

**The Syntactic and Semantic Relationship in Synthetic Languages:  
Linear Modification in Latin and Old English**

**TFG – Grau d’Estudis d’Anglès i Clàssiques**

Supervisor: Malou van Wijk Adan

Raquel Navarro Caparrós

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**A:** Adverbial clause

**ACC:** Accusative

**ATR:** Attribute

**C:** Complement

**DAT:** Dative

**DTh:** Diatheme

**FSP:** Functional Sentence Perspective

**G:** Genitive

**NOM:** Nominative

**OBJ:** Object

**Rh:** Rheme

**SUBJ:** Subject

**Th:** Theme

**Tr:** Transition

**V:** Verb

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## **ABSTRACT**

Speakers and writers express ideas according to the intentions of what they want say. Apart from the syntactic and grammatical rules of a given language, word-order is also dependent on the value of linguistic elements in terms of informational importance. Bolinger (1952) referred to this phenomenon as Linear Modification, in which participants order linguistic elements in sentences according to the range of informational relevance: from less to the most informative. Considering that syntax is also necessary when ordering linguistic elements in sentences, it might be important to consider the semantic and syntactic relationship between languages with similar grammatical properties. For this reason, and taking as bases Chamonikolasová's model (2009) and Firbas' terminology, twenty selected extracts from the *Anglo Saxon-Chronicle* and Tacitus' *Agricola* are analysed to set an approach to the degree of flexibility on the basis of communicative purposes of synthetic languages such as Old English and Latin, in which the latter seems to have a slightly higher degree of flexibility.

**Keywords:** Linear modification, synthetic languages, Latin, Old English, communicative purposes, syntactic and semantic relationship.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Languages have been traditionally classified according to their grammatical and syntactic properties, but the truth is that syntax and grammar are not the only factors on which word-order depends: to express pieces of information context is also relevant. As Firbas points out, “a linguistic element acquires the character of information and participates in the development of the communication and in the fulfilment of the communicative purpose” (Firbas 1996: 23). In other words, the order of pieces of information is significant when speakers utter propositions.

Speakers communicate with the intention of giving information and expressing ideas. These intentions are referred to as communicative functions or purposes, which occur whenever a statement is expressed. Speakers tend to express the given information in initial position or, sometimes, do not overtly express it because it is unnecessary. The new information tends to appear in final position, which is logical since new information is added constantly and cannot be omitted or assumed (Miller 2002: 357). Hence, it might be useful to find out if the goal of the message influences the distribution of linguistic elements in sentences and, if so, to what extent the informational factor is relevant. Thus, this research is presented to approach the role of communicative functions in terms of word-order by contrasting syntactic structure against information structure.

This paper is based on Dwight Bolinger’s theory of Linear Modification published in 1952. In his theory, based on Present Day English, Bolinger argues that speakers tend to express ideas gradually from the broader to the narrower in terms of meaning (Bolinger 1952: 1119). Following his theory, Chamonikolasová (2009) concludes that Old English is more prone to undergo linear modification given that its

syntax is less constrained than that of Present Day English. Her results suggest that the scope of linear modification is not the same in all languages, since it depends on their syntactic rules.

To apply linear modification, it is convenient to consider Firbas' theory. Jan Firbas was a Czech linguist who developed the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), which "deals with how the semantic and syntactic structures of the sentence function in fulfilling the communicative purpose intended for the sentences" (Leong 2004: 25-26). According to his theory, a linguistic element can be identified as Theme or Rheme in terms of structural position (Miller 2002: 357). Themes are the elements appearing at the beginning whereas Rhemes take place in final position. Generally, Themes do not provide new information or, at most, provide that which is already assumed. By contrast, new information tends to appear in the Rheme (Miller 2002: 357-362): "this causes beginning elements to have a wider semantic range than elements towards the end" (Bolinger 1952: 1117).

This study concentrates on similar languages in terms of their morphological typology. Synthetic languages such as Latin and Old English make use of inflections and are, hence, not highly subjected to the restrictions of word-order. The approach to the syntactic and semantic relationship in synthetic languages might be relevant to add other aspects not intrinsically related to grammar or syntax, but rather to the context and the range of information in terms of the application of word-order in this kind of languages. Using Firbas' terminology and Chamonikolasová (2009) as bases, this research aims to compare linear modification in both synthetic languages. Despite having similar grammatical rules, we hypothesise that Latin is more flexible than Old English considering linear modification.

Thus, the aims of the present study are:

1. To analyse linear modification in Latin and Old English and establish their degree of flexibility in terms of word-order.
2. To prove that Latin is more flexible than Old English.
3. To determine the importance of communicative purposes in the overriding of linguistic elements.

