“Order of Things” and “Order of Words” in Priscian: Grammatical and Logical-Ontological Arguments in the Division and Ordering of Word Classes in *De Constructione* (Ars GL 2, 116.9-121.15)

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Abstract — The partes orationis (the parts of speech) were of paramount importance in the Greek and Latin grammatical traditions. Not only did Priscian discuss them from the point of view of syntax in his De constructione, but he also displayed them in a new arrangement, partially following the work of Apollonius Dyscolus, the Peri Syntaxeos (2nd century). In this article, we intend to analyze the reasons the Latin grammarian puts forward to justify this new ordering. As he defends the new disposition given to the parts of speech in his grammar, he comes up with theoretical remarks on the notion of order (ordo). By analyzing the passage between Grammatici Latini [GL] 2, 116.9 and 121.15 from the Ars Prisciani, we propose to understand the place and the importance of the different analytical criteria mobilized by the grammarian in his discussion, criteria which are both linguistic and logical-ontological.

Keywords — linguistic criteria, logical-ontological criteria, order, parts of speech

Introduction

The topic of order in language is not trivial. On the contrary, Priscian argues that those who dismiss this issue or consider it to be the result of chance would attest...
to their own ignorance ("although some people, seeking to console themselves for their incompetence, maintain that there is no need to wonder about this kind of things, and suppose that the positions inside this order are the result of chance" – quamuis quidam suae solaciium imperitiae quauerentes aiunt, non oportere de huiuscemodi rebus quaerere, suspicantes fortuitas esse ordinationum positiones – Ars GL 2, 115.23-116.1). This brief observation by Priscian seems to criticize a position of difficult identification and reaffirms the existence of an “order” (ordo) underlying the Latin syntax.³ As it is also stated in this book, the notion of order not only concerns the gathering or the arrangement of linguistic elements (such as, for example, the order of cases, tenses and parts of the speech – de ordinatione casuum et generum et temporum et ipsarum partium orationis), but it also affects other entities in the world as well (“If, on the other hand, they admit that there is an order for certain points, it is inevitable that they also admit that there is an order for everything” – Si autem in quibusdam concession that ordinationem, necesse est etiam omnibus eam concedere – Ars GL 2, 116.3-5).

In this article, we intend to analyze how Priscian refers to the notion of order of the parts of speech in Ars 17 (GL 2, 116.9-121.15). We aim at showing that, in the midst of the grammatical discussion, Priscian presents arguments founded on three different types of criteria: i. the methodological, or meta-grammatical one; ii. the linguistic one, and iii. the logical-ontological one. By methodological or meta-grammatical arguments, we understand those based on the order of disposition of the linguistic material throughout the grammatical treatise, i.e. a teaching-oriented textual and informational disposition. By linguistic arguments, we understand those providing the identification of either (a) syntactic phenomena, such as the eventual position, albeit variable, that each category can assume within the Latin sentence; or (b) semantic properties, related to the completeness and independence of each part as to their meaning. Finally, by logical-ontological arguments, we understand the observations regarding the nature or essence of each part of a speech or, still, concerning their definitions based on the Aristotelian notions of substance and accident. In short, we intend to evaluate to what extent these different criteria are pre-

2 To whom would this criticism be directed? Considering that the passage translates almost literally what had already been stated in Apollonius Dyscolus (§ 1.13), one could perhaps mention the work of the sceptic philosophers, such as Sextus Empiricus (2nd century AD), who, having written his Adversus grammaticos right after Apollonius Dyscolus’ Peri Syntaxeis, mobilized his sceptical artillery against the Stoic foundations of the grammatical doctrine. In addition to the sceptic philosophers, would the criticism be addressed to other grammarians of the Latin tradition, who merely transmitted the order of the parts of speech without philosophically reflecting on it? Or, finally, to the anomalists? On the role of anomaly vs. analogy in the Greek grammar, cf. Blank 1994: 149 sq.; on the long journey of the philosophical notion of order and syntax, including the sceptics, cf. Brito & Freitas 2018.

3 The syntax of Latin is the theoretical object in De constructione. As we will see in this article, a considerable part of Priscian’s theoretical framework stems from a previous formulation of this object by Apollonius Dyscolus, whose Peri Syntaxeis is partially translated into Latin in Priscian’s work. As the scope of our analysis is not to present any comparative overview of the approach given by the two authors, we will not focus on this relationship, only referring to Apollonius when it is crucial to this analysis.
sent in the discussion carried out by Priscian. For that, in the first section of this article we present some remarks on the relationship between Priscian’s Ars and their theoretical and philosophical framework. Next, we analyze some passages of the corpus. We follow the Latin text by the Groupe Ars Grammatica (2010), eventually compared with the edition of Martin Hertz in GL, edited by H. Keil (1855-1880).

