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## Is it Possible to Identify ‘Orality’?

*Verb-Phrases ‘Auxiliary+Infinitive’ in Spoken (Late) Latin*

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### Abstract

First, based on analysis of some – mostly late – Latin texts that positively reflect actual oral delivery, I present some remarks on structure and frequency of Verb-Phrases ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ as arguable markers of ‘orality’ in Latin. Second, I examine the occurrence of these Verb-Phrases in some works by Ambrose of Milan and show that, on the one hand, the investigation of Verb-Phrases might support the view that the *De sacramentis* and *Explanatio symboli* are unrevised catecheses, but, on the other hand, it is of no help in the conjecture of the degree of elaboration undergone by those works that, stemming from an oral homiletic delivery, were later revised in view of publication.

### Keywords

Latin language – Latin linguistics – orality – word order – Ambrose of Milan

In this paper I investigate structure and frequency of a specific Verb-Phrase (henceforth, VP) – the one formed by an auxiliary verb governing an infinitive as a direct object – as a trace of “l’oral dans l’écrit”<sup>1</sup> in Latin texts. This research relies on an obvious presumption: orality, i.e. traits of the spoken language, *can* be witnessed in the written *medium*, including literary texts. This might occur not only when a linguistic utterance is conceived of as pertaining to the “langage de l’immédiat” (‘conceptional’ orality),<sup>2</sup> but also when texts are dictated or are as a result of notes taken down during an oral performance (‘compositional’ orality).<sup>3</sup>

In section (1), I present some data that strengthen the assumption that VPs might be viewed as markers of orality, that is of ‘spoken Latin’, in two respects:

- order of the constituents. We can assume that spoken Latin is mirrored when – in the majority of VPs – the constituents are placed according to the ‘head+modifier’ order (= ‘auxiliary verb+dependent infinitive’), a fact that should be connected to the shift from OV to VO order taking place in spoken Latin over time, and resulting in VO order being “usual in speech higher up

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<sup>1</sup> Österreicher 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Österreicher 1998, 145-147, speaks of “oralité conceptionnel”; he also presents a survey of the typologies of Latin texts endowed with conceptional orality and, therefore, arguably attesting features of ‘spoken Latin’ (1998, 149-153). On ‘conceptional’ orality as different from orality as applicable only to linguistic utterances achieved through the written *medium*, cf. also Koch - Österreicher 2010, 585-587.

<sup>3</sup> As suggested by Moretti 2017, 495-499: therein the impact of compositional orality on the language of Jerome’s letters, which were hastily dictated, is dealt with.

the educational scale as well” in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>4</sup> Although some of these data have been discussed in earlier studies,<sup>5</sup> here I add new ones and reconsider the figures, drawing attention to the difference between main and subordinate clauses, the latter not surprisingly being less innovative than the former;

- high frequency. The frequency of this kind of VP seems to be quite high in texts positively mirroring an oral delivery, such as the lessons held by the 5<sup>th</sup> century grammarian Pompeius, which arise from notes taken down by his students while he was speaking, or the stenographic accounts of the councils of Aquileia (381 A.D.) and Carthage (411 A.D.). The increasing frequency of VPs admittedly is not confined to spoken Latin, in that it should be connected both to syntactic changes endured by the infinitive and to the process of grammaticalization undergone by some of these VPs in late Latin at large: nevertheless, it turns out to be widespread especially in texts endowed with compositional orality.

These two criteria – prominence of ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ order and high rate of occurrence of VPs –, when they are associated, seem to offer a reliable tool for detecting orality as featuring in Latin texts, especially those dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on.

In section (2), I put this tool to the test, and analyze the occurrence of VPs in a few select works by Ambrose of Milan. As a matter of fact, most of Ambrose’s works can be assumed to stem from the oral delivery of one or more homilies, which are later revised in view of publication. In particular, I first investigate the *De sacramentis* and the *Explanatio symboli*, whose linguistic peculiarities have sometimes even lead scholars to question their genuineness: the analysis of VPs supports the view that they could be unrevised catecheses, written down by *notarii* whilst the bishop was delivering them orally, and that their linguistic peculiarities should be accounted for in light of their being unembellished recordings of the bishop’s speech. Second, an investigation of VPs confirms that the *Explanatio psalmi 43*, which we know to have been composed by Ambrose on his deathbed, is not based on a sermon delivered orally. However, when other works by Ambrose are taken into consideration (on the one hand, allegedly revised homilies: *De mysteriis*, *Explanatio psalmi 38*, *Contra Auxentium*; on the other hand, a written treatise that possibly incorporates some earlier homiletic materials: *De officiis*), analysis of VPs does not lead to clear-cut conclusions about the relationship between the presumable original homilies and the final layout of the works.

## 1 VPs ‘auxiliary+infinitive/infinitive+auxiliary’ in ‘spoken (late) Latin’

An investigation of the order of the constituents within the VP ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ might be serviceable, at least to some extent, in order to pinpoint traces of ‘orality’ in written Latin texts. The VPs I take into consideration are formed by an auxiliary (i.e. modal) verb, governing an infinitive as a primary object: e.g., *scire debes* vs. *debes scire*.<sup>6</sup> On account of Adams’ thorough study on *Social variation and the Latin language*, we could safely maintain that the prominence of word order ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ in these VPs can be viewed as denoting closeness to speech. As a matter of fact, postposition of the infinitive can be interpreted against the background of the diachronical shifts in word order that are peculiar to the Latin language, and can be said to reflect

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<sup>4</sup> Adams 2013, 838. Adams here refers to the the grammarian Pompeius, on whose work I shall return to below.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Adams 2013, 821-838, but also Moretti 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Propositional objects (accusative+infinitive) are ruled out. A detailed list of governing verbs which are found in our texts is presented below.