For this purpose, the research is structured in three sections. In the first section we proceed to summarise the main characteristics of Present Day English as an analytic language in order to contrast them with the main syntactic features of Latin and Old English in the second section. The last section analyses selected extracts from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in Old English and Tacitus' *Agricola* in Latin, given that both are written in prose and deal with the geographical background of Ancient Britain and with similar historical events: in the former, Tacitus deems it necessary to describe Britain, since he wanted to narrate Agricola's adventure in the island and Britain was still unknown to Romans. The latter compiles a series of manuscripts dealing with a list of historical events. Additionally, both texts are written in prose in their authors' vernacular language.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Dwight Bolinger's Linear Modification**

Dwight Bolinger was one of the most important American linguists during the 20th century. He was the President of the Linguistic Society of America and of the Linguistic Association of the U.S. and Canada (Stockwell 1993: 99) and dedicated most of his life to the study of linguistic structures, especially in English and Romance languages.

One of his most well-known theories, Linear Modification, suggests that constituents are ordered according to their degree of informational importance within a sentence, from least to most relevant (Bolinger 1952). Throughout his research, Bolinger uses contrastive examples in order to prove manifestations of subjective word-order (Bolinger 1952: 1123-1144). The clearest evidence is found in cases of adverbs and adverbial clauses. Adverbs and adverbial clauses appear not to be as informationally important when occurring sooner than when occurring later within a sentence. In his selective contrast, Bolinger found that adverbs appearing sooner are expletive rather than necessary (Bolinger 1952: 1124). On the other hand, adverbs appearing in final position add new information which most often is required.

(1) Why did you **abruptly** back away?

(2) Why did you back away **abruptly**?

(Bolinger 1952: 1120).

In both examples the meaning is quite similar but the focus is not the same. In (1) the main sense of the question is ‘Why did you abruptly **do this**?’ As it can be noticed, the semantic stress is on the verb rather than on the adverb, which could be omitted without a significant change in meaning. In (2) the question asks ‘Why did you back away **in such a way**?’ In (2) the adverb contains more relevance than the verb and, consequently, it cannot be omitted as in (1).

Since “progression in position creates progression in meaning” (Bolinger 1952: 1125), the location of elements within a sentence is crucial not only to distinguish the possible differences in meaning, but also to identify what is relevant and what is not when uttering a proposition. However, it is also necessary to take into account that

gradation of words according to their informational importance is intrinsically subjected to the syntactic limitations of a given language. Chamonikolasová (2009) notes that the alteration of order in Present Day English is not as frequent as in Old English. By extension, the same goes for languages that are more flexible in terms of word-order, such as Latin. Taking into consideration that Old English and Latin are syntactically less constrained than Present Day English, manifestations of linear modification are likely to appear more often.

## **2.2 Word-order in analytic languages: Present Day English**

In terms of morphological structures, in the 19th century August and Friederich von Schlegel classified languages into isolating, agglutinating and inflecting (Helmbrecht 2004: 1247). As far as inflectional languages are concerned, von Schlegel distinguished between analytic and synthetic languages considering their syntactic system.

Analytic languages are considered to be more rigid because of their lack of inflections. Since analytic languages do not make use of morphemes for grammar, the agreement system is not the rule whereby each component is established in a sentence. Instead, the resource through which sentences in analytic languages are constructed is mainly word-order. Consider the following sentences in Present Day English:

(3) The big dog [NOM-SUBJ] chased [V] the small cat [ACC-OBJ]

(4) The small cat [NOM-SUBJ] chased [V] the big dog [ACC-OBJ]

Although both sentences share the same components, their propositions are different. In (3) ‘the big dog’ is the agent which takes the action of the verb ‘chased’, whereas in (4) it is ‘the small cat’. Since there is no difference in the form of the

constituents in each sentence, word-order is primordial in order to mark the grammatical function of each. In declarative sentences the subject precedes the verb, while the object follows the verb. The reason of such a significant change in meaning is that Present Day English is a head-initial language and this implies that objects must follow verbs (Llinàs et al. 2014: 10). However, modifiers ('big' and 'small') are inseparable from their respective nominal head noun. In Present Day English adjectives depend on the head and must precede it, otherwise it would be ungrammatical (Capdevila, Curell and Llinàs 2006: 51-53). In view of the fact that in Present Day English word-order is rigid, the chances are that cases with subjective word-order are quite few.

Applying Bolinger's theory on Old English and Present Day English, Chamonikolasová (2009) resolved that linear modification in the latter is less significant than in Old English due to "[its] reduction of the flexibility within word-order patterns" (Chamonikolasová 2009: 25). The rigidity in the grammatical structure allows Present Day English to apply linear modification very little.

### **2.3 Word-order in synthetic languages: Old English and Latin**

Synthetic languages count on semantic and syntactic morphemes attached to nouns and verbs in order to mark grammatical function. Syntactically, the agreement system is the main principle used to establish the construction of the sentence. That is why some linguists, such as Fries (1940), assert that in synthetic languages "word-order has no bearing whatever upon the grammatical relationships involved" (Fries 1940: 199).

Given that its syntactic properties are those identified with inflective languages, Old English is considered to be a synthetic language. Inflections –or taxemes of selection as Fries (1940) refers to them– appear to be the main system to denote

grammatical function and to construct syntactic relationships. According to Fries, word-order does not appear to be needed until the 12th century, when English is referred to as Middle English. Taking into account that the syntax of Latin is based to a large extent on the same rules, this theory can also be applied to it.

