

## Attributive prepositional phrases in Latin prose

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### Abstract:

I will present data that touch upon the previous, intuitive estimates concerning the relative frequency, and the contexts of occurrence, of APPs in Latin prose, using as my sample texts prose authors ranging diachronically from Cato to Tacitus. These data not only shed some light on certain diachronic changes in the use of APPs, but also, while generally confirming earlier opinions on the pragmatics of APPs, expand our knowledge of the range of contexts in which Latin authors tend to place APPs. Finally, I will argue that the pragmatic conditions surrounding the use of APPs discussed here are explicable by means of a single pragmatic principle.

**Keywords:** Latin | attribute prepositional phrases | pragmatics

### Chapter:

#### 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The use of prepositional phrases as Attributes (henceforward APPs) in Latin has long been noticed and commented upon (Jäneke 1886-87, 1; Nägelsbach-Müller 1905, 306ff.; Kuhner-Stegmann 213ff.; Hofmann-Szantyr 428; Pinkster 1990, 73, 76). Until the present time, interest in the phenomenon has been focused primarily on its semantic motivations; the senses of the APPs themselves as well as the semantics of the nouns with which they tend to co-occur have been well noted (Jäneke 1886-87; Kuhner-Stegmann 214-15). To some extent also the syntax of APPs has been discussed, primarily with regard to the fact that APPs often occur with so-called 'valent' nouns, which require, or allow, a prepositional Attribute (Kuhner-Stegmann 213; Pinkster 1990, 83). Certain word order phenomena have also been thought to be associated with APPs, in particular the enclosing word order, in which the APP is sandwiched between its Head

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and another Attribute, e.g. *tria cum Carthaginensibus bella* (Hofmann-Szantyr 428; Kuhner-Stegmann 217), or simply that APPs often appear in a NP with another Attribute (Hofmann-Szantyr 428), and the fact that APPs often follow their noun-Heads (Kuhner-Stegmann 213). Finally, various stylistic observations have been made, namely that APPs tend to occur in colloquial and elliptical language (Hofmann-Szantyr 428), and that their use is somewhat freer in Livy, Tacitus, and later Latin than in Cicero. (Jäneke 1886-87, 1; Kuhner-Stegmann 213). I will have little to say here regarding the syntax or semantics of APPs. Instead, I will present data that touch upon the previous, intuitive estimates concerning the relative frequency, and the contexts of occurrence, of APPs in Latin prose, using as my sample texts prose authors ranging diachronically from Cato to Tacitus. These data not only shed some light on certain diachronic changes in the use of APPs, but also, while generally confirming earlier opinions on the pragmatics of APPs, expand our knowledge of the range of contexts in which Latin authors tend to place APPs. Finally, I will argue that the pragmatic conditions surrounding the use of APPs discussed here are explicable by means of a single pragmatic principle.

## 2 Methodology

I collected samples for four prepositions, *ex*, *cum*, *in* + ablative, and *in* + accusative, and searched for PPs using these prepositions in the following authors and works, using the Pandora search program on the Packard Humanities Institute CD-ROM #5.3 (1991): Cato, *De agri cultura*; Varro, *De re rustica*; Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* (searching for *cum* only, see below); Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, book 1; Columella, *De re rustica* books 1-4; and Tacitus, *Annales*, book 1. For *in* and *ex* in the *Tusculanae disputationes* I relied on the data gathered by Jäneke (1886-87). I examined and counted all PPs, and accepted as APPs only those PPs that were unambiguously attributive. Those that were accepted were checked against codex editions for accuracy; a few APPs of uncertain textual authority were rejected. In order to find whether APPs differ in their use from other Attributes, it was necessary to collect a control group of non-prepositional Attributes. For this group I selected lexical, attributive adjectives (LAAs) from the same books and authors listed above<sup>2</sup>. The main group of these LAAs were obtained by picking random pages from the above texts and selecting the first LAA found. A second group, which was used for comparisons of word-order phenomena, was selected by scanning the texts for LAAs according to randomly selected case endings, on the assumption that the case and declension of an adjective is not correlated with its position in the NP.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Frequency of Occurrence

The frequency of occurrence of APPs as a percentage of all PPs in the sample texts is shown in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Numerals, demonstratives, and quantifiers were excluded from this group because of their general tendency to precede their heads (see Pinkster 1990, 184-186), although their inclusion would probably sharpen the differences between the APPs and the control group.

