

## THE PECULIARITIES OF 'PERSONAL' SENTENCES IN FORMAL LETTERS WRITTEN IN OLD SPANISH

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### Abstract

Formal or official letters are considered legal documents. They have all indications of validity: date and place of writing, signature of the authorized person/s, signatures of witnesses, seal and other official requisites. As a rule formal letters are written in normative language. It is neutral and it is not marked expressively and emotionally. Medieval formal letters are not an exception. This article considers the main characteristic features of 'personal' sentences in formal letters written in the old Spanish language (the so-called Castilian Romance) of the period when the normative syntax of formal language began to form within the emerging national language. Analyzed documents demonstrate real lexical, morphological and syntactic structure of the written national language existing in Medieval Spain. In particular, the authors reconstruct, describe and systematize some models of simple sentences with the verb (in 'personal' form) in the indicative mood that can be found in the texts of formal letters dated by the XIII<sup>th</sup> - the beginning of the XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Keywords:** Formal letter, document, formal language, syntax, subject, predicate, grammatical agreement of the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate, word order, 'personal' sentences, the old Spanish language, the Castilian language, national language, Medieval Spain.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

It is known that in the structure of a so called 'personal' sentence there is a verb that clearly indicates the agent (the person who performs the action). The agent can be expressed explicitly by the separate element of the sentence (i.e. by the grammatical subject) or can be expressed implicitly (in this case the grammatical subject is omitted (but not in English!)). The Castilian language refers to the languages with the pronominal system of verb conjugations. Such languages admit the so-called 'subjectless definite personal' sentences. It is the verb ending that indicates the agent.

As for 'personal' sentences in formal letters written in old Spanish in the period when the normative syntax of formal language began to form within the emerging national language (the beginning of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century) they are characterized first of all as extended sentences (in the broad sense).

The concept of extension refers not only to the secondary parts of the sentence (i.e. to their obligatory presence), but often to the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate (or the verbal kernel) as the basic elements of the sentence. It means that, firstly, there are secondary parts of the sentence; secondly, there are a lot of homogeneous parts of the sentence; thirdly, there are synonymous (sometimes antonymous) duplicates that generally lead to informative saturation or even to oversaturation; fourthly, there are frequent reiterations of the elements (the same information is repeated in different structural parts of a formal letter, that leads to informative pleonasm).

The grammatical subject (coinciding with the logical subject or the agent) is rarely consists of one word. Basically, it represents a simple word-group (which consists of one kernel with secondary subordinate elements) or complex formation (which consists of two or more kernels). The grammatical predicate is also

characterized by synonymous duplicates.

## 2 WORD ORDER IN 'PERSONAL' SENTENCES

### 2.1 Word order in opening sentences of formal letters

The first (opening / introductory) sentence of a formal letter written in old Spanish (with the exception of the theological component *En el nombre de Dios* 'In the name of the God' or etiquette formula *Sepan todos aquellos que veran y odran esta carta* 'Let it be known to those (people) who could see or hear about this letter') is always a complete sentence with two basic members (the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate).

The introductory sentence of medieval formal letters usually contains the information about the addresser and/or other participants of business (transactions, agreements, donations, exchanges, etc.). As a rule the verb has the form of indicative mood (more often in Present Simple Tense, more seldom in Past Simple Tense). For example:

- "*Sepan quantos esta carta vieren cómo* [complex grammatical subject of two kernels expressed by two PRONOUNS **yo y yo** with complementary elements ANTHROPONYMS + NOMINAL GROUPS (which indicate profession / occupation, ties of blood, place of residence, etc.) →] *yo Gil Velasco, fijo de Velasco Gil, e yo Velasca Martínez, su muger, moradores en el Villar, amos de mancomún, vendemos* [indirect object (group-word by structure, i.e. of one kernel with secondary subordinate elements PRONOUN + ANTHROPONYM + NOMINAL GROUP (position, ties of blood) →] *a vós Blasco Blásquez, arcediano de Ávila,* [direct object (characterized by antonymous and multiple features) →] *todo poco e mucho quanto avemos en Cornejos, casas, prados, vuertos, linares, faceras, heredamiento, montes, defessas,* [attribute (synonymous duplicate) →] *todo libre e quito,* [modifier of manner (informative saturation) →] *con entradas e con salidas, por prezio conombrado ciento e veinte seis maravedís de la moneda blanca que el rey don Fernando mandó labrar ...*

*E por que esto sea firme e non venga en dubda rogamos a Pascual Domingo, notario público ..., que faga esta carta e ponga en ella su signo. Esto fue fecho XIV días de diciembre, era de mill e CCC e treinta e nueve años. Testigos: don Polo Ivánez Domingo, fijo de Domingo Caro, Miguel Domingo, de Vallacos, Alfonso Pérez.*

[Simple word-group (grammatical subject of one kernel) →] *Yo Pascual Domingo, notario sobredicho, fiz esta carta a ruego de amas las partes e pusse en ella mio signo atal en testimonio (CODEA, № 0120)*. – The private formal letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> of December of 1301.