The word-order of Old English is mainly V2, that is to say that verbs tend to occur in second position in affirmative declarative sentences. However, such a structure is not fixed, since mobility would not make the sentence ungrammatical or unintelligible (Rybarkiewicz 1977). Fries claims that taxemes of selection make word-order “non-distinctive and connotative” (Fries 1940: 199) because a variety in word-order would not change the meaning of sentences such as in

(5) sē mann [NOM-SUBJ] slōh [V] þone beran [ACC-OBJ]

(6) sē mann [NOM-SUBJ] þone beran [ACC-OBJ] slōh [V]

(7) þone beran [ACC-OBJ] sē mann [NOM-SUBJ] slōh [V]

(8) þone beran [ACC-OBJ] slōh [V] sē mann [NOM-SUBJ]

(9) slōh [V] sē mann [NOM-SUBJ] þone beran [ACC-OBJ]

(Fries 1940: 200).

Translation: “*The man slew the bear*”.

In his data from the sermons of Ælfric, Fries also proves that accusative-objects occurred either before or after the verb within the sentence indistinctively<sup>1</sup>. The same is

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.1 for percentages provided by Fries’ data.

true of dative-objects, which could take place in any position of the sentence even when combined with accusative-objects<sup>2</sup>:

(10) Cartaginenses sendon fultum [ACC-OBJ] Tarentium [DAT-OBJ] (Or.  
162.8)

(Fries 1940: 201).

Translation: “*Cartaginenses sent the army to Tarentium*”.

(11) he asende his apostlum [DAT-OBJ] þone halgan gast [ACC-OBJ]  
(Wulfstan 1.230.27)

(Fries 1940: 201).

Translation: “*He sent this sacred spirit to his apostles*”.

It is very convenient to indicate that in Old English the so-called ‘weight principle’ is very frequent, i.e. lighter elements tend to occur at the beginning of sentences whereas heavier ones tend to do so at the end (Hogg 2002: 90). As it can be seen in (11), the accusative-object is placed in final position because it is longer than the dative-object.

In turn, in Latin the subject usually appears at the beginning of the sentence whereas the verb at the end. However, since there is no fixed rule for word-order in Latin, “for the sake of emphasis the normal arrangement is often abandoned, and the emphatic word is put at the beginning, less frequently at the end of the sentence” (Bennett 1918: 259).

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.2 for percentages provided by Fries’ data.

(12) Darius [NOM-SUBJ] classem [ACC-OBJ] quīngentārum nāvium [G]  
comparāvit [V] (Nep. Milt. 4.1)

(Bennett 1918: 259).

Translation: “*Darius got ready a fleet of five hundred ships*”.

(13) omnium rērum [G] mors [NOM-SUBJ] est [V] extremum [NOM-ATR  
(SUPERLATIVE)] (Cic. Fam. 6, 21, 1)

(Bennett 1918: 185).

Translation: “*Death is the end of all things*”.

As it can be seen, the constraint in the syntax of Old English is rather low as compared to Present Day English. Hence, it is predictable that “the shift from flexible word-order to fixed word-order, which was closely related to certain phonological and morphological features of English, was accompanied by a reduction of the power of linear modification as a word-order principle” (Chamonikolasová 2009: 17). By the same token, Latin, with a similar grammatical structure to Old English, may also prove prone to undergo linear modification.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 *Agricola* and the *Anglo Saxon-Chronicle***

The choice of these texts is due to the fact that they share features which enable the comparison between them: both texts describe events which would have been unknown without them. They are both written in prose, which means that texts are not as exposed

to stylistic resources as a text in verse could be. Moreover, both texts are compositions written in their respective vernacular languages, not a product of a translation.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a recollection of manuscripts of historical events from Caesar's conquest of Britannia to the 12th century, after the Norman conquest of England. It is considered to be the most important work written in English before the Norman Conquest. Its value lies in the fact that it was originally written in Old English, and not in Latin like many other historical documents. Specifically, it was written in the dialect of Wessex, which was the written standard language of the period. It was an innovation of the age if we consider that Latin was the language used by monks in minsters to compose their writings.

In turn, *Agricola* was written in Classical Latin, the language used for literary and administrative writings by one of the most celebrated authors in Latin historiography, Tacitus. It describes the lifestyle of Tacitus' father-in-law, Agricola, in Britain alongside with that of other Britons (Clarke 2001: 94). The relevance of *Agricola* does not lie in the conqueror's biography during his stay in Britain, but rather in the awareness and description of these islands unknown before. *Agricola* served as a tool to bring to Roman knowledge the location of the island, as well as the description of its inhabitants and their costumes.

### **3.2 Analysis**

Starting out from Jan Firbas' theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), the distribution of linguistic elements in sentences is analysed. Constituents which give information already known or serve to introduce the topic are referred to as themes (Th). To identify themes it is useful to respond the question 'what is it about?' (Miller 2002:

360). Although themes tend to occur at the beginning, sometimes they are elided because they do not give new information as rhemes (Rh) do. Rhemes tend to occur in final position and cannot be omitted, since they convey new information which otherwise would be unknown to the receptor. Apart from thematic and rhematic components, it is also necessary to take into consideration verbs, referred to as transitions (Tr), which mark the progression between the less informative element (Th) to the most informative one (Rh). There are also elements to contextualise the message which often do not provide essential information and so tend to come first in sentences. These elements are called diathemes (DTh).