**Table 1.** APPs as a percentage of all PPs

	<b>in + acc.</b>	<b>in + abl.</b>	<b>cum</b>	<b>ex</b>
Cato	5.6	3.6	11.9	4.8
Varro	1.7	2.1	13.6	5.8
Cicero	1.1	2.8	5.9	2.4
Livy	2.2	2.5	1.6	12
Columella	0.4	0.8	2.0	7.1
Tacitus	9.0	4.6	10.4	27

No unambiguous, overall, diachronic trend emerges from these data, but we may make the following observations: first, the frequency of occurrence of APPs in Tacitus, the latest author, is on average significantly higher than it is in any of the earlier authors. This does not, however, necessarily indicate a pervasive, language-wide change in the treatment of PPs, especially in view of the fact that Tacitus' nearest predecessor, Columella, has the lowest frequency of APPs. Clearly, more data are needed in order to determine whether Tacitus' tendencies are entirely due to the peculiarities of his style, or whether he is indeed reflecting a real change in the use of APPs. Second, APPs with *ex* do seem to have undergone a rather more clear and traceable diachronic change, although that fact is not entirely apparent from the data in Table 1. Starting with Livy, *ex* in partitive constructions (e.g. *aliqui ex vobis*) accounts for a high percentage of APPs, accounting for 67% of APPs with *ex* in Livy, 50% in Columella, and 60% in Tacitus.

### 3.2 Head-initial APPs

As I noted above, it has been proposed that the normal position for an APP is immediately following its Head. I tested this hypothesis first by counting 'lone' APPs, i.e., those with no other Attribute present in the NP, and comparing their frequency of occurrence after their Head with the frequency of occurrence of LAAs in the same position.

**Table 2.** Percent of lone APPs that follow their Heads, compared with similar LAAs

	<b>in + acc.</b>	<b>in + abl.</b>	<b>cum</b>	<b>ex</b>	<b>LAAs</b>
Cato	100	100	100	—	88
Varro	100	100	100	50	45
Cicero	100	100	100	66	24
Livy	100	100	80	46	35
Columella	—	—	—	100	25
Tacitus	100	100	100	85	14

(When the totals for all APPs combined and all LAAs are compared,  $\chi^2 = 42.7693$  and  $p < .001$ )

Table 2 clearly shows that lone APPs, in all authors combined, overwhelmingly tend to follow their Heads, and that they differ significantly from non-prepositional Attributes in this respect. The only preposition that regularly departs from this tendency is *ex*, for reasons that are not clear. (See below. One anomalous example of *cum* also occurs in Livy, but this seems to be explained by the contextual factor discussed in section 3.5.) In addition, it is noteworthy that the very strong tendency of APPs to follow their Heads is greatly weakened when another Attribute (of any type) is present in the NP. Whereas 80% of all lone APPs follow their Heads, only 58% of

APPs in the presence of one or more other Attributes do so. And when APPs with *ex* are excluded, the figures change to 98% and 61%, respectively.

### 3.3 Enclosing Word Order

To test whether APPs tend to be enclosed in their NPs, I calculated the frequency of enclosed APPs where enclosure was theoretically possible, that is, where a Head and at least one other Attribute (of any type) were present in the NP, and I compared their frequency of occurrence with that of similarly enclosed LAA<sup>3</sup>s.

**Table 3.** Percentage of APPs and LAAs enclosed where another Attribute is present

	% APPs enclosed	% LAAs enclosed
Cato	51	30
Varro	21	30
Cicero	25	30
Livy	58	40
Columella	40	40
Tacitus	69	30
Total	42	33

( $\chi^2 = 0.907$ ,  $p > .30$ )

Although in this sample APPs are enclosed somewhat more frequently than LAAs, the difference between the groups is not statistically significant, with a greater than 30% probability that the difference between the two groups is due to chance. It should be noted, however, that some authors (e.g. Tacitus, Livy, and Cato) show a markedly higher rate of enclosure than the others, although this difference is not statistically verifiable because of the smallness of the sample sizes. Further research may confirm that some authors do indeed enclose their APPs at a significantly higher rate. One diachronic phenomenon may be noted in the word order of NPs containing enclosed APPs. Table 4 shows the percentage of all enclosed APPs which are Head-initial.

**Table 4.** Percentage of enclosed APPs which are Head-initial

	% Head-initial
Cato	89
Varro	75
Cicero	50
Livy	29
Columella	25
Tacitus	0

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that the data in this table are only a rough measure of the tendency of APPs to be enclosed. Certainly other word order tendencies are at work, which may in some cases work against the APP being enclosed, even in the presence of another Attribute. See Pinkster 1990, 73ff. and Risselada 1984 for a fuller discussion of word order phenomena in the Latin NP. The semantic relations of the elements, and the levels of modification (Pinkster 1990, 73 ff.), as well as pragmatic factors like Focus (Pinkster 1990, 185) all affect the ordering of the constituents in the NP. In addition, other, structural, and diachronically sensitive factors may also be at work in determining the word order of a NP (see, e.g., Hawkins 1983, 1-15).

