

## Latin *placēre* as an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat verb: A radically new analysis

Traditionally, the Latin verb *placēre* ‘like, please’, which is a two-place predicate licensing a nominative and a dative argument, is analyzed as a Nom-Dat verb, which means that it is the nominative that is considered to be the subject, whereas the dative is assumed to be the object. However, examples like the ones in (1) below show that either order, Dat-Nom as in (1a) and Nom-Dat as in (1b), is acceptable in Latin. The fact that both word order patterns are equally fine has been observed in the field, but it has generally been attributed to what is termed ‘free word order’ (Devine & Stephens 2006, Spevak 2010, inter alia).

- (1) a. (Ov. *Tr.* 4,10,19)  
At **mihi iam puero caelestia sacra** placebant  
and I.DAT even boy.DAT mystic.NOM service.NOM like.IMPF.3PL  
“And I, even as a boy, liked the mystic services”
- b. (Cic. *Orat.* 2, 42, 179)  
**Qui ordo tibi** placeat inquit Catulus  
what.NOM arrangement.NOM you.DAT like.SBJV.PRS.3SG say.PRS.3SG Catulus.NOM  
“What arrangement would please you, said Catulus [...]”

The present paper advocates a more radical approach, namely in terms of *alternating predicates*. Such structures have also been shown to exist in Germanic (Barnes 1986 for Faroese, Allen 1995 for Old English, Barðdal 1998 for the history of the Mainland Scandinavian languages, Barðdal 2001 for Modern Icelandic, Barðdal, Eythórsson & Dewey 2019 for Modern German) and in Romance (Illoaia 2022 for Romanian), and they may also exist in Baltic, Slavic, Hittite and Sanskrit (cf. Barðdal 2023: Ch. 3). Alternating predicates systematically occur with two diametrically opposed argument structures: a Dat-Nom argument structure and a Nom-Dat argument structure. As a consequence, (1a) would contain a dative subject and a nominative object, whereas the opposite is true for (1b), which would contain a nominative subject and a dative object.

Here we focus on one specific verb in Latin, *placēre* ‘like, please’, confining our analysis to occurrences of this verb as a two-place predicate, which licenses a nominative and a dative argument. The data are drawn from the *LatinISE* corpus, which stretches a period of approximately 500 years, from the Archaic Period (3rd–2nd century BCE) up to the Late Latin period (7th century). Our dataset comprises 350 occurrences of *placēre*, annotated for (pro)nominativity, person, definiteness, length, and animacy.

In line with Eythórsson & Barðdal (2005), Barðdal & Eythórsson (2012, 2018), and Barðdal (2023), we define subject as the leftmost argument of the argument structure. This definition is based on a generalization across a range of diagnostics which have been successfully applied to various Germanic languages and the behavior of the arguments relative to these. Unfortunately, research on the modern linguistic concept of subject is still in its early stages within the Latin scholarship. The issue was first dealt with by Michaelis (1992), later to be taken up by Baños Baños (2003) and Fedriani (2009, 2014).

More recently, Barðdal et al. (2023) have shown that several subject tests identified for the Germanic languages may be successfully applied to Latin and Ancient Greek. On this basis, we discuss the behavior of the two arguments of *placēre* with regard to these subject tests and show that either argument, the nominative or the dative, passes the subject tests in Latin. We focus in particular on data involving word order, raising-to-object, raising-to-subject, and control infinitives.

Barðdal et al. (2023) further document that ordinary nominative subjects in Latin precede the object in ca. 70% of the cases, thereby establishing a baseline against which to compare the statistics obtained for alternating predicates. We compare our Latin word order statistics with corresponding statistics from Old English (Allen 1995) and Old Norse-Icelandic (Elens, Somers & Barðdal 2023), arguing that Latin *placēre* ‘like, please’, shows the same distributional properties as alternating predicates in the Early Germanic languages.

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