Thus, the terms used in the analysis:

- Theme: Th
- Rheme: Rh
- Transition: Tr
- Diatheme: DTh

If we bear in mind that linear modification suggests that “elements as they are added one by one to form a sentence progressively limit the semantic range of all that has preceded” (Bolinger 1952: 1117), it is possible to conclude that the order Th – Rh corresponds to Bolinger’s theory. Whenever this structure is altered, linear modification is violated, which is usual when speakers and also writers want to emphasise or contrast a specific item or create a sort of effect in the message such as expectancy or suspense. This is why the violation of linear modification (Rh – Th) can also be called *subjective word-order*, in contrast with the most recurrent one (Th – Rh).

The material analysed consists of selected extracts from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Agricola* dealing with the geographical description of England seen from Anglo-Saxon and Roman perspectives. These fragments have been selected from chapter 10 of the first book of *Agricola* and from the Laud Manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* written at Peterborough, for the reasons mentioned in the section 3.1. The material analysed is 20 sentences of each.

To discuss linear modification Chamonikolasová's model (2009) is followed. The syntactic analysis has been carried out by analysing the different constituents in sentences in order to determine their syntactic functions. Next, these syntactic functions have been contrasted with the context of the text, taking into consideration if the information appears as a given one, i.e. not very informative or essential, but already known (Theme), or as a new one, i.e. unknown and necessary for the receptor (Rheme). Each independent and each coordinate clause is considered as one sentence whereas relative clauses are not analysed separate from the respective independent clause. Adverbial subordinate clauses are also considered as clause constituents and, hence, not separated from the principal clause. The following are some examples taken from *Agricola*<sup>3</sup> and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*<sup>4</sup>:

The *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*:

(14) And þa Pyhtas // heom // abædon // wif æt Scottum

And the Picts // them // obtained // wives of Scots

Th – SUBJ // Th – OBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B.1 for the complete material analysed.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B.2 for the complete material analysed.

(15) her // sind // on þis iglande // fif geþeode. Englisc. 7 Brittisc. 7 ...

Here // are // in this island // five languages: English and British and...

DTh – A // Tr – V // DTh – A // Rh – OBJ

*Agricola:*

(16) Gallis in meridiem etiam // inspicitur;

Also to Gauls in the south // look

Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(17) Credo // quod rariores terrae montesque causa ac materia...

I think // that the comparatively rare lands and mountains are cause and origin...

Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

#### **4. RESULTS**

Considering the methodology of this study, Table 1 and Table 2 show the number of occurrences of the basic word-patterns in Old English and Latin respectively. These basic word-patterns, however, do not appear exactly in the same way: other linguistic elements appearing within a basic word-pattern have been marked between brackets; linguistic elements elided have been marked with a little percent sign.

Tables 3-4 show FSP elements in initial and final position in Old English. In Tables 5-6 show FSP elements in initial and final position in Latin. These last four tables are essential in order to analyse the ratio in which the different syntactic elements carry out less (Themes) or more (Rheme) informational relevance. It has been necessary

to analyse both initial and final position of sentences to see the ratio between the informational elements and the position in which they occur in sentences.

**Table 1: Word-order pattern in Old English**

Basic word-order pattern	Variations within the basic Word-order pattern	No. of occurrences	
		SV	S(A)V
SVO	S <sub>%</sub> <sup>5</sup> VO, (A)SVO, S(O)VO	7	35%
SVA	(A)SVA	6	30%
AVS	AV(C)S	4	20%
OVS	(A)OVS	1	5%
SVC		1	5%
Total		20	100%

**Table 2: Word-order pattern in Latin**

Basic word-order pattern	Variations within the basic Word-order pattern	No. of occurrences	
		SV	S(A)V
SVO	S <sub>%</sub> VO	2	10%
OSV	OS(A)V	1	5%
SOV	S <sub>%</sub> OV, (A)S <sub>%</sub> OV	4	20%
AVS		1	5%
ASV	A(A)S <sub>%</sub> V, AS(A)V	4	20%
SCV	(A)S <sub>%</sub> CV	1	5%
Total		20	100%

**Table 3: FSP in initial position in Old English**

		S	V	O	A	C	Total	
Th	Theme	8	--	--	1	--	9	45%
DTh		--	--	--	8	--	8	40%
Tr	Transition	--	3	--	--	--	3	15%
Rh	Rheme	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total		8	3	--	9	--	20	100%

<sup>5</sup> Elided subject.