**Translation** (the translation from Spanish into English here and further is done by the author 1 – S.B.): 'Let it be known to all (people) who could see this letter that I, Jil Velasco, Velasco Jil's son, and I, Velasca Martínez, his wife, villagers of Villar, joint owners, sell you, Blasco Blasquez, the archdeacon of Avila, everything that we have in Cornejos: houses, meadows, gardens, groves, pavements, property, mountains, defenses, everything is free [from the rights], with entrances and exits, at the indicated price of 126 maravedies in coins that the King Fernando ordered to mint ...

To be this letter valid and indisputable we ask Pascual Domingo, a public notary, to write this letter and to put his seal on it. This [letter] was written on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December in the year 1339 of the Hispanic era (= 1301 AD\*). Witnesses: Don Polo Ibañez Domingo, Domingo Domingo Caro's son, Miguel Domingo from Valyakos, Alfonso Perez.

I, Pascual Domingo, the above indicated notary, wrote this letter at the request of the parties and put my seal on it to certify the document'.

(\*Before Christian system of chronology, known as Anno Domini (AD) or the 'years of the incarnation,' a pagan system was used. This was the medieval chronological system, the so-called *Hispanic era* (in the document this is indicated by *era*). It is also called the chronology of Visigoths. This chronological system was widely used in Europe (not only in Spain) from the V<sup>th</sup> till the XV<sup>th</sup> century. To bring the years by Hispanic era (o just ERA) into accord with the modern chronological system one should subtract 38 years as the Hispanic era began in 38BC (Bezus, 2013, p. 68)).

Other analyzed letters also show that the opening sentence of medieval formal letters written in Romance (old Spanish) represents a full (with the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate) 'personal' construction with the direct word order **SVO** (SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT). In such constructions the verb (in the indicative mood) and the grammatical subject expressed explicitly (pronoun + complementary

elements) realize the initial indication to the agent.

When the second indication to the agent is realized, as a rule, it is not necessary to use personal pronouns (because the ending of the verb indicates the agent). However, we can find sentences with personal pronouns (without complementary elements) where the author mentions the agent for the second time. It is requested by special additional (stylistic) circumstances (such as emphasis and/or contrasting of subjects).

- “*Conocida cosa sea a todos aquellos que verán esta carta que Aznar nos [the grammatical predicate with two verbal kernels in Past Simple Tense →] **vendió** e nos **desamparó** la quarta parte del Aldea del Obispo, que fue de Merena Domingo, e [explicitly expressed grammatical subject →] **nós** [the grammatical predicate with one verbal kernel →] **pagámosle** de los maravedís que avié sobre la heredad (CODEA, № 0038)”. – The private formal letter of the 12<sup>th</sup> of April of 1233. – ‘Let it be known to those people who will see this letter that Aznar sold us and alienated the fourth part of the village Obispo, which was Merena Domingo’s, and we paid him the sum for the mentioned property.’*

In the first part of the extract № 0038 there is a reference to the subject ‘we’ (**nos**). In spite of this in the second part the author uses the ‘personal’ pronoun **nos** (the first person plural) although the verbal form **pagamos** indicates the first person plural as well. It is possible that the author wanted to contrast two subjects: from one part – Aznar (got money), from another – we (paid money).

Besides, when the agent is mentioned for the second time it admits the inverse word order as **OVS**. For example:

- “*In Cristo nomine, amen. Conoçuda cosa sea a todos omnes que esta carta verán: [SVO] **io** don Pero Arcéiz de Arróniz, estando en mi memoria bona, **mando e dono** aquella heredaç de Cervera e de Andiön con sos collaços e quanto venía en Navarra de García Cervera por mi alma e de todos mios parientes a Dios ... . [O\_\_V S →] E est mandamiento **fago io**: ... Facta carta in mense julio III nonas eiusdem mensis, sub era MCCLXXII (CODEA, № 0884)”. – The clerical letter of the 5<sup>th</sup> of July of 1234. – ‘In the name of the God, amen. Let it be known to all people who will see this letter: I, Pero Arceiz de Arroniz, being in my right mind, order and grant the property of Cervera and Andion, and everything that I have received from Garcia Cervera and from my relatives in Navarra ... And it’s me who do this order ... The letter was written on the third day of July nonas\*\* in the year 1272 of the era.’*

It is obviously that the direct word order is neutral; the inverse word order is marked, i.e. more expressive (See the English translation: *It’s me who* ... ← the emphatic construction).

