finite verbs. This phenomenon is called the "extended accusative". In the following, I present some examples of accusatives appearing in nominal clauses and as subjects. They are taken from Cennamo, 2009, Rovai, 2012, and Adams, 2013.

(1) *me infelicem et scelestam* [--] (Plaut. *Cist.* 685, 3rd/2nd c. BC)

   'oh me unhappy and cursed [--]'

(2) *ius in sarda: piper, origanum, mentam, cepam, aceti modicum et oleum* (Apic. 9.10.3, 4th c. AD)

   'sauce for sardine: pepper, oregano, mint, onion, a little vinegar and oil'

(3) *portionem ad eos qui sanguinem meient* (Chiron 822, 4th c. AD)

   'a drink for those who pass blood'

(4) S_O subject, impersonal: *incerte errat animus*: *praeter propter vitam vivitur* (Enn. *trag.* 248, 3rd/2nd c. BC)

   'the mind wanders aimlessly: one lives life only so-so'

(5) S_O subject, unaccusative: *nascitur ei genuorum contractionem et claudicationem* (Chiron 516)

   'its knees are developing a contraction and limp'

(6) S_A subject, unergative: *si sequenter ipsum currit* (*Lex Alamannorum* 94.3, cod. A, c. AD 720)

   'if he runs away subsequently'

(7) A subject, transitive: *fontem vero ubi testa saniam radebat quater in anno colorem mutat* (Egeria 13.1, *Excerpta Matritiensia* 20–25, 4th c. AD)

   'indeed, the fountain, where he scraped the pus with a crock, changes its colour four times a year'

(8) A subject, transitive: *nec hoc quod eos quesierunt habere debent* (*Lex Curiensis* 2.9, 8th c. AD)

   'and they should not get what they have asked'

With exclamations, accusative is attested from very early on, as seen in the Plautine example (1) (Pinkster, 2015, p. 364–365). The accusative is also used in independent lists (2) and headings (3), where one can conjecture a verb although it is not necessary, as the accusatives seem to be semantically motivated regardless. I will not reckon (1) to (3) among extended accusatives because they appear to be an established part of the Latin grammatical toolkit. Nevertheless, these uses seem to anticipate the extension of the accusative to clearly syntactic environments. In number (4), *vitam*

is often viewed as a cognate object of the impersonal construction (e.g. Pinkster, 2015, p. 268–269), but can also be interpreted as a subject reanalysed as an object, as Cennamo, 2009, suggests. In (5), there are accusative-form subjects attached to an unaccusative, intransitive verb, which denotes change of state. Number (6) is an example of an accusative-form pronoun subject with unergative verb, and (7) and (8) are claimed to be examples of accusative subject with transitive constructions. The subject is S_O in (4) and (5), S_A in (6), and A in (7) and (8).

It is noteworthy that examples (1) to (3) can be explained as resulting from default case assignment. I argue, however, that the extended accusative and markedness are tightly intertwined in all the examples. Indeed, Cennamo (2009) and Vincent (1997) have suggested that the default use of the accusative is the reason of the extension of accusative from nominal clauses to more and more verb-like and transitive constructions. According to Cennamo (2009, p. 327), the accusative alternates with the nominative in the encoding of non-active "neutral" participants, i.e. those "at rest" in the clause.[4]

Before presenting my findings from LLCT, I will summarise in the following what is meant by the morphosyntactic alignment and which kind of realignment is supposed to have taken place in Late Latin.

5. Alignment types

In N/A alignment, which was predominant in Classical Latin, the subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs (A and S) are opposed to the object of the transitive verb (O) as for their case form. Both A and S are encoded by the nominative and O by the accusative. Ergative/absolutive alignment is the mirror image of N/A alignment: the subjects of transitive verbs (A) are opposed to the other nuclear arguments (S and O). A is encoded by a case that is conventionally called the ergative and the other nuclear argument with a case called the absolutive.