1 Priscian and the philosophical framework

Priscian Caesariensis, a Latin grammarian of the 6th century, is the author of a monumental and referential work on the grammar of the Latin language, produced in the Hellenic region of the Roman Empire (Ballaira 2009; Bonnet 2009). In this vast work, Priscian developed an innovative “Graeco-Roman” doctrine on language, suited to its bilingual context of production (Rochette 2007; Fortes 2012, 2014 and 2019; Martorelli 2014). In addition, Priscian’s grammatical thinking belonged to a long line of Latin grammatical treatises, heir of the Greek philosophical, —especially Stoic— tradition (Blank 1982 and 1994). In the last two books of his Ars, an investigation on the Latin syntax, Priscian’s main grammatical and philosophical source is a 2nd-century Greek treatise by Apollonius Dyscolus, the Perí Syntáxeōs (Luhtala 2005; Lallot 2009).

A possible philosophy of language underlying Priscian’s grammatical thinking is still largely unrecognized, possibly underestimated. Indeed, in a contribution to a collective work on Priscian, Ebbesen (2009) highlighted the fragility of the philosophical foundations of Priscian’s work. According to Ebbesen, the grammarian would have had a superficial contact with the sources of Greek philosophy (be it Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic or Neoplatonic), which would have resulted in a “second-hand” presentation of philosophical notions, filtered through the reading of Apollonius Dyscolus and of late commentators, such as Marius Victorinus or Cicero (ibid.: 100-101). For this reason, the philosophical basis of Priscian’s grammar would have been inaccurate, revealing misunderstandings about the original philosophical concepts (ibid.: 104). As Ebbesen did not find evidence that Priscian was familiar with authentic philosophical texts, he concluded that Priscian should be regarded as no more than a “Latin grammaticus” (ibid.: 107). He seems to exclude any possibility that Priscian, even faced with a philosophical source that may be scarce and imprecise, could have appropriated or even elaborated new philosophical categories of his own, adequate to his grammatical project.5

4 In fact, according to Ebbesen, even the expressive number of quotations from Plato contained in Book 18 of Priscian’s Ars would not be of philosophical importance. According to this author, it would be a communis locus, such as found in other works of the genre. However, the number of such quotations contrasts largely with what we actually see in Apollonius Dyscolus, for example.

5 In addition, Ebbesen’s (2009) text is based on premises lacking references, such as: 1) at the time of Priscian, access to philosophical instruction would be very difficult, with not many philosophy teachers
In the same collection of studies, Luhtala reveals, however, that Priscian’s work would be the most philosophical one of all late Latin grammarians. According to the scholar, “philosophy appears to have been a fundamental element in Priscian’s language theory” (Luhtala 2009: 109), due to the heterogeneous and eclectic set of philosophical principles that is reflected in the way Priscian defines nominal classes (pronoun, noun, adjective). Although Priscian’s philosophical source is Apollonius Dyscolus—and, therefore, indirectly, the Stoic logic—Priscian also brings up Middle-Platonic elements, such as the notion of intelligibles, absent in Apollonius; as well as Aristotelian concepts, such as the notion of substance, replacing the Stoic notion of body in Priscian’s definition of nouns (ibid.: 111).

The way in which Priscian appropriates the Aristotelian notions of substantia and accidentia for defining the parts of speech reveals an original handling of philosophical notions. In fact, these two terms, which represent the Latin translation for the categories of ousia and symbebekōta (Arist. Cat. 1b-4b; Met. Z), were not common in the Latin tradition prior to Priscian. Except for indirect references in some works of rhetoric, as in Quintilian’s Institutio oratoria, in reference to Theodorus of Gadara (Inst. or. 3.6.36-40), the term substantia had only been systematically used by Boetius, commentator of Aristotle and contemporary to Priscian, and, evidently, by Priscian himself in his work (Garcea 2009: 126).

In this sense, the extensive use of the Latin pair substantia-accidentia was not exclusive to Priscian. His innovation consisted of employing such concepts for the foundation of grammatical distinctions, such as those, as we shall see next, that explained the difference between nouns and verbs. This seems to suggest that, for the elaboration of his grammar, Priscian was not limited to the formal, semantic and usage distinctions of the parts of speech, as they were dealt with in the context of the former Latin grammatical treatises, but revealed and emphasized the logical nature of them. Secondly, the innovative character of using the pair substantia-accidentia in Priscian is demonstrated by the fact that, as Garcea (2009: 127) points out, a “theory of substance” is practically absent from the work of Apollonius Dyscolus. The absence of these notions in Apollonius’ work not only reveals another sign of distinction between available; 2) Priscian might only have contact with second-generation philosophers, and the quality of “second-generation” philosophy teachers was inferior to that of “first-generation”; 3) Despite being fluent in Greek, Priscian would not have read philosophy texts in Greek, but only grammatical texts(3). Even if such statements were admitted as true, none of them would be enough reason for Priscian to not have his own philosophical concepts.