the general spread of VO (i.e., ‘head+modifier’, ‘right branching’) word order patterns in spoken Latin.<sup>7</sup>

In order to support the general assumption that postposition of the infinitive is increasingly prominent in spoken Latin – not only of low register – over time, Adams has collected a huge amount of data, ranging from early republican to late Latin, from Plautus to Anthimus.<sup>8</sup> Among these texts, a peculiar importance is given to the work of the grammarian Pompeius, who flourished in Africa during the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> Pompeius’ commentary on the *Ars* of Donatus bears a crucial witness to spoken Latin, due to its compositional orality: it results from a stenographic report of orally performed classes, a kind of ‘recording’ that bridges the medial gap between the written record and its original spoken utterance.<sup>10</sup> In Adams’ view, Pompeius’ language shows that in the 5<sup>th</sup> century postposition of the infinitive “has the look of a mechanical order”, which would surface abundantly in texts closely associated with speech, whether in high or low register ones.<sup>11</sup>

Further evidence is added to the statistical data discussed in earlier studies,<sup>12</sup> in the following tables. I have scrutinized texts which are related to orality in different ways – and to different degrees –, separating main clauses from subordinate ones, which are commonly known to be less liable to innovation ( $x_m$  vs.  $x_s$ ),<sup>13</sup> and listing both the total figures (columns 2 and 3) and percentages (column 4).

The *corpus* embraces four groups of items:

- (I.1) three texts which are closely – although differently – related both to orality and to Greek: the letters of Terentianus to Tiberianus (*P.Mich.* 467-472), which are dictated by a *semicultus* bilingual author in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (conceptional and compositional orality);<sup>14</sup> the *Itala* translation of Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 1-10 (conceptional orality);<sup>15</sup> the *Colloquium Vindobonense*, a school dialogue composed to teach spoken language (conceptional – and compositional? – orality);<sup>16</sup>

- (I.2) two literary texts: Petronius’ sections of the *Cena Trimalchionis* (41-63), where the freedmen’s speeches are artfully mimicked (conceptional orality);<sup>17</sup> a selection of Jerome’s

<sup>7</sup> See Adams 2013, 821-822. A general survey on Latin word order, on the shift occurring from prominence of OV (‘modifier+head’, ‘left-branching’) to VO order (‘head+modifier’, ‘right-branching’), and on interplay of syntactic, pragmatic and prosodic factors accounting for the “steady increase of VO patterns in Latin”, see Bauer 2009 (quotation at 270).

<sup>8</sup> Adams 2013, 829-832, see esp. the texts listed at 830.

<sup>9</sup> His *Commentary on Donatus* is published by Heinrich Keil (Keil 1868, 95-312). The third part of this work – embracing chapters *De barbarismo*, *De soloecismo*, *De ceteris vitiis*, *De metaplasmo*, *De schematibus*, *De tropis* – is now edited in Zago 2017, along with an extensive introduction (including a thorough study of the manuscript tradition) and a detailed commentary.

<sup>10</sup> As convincingly demonstrated in the detailed analysis offered by Kaster 1988, 153-159; see also Adams 1991; Adams 2013, 824-825; Zago 2017, xcvi-c.

<sup>11</sup> Adams 2013, 837-838.

<sup>12</sup> See above, n. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Hoch 1991 (313-379: 332) speaks of a “a widely noted tendency for dependent clauses to be more conservative than main clauses in syntactic change”. This conservatism, which concerns both syntax and morphology, has been accounted for in light of different factors: see esp. Matsuda 1998, who supports the view of a combination of discourse pragmatic and processing-based explanation. On Latin, cf. Bauer 1995, 91-92, 101-102; Ead., 2009, 269-271; Adams 2013, 825.

<sup>14</sup> Adams 1977, 3-6; Id. 2013, 831. See also Österreicher 1998, 150.

<sup>15</sup> See also Österreicher 1998, 152.

<sup>16</sup> See Dionisotti 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Only the freedmen’s direct speeches are taken into consideration. See Österreicher 1998, 152-153.

letters,<sup>18</sup> whose somewhat ‘informal’ Latin might result from their being dictated hastily (conceptional and compositional orality);<sup>19</sup>

- (I.3) a proper recording of spoken Latin: two sections of the above mentioned commentary of Pompeius, including the chapters *De litteris* and *De barbarismo, De soloecismo, De ceteris vitiis* (conceptional and compositional orality);<sup>20</sup>

- (I.4) two texts resulting from stenographic records of speeches: the official acts (*gesta*) of two bishops’ encounters, which are remarkable for featuring Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo, respectively, as speakers on behalf of the Catholic party:<sup>21</sup> the council of Aquileia (*Gesta concilii Aquileiensis*), summoned in 381 A.D. to try two homeousian bishops;<sup>22</sup> the conference of Carthage (*Conlatio gestorum Carthaginiensis*), 411 A.D., where the *tribunus et notarius* Marcellinus is designated to judge the Catholics’ and Donatists’ conflicting claims to embody the only catholic, i.e. universal and true, Church (compositional – and conceptional? – orality).<sup>23</sup>

Before turning to the data, I would like to draw attention to the fact that items listed in (I.2) and (I.4) were not considered by Adams, and that the *conlatio* also allows us to elucidate in detail the whole writing process from which the text itself stems, which is repeatedly hinted at by the speakers: it involves a shorthand record of the discussions (*notae*, taken down on *codices*), then transcription *in apices evidentes* (*descriptio*, in *scedae*, ‘drafts’) and *emendatio*, followed in this peculiar case by official approval (the speakers’, the stenographers’ and the judge’s *recognitio*) and publication (*editio*).<sup>24</sup> The records of dialogues must be viewed as reflecting “the actual wording of the participants”.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that formularity, even in originally spoken words, and revision, in their recording, are to be ruled out. For instance, we can expect that some spontaneous marks of oral delivery (such as interjections, interrupted sentences, anacoloutha...) should have been deleted. However, neither formularity nor revision prevent them from being almost exact recordings of – high register – spoken Latin, worthy of accurate linguistic investigation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jerome’s letters to Pope Damasus are analyzed (*epist.* 15-16, 18, 20-21, 35-36), dating from the early eighties of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>19</sup> See above, n. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. Keil 1868, 98-111 (*litt.*) and Zago 2017, 3-39 (*barb., soloec., cet.*).