Some languages split nuclear argument S into two semantically-motivated arguments, S_A and S_O. S_A represents the semantically active, agentive Actor macrorole, and formally aligns with A. S_O, instead, is the semantically inactive, non-agentive, Undergoer macrorole, and formally aligns with O, hence the name active/inactive alignment, which is used along with "semantically-based alignment", a term proposed among others by Rovai, 2012. Rovai states that the semantically-based alignment manifests itself through the S_O subjects, which often occur with unaccusative verbs. Because S_O subjects typically are inanimate nouns (examples (4), (5), and (7)), the extension of the accusative to the subject function can be best observed in the low-animacy domains of Latin (Rovai, 2012, p. 112). The extended accusatives which are found in contexts such as those in examples (4) to (8) suggest a limited presence of semantically-motivated alignment in Late Latin. It was apparently only a transitory stage in the realignment process of Latin grammatical relations, whose outcome was the neutralised alignment of the modern Romance languages (except Romanian) with no case contrast. That the alleged semantically-based alignment does not show completely in the extant sources is supposed to be due to the conservativeness of the written code.

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[4] Adams (2013, p. 254–256) claims, instead, that the extension of the accusative cannot be explained by assuming the accusative to be the default case of Latin. This position seems justified as regards the early stages of the Latinity, whereas there seems to be no doubt that a default-changing markedness turn took place in Late Latin.

Cross-linguistically, it has been noticed that the N/A alignment implies markedness of O and unmarkedness of A. Conversely, semantically-based alignment usually implies markedness of A and unmarkedness of O (Plank, 1985, p. 301–302). Thus, a good point of departure is to consider the Classical Latin nominative to be the unmarked case. From a typological perspective, postulating a semantically-based alignment in Late Latin implies a markedness change somewhere between Classical and Late Latin.

6. Evidence from LLCT

Next I will demonstrate how the LLCT data support the existence of a mainly semantically-based alignment in Late Latin. Table 1 presents the case distribution of the 3rd declension imparisyllabic subjects. The imparisyllabic nouns, such as *pars* (acc. *partem*), are resistant to the morphophonological levelling: they are able to maintain the N/A contrast because their nominative and accusative forms still differ from each other in LLCT (*pars*, acc. *parte(m)*). Instead, with parisyllabic nouns, such as *testis* 'witness' (acc. *testem*), it is difficult to tell whether forms like *testi* derive from the nominative or from the accusative due to the phonetic erosion of the word-final sounds. The below table shows the cross-tabulation between case (N/A) and animacy/referentiality class, which features three levels: inanimate common nouns (e.g. *pars* 'part'), animate common nouns (e.g. *homo* 'man'), personal names (e.g. *Wileradu*) (cf. Croft, 2003, p. 130). Although personal names are animate, they are treated separately because they are supposed to be more agentive than the animate common (non-personal) nouns.

Table 1. Dependence between subject case and animacy/referentiality class (3rd decl. imparisyllabic subjects).

Case		Animacy			Total
		inanimate	animate	personal	
nominative	N	173	118	10	301
	%	69.2%	90.1%	91%	76.8%
	residual[5]	-4.7	4.4	1.1	
accusative	N	77	13	1	91
	%	**31%**	**10%**	c. 10%	23%
	residual	**4.7**	**-4.4**	-1.1	
Total	N	250	131	11	392
Chi-square		$\chi^2 = 22.28$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$			

Table 1 shows that the accusative percentage of the inanimate subjects is considerably higher (31%) than those of the animate common noun and personal name subjects (both about 10%). The fact that these animate and personal name subjects do have accusatives in about 10% of cases is noteworthy. This may suggest that the alignment is not exclusively semantically-motivated.

