Three notes on the Latin subjunctive[1]

H. PINKSTER

1. *non* instead of *ne*

The latin negation particles *non* and *ne* are used in distinct
functions : *non* is used in declarative and interrogative sentences;
ne is used in imperative sentences. Accordingly, we find *non*
both in sentences in the indicative mood and in sentences with
a so-called potential or deliberative subjunctive. *Ne*, on the
other hand, occurs both in sentences with an imperative and in
sentences with a so-called jussive, optative or concessive sub-
junctive. Whereas most latinists will agree in considering the
distribution of *ne* and *non* decisive for the distinction between
imperative and non-imperative sentence types − a distinction
that was made as early as Quint. 1,5,50 and is corroborated by
the distribution of sentence adverbials like *fortasse*, emphatic
particles like *profecto*, and curses like *hercle*[2] − the correlation
between the occurrence of *ne* and *non* and the putative meanings
of the Latin subjunctive is valued differently by various scholars.
Scherer, for example, bases his distinction between the 'volitive'
and 'non-volitive' uses of the subjunctive on the behaviour of
ne and *non*, respectively (1975 : 76, *cf.* Calboli 1983 : 94). In

---

1. I have profited from papers written by students of the 1981 class on
   modi. See also Chapter 10 of Pinkster (1984).
2. *fortasse* is not allowed in interrogative sentences (Vairel 1975); *profecto*
   occurs only in declarative sentences.

Szantyr's classification of the subjunctive, however, especially in his treatment of the deliberative subjunctive, the behaviour of the negation particles is ignored (1965 : 330-8).

Our manuals (Kühner-Stegmann : I,192; Szantyr : 337) and especially Löfstedt (1966 : 12-20) mention exceptions to the rules for the distribution of *non* and *ne*. It appears that among the textually reliable cases cited[1] there is only one example of *ne* instead of *non* [ex. (1) quoted by Löfstedt : 12][2] against some 40 instances to the contrary.

(1) *hoc simulacrum ne revellis*   (Notizie d. Scavi 1909, 456).

The number of cases of *ne* instead of *non* is remarkably low in spite of the fact that there are quite a few instances of questions with a directive illocutionary force such as (2), where *non*, of course, is normal, but where mistake could be expected.

(2) *non tu abis quo dignus es*
            ('Go to – where you belong, will you', Plt. *Men.* 516).

(*Cf.* Löfstedt 1966 : 188-91; Lodge's Lex. Plaut. s.v. *non*, p. 193).

Before proceeding to the exceptions with *non* instead of *ne* it is necessary to recall the use of *non* in order to negate a particular constituent rather than the content of a sentence as a whole. Kühner-Stegmann (: I, 191) use the term 'Begriffsnegation'. The clearest cases of constituent negation are those in which there is an explicit contrast, for example *non ... sed*. When there is no such explicit contrast it is not always easy to decide whether *non* negates the entire sentence or just a part of it. However, if a Roman wanted to negate a particular constituent in a sentence – irrespectively of the sentence type – he had to use *non*. *ne* can not be used in that way. Examples of constituent negation are (3) and (4) [Kühner-Stegmann : I, 192; 203].

(3) *age, perge, quaeso, animus audire expetit ut gesta res sit:*
     utinam audire non queas   (Plt. *Ci.* 555)[3].

---

1. Uncertain are Ter. *Andr.* 787; Cat. 66,91; Ovid. *Ars* 1,389; Fronto 142,6 vdH.; according to Szantyr (: 337) Plt. apud Gell 18,12,4.

2. Löfstedt also mentions Plt. *Mil.* 57, but this is a mistake.

3. *non queas* is equivalent to *nequeas*, according to Szantyr. I prefer to deal with this example in the same way as with (10)-(12).

(4) *nunc vos ... non prius unanimis corpora coniugibus tradite*
    ... quam iucunda mihi munera libet onyx
                      (Cat. 66, 79-82, *cf.* Fordyce, a.l.).

The 40 exceptions referred to above cannot be regarded as
instances of constituent negation, or rather, are not regarded
as such in the literature. Instead, the use of *non* in these
cases is usually described as a stronger or more emphatic form
of denial. The phenomenon is rare in classical Latin, but becomes
more frequent in poetry and in later prose. Finally, the presumed
difference (strong : weak negation) was lost and *non* became
the generalized negation particle for all sentence types. In my
opinion, most of the exceptions cited in the literature can be
explained without having recourse to the notion of strong
denial[1]. Several are instances of constituent negation [exx.
(5)-(6)], the latter being one of several instances of litotes in
Velleius.