<sup>21</sup> Hagedahl 1971 is still fundamental for the investigation of the role played in Latin antiquity by shorthand reports of orally performed speeches of any kind. See also Teitler 1985, to whom I shall return; Merkt 1997, focusing on Christian preaching.

<sup>22</sup> Palladius of Ratiaria and Secondianus of Singidunum. Latin text in Banterle 1988.

<sup>23</sup> The text is edited in Lancel 1974. On the conference, see Brown 2000, 330-335. Teitler (1985, 5-21, 148-149) takes his cue from the proceedings of the Carthage conference in his comprehensive study of the role of shorthand writing and writers in the late Roman Empire. The edict by which emperor Honorius orders Marcellinus to summon and preside over the conference can be read twice, in *conc. Carth.* 1.4 and 3.29.

<sup>24</sup> See Lancel 1972, 337-353, 390-391; Teitler 1985, 5-15; Atzeri 2008, 88-97.

<sup>25</sup> Pinkster 1998, 549. Lancel speaks of “textes sténographiés, scrupuleusement enregistrés” (1972, 341-342). Marcellinus’ opening edict (*conc. Carth.* 1.10) states that the report of what would be said, as it is bound to be published, should be as literal as possible, and that every speaker will have to confirm by signature the report of his own words: see Teitler 1985, 7.

<sup>26</sup> A linguistic analysis of the speeches is achieved by Lancel 1972, who dwells both on some remarkable features of orality (309-316), and on elements pertaining to the higher register, such as metrical and rhythmical *clausulae*, which often exert influence on word order also in ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ VPs (321-327). Pinkster 1998 focuses on ‘verb object/object verb’ word order in this text, and concludes that word order is, to the utmost degree, pragmatically determined. We should keep in mind that Pinkster deals only with the first session, containing the recognition of the participants which is preliminary to the discussion: Pinkster’s choice of this very peculiar section discourages one from extending his remarks to the whole text.

Table I.1	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
Terentianus	0:8	0:7	0:100 <sub>m</sub> - 0:100 <sub>s</sub>
<i>Itala, Matth.</i> 1-10	0:30	0:11	0:100 <sub>m</sub> - 0:100 <sub>s</sub>
<i>coll. Vindob.</i>	2:4	0:5	33:66 <sub>m</sub> - 0:100 <sub>s</sub>

Table I.2	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
Petron., 41-63	14:21	3:7	40:60 <sub>m</sub> - 30:70 <sub>s</sub>
Hier., <i>epist.</i> <sup>27</sup>	10:39	38:70	20:80 <sub>m</sub> - 35:65 <sub>s</sub>

Table I.3	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
Pomp., <i>litt.</i>	5:29	7:23	15:85 <sub>m</sub> - 23:77 <sub>s</sub>
Id., <i>barb.; sol.; vit.</i>	6:32	7:26	16:84 <sub>m</sub> - 21:79 <sub>s</sub>

Table I.4	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
<i>conc. Aquil.</i> 2-75	14:26	15:13	35:65 <sub>m</sub> - 54:46 <sub>s</sub>
<i>conc. Carth.</i> 3, 3-150	27:39	78:78	41:59 <sub>m</sub> - 50:50 <sub>s</sub>

All the texts definitely show a nearly ubiquitous prominence of postposition of the infinitive.

This trend turns out to be, in different degrees, pervasive in main clauses. As regards dependent clauses, which are commonly recognized as more conservative in syntax,<sup>28</sup> a difference can be observed between (I.1)-(I.3) and (I.4). In the former three groups, data relating to dependent clauses are roughly consistent with those relating to main ones. On the other hand, in (I.4) the prominence of the order ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ is, interestingly enough, limited to main clauses. Although various factors may lead to the prominence of ‘infinitive+auxiliary’ order in subordinate clauses,<sup>29</sup> I would argue that the difference between Pompeius’ speech and the speeches recorded in the *Gesta concilii Aquileiensis* and in the *Conlatio gestorum Carthaginensis* can be accounted for mostly by an opposition between two equally ‘educated’ varieties of spoken Latin: a “casual” vs. a “careful” one.<sup>30</sup>

On the one hand, Pompeius’ commentary reflects “casual speech”, uttered in a quite familiar environment: recorded classes that are delivered in front of students or fellow grammarians, and notes that are not revised by Pompeius himself. See for instance the opening section of the chapter *De barbarismo* (2-4; ed. Zago 2017):

2. Barbarismus est: et definit, quid est barbarismus. Plerumque **volumus** aliquem **reprehendere**, et ipsa reprehensio ostendit nos inperitiores. Facit nescio qui vitium, et dico illi: “soloecismum fecisti”, et forte non fecit soloecismum, sed barbarismum; aut barbarismum facit, et dico illi quia acyrologiam fecit. Dum **volumus** illum **reprehendere**, confitemur esse nos vitiosos. Ergo **debemus** singula vitia, quae habent propria nomina, propriis nominibus **vituperare**, ne nos in vitia trahamur. 3. Ut puta: quid est barbarismus? Ita definit: barbarismus est vitium factum in una parte orationis; soloecismus est vitium factum in contextu partium orationis. Ut puta: quando dico

<sup>27</sup> See above, n. 18.

