

**THE PRAGMATIC MOTIVATION  
FOR THE USE OF SUBJECT PRONOUNS IN LATIN:  
THE CASE OF PETRONIUS**

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**Introduction**

In an earlier paper (Pinkster 1986) on the use of first and second person pronouns in subject function I suggested that a distinction should be made between conversational texts and narrative texts. In conversations *ego (nos)* and *tu (vos)* are either used to identify the speaker or addressee or to carry some form of « focal » (1) information, that is: they indicate « contrast » or some other form of « emphasis ». (1°) is a clear example of contrast, (2°)-(5°) represent other kinds of emphasis:

- 1°. *si ferae partus suos diligunt, qua nos in liberos nostros indulgentia esse debemus?* (Cic., *de Orat.*, 2, 168)
- 2°. *quantum ego iudicare possum* (Cic., *de Orat.*, 2, 78)
- 3°. *atque ego hoc ex iis saepe audivi* (Cic., *de Orat.*, 2, 155)
- 4°. *ego ista studia non improbo* (Cic., *de Orat.*, 2, 156)
- 5°. *interimam hercle ego te, si vivo* (Plt., *Mo.*, 1168)

In (2°), the speaker stresses the subjectivity of his own judgment. In (3°), the speaker stresses that he himself has witnessed, or experienced a certain fact. In (4°), the speaker defends himself against an unjustified accusation - related to this are instances where the speaker accuses some one else. In (5°), finally, the speaker stresses that certain actions will definitely take place - threats and promises fall under this type of emphasis. In narrative texts, however, the nominative forms of the first person pronoun are used to indicate a change of « Topic ». The second person is not often found with this function, because we do not possess many second person narrative texts. An example of Topic change is (6°):

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1. The notions « focus » and « topic » are taken from Dik (1973 : 19) : « the Topic presents the entity « about » which the predication predicates something in a given setting. The Focus presents what is relatively the most important or salient information in the given setting ».

6°. haec sunt, ut opinor, in republica. *Ego* autem... (« As for me », transl. Sh. -B.) (*Att.*, 1, 19, 5-6).

Latinists usually try to explain the use of the pronouns in narrative texts on the basis of their function in conversation, which inevitably leads to the conclusion that they are used without expressing contrast or emphasis. Instances of this are often called « weakened » or « redundant ». This putative « weakened », « unemphatic » use of the pronouns is then regarded as a stage in the development of the automatic or « mechanical » (cf. Szantyr : 173) use of subject pronouns. The assumed development, however, is mainly a French phenomenon and not typical for the Romance language as a whole (Harris, 1978 : 111 vv.) and, as a consequence it is not really a solid justification of « unemphatic » use of the pronouns.

The same tendency to explain the use of first and second person pronouns on the basis of their function as Focus indicating devices can be found in studies on Petronius, notably Nelson (1947) and Petersmann (1977). It must be said, however, that Nelson goes much further in this respect than Petersmann. The large number of « unemphatic » instances of the subject pronouns is explained by reference to the « vulgar » character of the language. I hope to show that the use of the subject pronouns in Petronius is basically the same in « classical » Latin, notably in Cicero *de Oratore*.

Petronius offers an interesting text because it is a mixture of conversation and narrative. Sometimes the narrative is, in fact, the story of a conversation, and in the conversation the partners quite often tell anecdotes and adventures. This means that the same pronoun can be used alternatively as a Focus indicating device and as a Topic indicating device. Moreover, it is also used for identification purposes. I will first discuss a number of instances of first and second person pronouns which have been described as « weakened », « pleonastic » and so forth by Nelson and/or Petersmann. Then I will add a few remarks on the use of *ille*.

## 1. Second person.

### 1. *TV* in imperative sentences :

Both Nelson (1947 : 121-122) and Petersmann (1977 : 46) discuss the use of *tu* in imperative sentences. According to them, although this usage may add a flavour of pathos, it sometimes has to be regarded as redundant. However, the use of *tu* when addressing someone in a company of more than two people clearly fulfils an identifying function. In most of the examples discussed, the situation is such that the addressee is not previously identified, for example (7°) :

7°. sed narra *tu* mihi *Agamemnon* quam controversiam hodie declamasti (Petr., 48, 4).

In this case, there is no sign whatsoever that Trimalchio will address someone in the company. Just as often, *tu* is accompanied by the vocative and may well be regarded a vocative itself. The use of *tu* will probably have been accompanied by non-linguistic signals such as a movement of the eyes, or of the hand as well (2). It is to be expected that, if more persons are addressed successively, *tu* will be repeated, as is in fact the case once in Petronius (124, vv. 288 f. - all three times accompanied by vocative proper nouns). Petronius, therefore, does not differ in this respect from what we find in Cicero.