(5) *sed tu non ideo cuncta licere puta ?*   (Ovid. *Her.* 16, 164)

(6) *non praetereatur Asinii Pollionis factum et dictum memorabile*
                                              (Vell. 2,86,3).

In other cases some sort of contrast between constituents in a
sentence or across sentences – either explicit [exx. (7)-(8)] or
implicit (9) – explains the use of *non*.

(7) *sic denique non sint tam longae Bromio quam tibi, Phoebe,*
    comae   (Mart. 4,45,7)

(8) *non finitiones illas spectaveris, sed aurem tuam interroga*
                                              (Gell. 13,21,1)

(9) *dura prima fronte quaestio. non desperemus : credibile est*
                                              (Quint. 7,1,56).

In (9) the contrast might be made explicit by introducing
quidem and *sed*. Thirdly, there are several instances of coun-
terfactual wishes, including two cases in Cicero, recognized as
such by Kühner-Stegmann.

---

1. I leave out of account cases like *non visas* in Ter. *Hec.* 342 which
   echoes preceding *non visam*. Vell. 1,13,5 *non tamen puto dubites* is
   potential (on account of *puto, cf.* Bolkestein 1976 : 164). It may be
   relevant to the relatively high number of instances of *non* instead of *ne*
   that there are almost no second person subjunctive and imperative
   examples.

(10) *vellem non constituissem in Tusculanum me hodie venturum*
                        (Cic. *de Orat.* 1,265; *cf. Att.* 11,9,3)

(11) *Clitus utinam non coegisset me sibi irasci*   (Curt. 8,8,7)

(12) *utinamque non peiora vincant*   (Quint. 9,3,1).

Whereas in (7)-(9) neighbouring sentences or clauses were in contrast, this is not the case in (10)-(12). However, contrast does exist between the sentences and reality. A last type is exemplified by (13)-(15).

(13) *rogare desine : non agites, si qua coire velis*
                                        (Ovid. *P.* 1,6,24)

(14) *sumat igitur ante omnia parentis erga discipulos suos animum, etc.*   (Quint. 2,2,5)

(15) *non adsuescat ergo ne dum infans quidem est sermoni qui dediscendus sit*   (Quint. 1,1,5).

In examples like these negated sentence is opposed to something which may be inferred from the preceding context and where, either explicitly or implicitly, the relation between the preceding context and the negated sentence is one of result (typical particles: *ergo, igitur*). The example (16), where editors tend to change the manuscript reading *non* into *ne* is of the same type (*quapropter*).

(16) *quapropter prodigam in multos largitionem abstinentiae testimonium non credideris*   (Rutil. Lup. 2,9).

What the examples (7)-(16) and, in fact, most of the "exceptions" have in common is some sort of contrast with either an element in the same sentence or a presupposition established by the preceding context or the extralinguistic reality. This very element of contrast is also present in the use of *non* as a constituent negation particle. The examples discussed above may be explained as caused by the desire of the authors to express themselves as clearly as possible. The increase of the use of *non* can be attribued to an extension of this desire to contexts less difficult than the ones discussed.

2. Non-anterior uses of the perfect subjunctive

The use of the perfect subjunctive with a non-anterior meaning has been subject of scholarly dispute over a long time. Recently

Vairel has devoted a number of articles to the problems involved.
The perfect subjunctive is found both in imperative sentences
(type *ne feceris*[1]) and in declarative sentences (types : *non
facile dixerim, quisquam dixerit, pace tua dixerim*). The use of
the form in declarative sentences is labeled "potential"; negation
is expressed by means of *non*. In declarative sentence the
perfect subjunctive is said to express a state of affairs in a
less outspoken, more subtle, way than the present tense indicative
would do. In imperative sentences, on the other hand, the
perfect subjunctive is often regarded as the expression of a
strict order, more stringent than, for example, *ne facias*.
Vairel (1981) has recently tried to explain why the same form
can be used both with a weak and a strong meaning. The aim
of the present note is to stress the idiomaticity of the expres-
sions involved and, hence, the difficulty to arrive at a reliable
description of their meaning.

2.1. *pace tua dixerim*

In their chapter on the potential use of the subjunctive Kühner-
Stegmann include expressions like *pace tua dixerim*. An example
of such an expression is (17).

(17) *quaedam etiam Posidonius – pace magistri dixerim – comminisci
     videtur*   (Cic. *Fat.* 5).