6 For middle-Platonist elements when discussing the interrogatives, cf. GL 3, 135.1-11. For a definition of ideas as what has been previously in the divine mind, before being in a body (Medium-Platonic view), cf. Luhtala 2009: 120, n. 19.

7 As “Latin grammatical tradition”, we refer here to the set of grammatical arts that were produced between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD. Among them, we can mention the artes by Sacerdos (3rd century AD), Donatus, Augustine, Diomedes and Dosithheus (4th century). They were very different from each other, being produced in different regions of the Roman Empire, but, for the purposes of this article, they can be grouped as belonging to a group of Latin school grammars that preceded Priscian’s work. Particularly, because they were produced in the East, the works of Diomedes and Dosithheus were closer to the work of Priscian.
these two authors, but it also emphasizes a possible difference in philosophical orientation. In fact, by appropriating these categories, Priscian gives a more markedly Aristotelian varnish to a discussion that, in Apollonius, had been limited to the use of elements of Stoic logic for a typically Alexandrian philological analysis. The question that arises is how these categories, taken from the philosophical discourse, give support to properly grammatical distinctions; in other words, are there any boundaries between linguistic and philosophical reflection in Priscian’s work? In the following sections, we intend to analyze this issue in more detail.

2 FROM THE ORDER OF WORDS TO THE ORDER OF THINGS IN THE WORLD

The parts of speech had long been fixed in the grammatical tradition (Matthaios 2002; Swiggers & Wouters 2005). At least since Quintilian (Inst. or. 4.17-20), the Romans acknowledged a long historical development for the concept of partes orationis, beginning with the classical dialecticians, reaching its culmination with the Stoics and eventually resulting in the eight different word classes admitted by the Greek and Latin grammarians: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition and interjection. In the Ars liber XVII, Priscian gives these parts a new arrangement. Before analyzing the reasons put forward to justify this new disposition, let us have a quick look on the canonical order of the parts of discourse, as traditionally presented by Latin grammarians, compared to the new order proposed by Priscian:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The order of the parts of speech</th>
<th>In the Latin grammatical tradition</th>
<th>In the Institutiones grammaticae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. nomen</td>
<td>1. nomen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. pronomen</td>
<td>2. uerbum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. uerbum</td>
<td>3. participium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. aduerbium</td>
<td>4. pronom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. participium</td>
<td>5. praepositio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. coniunctio</td>
<td>6. aduerbium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. praepositio</td>
<td>7. interiectio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. interiectio</td>
<td>8. coniunctio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in the table above, Priscian presents a new order for the partes orationes, in which we find the following changes: i. the categories of noun and verb head the list, in the first and second positions respectively; ii. the participle occupies the third position, displacing the pronoun; iii. the preposition comes at the second half of the list, placed before the adverb. This new order largely mirrors the way the word classes had been displayed in Apollonius Dyscolus’ Perì Syntâxeōs (1.13-29), with

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8 This “canonical order” is found, with few variations, in authors who are representative of the “Latin grammatical tradition”, such as Donatus, Augustine, Diomedes and Sacerdos. In all of them, with some difference in detail, the disposition of the parts of the sentence follows exactly the same order, as indicated in the table.
the difference that, while in the latter, there was still the articles class, which occupied the fourth position, in the former, the absence of this class in the Latin language was compensated by the addition of one last class, the interjections. In Priscian’s, as in Apollonius’, there are underlying reasons for this new order; these reasons, as we will see below, respond to methodological (meta-grammatical), linguistic (syntactic-semantic) and, mainly, logical-ontological criteria.

Before going further in Priscian’s reasons, it is relevant to highlight the general principle presiding over his grammatical project: an adequate order (apta ordo) can result in a complete sentence (perfecta oratio). Central to Priscian’s syntactic theory, the idea of sentence completeness comes up in the first paragraphs of Book 17. The examination of the complete sentence is considered to be necessary for the explanation of the authors (ad auctorum expositionem):

\[
\text{nunc autem dicemus de ordinatione earum, quae solet fieri ad constructione orationis perfectae, quam admodum necessariam ad auctorum expositionem omnium diligentissime debemus inquirere.}
\]

We are now going to talk about the way of arranging them to construct a complete sentence, which we must examine with the greatest care because it is absolutely essential for the explanation of a text by any author. (Prisc. Ars 17.2 GL 2 108.6-9)