**Table 4: FSP in final position in Old English**

		S	V	O	A	C	Total		
Th	Theme	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5%
DTh		--	--	--	1	--	1	5%	
Tr	Transition	--	2	--	--	--	2	10%	
Rh	Rheme	4	--	7	5	1	17	85%	
Total		4	2	7	6	1	20	100%	

**Table 5: FSP in initial position in Latin**

		S	V	O	A	C	Total		
Th	Theme	1	--	1	--	--	2	10%	50%
DTh		--	--	--	8	--	8	40%	
Tr	Transition	--	2	--	--	--	2	10%	
Rh	Rheme	4	--	4	--	--	8	40%	
Total		5	2	5	8	--	20	100%	

**Table 6: FSP in final position in Latin**

		S	V	O	A	C	Total		
Th	Theme	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0%
DTh		--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Tr	Transition	--	3	--	--	--	3	15%	
Rh	Rheme	5	--	6	4	2	17	85%	
Total		5	3	6	4	2	20	100%	

## 5. DISCUSSION<sup>6</sup>

The results obtained in this study show that the average of variations in word-order patterns in Old English is weaker than in Latin. Taking as basis six word-order patterns (SV, SVA, SVO, AVS, OVS, SVC), seven variations have been also found. Since Old English behaves as a V2 language in affirmative declarative sentences, it was

<sup>6</sup> The examples mentioned are provided in the Appendix.

predictable that in the majority of sentences Verbs would occur in second position or in the first one when the subject is omitted.

The most recurrent pattern is SVO, with 35%. It should be noticed that six of the seven sentences with this pattern contain verbs concerning opinion or communication. In these cases, Objects perform rhematic functions by virtue of the fact that the information has not been revealed yet. Our findings also reflect that Objects not only occur as rhematic elements, but also as thematic ones. The main reason is that the information they contain is not necessary or already assumed, such as in (35) or (38).

The following most recurrent pattern is SVA with 30%, which is logical if we bear in mind that the selected extracts deal with the geographical description of Britain. The aim of these fragments is not to explain the activities of the first inhabitants of Britain, but to contextualise and describe the place, which is why adverbs and adverbial clauses dealing with location are so frequent. Given that these initial fragments of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* intend to give an account of the geographical situation of Britain, Adverbial phrases expressing settings are the most relevant and informative elements in sentences, and so they occur in the rheme.

Moreover, as mentioned in the section 2.3, in Old English heavier elements tend to occur in final position. Although the number of occurrences of Adverbial phrases in initial position is not low (45%), it is noticeable that they are lighter and less informative than those appearing after. The ‘weight order principle’ is reflected in examples such as (24) in contrast with (23) or (25), where diathematic adverbs come first. In (26), however, the Verb occurs in second position and it should take place in final position since (26) is a subordinate clause and in this kind of clauses Verbs tend to occur at the end. This subjective position of the verb emphasises the new and most

significant piece of information in the sentence which appears in final position: the adverbial clause which describes where the Picts came from.

As Subjects do not normally take place in final position in main clauses in Old English, few evidences have been found. In (38), for example, the word-order pattern is OVS, 'Brittas' being the Subject. The reason for this word-order does not lie in grammar or syntax, but in the communicative intention: the most relevant element is the Subject and for this reason it appears in final position. In (36) the Subject also appears in final position for the same reasons. (36) and (38) contrast the different nations inhabiting these lands. These two examples are significant to remark the informational importance when ordering linguistic elements.

As for Latin, in the seven basic word-order patterns considered (SV, SVO, OSV, SOV, AVS, ASV, SCV), more variations have been found than in Old English. It is important to highlight that Latin tends to behave as a V-final language. As it can be seen in the results, Verbs are the linguistic elements which appear most frequently in final position (85%). However, the linguist Panhuis (2006: 185-196) suggests that although in the normal word-order scheme Verbs occur at the end, it is not an obstacle to consider "an emotive and special word-order [when] the speaker/writer emotionally starts with what he/she considers most important and utter the rheme proper first, only to add later the theme (or themes)" (Panhuis 2006: 193). For this reason, in Table 6 Verbs appearing at the end have not been considered unless they perform rhematic functions and their position goes in accordance with their informational importance in the sentence. In (2), for example, the Verb carries all the weight of the initial fragment: the reason why Tacitus decides to describe the landscape of Britain.

The pattern SV appears 85% of times. In this pattern, Subjects often perform rhematic functions, and so their informational relevance lies in the fact that they introduce new pieces of information. Latin tends to omit the subject whenever it is not necessary. Since its verbal morphology is very rich in terms of conjugation, the author does not overtly express Subjects which can be predicted without mentioning. For this reason, when there is no other element with a more relevant informational weight, Subjects perform rhematic functions.

Although few examples of thematic Subjects have been found, in (4) it can be seen that the Subject is introduced some lines before, and so 'Britannia' is already given; besides, it is thematic because it serves to contextualise the fragment: it is located Britain in order that it could be imagined in Roman minds. It ought to be remembered that Tacitus' work deals with the description of an island unknown in the Latin imaginary. If Tacitus aims to explain the activity and lifestyle of his father-in-law, it is necessary to make Britain visible or, at least, imaginable.

Next, SOV and ASV are the most recurrent patterns (20%). In these cases, the author intends to put emphasis on Objects rather than on Subjects. Although sometimes Subjects are omitted, for reasons mentioned before, they have been included in these patterns taking into consideration the communicative purpose. In (12) the infinitive clause performs the Object function of the verb 'adfirmavit': of course the Subject has already been mentioned in the previous sentence, but more importantly the absence of a Subject increases the relevance of the content of the Object. This phenomenon is also repeated in (13) and (14).