In the same way, Table 2 shows that the accusative percentage of the S_O subjects of the unaccusative constructions (both active and passive) is higher (about 30%) than the accusative percentages of the A subjects of transitive constructions (15%) and of the S_A subjects of the

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[5] For the interpretation of the adjusted standardised residuals, see Agresti, 2007, p. 38–39.

unergative constructions (about 10%). It is interesting that here the smallest percentage is not the A subjects but the S_A subjects. This is likely to be related to the fact that the A subjects of LLCT are particularly low in transitivity, a topic which is, however, beyond the scope of this study.
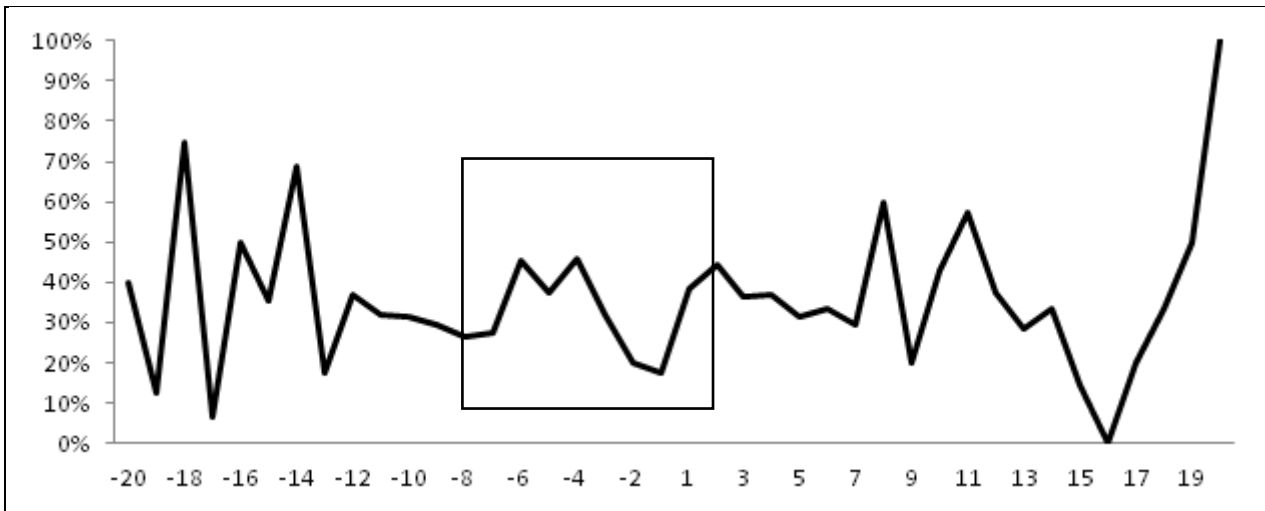
Table 2. Dependence between subject case and construction type (3rd decl. imparisyllabic subjects).

Case		Construction type				Total
		A	S_A	S_O	S_O passive	
nominative	N	124	25	123	29	301
	%	85.5%	c. 90%	68.7%	c. 75%	76.8%
	residual	3.1	1.6	-3.5	-0.7	
accusative	N	21	3	56	11	91
	%	**15%**	c. 10%	**31%**	c. 30%	23%
	residual	**-3.1**	-1.6	**3.5**	0.7	
Total	N	145	28	179	40	392
Chi-square		$\chi^2 = 15.16$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$				