These data show a clear and evenly graduated shift in preference regarding the placement of the Head of NPs which enclose an APP, with Cato's strong tendency to place the Head first being completely reversed by the time of Tacitus.

### 3.4 APPs in the Presence of Other Attributes

Some commentators have noted the apparent frequency with which APPs tend to occur with other APPs (e.g., Kuhner-Stegmann 215). Apart from a few striking examples<sup>4</sup>, however, such combinations of APPs accounted for only a miniscule percentage of these data. Nevertheless, the presence of other Attributes of any type does seem to be related to the appearance of APPs in NPs, as suggested by Hofmann-Szantyr (428f.). Table 5 shows the frequency of APPs co-occurring in NPs containing another Attribute, as a percentage of all APPs, compared with the comparable frequencies of LAAs.

**Table 5.** Percentage of all APPs co-occurring with another Attribute, (all prepositions combined), compared with similar LAAs

	APPs	LAAs
Cato	57	25
Varro	39	23
Cicero	52	28
Livy	32	15
Columella	83	20
Tacitus	41	30
Total	48	23

( $\chi^2 = 26.3866$ ,  $p < .001$ )

APPs in this sample are more than twice as likely as LAAs to co- occur with another Attribute in their NP, clearly supporting Hofmann-Szantyr's suggestion, with a less than 0.1% probability that the differences observed between the two groups are due to chance.

### 3.5 APPs in Parallel NPs

APPs also tend to co-occur with NPs that stand in parallel with another NP of similar structure and function. Specifically, the two NPs must share the same syntactic function in the same sentence, and both NPs must have a Head and at least one Attribute (of any kind), i.e. [Head + APP] with [Head + Attribute]. The two NPs may display any internal word order, and may be in any, linear order with respect to each other.

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<sup>4</sup> (E.g. .... *id est cingulum circum collum ex corio firmo cum clavulis, capitatis ...* (Var.R. 2,9,15)

**Table 6.** APPs co-occurring with parallel NPs as a percentage of all APPs, compared with similar LAAs

	APPs	LAAs
Cato	57	30
Varro	39	25
Cicero	55	13
Livy	22	13
Columella	17	20
Tacitus	22	15
Total	37	18

$\chi^2 = 16.0997, p < .001$

As above, APPs are more than twice as likely to co-occur with this environment as are LAAs, with less than a 0.10% probability that the differences between these groups is due to chance alone.

### 3.6 Pragmatic Restrictions on the Use of APPs

The above data show that certain pragmatic conditions tend to accompany APPs more frequently than they do LAAs; more significant, however, is the fact that APPs very rarely appear outside of these contexts. Table 7 shows the percentage of all APPs which did not occur either (1) as a lone APP immediately following its Head, or (2) with a parallel NP, or (3) with another Attribute in its NP.

**Table 7.** Percentage of APPs occurring outside of any of the contexts specified in Tables 3, 5, and 6

	in + acc.	in + abl.	cum	ex
Cato	0	0	0	0
Varro	0	0	0	10
Cicero	0	0	0	7
Livy	0	0	0	21
Columella	0	0	0	0
Tacitus	0	0	0	0

Of all APPs gathered here, 94% appeared in at least one of the specified contexts. Every one of the 6% which did not fall into any of these categories was an APP with ex; the other APPs are entirely restricted to these contexts. Notice also that Cato, Columella, and Tacitus obey these restrictions for all APPs. These percentages contrast very strongly with the corresponding figures for LAAs, 42% of which appeared apart from any of the specified contexts ( $\chi^2 = 64.5466, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, APPs tended significantly more frequently than LAAs to co-occur with a combination of these contexts, with 35% of APPs co-occurring simultaneously with two of the three specified contexts, but only 10% of LAAs doing so ( $\chi^2 = 37.6499, p < .001$ ).

## 4 Discussion

The above figures suggest a single pragmatic factor affecting the use of APPs, namely, that APPs tend strongly to be used in such a way that they are easily recognizable as Attributes. In the case of lone APPs, their immediate, post-Head position clearly marks them as Attributes, as this position is a traditional one for Attributes (Pinkster 1990, 185). The appearance of an APP with another Attribute in the NP also seems to aid in the recognition of the APP as an Attribute, probably because the 'normal' Attribute acts as a cue to the processing of the APP as an Attribute. This cueing probably also explains why the word-order restriction on APPs is loosened when another Attribute is present. And the co-occurrence of a parallel NP seems to perform a similar cueing function, by increasing the expectation that the NP with the APP shares the structure [Head+Attribute].

The reason why APPs should be restricted in these ways is not difficult to understand. In general, PPs tend very predominantly to be used in syntactic functions other than that of Attribute, with APPs comprising substantially less than 10% of all PPs in this sample. It is also the case that APPs lack the case markings that normally help Latin speakers to identify most Attributes. If we add to this the fact that Latin prepositions were probably originally adverbs, it seems clear that the use of a PP as Attribute would, under most circumstances, be contrary to expectation, unless the APP were clearly and unambiguously identified as such. It is my hypothesis that the three contexts identified here help to perform exactly that function.