As seen in the passage above, Priscian puts in evidence a declaredly philological purpose, i.e. the “explanation of authors”.\(^9\) He characterizes the complete sentence as a sort of assemblage of elements, whose proper arrangement provides autonomy and intelligibility. As can be seen in the sequence, logical-ontological explanations are implied in such syntactic considerations:

\[
\text{Igitur manifestum, quod consequens est, ut etiam dictiones, cum partes sint per constructionem perfectae orationis, id est τοῦ κατὰ σύνταξιν αὐτοτελοῦς λόγου, aptam structuram id est ordinationem recipiant: quod enim ex singulis dictionibus paratur sensibile id est intellegibile, quodammodo elementum est orationis perfectae, et quomodo elementa iuncturis syllabas efficiunt suis, sic etiam ordinatio intellegibilium imaginem quandam syllabae perfecta adiunctio dictionum. Est enim oratio comprehensio dictionum aptissime ordinatarum, quomodo syllaba comprehensio literarum aptissime coniunctarum; et quomodo ex syllabarum coniunctione dictio, sic etiam ex dictionum coniunctione perfecta oratio constat.}
\]

It is therefore clear, as a result, that the words also respect a mode of organization, that is to say, an adequate arrangement, insofar as they are the parts constructing a complete sentence, i.e. τοῦ κατὰ σύνταξιν αὐτοτελοῦς λόγου. What each word obtains as comprehensible, that is to say, intelligible, is in fact like the minimum unit of a complete sentence, and just as the minimal units produce syllables as they combine, so the arrangement of intelligibles produce an image of syllable with the

\(^9\) As we have shown in another work (Fortes 2020), the logical orientation of Apollonius’ grammar is in accordance with its philological orientation, i.e. the elucidation of textual problems for the reading of Greek authors.
association of words. The sentence is in fact a grouping of words arranged in the most adequate way; and just as the word proceeds from the junction of syllables, the complete sentence also proceeds from the junction of words. (Ibid. 17.3 GL 2 108.17-109.4)

At the end of this passage, it becomes clear that the sentence (oratio) consists of a hierarchical gathering of elements (elementa). To a large extent, the excerpt reproduces in Latin the formulation already found in Apollonius Dyscolus (S.1.1),\(^\text{10}\) whose theory of the “complete sentence” (oratio perfecta, lat.; autoteleios lógos, gr.) comes after the Stoic division between simple statements (axiómata hapla) and complex statements (axiómata ouk hapla), being the result of the philosophical effort to compose and understand true statements, in the quest for the truth of things (Frede 1987; Lallot 1997). Nevertheless, between the Stoic formulations and their reception in this grammatical text, there has not been a total mirroring, but a complex synthesis trying to assemble different interests and purposes: from the philosophical concern towards the truth to the philological care for preservation of texts (Sluiter 1990; Lallot 1997). Besides that, while Priscian’s purpose is still a declaredly philological one (as we noted above: ad auctorum expositionem, also following the steps of Apollonius), his way of discussing the sentence syntax seems to be rooted in a philosophical praxis: that of dividing and classifying the lógos, with syntactic and semantic consequences.

Moreover, whereas in the corresponding passage of Apollonius Dyscolus’ text we can only find evident Stoic connotations, the use of the expression ordo intelligibilium (“the order of intelligibles”) by Priscian also suggests an undisguised Neoplatonic coloring (Groupe Ars Grammatica 2010: 65, n. 6), which allows us to assume that Priscian might have intended to expose two levels of “order” (ordo) side by side: one happening in the “sensitive domain” of reality (from what one hears —the sound sequence of the words caught by the organs of sense), another taking place “in the intellect” —an “intelligible order” (ordo intelligibilium). If such assumption proves itself true, Priscian may have tried to represent herein a sort of mental image of language (imago).

All these elements show that, in addition to the description and explanation of a certain state of affairs in the language itself (the order of the words and the semantic completeness of the statement), there is also, from the very beginning of Priscian’s text, some consideration regarding the state of affairs of the world (the partition of the sentence, which can be read as a partition of the logos, and the opposition between sensibles vs. intelligibles\(^\text{11}\)). As can be seen, these two aspects add a logical and ontological layer to Priscian’s philological purpose of “explaining the authors”.

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10 We could also affirm that it recalls indirectly the long tradition of partitioning the discourse, whose roots can be traced back to Plato (Crat. 424; Soph. 262c) and Aristotle (Poet. 20; Herm. 16b27, cf. Bostock 1994; Williams 1994; Charles 1994; Luhtala 2005).

11 The analysis of this reference needs further study, as to answer to what extent the opposition sensitive vs. intelligible read in this passage could make reference to an ontological (Neoplatonic) view and/or to semantic (form vs. sense) discussion.
Resuming the discussion, let us analyze in this section the types of arguments that Priscian evokes for the main changes carried out in the order of the parts of speech:

i. The noun and the verb appear in the first two positions;
ii. the participle occupies the third position;
iii. the preposition comes at the end of the list, placed before the adverb.