It is obvious that the animacy/referentiality class of the subject and the construction type in which the subject occurs are not independent of each other. What I want to show with the above numbers is, however, that there seems to be a theory-compatible, systematic dependence between the subject case and the animacy as well as construction type categories, both of which have been proposed to be crucial factors in defining the extension of the accusative to the subject function. The accusative percentages of Tables 1 and 2 suggest an essentially semantically-based alignment for the Latin of LLCT. However, the successive evolutionary stages, i.e. the ergative/absolutive and the neutralised alignments, seem to be present as well: the S_A and A subjects already display accusatives, albeit to a lesser degree (15% and c. 10%) than the S_O subjects. On the other hand, the nominative is still the most common subject case, which is only to be expected in written texts, which, obviously, reflect the spoken language only imperfectly.
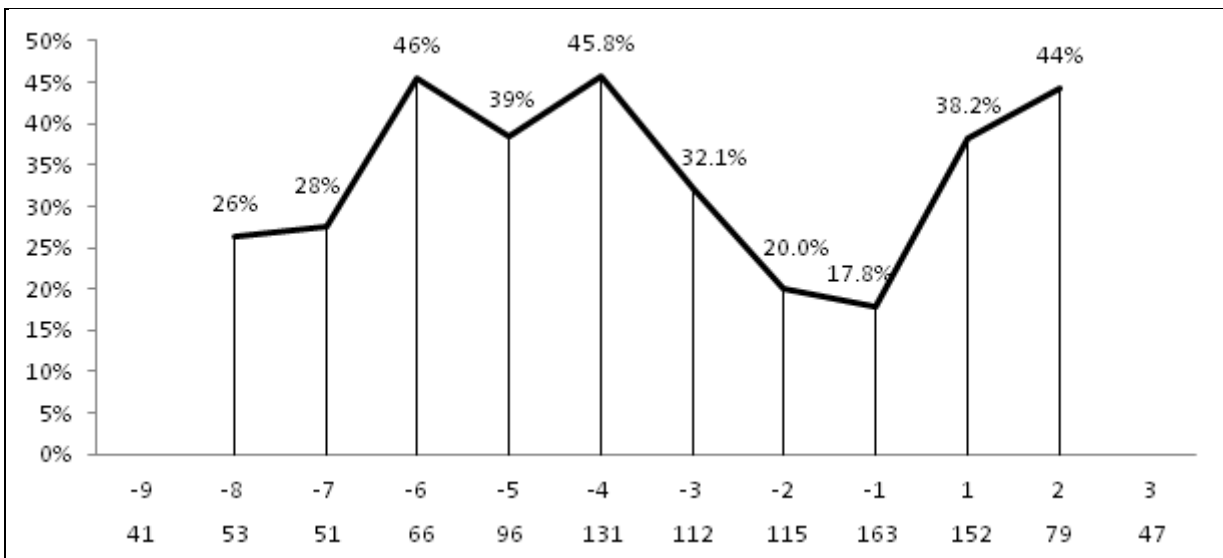
The syntactic variable that describes the linear distance of the subject from the verbal head is, however, even more interesting for this paper. Figure 1 presents the accusative percentage of the LLCT subjects as a function of distance from verb. The number on the X-axis is the distance of the subject from the verb, measured as word positions. A negative value stands for preverbal subject position and a positive value for postverbal subject position.

Figure 1. Accusative percentage of subjects as a function of distance from verb in LLCT (-20 to +20).

The oscillation of the percentage graph is considerable on the fringes of the graph, which results from the fact that there are only a few occurrences of subjects (1 to 10) at the extreme positions. Therefore, I choose only the range from -8 to +2 which contains most occurrences (i.e. more than 50 at each position; see Figure 2). This range has enough occurrences to make Pearson's chi-square test possible. The most important point is the dive at positions -2 and, especially, at -1. At -1, the accusative percentage is only 17.8. In other words, over 80% of the immediately preverbal subjects are in the nominative.

Figure 2. Accusative percentage and frequency of subjects as a function of distance from verb in LLCT (-8 to +2) ($\chi^2 = 49.69$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$).

I suggest that, in the immediate preverbal position, the cohesion of the subject/verb combination is at its highest and that is why scribes succeeded in producing the marked case, i.e. the nominative better than in other places, where the unmarked default case tended to occur. Indeed the further from the verbal head the subject is, the more easily it seems to slip into the unmarked case form, i.e. the accusative. This observation is obviously connected to the idea of default case: in those contexts where the syntactic cohesion of the verbal nucleus is weakened, the accusative, i.e. the default case, occurs.