In Latin, the ratio of themes in initial position is significantly lower than in Old English (50% / 85%). As it has been argued, in these fragments selected from the

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the main topic deals with the geographical description of the island, which is why 45% of linguistic elements occurring in initial position are thematic Adverbial phrases of location. The 40% left are thematic Subjects dealing with the different peoples inhabiting these lands. On the other hand, *Agricola* also focuses on the landscape of Britain, but such a description is used as a resource to more accurately explain the Roman expedition in Britain. Since the geographical aspect is not always the central point, the ratio of Subjects and Objects performing rhematic functions is quite high even in initial position (40% each). This word-order demonstrates the communicative perspective of the author, much more evident than in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, where no evidence of rhemes in initial position has been found. With respect to final position, 85% of linguistic elements in Latin carries out rhematic functions, as against 80% in Old English. No cases of themes appearing at the end have been found. Finally, Verbs in final position give emphasis to the action in itself. It is clearer in the case of Latin, as has been commented above in the case of (2).

On the whole, this study demonstrates that linear modification in Latin and Old English prevails over subjective word-order. However, and in spite of belonging to the same morphological type of languages, it has been proved that their degree of flexibility is not equal. The ratio of rheme is very high in Latin (85%) and Old English (80%), suggesting that the terms which add new information to the given one tend to occur later. Thus, in both languages the normal word-order scheme seems to prevail: the goal of the message is expressed in final position.

Nevertheless, Latin seems to have a slightly higher flexibility: the percentage of themes occurring at the beginning (50%) contrast with that of Old English (95%). This considerable difference suggests that *Agricola* has undergone a greater subjective word-

order than the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Or, to put in another way, the *Anglo Saxon-Chronicle* seems to show that Old English is more prone to undergo linear modification. Whereas the average of Rhemes in final position is almost the same, the average of Themes in initial position is not: in Old English Themes at the beginning are more frequent than in Latin, in which linear modification (Th – Rh) is the main word-order but not the only one. The reason for this difference does not reside in syntax, but mainly in the context. It should not be forgotten that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a collection of manuscripts with the aim of informing and describing, and so the voice of the author is not as important as in *Agricola*, where Tacitus' intention is visible. In fact, in the prologue of his work, as in (1), (2) and (3), Tacitus uses the first person singular, providing a subjective vision of the island.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Synthetic languages enjoy a great flexibility when ordering linguistic elements. The variety of word-order patterns is quite wide, as these languages make use of inflections and linguistic elements can hence occur in different positions in sentences without resulting ungrammatical. These features allow other factors related to the communicative process to be relevant to the distribution of words within sentences. This degree of flexibility allows speakers of this kind of languages to give a more nuanced message just by ordering words subjectively.

Given the importance of participants' communicative intentions, the aim of this research was to analyse linear modification on Latin and Old English to assess the relevance of the communicative purposes to word-order. For this purpose, it has seemed appropriate to approach the main characteristics of Old English and Latin before proceeding with the analysis of *Agricola* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which have

been chosen because of their similarities. Even though Latin and Old English share some grammatical aspects, the former seems to show a higher degree of flexibility, which enables speakers and writers to construct sentences with a wider variety of word-order patterns and, hence, to utter messages in which the subjective perspective is more clearly seen.

Nevertheless, we should also take into account that, despite dealing with the same topic, the objective of both texts was not the same and, for this reason, the points of view change. The intentions of writers have also influenced in the order of words in sentences: Tacitus' intentions were more evident, since he wanted to describe a landscape unknown as well as to praise the activity of his father-in-law in the island. By contrast, in the *Anglo Saxon-Chronicle* the role of the writer was subtler, since the main purpose of the work seems to be the chronological narration of events. This aspect, however, should not be an impediment to compare both texts. It shows more clearly how important the communicative purpose is in terms of word-order: when the message is uttered with a specific purpose, the linguistic elements are more prone to undergo a subjective word-order.

To sum up, it might be important to emphasise on the way in which ideas are ordered, since it is often arbitrary. This project has concentrated on synthetic languages, specifically on Latin and Old English, but it would be interesting to expand the study in other languages. The influence of the communicative purpose when constructing sentences is undeniable, since it is the order of ideas which produces a certain nuance of the speaker's/writer's message. Thus, and without overriding grammatical and syntactical rules which are necessary to avoid the ungrammaticality of sentences, ideas

occur in a specific order for the sake of the effect wanted and the writer's/speaker's purposes.