There are at least 11 instances in Ciceron, Livy has a few and
Velleius has one. The expressions are always parenthetical.
There are no object constituents, neither nominal ones nor
accusative and infinitive constructions. The expression is meant
as an apology for a wording that might be taken as criticism,
reproach, etc. It is clear that in the circumstances it is almost
impossible to establish the precise meaning of the expression.
This problem is reflected by modern translations. Foster, in his
Loeb translation, renders *pace dixerim deum* in Livy 10,7,12 :
"under Heaven's favour be it spoken", which seems more suitable
for an optative expression than for a potential one. How do we
know that the expression is a potential one? How do we know
that the meaning of the perfect subjunctive is non-anterior ?

---

1. I leave out of account the optative and concessive use of the perfect
   subjunctive with an anterior meaning, *cf.* ex. (21).

Kühner–Stegmann (I: 177) have one example of *pace tua dicam*, viz. (18).

(18) *tamen adfirmo et hoc pace dicam tua* + Acc. and Inf.
                                                (Cic. *Marc.* 4).

However, it might be worthwile to regard *dicam* as a future indicative form in view of the fact that (i) it is coordinated with *adfirmo*; (ii) it has an object (*hoc*) which announces an accusative and infinitive construction; (iii) it is not a parenthesis. Moreover, it is the only putative present subjunctive example[1].

Arguments for an optative interpretation of the expressions might be found in the existence of a number of cases with some form of *licet* with present or perfect infinitives of the verb *dicere* and the same expressions *pace tua* etc., for example (19)[2].

(19) *pace mihi liceat, caelestes, dicere vestra : mortalis visus*
        pulchrior esse deo   (Lutat. *apud* Cic. *N.D.* 1,79).

An anterior meaning might be argued on account of (20).

(20) *cum pace autem cumque venia istorum, si qui sunt, qui*
        Verrii Flacci auctoritate capiuntur, dictum hoc sit
                                                (Gell. 17,6,4).

As an optative anterior expression it might be compared with cases mentioned by Kühner-Stegmann (: I, 183), for example (21).

(21) *cui quidem utinam vere fideliter abunde ante auguraverim*
                                                (Cic. *Rep.* 4,8).

I have no cases comparable to (19) and (20) which would force us to describe the subjunctive as potential. In fact, the reason for treating *pace tua dixerim* in the same way as *non facile dixerim* etc. might well be that it is also a politeness expression. However, in spite of (19)-(20), *pace tua dixerim* can best be regarded as an isolated idiomatic expression. It is difficult to decide with what other expressions it should be classified. It is, moreover, impossible to say what the precise meaning of the

---

1. Liv. 3,19,7 (*loquar*) and Ovid. *Am.* 3,2,60 (*loquar*) probably are also future indicative. I also do not exclude the possibility that *paene dicam* in Cic. *S. Rosc.* 68; *Cluent.* 192; *Q. Rosc.* 16 are future indicative.
2. Apart from (19) compare Ovid. *Tr.* 5,12,45; Plin. *N.H.* 35,8; Sen. *Tro.* 276; Cat. 66,71; Juv. 11,195; Quint. 1,6,9.

perfect subjunctive is in relation to, for example, the present subjunctive, because an adequate number of minimal pairs is lacking, a situation which holds, by the way, for unambiguous instances of the potential use of the perfect subjunctive (*non facile dixerim*) as well.

2.2. ne feceris

The lack of an adequate number of minimal pairs is also a serious obstacle to the description of the meaning of the perfect subjunctive in prohibitions. In Cicero, for example, there are only three or so instances of *ne facias*[1], in contrast to 43 examples of the perfect subjunctive, *noli* + infinitive being the normal expression (107 instances). In Plautus there is an abundant number of *ne fac* constructions. *ne facias* is found rather frequently; but on closer inspection 76 out of 96 cases appear not to be prohibitions at all, but so-called pseudo-final subordinate clauses (22) to be compared with *ut*-clauses like (23).

(22) *nam illaec tibi nutrix est, ne matrem censeas*
                                                    (Plt. *Ci.* 558).

(23) *Carthagini ego sum gnatus, ut tu sis sciens*
                                                    (Plt. *Poe.* 1038).

Among the remaining 20 cases 10 contain in themselves not unproblematic forms like *attigas*, which leaves us with 10 'simple' cases. In Plautus we find ca. 20 instances of *ne feceris* and 17 of *noli* + infinitive.

As for the meaning of *ne feceris*, Thomas (1938 : 122-5) and Vairel (1981) and others have argued, in spite of the low number of examples, that *ne feceris* is a categorical statement, whereas *ne facias* is not[2]. This may well be true, but helps us

---

1. Lebreton (1901 : 302) tries to get rid of all instances of *ne facias*, for example by treating *ne facias* sentences with an *amabo te* parenthesis as subordinate clauses. We find *amabo te* also in sentences with an imperative (*Fam.* 2,7,2) and in a sentence with *nihil feceris* (Att. 7,8,2) where subordination is excluded.