Less easy to explain are occurrences of *tu* in imperative sentences where the addressee can be inferred from the preceding context. In normal exchange between partners in a conversation, the pronouns are not used unless specific focal factors are at stake. One such example is (8°) :

8°. vide *tu*, inquit (Trimalchio), *Stiche*, ne ista mures tangant aut tineae ; alioquin te vivum comburam (78, 2).

It is useful to observe that Stichus has been addressed without *tu* in the preceding context. Here two explanations are open. Either we assume (with Buecheler) a lacuna in the text of such a size that repeating the address *tu* is in order - which we cannot prove, of course -, or we assume that *tu* has Focus function. The latter alternative is quite feasible in view of the threat immediately following the order. Two other instances of *tu* in imperative sentences where the addressee is known from the preceding context (127, 2 and 137, 8) can best be explained as due to contrast (3). The « I » and « we » in the examples under consideration perform a certain action and the « you » is summoned to do something in turn. In such cases it is difficult to decide between a Focus identifying function and a Topic identifying function of *tu*.

### 2. Other instances of *TV* with the function Focus :

The use of *tu* in « emphatic questions » (Petersmann : 47) is well-known. Such questions express not only interest in the identity of the agent, but also implies some sort of contrast : « you, as opposed to others » or « you, contrary to what was to be expected », etc. A

2. Such physical actions may be made explicit in the text, as in 114,5 : porrigit manus et « *tu* » inquit « Encolpi », succurre...

3. A good example of contrast is 59,1 : sanguen *illi* fervet, *tu* melior esto.

simple instance (regarded as « mechanical », however, by Nelson : 122) is (9°) :

9°. (The old lady explained her delay) « quid porro tu » (4) inquit « me absente fecisti...? » (136, 11)

The contrast between the old woman (*I* in direct discourse) and the addressee (you) is stressed by the presence of *porro* (« übrigens » in Müller's translation). More complicated are (10°) and (11°) :

10°. « O » inquit « hominem... urbanitatis vernaculae fontem. Quid ? Tu non intellexeras...? » (24, 2)

11°. Vis tu reviviscere ? vis discusso muliebri errore... lucis commodis frui ? (111, 12)

In (10°), *tu* is necessary because a man with the qualities of a *urbanitatis fontem* may be expected to know the meaning of *embasi-coetas*. (11°) is less easy. Most translators insert a negation in their translation, as in the Loeb-edition « will you not begin life afresh », thus understanding the question as a request or an incitement. However, this is a little bit strange from the point of view of Latin (5). The question is rather : « Do you want to begin life afresh ? In that case the body itself (*ipsum... corpus*) of your dead husband ought to persuade you ». The sequence of the two questions and the following statement as a whole serves as a conditional statement (cf. Sz. 657). « If you want this, your husband encourages you to do so ». In this way *tu* can be explained quite well. Therefore, these instances are not only « bis zu einem gewissen Grad noch tontragend » (Petersmann : 47) but are fully motivated from the pragmatic point of view.

Petersmann and Nelson mention a number of instances of *tu* in declarative sentences which they take as « mehr oder weniger nachdruckslose Feststellungen » (Petersmann : 47). In my opinion, at least those examples quoted by Petersmann can be explained reasonably well :

12°. ego... accipere potui. scis tu me non mentiri (74, 15).

13°. nunquam tu hominem tam infelicem vidisti (134, 9).

In (12°), Fortunata is called as a witness for the truth of Trimalchio's statements : « others may not know this, but you know it damned well ». In (13°), the personal experience of Oenoe is compared with the dreadful reality.

4. In the Loeb-edition *porro* is not taken as part of the quotation, unjustly so, in my opinion.

5. One would expect *visne*. There is, in fact, some manuscript variation for the second *vis*. In Pinkster (1986) I called *vis tu reviviscere* an accusation. I changed my mind.

14°. (Trimalchio quotes the words of an astrologer, whom he met in the past) *tu dominam tuam de rebus illis fecisti. tu parum felix in amicos es... tu latifundia possides. tu viperam sub ala nutricas* (77, 1).

The repetition of *tu* is strange, but can be explained if we assume that we do not have one quotation consisting of a set of immediately connected sentences, but a number of quotations drawn from the conversation between Trimalchio and the astrologer. Trimalchio is then witness to the truth of the statements of the astrologer. As I said in the introduction, the use of the subject pronoun is quite normal in the case of the first person, when someone wants to stress the fact that he has experienced something himself. The examples discussed above are the second person counterparts of the instances to be discussed below ((16) - (19)).