(\*\* In all letters written in Latin, and in some letters written in Castilian, the date is given by the Roman calendar. In the Roman calendar there were three specific points within each month, ‘kalendae’, ‘nonae’ and ‘idus.’ The first days of the months are called ‘kalendae.’ The fifth day in January, February, April, June, August, September, November and December and the seventh day in March, May, July and October are called ‘nonae.’ The thirteenth days of the months (when ‘nonae’ fell on the fifth days) or the fifteenth days of the months (when ‘nonae’ fell on the seventh days) are called ‘idus.’ Today the usual way to count days is forwards (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... 31). The Romans counted days backwards from ‘kalendae,’ ‘nonae’ and ‘idus.’ It should be remembered that the starting date itself is always included in the counting of days. For example, the date ‘*Facta carta era millesima ducentesima undecima. Die sexto decimo Kalendas Aprilis*’ is interpreted as the following: Written in the year 1211 of the era. The sixteenth day of the April Kalendae. To bring this date into accord with the modern calendar it is necessary to count backwards from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April (the April ‘kalendae’) by sixteen days, including the 1<sup>st</sup> of April (1, 31, 30, 29, 28, 27 ...). The date will therefore be the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. We must also subtract 38 from the Hispanic era year. Therefore, the letter was written on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March in 1173 AD. Looking at another date: ‘*Facta carta ista quinto idus Nouembris. Anno Domini millesimo ducentesimo vigesimo tertio*’. – The fifth day of the November ‘idus’ in 1223 AD. In November ‘idus’ fell on the 13<sup>th</sup>. If we count five days back from the 13<sup>th</sup>, including the 13<sup>th</sup> (13, 12, 11 ...), we calculate it as the 9<sup>th</sup> of November (Bezus, 2013, p. 69)).

The word order in ‘personal’ sentences depends on the part of the letter. The most frequent word order in medieval formal letters written in old Spanish is **SVO**, i.e. with the verb in the central position. By the words of many linguists such a word order is more colloquial and reflects the natural train of thought from known things to unknown things (Alisova, 2007, p. 384).

Latin norm (**S)OV** when the direct object precedes the verb is characteristic for the opening etiquette formula *Coñocida cosa sea a quantos* [OV →] *esta carta* [O] *viren* [V] – (word for word →) ‘Known thing for so many [people] who *this letter* would see (the correct word order in English is ‘*who would see this letter*’).’

## 2.2 Word order in closing sentences of formal letters

In closing sentences there are some examples of 'personal' sentences with Latin word order **SOV**. Let's compare:

- "Et [SOV →] *yo fernan gonçaluiz* [S] *esta carta* [O] *que mande fazer* [V] *conmyas manos la* [O] *Rouro* [V] & [SOV →] *signo* [O] *fago* [V] (CODEA, № 0472)". – The clerical formal letter of 1255. – 'And I, Fernando Gonzalez, confirm with my own hand this letter, that I ordered to write, and put my seal [on it] ≈ (word by word) 'I this letter confirm with my own hand and the seal I put.'

In the closing part of formal letters we can find the compressed constructions **SV(Ø)** where the direct object (O) is usually omitted. For example:

- "Munio Ferr..., maior merinus in Gallecia, **confirmat**. Sanctius, scriptor domini Regis, **scripsit** (CODEA, № 0649)". – The clerical formal letter of 1248. – 'Munio Ferrand, the circuit judge, confirms [this letter]. Sancho, the royal clerk, has written [this letter].' The omitted element [here: 'this letter'] is easily reconstructed by the context.

If the situation requires simple (emotionless) statement of the facts, as a rule the words explaining each other normally are situated in the nearest positions. The separate position of the syntactically related words gives certain expression to the phrase. 'The word separation' is known as **hyperbaton**. Hyperbaton was very characteristic for the Latin word order. We can find distance position of the words in *Cantar de mio Cid* 'My Cid's canto'. The Castilian language of medieval formal letters doesn't admit the separation of the syntactically related words.

Although slight dispersedness of the components in one syntactic group is found in closing sentences of some notarial and royal letters.

Thus, in the following phrase (very frequent for the notarial sentences):

- *Yo esta present **carta** escriví, por abc **partida**, el XXIII día del mes de julio*. – 'I wrote this letter entering it in the register on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July.' – (Word by word translation: I this letter wrote [letter] entered (Past Participle) in the register on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July.)

the subordinate component of the nominal syntactic group **partida** agrees with the kernel (main component) **carta** in number (singular) and gender (feminine). They are separated by the verb (*escriví*) and by the preposition group (*por abc*) that leads to 'the syntactic dispersedness'.