2. On *ne facias* in Plautus compare Vairel (1981 : 252-4). Her opinion about the value of *ne feceris* is also based upon data from Plautus. I pass over differences of opinion between Vairel and Thomas because they are not relevant here.

very little in the case of Cicero. *noli facere* is sometimes re-
garded as a mild kind of prohibition (Szantyr: 336-7; Thomas
1938: 122) which also implies that *ne feceris* is the less gentle
type. This opinion is based on the occurrence of words like
obsecro, sis, amabo in sentences with *noli* + infinitive. They
do, in fact, occur with this expression, but they are not
excluded in *ne feceris* sentences. Cicero uses *ne feceris* more
frequently in his letters to Atticus and Quintus than in his
Fam. and, on the other hand, *noli* + inf. more often when
addressing judges in his speeches. However, here too the *ne
feceris* type is not excluded. If a significant difference in
politeness of the expressions existed, we might expect diffe-
rences in the classes of verbs used in those expressions. The
data do not allow such a conclusion. Finally, both *ne feceris*
and *noli facere* are found in the immediate context of imperative
forms. At this moment, therefore, there seems to be only slight
preference for *noli* + infinitive in situations which require
politeness phenomena.

However, even if it could be proved that *ne feceris* is used for
prohibitions which are less polite, etc., how could this be
related to other, regular, uses of the perfect subjunctive and
to the verbal system as a whole? And also, how could it be
related to the non-anterior potential use mentioned in 2.1. As
far as I know there are two kinds of explanation. The most
familiar one is the diachronic explanation by reference to the
putative sigmatic/aoristic origin of the forms. The non-anterior
use of the perfect subjunctive can, in this perspective, be
regarded as a relict which has a place outside the synchronic
system. This means, of course, that there is no synchronic
relation to the regular, anterior uses. As far as I know, Vairel
(1979; 1981) is the only one who has ventured a synchronic
explanation for both types of non-anterior use of the perfect
subjunctive mentioned above. In her (1979) article and elsewhere
she argues that the element of indirectness, politeness etc.,
that is inherent in the meaning of the perfect subjunctive – she
calls it 'moindre actualisation' – is in many languages a conco-
mitant feature of past tenses. This can be illustrated with
example (24).

(24) *sed si domi est, Demaenetum volebam*

(Plt. *As.* 452).

In the same way, according to Vairel the Latin perfect not only
marks anteriority but also non-actuality. In my view, the
assumption of a non-actual value for the Latin perfect ought to

be motivated independently, before it can be used as an explanation for the potential use of the perfect subjunctive. Since the (1981) article about the *ne feceris* expressions depends on the (1979) article for its argumentation, a synchronic explanation — pace Vairel dixerim — is still lacking[1]. In other words, *ne feceris*, too, can best be regarded as an isolated idiom, the correct understanding of which is precluded by the lack of data and the uneven distribution of our data over various authors.

Bibliography

Bolkestein, A.-M. (1976). "The relation between form and meaning of Latin subordinate clauses governed by verba dicendi", *Mnem.* 29, 155-75.

Bolkestein, A.-M. (1980). *Problems in the Description of Modal Verbs*. Assen, Van Gorcum.

Calboli, G. (1983). "Problemi di Grammatica Latina", *ANRW* 29, 1, 3-177.

Kühner, R. & Stegmann, C. (1912). *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache II Satzlehre*. Hannover.

Lebreton, J. (1901). *Etudes sur la langue et la grammaire de Cicéron*, Paris.

Löfstedt, L. (1966). *Les expressions du commandement et de la défense en latin et leur survie dans les langues romanes*. Helsinki.

Pinkster, H. (1984). *Latijnse Syntaxis*. Amsterdam.

Scherer, A. (1975). *Handbuch der lateinischen Syntax*. Heidelberg, Winter.

Szantyr, A. (1965). *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*, München, Beck.

1. I must confess that I cannot follow Vairel's argument when she observes *"une éventualité que le locuteur éloigne davantage du réel est une éventualité dont il refuse davantage la réalisation"* (1981 : 263).

Thomas, F. (1938). *Recherches sur le subjonctif latin*. Paris, Klincksieck.

Vairel, H. (1975). *Exclamation, Ordre et Défense*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres.

Vairel, H. (1979). "Moindre actualité et moindre actualisation", *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 24, 563-84.

Vairel, H. (1981). "Les énoncés prohibitifs au subjonctif", *R. Ph.* 55, 249-72.