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**APPENDIX A.1: Placement of ACC-OBJ according to Fries' data**

	c. 1000	c. 1200	c. 1300	c. 1400	c. 1500
<b>ACC-OBJ (before V)</b>	52.5%	52.7%	40+%	14.3%	1.87%
<b>ACC-OBJ (after V)</b>	47.5%	46.3%	60-%	85.7%	98.13%

(Fries 1940: 201)

**APPENDIX A.2: Placement of DAT-OBJ according to Fries' data**

	<b>DAT-OBJ (before V)</b>		<b>DAT-OBJ (after V)</b>		<b>DAT-OBJ (before ACC-OBJ)</b>		<b>DAT-OBJ (after ACC-OBJ)</b>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Nouns</b>	95	27.6%	249	72.4%	249	64%	140	36%
<b>Pronouns</b>	495	48.7%	518	51.3%	674	82.8%	141	17.2%
<b>Both together</b>	587	43.4%	767	56.6%	923	76.6%	281	23.3%

(Fries 1940: 202)

**APPENDIX B.1: *Agricola***

**Translation:** I will speak of the geography and inhabitants of Britain, described by many writers, not that my research and ability may be compared with theirs, but because for the first time it is subdued. So that my predecessors, without knowing it yet, have adorned it with eloquence, now it shall be narrated with veracity of facts. Britain, the largest of the islands which Roman geography includes, is stretched in extent and sky over Germany on the east, Hispania on the west, and also looks to Gauls in the south. In its northern side, against no land it is beaten by a devastated and open sea. Livius of the

ancients and Fabius Rusticus of the recent ones, very eloquent authors, compared the shape of the whole of Britain to an oblong of two-edged figure. Certainly it is its shape without Caledonia, so it is also famous in the whole: going beyond, an immense and large extension of land sticking out to the furthest shore gets narrower in a wedge-form. Then, for the first time, the Roman fleet sailed around this boarder of the remote sea and affirmed that Britain was an island and, at the same time, discovered and conquered unknown islands which they call Orcades. Thule is also discerned, because orders came that far, and also winter was coming. However, they adduce that the sea is averse and rough to row that it is not even raised by the wind like other seas. I think that infrequent lands and mountains are the cause and the origin of storms and, the depth masses of the uninterrupted sea is more slow set in motion. But the nature of the ocean and its agitation is not demanded of this work, and many have already talked about it.

(1) Britanniae situm populosque multis scriptoribus memoratos non in comparationem curae ingeniive // referam,

The geography and inhabitants of Britain, described by many writers, not that my research and ability may be compared [with theirs], // I will speak of

Rh – OBJ // Tr – V

(2) sed quia tum primum // perdomita est.

But because for the first time // [it] is subdued.

DTh – A // Tr – V

(3) Ita quae priores nondum comperta eloquentia percoluere, // rerum fide // tradentur.

So that predecessors, without knowing [it] yet, have adorned [it] with eloquence, // with veracity of facts // [it] shall be narrated.

DTh – A // Rh – A // Tr – V

(4) Britannia, insularum quas Romana notitia complectitur maxima, // spatio ac caelo in orientem Germaniae, in occidentem Hispaniae // obtenditur,

Britain, the largest of the islands which Roman geography includes // in extent and sky over Germany on the east, Hispania on the west // is stretched

Th – SUBJ // Rh – A // Tr – V

(5) Gallis in meridiem etiam // inspicitur;

Also Gauls in the south // look to

Rh – A // Tr – V

(6) septentrionalia eius, nullis contra terris, // vasto atque aperto mari<sup>7</sup> // pulsantur.

In its northern side, against no land // by a devastated and open sea // are beaten

DTh – A // Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(7) Formam totius Britanniae // Livius veterum, Fabius Rusticus recentium eloquentissimi auctores // oblongae scutulae vel bipenni<sup>8</sup> // adsimulavere.

The shape of the whole of Britain // Livius of the ancients, Fabius Rusticus of the recent [ones], very eloquent authors, // to an oblong or two-edged figure // compared.

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<sup>7</sup> It is an ablative performing the function of Agent. It is considered as the subject of the verb.

<sup>8</sup> The verb 'adsimulavere' requires a genitive case.

Th – OBJ // Th – SUBJ // Rh – A // Tr – V

(8) Et // est // ea facies citra Caledoniam,

Certainly // is // its shape without Caledonia,

DTh – A // Tr – V // Rh – SUBJ

(9) Unde et in universum // fama // est:

So also in the whole // famous // is

DTh – A // Rh – COMPL // Tr – V

(10) Transgressis // inmensum et enorme spatium procurrentium extremo iam litore  
terrarium // velut in cuneum // tenuatur.

Going beyond // an immense and large extension of land sticking out to the furthest  
shore // in a wedge-form // gets narrower.

DTh – A // Th – SUBJ // Rh – A // Tr – V

(11) Hanc oram novissimi maris // tunc primum // Romana classis // circumvecta

Then for the first time this boarder of the remote sea // the Roman fleet // sailed around

DTh – A // Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(12) insulam esse Britanniam // adfirmavit,

Britain is an island // affirmed,

Rh – OBJ // Tr – V

(13) ac simul incognitas ad id tempus // insulas, quas Orcadas vocant // invenit  
domuitque

and at the same time // unknown islands which they call Orcades // discovered and  
conquered

DTh – A // Rh – OBJ // Tr – V

(14) Dispecta est // et Thule,

Is discerned // also Thule,

Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

(15) quia hactenus iussum, et hiems // adpetebat.

because orders [came] that far, and also winter // was coming.

Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(16) Sed mare pigrum et grave remigantibus // perhibent

But the sea [is] averse and rough to row // [they] adduce

Rh – OBJ // Tr – V

(17) ne ventis quidem perinde<sup>9</sup> // attolli,

that even by the wind just like [other seas] // is not raised

Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(18) credo // quod rariore terrae montesque, causa ac materia tempestatum, et  
profunda moles continui maris tardius impellitur.

I think // that infrequent lands and mountains are the cause and the origin of storms and,  
the depth masses of the uninterrupted sea is more slow set in motion.

---

<sup>9</sup> It is an ablative performing the function of Agent. It is considered as the subject of the verb.

Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

(19) Naturam Oceani atque aestus neque quaerere huius operis // est,

The nature of the ocean and its agitation [is] not demanded of this work // is

Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

(20) ac multi // rettulere:

And many // have already talked:

Rh – SUBJ // Tr – V

## **APPENDIX B.2: *Anglo Saxon-Chronicle***

**Translation:** The island of Britain is 800 miles long and 200 miles broad. And here, in this island, there are five nations: English, British, Welsh, Scottish, Picts and Latin. First, the Britons who came from Armenia were the inhabitants of this land. And they were settled southward of Britain first. Then it happened that Picts came south from Scythia with not many long ships. And they landed first in the northern part of Ireland. And there they told the Scots that they must dwell there. But they did not want to permit them, since they said that they could not dwell all together there. And the Scots said: “but we may nevertheless give you an advice. We know there is another island in the east. There you may dwell if you wish; and if someone withstands you, we will help you so that you might beat it”. Then the Picts went and entered this land northward. And southward the Britons possessed it, as we said before. And the Picts obtained the wives of Scots.

(21) Brittene igland // is // ehta hund mila lang. 7 twa hund brad.

The island of Britain // is // 800 miles long and 200 miles broad.

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – COMPL

(22) 7 her // sind // on þis iglande // fif geþeode. Englisc. 7 Brittisc. 7 Wilsc. 7  
Scyttisc. 7 Pyhtisc. 7 Bocleden.

And here // [there] are // in this island // five nations: English and British and Welsh and  
Scottish and Picts and Latin.

DTh – A // Tr – V // DTh – A // Rh – OBJ

(23) Erest // weron // bugend þises landes // Brittes þa coman of Armenia.

First // were // inhabitants of this land // the Britons who came from Armenia

Th – A // Tr – V // Th – COMPL // Rh – SUBJ

(24) 7 gesætan// suðewearde Bryttene ærost

And were settled // southward of Britain first

Tr – V // Rh – A

(25) Ða // gelamp // hit<sup>10</sup>

Then // happened // it

DTh – A // Tr – V // Rh – SUBJ

(26) þæt Pyhtas // coman // suþan of Scithian.mid langum scipum na manegum.

That Picts // came // south from Scythia with not many long ships

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – A

---

<sup>10</sup> It is an empty subject and that is why the relative clause below has been considered separately.

(27) 7 þa // coman // ærost on norþ Ybernian up.

And they // came // first in the northern Ireland

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – A

(28) 7 þær // bædo // Scottas // þet hi ðer moston wunian.

And there // told // the Scots // that they must dwell there.

DTh – A // Tr – V // Th – OBJ // Rh – OBJ

(29) Ac hi // noldan // heom<sup>11</sup> // lyfan.

But they // did not want to // them // permit

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ // Tr – v

(30) forðan hi // cwædon // <þæt hi ne mihton ealle ætgædere gewunian þær.

Since they // said // that they could not dwell altogether there.

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

(31) 7 þa // cwædon> // þa Scottas.

And then // said // the Scots

DTh – A // Tr – V // Rh – SUBJ

(32) we // eow // magon // þeahhwaðere ræd<sup>12</sup> // gelæron.

We // you // may // nevertheless an advice // give.

Th – SUBJ // Th – OBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ // Tr – V

---

<sup>11</sup> The object tends to precede the verb in this kind of construction.

<sup>12</sup> The object tends to precede the verb in this kind of construction.

(33) We // witan // oþer eglanð her be easton.

We // know // another island to be here in the east

Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ

(34) Ðær // ge // magon eardian // gif ge willað.

There // you // may dwell // if you wish

DTh – A // Th – SUBJ // Tr – V // Rh – A

(35) 7 gif hwa eow wiðstent. // we // eow // fultumiad. // þet ge hit magon gegangan.

If someone withstands you // we // you // help // [so] that you may beat it.

DTh – A // Th – SUBJ // Th – OBJ // Tr – V // Rh – A

(36) Ða // ferdon // þa Pihtas.

Then // went // the Picts

DTh – A // Tr – V // Rh – SUBJ

(37) 7 geferdon // þis land norþanweard.

And entered // this land northward

Tr – V // Rh – A

(38) 7 suþanweard // hit // hefdon // Brittas.

And southward // it // possessed // the Britons

DTh – A // Th – OBJ // Tr – V // Rh – SUBJ

(39) swa we // ær // cwedon.

As we // before // said.

Rh – SUBJ // DTh – A // Tr – V

(40) And þa Pyhtas // heom // abædon // wif æt Scottum.

And the Picts // them // asked // wives of Scots

Th – SUBJ // Th – OBJ // Tr – V // Rh – OBJ