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7. Default case and personal names

Next, I examine briefly the other two charter corpora, TA from the late 5th century and RP from the 6th century, to show how these materials provide information on the markedness change. TA and RP still display a very classicising form of Latin, and the deviations from the classical standard appear mainly in the formula "blanks", in which proper names were added, as well as in those few free sections where, for example, the borders of the sold real estate were defined.

The extended accusative is found only seven times in TA, and is restricted to low-animacy and low-agentivity domains, such as in sentence (9) (Väänänen, 1965, p. 38). RP also has only a handful of accusative subjects. Instead, there are lots of extra-syntactic inventories of various things, and these are almost systematically in the accusative (10).

(9) *in quibus sunt* [--] *siteciae arborem unam* (TA 4.7–8)

    'in which there are [--] <u>one pistachio tree</u>'

(10) *item et in speciebus secundum divisionem argenti libras duas*, *hoc est* [--] *butte minore valente siliquas duas* [--], *falce missuria*, [--] (RP 8.2.5, AD 564)

    'likewise <u>two pounds</u> of silver in goods according to the inventory, i.e. a <u>small barrel</u> worth two *siliquae* [--], a <u>sickle</u>, [--]'

On this basis, it is evident that the realignment was under way at the time of TA and RP: although the accusative-form subjects are few, they are restricted to inanimate nouns. Naturally, the written code does not reveal the real extension of realignment. What is, however, even more interesting are the personal names and their attributes that often seem to be in the nominative, especially when filling in the formula blanks in TA, e.g. (11) (Courtois *et al.*, 1952, p. 74–75, Adams, 2013, p. 213–215).

(11) *ego Lucianus petitus a Maxinus benditor* (TA 9.24)

    'I, Lucianus, [who was] asked by <u>Maxinus, the seller</u>'

This kind of case distribution makes sense: the fruit trees or barrels, as in (9) and (10), are low in agentivity, and therefore the first and the foremost to indicate a semantically-based system. The personal names, instead, are prototypically highly agentive and the nominative is the case of the Agent both in the N/A and semantically-based alignments. Thus, it is no surprise that in a semantically-based alignment the marked case form is realised in the personal names or, in other words, the default case of personal names is nominative due to their agentivity.[6]

As for the chronology, no accusative-form animate or S_A/A subject is attested in TA or RP (5th to 6th century), whereas they are found in LLCT (8th to 9th century). In general, there are only a few sporadic attestations of accusative-form animate or S_A/A subjects in the entire Latinity of the earlier centuries (see (7)). In TA, the nominative seems to be the default case of the agentive personal

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[6] It is true that the unmarked default case of personal names was the nominative also in the Classical N/A system. The point is, however, that at the time of TA the extension of the accusative had not yet fully reached the personal names.

names. Instead, in LLCT even the default case of the personal names which are utilised to fill in blanks is usually accusative (12).

(12) *manifestum est mihi Ferdualdum filio bone memorie Richiprandi quia* [--] (LLCT: MED 195, AD 784)

'it is manifest to me, Ferdualdus, son of the late Richiprandus, that [--]'

On these grounds, it seems plausible to state that ultimate markedness change, including the personal names, took place somewhere between the 5th and 8th centuries although it had certainly begun earlier with inanimate nouns. At the same time, morphosyntactic realignment was going on and seems to have surpassed partly the semantically-based stage at the time of LLCT (8th to 9th century); the accusative had already extended to S_A and even A subjects, and appears as the default case of the personal names in formula blanks.

8. Conclusion

I conclude that in the 5th and 6th centuries the semantically-driven realignment was in all likelihood going on, but did not yet manifest itself very clearly in written texts because of the scribes' education and classicising aspirations. Likewise, at that time the markedness change is still likely to have been under way. Although the default case form of the inanimate nouns was already the accusative, the default form of the agentive personal names in the formula blanks still seems to be the nominative. Instead, during the 8th and 9th centuries the semantically-based alignment is still visible, but the successive evolutionary stages appear to be present as well. The accusative is already the unmarked and default case even in most personal names.

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