<sup>28</sup> See above, n. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Including indulgence to rhythmical effects, as is the case for *conc. Carth.* See above, n. 26.

<sup>30</sup> The distinction “careful” (“formal”) vs. “casual” (“informal”) speech is a linguistic variation which hardly corresponds to a sociolinguistic discrimination between ‘speech of the educated’ and ‘speech of the uneducated’: as a matter of fact, both the cultured and the uncultured speaker can conceivably choose any of the two variants. See Adams 2013, 6.

*columa* pro eo quod est *columna*, quoniam una pars est orationis, et in ipsa una parte orationis iam vitium est, dicitur barbarismus; quando dico *mamor* pro eo quod est *marmor*, quoniam una pars est orationis et vitiosa est; et ut puta si dicas *relliquias* pro eo quod est *reliquias*. Ergo vitium factum in una parte orationis barbarismus est. 4. Quid si in conexione fiat? Non dicitur barbarismus, sed soloecismus, ut illud: *multi mihi homines iniuriam fecit*. Ecce, ipsa conexio habet vitium; et vide quem ad modum expressit Plinius [*dub serm. fr. 127 Della Casa*], quam bene et integre dicit: quid est barbarismus? Quod non dicitur per naturam. Quid est soloecismus? Quod male per artem dicitur. Nam re vera barbarismus per naturam non **potest dici**. Qui enim dicat *mamor* aut *columam*? Per naturam non **potest dici**. Quando autem dico: *multi mihi homines iniuriam fecit*, non per naturam non **potest dici**, sed per artem non potest.

On the other hand, the bishops' *gesta* reflect "careful speech", performed in an official context and whose record is thoroughly checked (as e.g. is clear from the *Recognovi* which follows each speaker's words in the *Conlatio gestorum Carthaginiensis*). Here follows the passage which opens the third session of the Carthage conference (*conc. Carth. 3.7-16*). In Peter Brown's words, "we can follow word for word the spoken Latin of the fifth century A.D." and "we can hear stubborn, clever men, versed in rhetoric and legal argument, manoeuvring for position over an issue on which their careers would depend".<sup>31</sup> The Catholic bishops wish to deal with the heart of the matter, i.e. the allegations of *traditio* and *persecutio* waged by the Donatists against the Catholic Church; on the other hand, the Donatists, who display a variety of delaying strategies throughout the debate, claim that the Catholics should take on the official role of *petitores*, 'prosecutors', making an open *propositio* against the Donatists and allowing them to take up the role of *respondentes*, defending themselves:<sup>32</sup>

7. Augustinus, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: "Principale negotium iamdiu est ut **cupimus terminari**. Proinde, si vel sero conceditur, probent, quoniam ex parte adversa esse desiderant, totiens obiecta ecclesiae sanctae catholicae toto orbe diffusae crimina et numquam probata..." Et, cum diceret – Et, alia manu: "Recognovi".

8. Adeodatus episcopus dixit: "Proponant. Sciamus quid agunt". Et, alia manu: "Adeodatus episcopus salva appellatione recognovi".

9. Vincentius, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: "Propositionem ex mandato non didicisti?" Et, alia manu: "Recognovi".

10. Possidius, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: "Morarum tendiculas nullus interponat, si de causae nostrae defensione aliquam habemus fiduciam..." Et, cum diceret – Et, alia manu: "Recognovi" –,

11. Marcellinus, vir clarissimus, tribunus et notarius, dixit: "Si quid intenditur, proponatur".

12. Alypius, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: "Mandatum ipsorum legatur, et intentionem ipsorum inde agnoscet nobilitas tua". Et, alia manu: "Recognovi".

13. Marcellinus, vir clarissimus, tribunus et notarius, dixit: "Amotis omnibus moris, quoniam constat omnia quae ad principia negotii pertinebant superiore iudicio terminata, causa dicatur".

14. Fortunatianus, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: "Duo in mandato suo obiecisse monstratur pars adversa, traditionem et persecutionem. Si igitur causam ecclesiae volunt ut peragamus, iam iamque te iudicante finiatur. Nefas est enim ut exspectatione populus in errorem mittatur. Si agnoscenda est ecclesia toto terrarum, sicut promissa est, orbe diffusa, testimoniis scripturarum

<sup>31</sup> Brown 2000, 332.

<sup>32</sup> Actually, it is the Catholics who have asked the emperor to summon the conference, but they have done so in order to defend themselves, as clarified by the *mandatum* read during the first session (*conc. Carth. 1.55*). On the sometimes involuted development of the argument, see Lancel 1972, 65-91, esp. 84-88 (on the issue of the *personae petitoris* and *respondentis*).

doceatur. Sin vero solitis praestigiis solitisque ambagibus id intendit pars adversa ne ad veritatem veniamus, dicatur, ut hoc omnibus innotescat”. Et, alia manu: “Recognovi”.

15. Marcellinus, vir clarissimus, tribunus et notarius, dixit: “Quid his refertur?”.

Emeritus episcopus dixit: “Numquam memini in iudicio condemnatam esse patientiam. Quin immo semper id laudi est, ut, secretum retinens, lingua obiectis, si potest, dilucide respondeat. Ergo quoniam omnium actionum **debent esse** principia, totiusque negotii initia ex se sumere consueverunt, quid praeteritorum dierum actus involvimus et, quasi non fuerint peracta, iterum refricamus, cum praesentis diei propositio suam **debeat sumere accipereque** personam? Unde, si propositio eorum et responsio nostra in iudicium mittitur, personarum primum est discutienda qualitas, quis in iudicium adduxit, quis convenire fecit, quis principes saeculi convenit, quis legatos misit, quis supplicavit, quis legem meruit, quis iudicium postulavit; ut, cum eorum intentionibus docti fuerimus, respondere valeamus”. Et, alia manu: “Emeritus episcopus salva appellatione recognovi”.