The corresponding normative sentence must be as following: *Yo escriví esta present carta partida por abc el 23 día del mes de Julio* – 'I wrote this letter entered in the register on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July.'

Here is an example of the closing sentence with 'the syntactic dispersedness' in the royal letter:

- "E d'esto les mandé dar esta mi carta seellada con mio **seello** de plomo **colgado** (CODEA, № 0402)". – The letter of the Castilian King Pedro I of the 10<sup>th</sup> of December of 1351. – 'That is why I ordered to hand them this letter of mine assured by my pendent leaden seal'. The syntactically related components of the nominal group are **seello** ('seal') and **colgado** ('pendent'), but they are separated by the prepositional group **de plomo** (of lead) ≈ (word by word) 'my seal of lead pendent'. It is obviously that 'pendent' refers to the 'seal', not to 'lead' in spite of the nearest position.

## 3 GRAMMATICAL AGREEMENT OF THE GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT AND THE GRAMMATICAL PREDICATE

Analyzing the verbal sentence A. Meillet states that the grammatical agreement between the verb and the noun (which is called the grammatical subject) exists only in one category of number because it is common for both noun and verb and because the Indo-European verb doesn't have gender (Meillet, 1938, p. 367).

The grammatical agreement between the verb and the grammatical subject in formal letters written in old Spanish has some specific features. When the grammatical subject coincides with the logical subjects we distinguish:

- individual (determined / undetermined) subject;

- collective (determined / undetermined / united (individual + collective)) subject.

If the question is about the united collective subject expressed by a simple word-group (**yo doña Joana con mis hijos** = 'I, donna Joan, together with my sons') the kernel of which is the pronoun of the first person singular (**yo** = I) referring to the ROYAL person and the complementary elements refer to the third person/s, the grammatical subject agrees with the verb in the same form of the first person singular (**do e otorgo** = 'I give and I grant'). Let's compare:

- "Coñocida cosa sea a todos quantos esta carta vieren cómo **yo** (the pronoun of the first person singular) **doña Joana**, por la gracia de Dios reina de Castiella, de Toledo, de León, de Gallizia, de Córdoba, de Murcia e de Jaén, en uno **con mis hijos** (← complementary elements referring to the third persons) **don Ferrando e don Loís, dó e otorgo** (verbal form of the first person singular) a vós don Ferrant Ordóñez ... casas en la villa de Carmona ... (CODEA, № 1206)". – The royal letter of 1248. – 'Let it be known to all (people) who will see this letter that I, donna Joan, thanks to God the Queen of Castile, Toledo, Leon, Galicia, Cordoba, Murcia and Jaen, together with my sons, don Fernando and don Luis, grant you, don Ferrant Ordoniez, ... houses in the village of Carmona...'

If the question is about the united collective subject expressed by a simple word-group (**yo doña Joana con mis hijos** = 'I, donna Joan, with my sons') the kernel of which is the pronoun of the first person singular (**yo** = I) referring to the CIVIL person and the complementary elements refer to the third person/s, the grammatical subject agrees with the verb in the form of the first person plural (**fazemos** = 'we do'). Let's compare:

- "Coñozuda cosa sea a los qui son y a los qui serán cómo **yo** (the pronoun of the first person singular) **fra Diag Ostioz** por mandamiento del abad don García de Santa María de Aguilar **con el conventu** (← complementary elements referring to the third persons) d'es mismu logar **fazemos** (verbal form of the first person plural) *camio*...(CODEA, № 0255)". – The clerical letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> of May of 1242. – 'Let it be known to all (people) who are and who will be that I, friar Diag Ostioz, by don Garcia's order, Father Superior of the monastery of St. Mary of Aguilar, together with the community of the monastery of the above mentioned place, realized the exchange ...'

#### 4 CONCLUSION

In general a 'personal' sentence in the texts of medieval formal correspondence written in old Spanish is characterized:

- 1) by the complete structure: there is not only 'structural minimum' (i.e. the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate) but also there are a lot of secondary parts of the sentence;
- 2) by presence of several homogeneous parts of the sentence (it refers to the grammatical predicate, direct and indirect object, attributes, adverbial modifiers) that reflects such features of formal / official style as clearness, conciseness, definiteness that doesn't allow several interpretations;
- 3) by presence of almost equal synonyms that leads to informative saturation;
- 4) by the semantic neutrality (as a rule 'personal' sentences are not marked expressively or emotionally with the exception of some models in the initial and final protocol phrases) that corresponds to one of the basic features of formal style as well.

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