3.1 Semantic dependency and independence: “vowel” and “consonant” terms

In Priscian, a complete sentence (oratio perfecta) has semantic autonomy and is formed by different elements in an organized way (constructio). The idea of autonomy is concerned with conveying meaning in itself (significantia), while dependency refers to the fact of only conveying meaning with the presence of other terms (cosignificantia). The opposition between semantically independent terms (significantia) and semantically dependent terms (cosignificantia) is also expressed by the pair “vowel”/“consonant” terms (uocalis/consonans elementum), as we see in the passage below:

Praeterea, quemadmodum elementorum alia sunt uocalia, quae per se uocem perficiunt, alia consonantia, quae sine uocalibus perficere uocem nequeunt, sic etiam in dictionibus animaduertimus quasdam ad similitudinem uocalium per se esse dicendas, ut in uerbis maxime imperatíuis uel nominibus uel pronominibus saepe uocatiuis uel aduerbiis, quae adiciuntur antecedentibus actionibus uel orationibus, cum clamamus “bene, recte, diserte” ad illos, qui oportune aliquid agunt uel dicunt. Aliae vero dictiones sunt, quae ad simulituidinem consonantium sine adiumento aliarum partium orationis, quae imitantur in hoc uocales, proferri ad perfectionem sensus non possunt, ut praepositiones uel conjonctiones. Eae etenim semper consignificant, id est coniunctae aliiis significant, per se autem non.

In addition, just as among the elements some are vowels, which by themselves fully constitute the voice, and others consonants, which without vowels cannot fully constitute the voice, so in words we notice that some, like vowels, can be said on their own, as is the case when it comes to imperative verbs, or quite often with vocative nouns and pronouns, or adverbs that we say in the sequence of something that has just been done or said, when we say “well! just! great!” for those who do or say something good. But there are other words which, like consonants, cannot be pronounced in such a way as to produce full meaning without the assistance of other parts of speech, which in this imitate vowels. This is the case of prepositions and conjunctions: these parts of speech are in fact always co-signifying, that is to say that they only signify in combination with others, but not by themselves. (Prisc. Ars 17.10 GL 2, 114.9-20)

The dichotomy vowel vs. consonant terms puts in evidence the distinction between semantically self-sufficient parts of speech (such as the noun, the verb, the adverb, the pronouns, the adjectives) and those that essentially depend on the syntactic context to have its semantic value defined (such as the prepositions and the con-
junctures). Thus, this first division takes into account a sort of syntactic-semantic criterion and seems to foreshadow the current distinctions made between free and dependent forms\textsuperscript{12} or between lexical and functional terms in contemporary linguistics. In addition, the passage also suggests a larger linguistic scope for such division: elements can either be \textit{vowel} or \textit{consonants} not only in the alphabet, but also in the whole universe of language, in which every part behave either as consonants (i.e. semantically dependent) or vowels (i.e. semantically independent).

In other parts of the work, Priscian gives evidence that this first distinction does not represent an ontological division, given the existence of intermediate elements, such as the semivowels —theme discussed by Priscian in Book 1—, and those words that, depending on the context, may or may not belong to a single category. That is the case of certain prepositions that could be read as adverbs in certain syntactic contexts, as noted in Book 14.\textsuperscript{13} For this reason, this first division can be accounted for as a methodological (or meta-grammatical) one, since it shows some properties related to the language for the sake of organizing them in the text. Also, it seems to stand for a tentative division based on grammatical properties (the syntactic and semantic distinction between classes of words, concerning their dependency/independence). Yet, despite being methodologically justified, such division does not affirm anything about the essence or reality of language itself.

However, if it is correct that this first division is meta-grammatical (even if being founded on linguistic distinctions), can we assume that it is also the case for the parts of speech? Let us look into each case.

3.1.1 The noun and the verb appear in the first two positions

The primacy of the pair \textit{nomen-uerbum} is firstly justified in view of the ideal of semantic completeness that guides Priscian’s syntactic model, whose core is made up by these two parts. Nouns and verbs are considered to be essential parts, inasmuch as, without them, one cannot produce a completely meaningful sentence:

\begin{quote}
\textit{A qua si tollas nomen aut uerbum, imperfecta fit oratio; sin autem cetera subtrahas omnia, non ncesses est orationem deficere, ut si dicas: “idem homo lapsus heu hodie concidit”, en omnes insunt partes orationis absque coniunctione, quae si addatur, aliam orationem exigit. Ergo si tollas nomen aut uerbum, deficet oratio,}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} In linguistics, the discussion about \textit{free forms}, \textit{bound forms} and \textit{dependent forms} has been carried out in the work of Bloomfield (1933). Recent developments of this discussion can be seen in the works of Mattoso Camara Jr. (1970), who examines the issue from the Portuguese point of view, and De Souza (2016), through a cognitivist reinterpretation of the concept. As we can see, the seed of this discussion was already found in Priscian, although there is no distinction between bound and dependent forms.