16. Fortunatianus, episcopus ecclesiae catholicae, dixit: “Diffidentia est causae personas **velle discutere**, quas priore conflictu visus est confirmasse. Et ideo causam ecclesiae peragamus, quae, sicut promissa est, toto terrarum orbe diffunditur”. Et, alia manu: “Recognovi”.

All in all, the scrutinized texts bear witness to the fact that the ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ order was a widespread feature of spoken Latin, and perhaps this was already the case by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> and beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (as witnessed since Petronius and Terentianus).

As suggested above, there is a further element worth scrutiny: the rate of occurrence of these VPs. In what follows, I will set apart texts listed in (I.1), where a close relationship to (spoken?) Greek might impact on VPs: Terentianus’ letters are influenced by their sender’s bilingualism;<sup>33</sup> the *Itala* of Matthew’s Gospel is a translation from the Greek;<sup>34</sup> the *Colloquium Vindobonense*, as is true for such *colloquia scholica*, is likely to result from multiple compositional layers, implying translation from Greek to Latin and *vice versa*.<sup>35</sup>

When we turn to (I.2), (I.3), and (I.4), we notice that the items which supposedly reflect orality to the utmost degree – because they either record (Pomp., *conc. Aquil.*, *conc. Carth.*) or imitate it (Petronius) – present a remarkable frequency of VPs: in Petronius, we find 1 VP to every 84 words [tot. 3.600]; in Pompeius, 1 VP to every 68 words, distributed equally in all the examined sections [tot. 9.200]; in the *Gesta concilii Aquileiensis*, 1 VP to every 87 words [tot. 5.900], and in the *Gesta conlationis Carthaginensis*, 1 VP to every 44 words [tot. 9.700]; whereas in Jerome’s letters – perhaps the most ‘literary’ item listed here – we find a slightly lower rate of occurrence: 1 VP to every 108 words [tot. 17.000].<sup>36</sup>

The increasing occurrence of these VPs in late Latin is not limited to the spoken language and might be connected to different and somewhat intertwined factors.

The syntax of the infinitive becomes wider and more varied over time, the infinitive being increasingly endowed with a prospective meaning;<sup>37</sup> and in some cases it is not even clear whether

<sup>33</sup> See Adams 1977, 70.

<sup>34</sup> See also Adams 2013, 826, on prominent postposition of the infinitive (with *coepi*) in Jerome’s translation of the New Testament, depending on Greek and on the *Vetus Latina*, as opposed to the prominence of anteposition in his translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>35</sup> See Dionisotti 1984, 91-92; Dickey 2012, 48-50.

<sup>36</sup> The computer-based total word count is indicated in square brackets. However rough the count might be (e.g. owing to sentences connecting direct speeches), I would argue the final outcome is not affected substantially.

<sup>37</sup> We might think also of the infinitive expressing aim after verbs of motion, replacing an accusative supine, or of the causative construction *facio*+infinitive, two constructions which are not considered here. Basically, “prospective infinitive” is not an innovation, but results from this mood being restored to its original (Indo-European)

in these VPs the infinitive should be interpreted as a proper ‘verbal object’ and/or as a ‘verb denoting aim’.<sup>38</sup> In connection with this, an increasingly wide range of verbs governing infinitive verbal objects can be found in late Latin. In general, they denote will, desire, and haste to do something;<sup>39</sup> shame, fear, and hesitation;<sup>40</sup> possibility and capacity;<sup>41</sup> starting or ending;<sup>42</sup> being accustomed to something;<sup>43</sup> daring or running the risk of doing something;<sup>44</sup> deserving something;<sup>45</sup> learning;<sup>46</sup> obligation;<sup>47</sup> *etc.* In early and classical Latin, some of these verbs are not in use – such as the biblical *confundor* (= *erubesco*) –,<sup>48</sup> while yet some others require different constructions.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, a process of grammaticalization of some ‘auxiliary verbs’ can be assumed to affect – that is increase – the rate of occurrence of these VPs in Latin: grammaticalization is easily seen in ‘*habeo*+infinitive’ (meaning ‘ability’, ‘obligation/necessity’, ‘futura’), and particularly in ‘infinitive+*habeo*’ (and *habui/habebam*) as monoverbal antecedents of romance synthetic future indicative (and present conditional);<sup>50</sup> it has been argued for ‘*coepi* + infinitive’;<sup>51</sup> although the issue is debatable, it has been suggested also regarding *debeo*, *possum*, *volo* as forerunners of romance future.<sup>52</sup>

Another possible factor in the spread of these VPs might be the ‘heaviness’ of these constructions. As a matter of fact, they fit the preference for more expressive forms that becomes prominent in spoken Latin, and that is accordingly reflected by late Latin.<sup>53</sup> A VP might sound like an effective periphrasis replacing the correspondent synthetic – and hence physically weaker – verbal form, even if the additional semantic nuance of the auxiliary verb (such as ‘possibility’ for *possum*) is not strongly felt by the speaker or needed within the context. Hence, also the aim to achieve vividness and expressivity should be taken into account as a reason for the preference given to these VPs.

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status of verbal noun, characterized by a prospective meaning (“infinitif prospectif”), as is lucidly illustrated and lavishly exemplified by Michelle Fruyt: see Fruyt 1996 and 1997.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. *Matth. 2.13 (Itala): Futurum est enim ut Herodes quaerat puerum istum perdere*, corresponding to the Greek: μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό. Is Herod going to look for the child ‘in order to kill’ him (prospective infinitive) or is he to try to kill the child (infinitive as a direct object)?