Even if we grant the truth of the preceding, however, we are still left with the problem of explaining the anomalous behavior of APPs with *ex*, which account for all our exceptions to the restrictions enumerated in 3.6. I should point out, however, that, in general, APPs with *ex* act more like other APPs than like LAAs; their rates of occurrence with another Attribute (43%), with parallel NPs (29%), and immediately following their Head when they are the sole Attribute (64%), are closer to those of APPs than they are to LAAs. In fact only 16% of APPs with *ex* occur apart from any of these contexts, as opposed to 42% of LAAs. Nonetheless, it would be convenient to be able to explain why *ex* in particular seems to be able to break out of what appear to be the normal pragmatic constraints on APPs. One possible explanation seems ready at hand. I noted above that, at least from Livy onward, APPs with *ex* tend predominantly to be used in partitive expressions; in addition, the figures in Table 1 show a sharp rise in the use of APPs with *ex* from the Augustan period onward. On account, furthermore, of the semantic similarity of partitive uses of *ex* to nouns in the genitive, and on account of the increasing frequency of their use in general, it seems reasonable to surmise that PPs with *ex* began at some point to carry with them an increased expectation of Attribute status, and that there was therefore a concomitantly reduced need to mark them as such pragmatically. When this process started is not clear from these data, but in order for it to explain the apparent anomalies in Table 2, we must assume that it began before Varro. It should also be noted that not all of the 'rogue' uses of APPs with *ex* are in fact partitive expressions, although most of them are. Thus we would also have to assume that all APPs with *ex* began to acquire attributive status, regardless of their semantic content.

In light of all of the preceding, we are now able to make a more comprehensive review of previous assessments of the use of APPs. First, the suggestion that Livy and Tacitus are freer in their use of APPs seems only partially supported. Livy's tendencies in most respects do not differ markedly from those of the rest of the authors. Although he is the freest of the authors by far in allowing lone APPs with *ex* to precede their Heads, he is nevertheless absolutely strict with the

other APPs. In terms of overall frequency of use, he stands nearly in the middle of this group of authors, with his very frequent partitive use of APPs with *ex* accounting for more than 40% of all of his APPs; he would otherwise be among the most conservative in his use of APPs. Whatever freedom Livy feels in using APPs, then, its scope seems restricted, and it has not affected all APPs equally.

In the case of Tacitus, it is clear that his use of APPs is more frequent than that of earlier authors, but, again, the environments in which his APPs tend to occur are essentially the same as the rest of the authors'. In some environments, specifically those illustrated in Tables 5 and 6, his use of APPs approximates his use of LAAs more closely than does that of all the authors as a group, yet in other respects, e.g. word order, his use of APPs seems more restricted than that of the other authors. In particular, his very strong tendency to place the Head last in the presence of enclosed APPs seems quite striking, although this should probably be understood in the context of his strong preference for placing even LAAs before their Heads: only 12.5% of Tacitus' NPs counted in the group with LAAs were Head-initial. And we also see a somewhat more conservative approach to the use of APPs with *ex*, with Tacitus being the second most restrictive, after Columella, in allowing them to precede their Head. And, as noted above, we should remember that, even with *ex*, Tacitus restricts all APPs to the contexts enumerated in 3.6.

Finally, with respect to language-wide diachronic changes, these data give rise to many more questions than answers. As noted, APPs with *ex* are used more frequently from Livy onward, accounting for a disproportionate portion of APPs in Livy, Columella, and Tacitus. This fact seems to suggest that prepositions may, over time, acquire an increased, independent expectation of Attribute status which affects not only their frequency of use, but also confers relative freedom from the pragmatic constraints discussed above. Yet changes in the treatment of one preposition do not seem to affect others; e.g., Livy's and Columella's relatively frequent use of APPs with *ex* does not seem to have affected their treatment of *in* or *cum*. In addition, it seems paradoxical that the latest authors (Columella and Tacitus) are the most conservative in obeying the word-order constraint on lone APPs with *ex*, and that they are joined by the earliest author, Cato, in overall compliance with the three pragmatic constraints discussed above.

Other anomalies are also apparent. If we control the data for generic variation, and track the changes in the use of APPs in the three agricultural writers only, we see overall a very markedly downward trend in their use, with Columella being by far the most infrequent and restricted in his use of them. These data suggest that the differences in the use of APPs among the authors in this study may be either generically or stylistically motivated. Clearly, further research, using a wider range of prepositions and a wider diachronic and generic range of authors, will be required to clarify these and other questions.

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