\textsuperscript{13} The existence of intermediate elements, such as the semivowels, challenges the idea of a strictly ontological division of language. The observation about semivowels can be found in the \textit{Ars liber I}. Similarly, the discussion of the categorical boundaries between prepositions and adverbs (Book 14) suggests a methodological (meta-grammatical) division of these categories and allows us to see some awareness concerning the fluidity of the linguistic phenomenon, as we have pointed out in another work (Fortes & Moura 2019).
desiderans uel nomen uel uerbum, ut si dicam idem “lapsus heu hodie concidit” uel “idem homo lapsus heu hodie”; sin subtrahas aduerbium, non omnino deficiet oratio, ut “idem homo lapsus heu concidit”. Nec non etiam participium si adimas, neque sic deficiet, ut: “idem homo heu hodie concidit”, nec si praepositionem et interjectionem: “idem homo cecidit”, nec si etiam pronomen: “homo cecidit”.

If we remove the noun or the verb from it, the sentence becomes incomplete, while if we remove the rest, even completely, the sentence will not necessarily be deficient of something. For example, if we say *idem homo lapsus heu Hodie* [the same man having fallen unfortunately today died], we see that there are all the parts of the speech there except for the conjunction (if we add it, it would require another sentence). So, if we remove the noun or the verb, something will be missing to the sentence, claiming either one or the other to be complete, if I say for example *lapsus heu hodie concidit* or *idem homo lapsus heu Hodie*. If, on the other hand, we remove the adverb, the sentence will not lack anything, as in *idem homo lapsus heu concidit* not any more than it will lack something if we remove the participle, like *idem homo heu hodie concidit*, and not more if it is the preposition and the interjection: *idem homo cecidit* nor if we remove the pronoun: *homo cecidit*. (Prisc. *Ars* 17.12-13 GL 2, 116.10-19)

In addition to this syntactic-semantic reason, the precedence of these two parts also responds to their logical property, *i.e.* their own definitions:

*Ante uerbum quoque necessario ponitur nomen, quia agere et pati substantiae est proprium, quia agere et pati substantiae est proprium, ex quibus proprietas uerbi, id est actio et passio, nascitur. Inest igitur intellectu nominativus in ipsis uerbis, quo sine substantia significari non poterat, in prima quidem persona et secunda definitus, in tertia vero, quia innumerabiles sunt personae tertiae, infinitus, nisi excepta fiat actio, sicut “fulminat, tonat”; ea enim, quamuis non addamus nomen, definita esse uidentur, cum ad solum pertineant Iouem.*

It is also necessary to place the noun before the verb. Indeed, to act or to undergo is what characterizes the substance itself, and it is in the substance that the nouns are instituted, and it is from the same that what is specific to the verbs is born, *i.e.*, the active and the passive. A nominative, without which there could be no expression of the substance, is therefore implicitly included in the verbs themselves; this nominative is defined in the first and second person, but indefinite in the third because the third persons are innumerable (except for exclusive action, such as *fulminat* [it flashes], *tonat* [it thunders]: even without the addition of a noun, these verbs seem defined, since they only concern Jupiter. (Prisc. *Ars* 17.14 GL 2, 116.26-117.4)

While substance (*substantia*) is essentially inherent to nouns, action or suffering (*actio et passio*) is in the very nature of verbs. Because action and suffering —two accidents— depend *ipsa facto* on the existence of a substance to be affected by them, verbs also depend on a previous existence of nouns. Thus, even though being

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14 It is useful to say that the examples given by Priscian in this passage are adaptations of those of Apollonius Dyscolus, cf. Groupe *Ars Grammatica* 2010: 83, n. 37-38.
semantically independent (*significantia*), verbs are logically dependent on nouns, which justifies their position in a second place.

As Garcea (2009: 127) points out, by giving the nouns the label of substances (*substantia*), Priscian makes here an important difference in relation to the thought of Apollonius Dyscolus. Actually, in the corresponding passage of his *Perì Syntáxeōs*, the Greek grammarian limited himself to defining nouns (*onómata*) as “corporeal elements” (*sómeta*). By using the notion of substance to qualify the nature of nouns, Priscian would not be alluding to the substance presupposed when uttering a noun (the so-called *referent* of speech, in the extralinguistic domain). Instead, Garcea (2009: 134) concludes that:

L’origine logique de cette notion apparaît claire quand on se réfère non pas à la substance présupposée par les noms et par les pronoms, mais au concept (d’abord aristotélicien, mais aussi stoïcien) de *huparxis*, renvoyant à l’existence réelle et actuelle d’un état de choses exprimé par un prédicat.