<sup>39</sup> *Nolo/volo/malo, cupio, desidero, opto, quaero, posco, expeto, studeo, exspecto; molior, propono, dispono (= constituo), meditor; festino, propero.*

<sup>40</sup> *Erubesco, verecundor, confundor, dubito, revereor, timeo, reformido, recuso, refugio, detrecto, differo, moror.*

<sup>41</sup> *Possum*, the periphrasis *potens sum, queo/nequeo, novi (= possum), nescio/ignoro (= non possum).*

<sup>42</sup> *Coepi, incipio, desino, desisto.* On grammaticalization of *coepi*, see below.

<sup>43</sup> *Soleo, consuesco.*

<sup>44</sup> *Audeo, praesumo; periclitor.*

<sup>45</sup> *Mereor, dignor, dignus sum.*

<sup>46</sup> *Disco* and its opposite, *dedisco.*

<sup>47</sup> *Debeo*, which is endowed both with ‘deontic’ and with ‘alethic’ meaning; the periphrasis *nesse habeo*; the polysemic *habeo* (on which see below).

<sup>48</sup> See *ThlL IV*, 263.76-264.27.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. *verba timendi* or *recusandi* usually govern a completive sentence with subjunctive mood. See at least Fruyt 1996, 46-47.

<sup>50</sup> See Adams 1991; Fruyt 1996, 60-68; Fruyt & Orlandini 2008, 232-233; Adams 2013, 652-666 and 673. At any rate, *habeo* is very rare within our *corpus*.

<sup>51</sup> Different views on *coepi*+infinitive are stated in Kurzová 1992; Fruyt & Orlandini 2008, 231; Rosén 2012; Adams 2013, 825-827.

<sup>52</sup> This is a standard view: Szantyr 1965, 313-315. *Contra*, Pinkster 1985 and 1987.

<sup>53</sup> On colloquial Latin’s ‘affective’ traits, see Hofmann 1986; on ‘heavy’ words replacing less bulky ones in late Latin, it suffices to refer to Löfstedt 1980, 42-46.



The data collected so far support the view that in texts reflecting oral delivery we might find prominence of ‘auxiliary+infinitive’ order, at least in main clauses, and a high rate of occurrence of VPs. In the following section, I will put this statement to the test through the investigation of some of Ambrose of Milan’s works.

## 2 VPs put to the test: Ambrose of Milan

The Ambrosian *corpus* includes works which admittedly have different origins: most of them stem from sermons, which are assumed to have been, to some extent, revised in view of publication.<sup>54</sup> The structure and frequency of VPs will be observed, in order to point out whether any connection can be established between them and the degree of ‘orality’ of single works. By ‘degree of orality’ I mean dependence on – and closeness to – an original oral delivery, which in Ambrose’s case would be that of a homily or catechesis, as opposed to ‘degree of (written) elaboration’.

Here, two preliminary remarks are needed.

First, there is a difficulty which could affect the investigation of the bishop’s works. The presence of oral features might also depend on imitation of ‘oral style’: as a linguistic register, consciously chosen and meant to bridge the communicative gap between the bishop and his uncultured public,<sup>55</sup> or as a rhetorical device, intended to make Ambrose’s teachings more effective in general among his literate public as well.<sup>56</sup> As far as an educated speaker’s speech is concerned, it would seem impossible to establish a clear-cut divide between ‘orality’ as an intended simplification or ornament, aimed at making oneself understood or aimed at pleasing the audience, and ‘orality’ as the automatic surfacing of features pertaining to speech. In this respect, perhaps it is not, indeed, required to establish a clear-cut divide between the two. As can be seen by the example of Petronius, even artful mimicking of orality – somewhat comparable to ‘oral style’ at the highest degree – does not *per se* prevent a text from being a reliable source of “l’oral dans l’écrit”.<sup>57</sup>

Second, these VPs appear almost mechanically in spoken Latin,<sup>58</sup> and, therefore, are more likely not to be revised, except for in one special case: when the search for prose rhythm is involved. Therefore, in what follows I will also touch on the presence of prose rhythm in single works, as has been detected by Oberhelman in his study of Ambrose’s works,<sup>59</sup> my assumption being that a more substantial concern for prose rhythm would of course ask for a higher degree of (written) elaboration.

I start from *De sacramentis* and *Explanatio symboli*, whose authenticity has been disputed for a long time, owing to the language and style being quite at variance with other works by Ambrose. Scholars now commonly admit that inconsistency with the rest of Ambrose’s *corpus*

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<sup>54</sup> A comprehensive survey of Ambrose’s works and their arguable times and methods of composition is found in Visonà 2004, 58-138.

<sup>55</sup> In the context of a “communication verticale: communication orale adressée par 1 ou x locuteurs de niveau culturel supérieur à 1 ou x auditeurs de niveau culturel inférieur” (Banniard 1997, 513 n. 2); see also Banniard 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Becker 2008 speaks of “eine didaktisch motivierte, rhetorisch Mündlichkeit”, which might be detected even in works which in Becker’s view have nothing to do with actual orality, such as the *De officiis*.

<sup>57</sup> Österreicher 1998, 152-153, lists Petronius’ *Cena* as an example of “oralité mimétique”; furthermore, Koch 1998 examines the universal features of orality as they appear in this work.

<sup>58</sup> At least in the later centuries: see above, n. 11.

<sup>59</sup> See Oberhelman 1991, 21-62.

can be accounted for because of their composition: these works are unrevised stenographic reports of Ambrose's catecheses,<sup>60</sup> the second one still containing three *notae* by a tachigrapher.<sup>61</sup>

Table II	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
<i>sacr.</i>	23:54	28:34	30:70 <sub>m</sub> - 45:55 <sub>s</sub>
<i>ymb.</i>	2:12	3:4	14:86 <sub>m</sub> - 43:57 <sub>s</sub>

As can easily be seen, the order 'auxiliary+infinitive' outnumbers the 'infinitive+auxiliary' in all clauses, its prominence being more substantial in main ones. Furthermore, the occurrence of VPs is high: 1 VP to every 83 words in the *De sacramentis* [tot. 11.500], and 1 VP to every 61 words in the *Explanatio symboli* [tot. 1.300]. A quotation of the final section of this work (*ymb.* 9) might well exemplify its manifestly oral flow:

Illud sane monitos vos volo esse, quoniam symbolum non **debet scribi**, quia reddere illud habetis. Sed nemo scribat! Qua ratione? Sic accepimus, ut non **debeat scribi**. Sed quid? Teneri. Sed dicis mihi: quomodo **potest teneri**, si non scribitur?

- Magis **potest teneri**, si non scribatur. Qua ratione? Accipite! Quod enim scribis, securus quasi relegas, non cottidiana meditatione **incipis recensere**.

Quod autem non scribis, time<n>s, ne amittas, cottidie **incipis recensere**.

Magnum autem tutamentum est: nascuntur stupores animi et corporis, temptatio adversarii, qui numquam quiescit, tremor aliqui corporis, infirmitas stomachi: symbolum recense et scrutare intra te ipsum! Maxime recense intra te! Quare? Ne consuetudinem facias, et cum solus fortius recenses, ubi sunt fideles, **incipis** inter catechumenos vel haereticos **recensere**.

The view that *De sacramentis* and *Explanatio symboli* exactly reflect the bishop's orally delivered catecheses is therefore supported, and is also confirmed by Oberhelman's investigation of prose rhythm, which evidences "a slight presence of accentual and metrical patterns" in the *De sacramentis*, and, more significantly, absence even of accentual patterns from the *Explanatio symboli*.<sup>62</sup>

A further set of data concerns a work which is explicitly known to have no connection with an original homiletic delivery, although it was dictated: the *Explanatio psalmi 43* is reported by Ambrose's biographer to have been dictated on Ambrose's deathbed.<sup>63</sup> However, I would maintain that dictating, under such unusual circumstance, should be compared to writing rather than to oral delivery.

Table III	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
<i>psalm. 43, 1-33</i>	11:8	20:16	58:42 <sub>m</sub> - 56:44 <sub>s</sub>
<i>psalm. 43, 34-93</i>	18:26	34:22	41:59 <sub>m</sub> - 61:39 <sub>s</sub>

<sup>60</sup> On stenographic reports of Ambrose's homilies, see Hagendahl 1971, 36-39; Hammerstaedt 1994-1996, 1269-1270. On *sacr.* and *ymb.*, see i.a. Mohrmann 1952 and 1976; Botte 1994, 7-25; Visonà 2004, 132-133, 95.

<sup>61</sup> *Symb.* 3: *Signate vos! (quo facto et dicto symbolo:) In hoc symbolo divinitas trinitatis aeternae evidentissime comprehensa est ... Ergo dicamus symbolum! (et cum dixisset, hinc conplevit:) Hoc habet scriptura divina; ibid.* 8: *Signate vos! (quo facto:) Credo... virgine.*

<sup>62</sup> Oberhelman 1991, 42-44 (*sacr.*) and 30-31 (*ymb.*).

<sup>63</sup> Paul. Med. vit. *Ambr.* 43.

Following Oberhelman's suggestion that the second half (cc. 34-93) lacks any editing and revision, as "the rhythms are progressively less polished as one reads through the work",<sup>64</sup> I have tested cc. 1-33 as being separated from the rest. I have noticed that the 'infinitive+auxiliary' order slightly prevails, except for the preference given to 'auxiliary+infinitive' in main clauses in cc. 34-93 – perhaps this being a clue of decreasing carefulness –, and that the occurrence of VPs is rather low: 1 VP to every 138 words in chapters 1-33 [tot. 7.600], 1 VP to every 109 words in chapters 34-93 [tot. 10.900]. I would suggest that word order and frequency of VPs support the view of the work as not stemming from an oral performance, but rather as being a work composed carefully, as far as the circumstance so afforded.

In both aforementioned cases evaluation of data is supported by a further kind of evidence, such as the scribes' *notae* and elements pertaining to both universal and historical orality (*symp.*),<sup>65</sup> or extra-textual information (Paulinus' testimony for *psalm. 43*).

However, when we look at texts that certainly stem from orally delivered homilies but are later revised for publication – which is the most common case among Ambrose's works – the examination of VPs hardly allow us to ascertain the higher or lower degree of revision the original texts have undergone, that is, the 'degree of orality' they still preserve. I have considered the *De mysteriis*, arguably a shortened and revised version of the *De sacramentis*,<sup>66</sup> the *Explanatio psalmi 38*, an exegetic homily, preached either in 388-390 or after 394,<sup>67</sup> and the *Sermo contra Auxentium de basilicis tradendis*, held on Palm Sunday of 386 during Ambrose's combat against the Arians, and later appended to letter 75, addressed to emperor Valentinian II.

Table IV	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
<i>myst.</i>	7:13	5:8	35:65 <sub>m</sub> - 38:62 <sub>s</sub>
<i>psalm. 38</i>	7:20	19:24	26:74 <sub>m</sub> - 44:56 <sub>s</sub>
<i>Aux.</i>	14:29	14:10	33:67 <sub>m</sub> - 58:42 <sub>s</sub>

The *De mysteriis* and the *Explanatio psalmi 38* show a prominence of 'auxiliary+infinitive' order in both main and dependent clauses, associated with a lower rate of occurrence of VPs: 1 VP to every 145 words in the *De mysteriis* [tot. 4.800]; 1 VP to every 110 words in the *Explanatio* [tot. 7.700]. On the other hand, the *Sermo contra Auxentium* shows a prominence of 'auxiliary+infinitive' order only in main clauses and a higher occurrence of VPs: 1 VP to every 58 words [tot. 3.900]. According to Oberhelman's study, the *De mysteriis* shows that attention has been paid to prose rhythm, and concern for rhythm seems to be even stronger in the *Explanatio psalmi 38* and the *Contra Auxentium*,<sup>68</sup> which would permit a higher degree of elaboration as prose rhythm is usually disregarded by Ambrose while preaching.<sup>69</sup> In this context, data relating to VPs show a prominent variability, which discourages any attempt at determining to what extent

<sup>64</sup> Oberhelman 1991, 28.