Therefore, if it is correct to assume an ontology behind the definitions of nouns and verbs, it is equally possible to admit that their order, since it is justified by these definitions, is consistent with that ontological view. What can be inferred from the passage, therefore, is not just an order of disposition of words justified by facts of the language itself (a syntactic order in view of semantic completeness), but also an overlap of *criteria* of two types: the grammatical criterion (syntactic-semantic) and the logical-ontological criterion (intrinsic to the definition of the parts). In other words, the passage suggests that, for Priscian, the description of a linguistic fact is also revealing of a fact of the world. This type of grammatical and philosophical reconciliation had no parallel in the prior Latin grammatical tradition.

### 3.1.2 The participle occupies the third position

*Participium etiam oportune post uerbum ponitur, ex quo et nascitur, sicut de uerbo tractantes ostendimus, quod necessario translationes uerborum fiebant in casuales figuras cum generibus, quae eis accident, cum uerba non possent consequentiam sui praesentare, ut etiam per obliquos casus adiungi possent et sine conjunctione consociari, ut “me legente proficio” pro “lego et proficio”. Manifestum autem, quod ipsius quoque positio nominationis, qua participium nominatum est, non bene seruartur, nisi post nomen et uerbum poneretur participium, cum ex eis utrisque per confirmationem pendens ea pars accipiebatur, quomodo post masculinum et femininum eorum abnegatiuum neutrum. Nisi enim praepositorum partium patiamur priorem positionem, reliquum est, ut nec participium uocare possimus neque tamen neutrum, quoniam duorum praepositorum generum fit abnegatiuum. Participium quoque necesse est ex quibusdam praepositis partem capiens constare, sed neque alien recte interponimus partem, id est pronomen uel aduerbium uel conjunctionem uel alien aliquam, cum nullam ex earum proprietate partem capiat participium.*
The participle is also in its correct place after the verb, owing to the fact that there have been inevitable transfers from verbs to case forms (with the addition of the gender category, which characterizes them), when verbs could not manifest the logical relation which unites them one to the other; the result of these transfers is that the association of verbs can be done even when they pass to oblique cases, and that without conjunction, as in *me legente proficio* [by reading I progress] instead of *lego et proficio* [I read and I progress]. It is moreover clear that the choice of the very word which constitutes the denomination of the participle would not be correctly respected if the participle were not placed after the noun and the verb, since it was taken, in an affirmation, depending on these two, as after the masculine and the feminine, [one has] the neuter. Unless, in fact, we accept the precedent position of these parts, what remains is that we could neither give the name of participle nor neuter, since it is made by negating the other two previous genders. For the participle, it is at the same time necessary that it results from elements arranged before it insofar as it *takes a part* of each, and conversely one could not insert between them another part of the speech, pronoun, adverb, conjunction or other, since the participle does not participate in what is proper to them. (Prisc. *Ars* 17.18-19 *GL* 2, 119.13-29)

According to the grammarian, the existence of the participle class depends on the classes of the verb and the noun. However, the dependency (*pendens*) of the participle does not refer to any syntactic or semantic bound, but to the definition of this class. Logically, one class that is derived from another one is secondary to it. So, the participle, being derived from nouns and verbs, must logically and ontologically come after them. Besides this logical-ontological justification, Priscian also displays some auxiliary etymological remarks, reinforcing the same conclusion: the term *participium* shows that it “takes part” (*partem capere*) in other classes. Finally, there is also a morphosyntactic argument: participles take from the nouns the case and genre inflections, and from the verbs their own roots (*lego > legente*), standing for a hybrid word class.

### 3.1.3 The preposition comes at the end of the list, before the adverb

*Apparet autem etiam, quod praeposito non primam habens positionem neque antiquiorem alii dictionibus post supra dictas ponitur; unde neque nominationem a propria aliqua significatione accepit, sed quia supra dicta praeponitur partibus, quae si non ante sint, neque ea constare possit — quod etiam de participio diximus —, ex quibus etiam ordinacionem accepit: scilicet cum modo per appositionem, modo per compositionem praeponitur ante dictis partibus. Ergo natura quidem posterior est, constructione uero principalis.*

However, it also seems that the preposition, having neither the first nor the most important position among the other words, should be placed after the categories presented above, since it is not named for any proper meaning it has, but for the simple fact that it is pre-posted to the parts of the clause quoted above, which, if they didn’t come before, that one would also not exist [as a category] —which we
also said about the participle. The preposition receives, from the other parts of the clause, even its position in the sentence: inasmuch as, whether through apposition or composition, it is pre-posted to the other parts, mentioned above. Therefore, by nature, it is, in fact, secondary; by construction, however, it comes in the first position. (Prisc. *Ars* 17.20 GL 2, 120.19-121.2)

We also note in this passage both logical-ontological arguments (associated with the definition of prepositions) and linguistic arguments (the syntactic position of the prepositions prior to other words). Priscian seems to draw here a distinction: from a grammatical point of view, prepositions precede other parts, since they are put before other classes (*praeponitur*); however, as to their “nature” (*natura*), they must be placed afterwards (*posterior*). There is little doubt that the reference to the nature of words says something about their ontology, and it is also clear that, in this passage, it is the ontological, rather than the linguistic criterion, that is prevalent for the order attributed to prepositions (at the end of the list).

Finally, let us see the case of the adverbs, placed after the prepositions:

_Aduerbium uero quod uerbi est ui adiectiium, positio, id est nominatio, quoque eius ostendit. Quomodo igitur in secundo loco uerbum post nomen, sic etiam aduerbium in secundo loco post praepositionem bene ponitur, quae per appositionem dictionis uim sibi defendens praeponitur nominibus uel aliis casualibus: composita enim uim dictionis non habet, concedens in eam, cui adiungitur._

As for the adverb, which shows that it has an adjective value in relation to the verb, it is its very institution, in other words the name given to it. Just as it is therefore correct to place the verb in the second position after the noun, it is just as correct to place the adverb in second position after the preposition, because this last one preserving its full word value when juxtaposed, is itself pre-posed to nouns or to other case words (in composition, however, it does not have the value of a word and gives it to the one which it is associated with). (Prisc. *Ars* 17.21 GL 2, 121.4-9)

The position of adverbs is also explained according to their nature. In the same way that verbs come after nouns, adverbs, a category that works as an “adjective” to verbs (modifying them from a semantic point of view), must come after the category that, theoretically, works as an adjective to nouns, the prepositions.

From a strictly grammatical point of view, the parallel drawn between adverbs and prepositions is not perfect, given that the roles that both classes play with verbs and nouns are not of the same type. In fact, whereas prepositions reveal some syntactic-semantic dependency, adverbs only show semantic relationship, not being syntactically dependent. Nevertheless, the linguistic particularities and differences between these two grammatical classes seem to have little importance here: what is at stake, for the establishment of their position in the rank, is their logical-ontological status, defined by their logical condition of “adjectives” (*adiectiua*) that both have in relation to the classes they refer to, the noun and the verb.
Finally, the status of “adjectives” given to them does not refer to any grammatical property, but underlines a logical and ontological characteristic common to both of them. As Garcea (2009: 130) observes, this is a new ontological category proposed by Priscian, different from accidents (accidentia) and substance (substantia). While accidents (accidentia) could refer to anything other than substances (in this case, for example, verbs are themselves accidents, whereas nouns are substances), adjectives (adjectiua) can affect other accidents.\(^\text{15}\) As a result, it has the effect of promoting, for the classification of the parts of speech, a kind of logical-ontological hierarchy: substance > accidents > adjectives. In terms of language, the passage shows that even an accident (like the verb) can be modified by other accidental categories (like the adverbs).

**Conclusion**

As we have seen in this article, by establishing a specific order for the parts of speech, Priscian mainly mobilizes arguments of different types: linguistic arguments (mostly associated with the ideas of semantic completeness or dependency, and the syntactic position of a word in the sentence); logical-ontological arguments (referring to the logical status of each of the parties, their definition and their nature); and, to a lesser extent, methodological or meta-grammatical arguments (associated with the attempt to organize reasonably the linguistic material in the grammatical text).

Although there is an apparent overlap of these different criteria, we can also notice the existence of some hierarchy between them. In fact, as far as the arrangement of word classes goes, the logical-ontological arguments prevail, only being supported by linguistic explanations and, finally, by possible methodological reasoning. Although Priscian puts in evidence linguistic elements, the logical-ontological aspect is the determining criterion for the division and ordering of the parts of speech. The privilege granted to such reasons leads us to highlight, as preliminary conclusions that (i) Priscian’s work is strongly committed to a philosophical background, that is to say, for his linguistic classification, the grammarian sticks to philosophical elements of different sources, partially following Apollonius Dyscolus, partially making up his own reasoning; (ii) the notion of “order” takes into consideration both linguistic and logical-ontological arguments, and there is no clear boundary in the usage of these two sorts of arguments in Priscian’s *De constructione*; (iii) the logical-ontological discussion vis-à-vis the reflection on the meaning conveyed by linguistic items and sentences seems to anticipate the theoretical and philosophical developments of the *Modistae*, whose works, later in the Middle Ages, had the work of Priscian as their main philosophical source (Marmo 1996; Van der Lecq 2011; Batalla i Costa 2013). Finally, the conclusions of this study are

\(^{15}\) It is, therefore, an ontological subdivision, perhaps heir to the logic of Porphyry (*Isag. CAG* 4.1, 12.24 sq.).
valid for the limited scope of Priscian’s work under analysis. Further investigation should examine if such criteria is equally used for further grammatical discussion in *De constructione*.

**REFERENCES**


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