<sup>65</sup> On universal vs. historical features of orality, see Koch - Österreicher 2010, 591-614; on the universal features which might be pinpointed in Latin texts, see Koch 1998 (who focuses on Petronius). *De sacramentis* and *Explanatio symboli* would deserve a separate study in this respect.

<sup>66</sup> Mohrmann 1952 and 1976, 103-108.

<sup>67</sup> Moretti 2000, 25-28; Visonà 2004, 92-93.

<sup>68</sup> 37-38 (*myst.*), 27-28 (*psalm. 38*), 45 (*Aux.*).

<sup>69</sup> Oberhelman 1991, 60.

revision has affected the presumable original homiletic text, although revision does seem indisputable, especially in the *Contra Auxentium*.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, I have analyzed the *De officiis*, the huge work delivered by Ambrose to his spiritual *filiis*, that is the Milanese clergy, in the wake of Cicero, who dedicates his three books of *De officiis* to his son. The overall plan of Ambrose's work is explicitly founded on Cicero's treatise, which stands as an overtly intended model: therefore, the bishop's work should be viewed as a 'Ciceronian' treatise, stemming from written composition and meant to be read.<sup>71</sup> Despite that, the impression readers get is that of a loose structure. Hence, the conjecture has been made repeatedly, that in Ambrose's *De officiis* materials of various origin, some of them arguably homiletic, must have been incorporated into a Ciceronian frame.<sup>72</sup> Some scholars have been so confident in this that they have even exactly pinpointed sections supposedly containing earlier sermons.<sup>73</sup>

As a matter of fact, figures relating to VPs might support this view.

Table V	Inf+Acc:Acc+Inf <sub>m</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf <sub>s</sub>	Inf+Aux:Aux+Inf %
<i>off.</i>	171:127	162:127	57:43 <sub>m</sub> - 56:44 <sub>s</sub>

Data are somewhat puzzling: in association with the expected prominence of 'infinitive+auxiliary' order – depending on carefulness either in written composition or in revision – we find a high occurrence rate of VPs: 1 VP to every 77 words [tot. 45.600].

Needless to say, a high occurrence of VPs might be accounted for also because of the topic: when duties are debated, auxiliary verbs like *possum*, *debeo*, 'deontic' *habeo*, etc. are endowed with a semantic pregnancy, and, therefore, their number might be higher.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Oberhelman observes a quite surprising "lack of any real rhythm",<sup>75</sup> and hence confidently takes for granted the hypothesis of homilies having been incorporated into the *De officiis*, in that this lack would reflect Ambrose's inclination to neglect prose rhythm in his preaching.<sup>76</sup> If this is true, the high VP frequency would be more easily justified. However, data relating to VPs, even if supporting the hypothesis of the multiple compositional layers – homilies later revised and merged into a written treatise – do not allow for the singling out of the exact sections which might have homiletic origin.

### 3 Conclusion

Does the analysis of VPs 'auxiliary+infinitive' indeed help detect traces of 'orality' in Latin texts? Yes, I would say it does so, at least to some extent.

Data coming from a *corpus* of Latin texts reflecting spoken language to different degrees – among them, texts resulting from shorthand reports of actually performed speeches – definitely lead to the conclusion that, as regards these VPs, the prominence of 'auxiliary+infinitive' order (at least in main clauses) and of a rather high frequency does feature in spoken (late) Latin, whatever its register.

<sup>70</sup> On the Ciceronian character of the *Sermo contra Auxentium*, see Testard 1985, who is willing to admit a high degree of revision (203 n. 41).

<sup>71</sup> Davidson 2001, 1: 33-37, whose view is taken for granted by Becker 2008.

<sup>72</sup> A short survey on scholarly views is found in Davidson 2001, 1: 37-39.

<sup>73</sup> See Testard 1984-1992, 1: 22-24 and 36; Id., 1995, 77-86. His opinion is harshly rebuked by Davidson 2001, 1: 37-44.

<sup>74</sup> The rate of occurrence of VPs is remarkably high also in Cicero's *De officiis*: in the 3<sup>rd</sup> book, we find 1 VP to every 70 words [tot. 11.200].

<sup>75</sup> Oberhelman 1991, 41.

<sup>76</sup> Oberhelman 1991, 39-41 and 60.

This is confirmed by the study of Ambrose's catecheses recorded in shorthand (*symb.*, *sacr.*), which are comparable to other almost contemporary stenographic records of orally delivered speeches. When we turn to further works by Ambrose, data show a much greater variability. This gives credibility to the view that these works – whatever their origin – must have been carefully composed, or revised, in view of publication. However, study of VPs does not allow for any positive conclusion about the exact degree of elaboration that original homiletic materials might have undergone, nor does it help establish positively whether or not a work like the *De officiis* actually incorporated homiletic materials.

Of course, no generalization is possible, as both word order – preference given to 'auxiliary+infinitive' order – and lexical choice – preference given to these VPs – appear to be shaky foundations on which to build. Nonetheless, I would argue that quantitative data on VPs, especially when associated with further textual or extra-textual evidence, can help us identify closeness to speech as it might have survived in ancient Latin texts.<sup>77</sup>

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