### 3. VOS :

There are not many instances of nominative *vos* in Petronius. A few of them are cited as « weakened » pronouns. A plain example of contrast is (15°), quoted by Nelson (: 120) :

15°. « hoc vinum » inquit (Trimalchio) « vos oportet suave faciatis (39, 2, cf. 48, 1).

Smith (comm. a. 1.) aptly remarks « a polite formula whereby the host compliments his guests while apologizing for the humble fare offered to them ». A little bit more difficult is (16°) :

16°. « me derivisse » inquit « vos putabatis ». « Ego sum ancilla Quartillae » (16, 3).

Most editors consider (16°) a question (Loeb : « Did you think you deceived me ? »), but this need not to be so. It may be a declarative sentence (a) or the question may be of a different type than it is usually taken for (b) : (a) *You* thought you deceived me (but the reality is different, or : but *I* know better : I am the maid of Quartilla) ; (b) *You* thought you deceived me ? (but I know better). Example (17°), finally, is an instance of internal contrast within the same sentence :

17°. « nec istud dii hominesque patiantur » Eumolpus exclamat « ut vos tam turpi exitu vitam finiatis » (103, 1).

« You are too good for such a vile conclusion of your lives (others might deserve such a death) ».

## 2. First person pronouns.

1. *EGO* and *NOS* in the function Topic :

Just as with *tu* (*vos*) most treatments start with the « emphatic » explanation. Petersmann (: 46) rightly observes that this can only be established on the basis of the context in which the pronoun occurs, continuing as follows: « Fest steht, daß das Pronomen sehr oft gesetzt wird wenn zuvor von einer anderen Person die Rede war ». The quotation shows that a proper distinction between Focus-information and Topic-information is lacking: Topic-information is regarded as a species of Focus-information. However, the observation itself is correct: a large number of instances of *ego* can be understood as indicating Topic change. The same goes for *nos*. A good example is (18°):

18°. at ille « ... ». damnavi *ego* stuporem meum (41, 5).

One understands why the distinction between Focus and Topic has not been made properly, because, in a sense, in (18°) there is some contrast between two participants in a certain setting. However, whereas in proper contrast the relationship between the participants can be described as « not X but I (did a certain thing) » the actions in (18°) are not really contrastive, but rather alternate; *nos* is found in similar contexts:

19°. tacentibus adhuc nobis... intravit *ipsa*... sedensque... flevit. ac ne tunc quidem *nos* ullum adiecimus verbum (17, 1-2).

Whereas in proper contrast the constituent normally takes the first possible sentence position, a Topic constituent may come later if there are other candidates for the first place (here: *ne tunc quidem*). Other normal instances of Topic change are 46, 4 and 62, 2 (*ego*) and 63, 4; 63, 8 (*nos*), cases which have been taken as « less emphatic » by Nelson. Topic change operates in two directions: *ego* may be expressed in order to mark the change with respect to a preceding participant (as we have seen), but it may also be used, because a new participant is to follow. An example is (20°):

20°. haec ut *ego* dixi, *Giton* vestem deposuit (114, 10) (6).

6. The example is mentioned by Petersmann (: 46) as a « superfluous » use of *ego* after direct speech, however, without quoting the immediately following sentence with a new Topic (*Giton*).

2. *EGO* (*NOS*) in the function Focus :

*Ego* is found in a variety of contexts indicating some sort of emphasis. Petersmann (: 46) quotes (21°) as an instance of change of subject (in my terminology - Topic change):

21°. aut dormi aut *ego* iam dicam patri (cf. 87, 3; 87, 10)

However, since this is part of a direct speech utterance, the explanation is not very attractive. It is much more likely that *ego* is expressed because the « I » wants to leave no doubts about his intentions. In this type of threat the subject pronoun is quite normal. Another type of emphasis can be found in (22°)-(25°):

22° in suburbano nascitur eo, quod *ego* adhuc non novi (48, 2).

23°. o si haberemus illos leones quos *ego* hic inveni (44, 4).

24°. nam Sibyllan quidem... *ego* ipse... vidi (48, 8).

25°. ita meos fruniscar, ut *ego* puto omnia illa a diibus fieri (44, 16).

These are instances of the - frequent - use of the subject pronoun when one's own experience or opinion is stressed. Notice the presence of experience or opinion verbs in the context.

Finally, I want to discuss two examples of *ego* in connection with examples of *ille*, as well as one example where *ego* is lacking, which is cited by Petersmann (: 46) as proof of the superfluous use of *ego* in the first two examples:

26°. votum feci et « domina » inquam « Venus, si *ego* hunc puerum basiavero, ita ut *ille* non sentiat, cras *illi* par columbarum donabo » (85, 4).

27°. consurrexi... « dii » inquam « immortales, si *ego* huic dormienti abstulero coitum plenum... Cras *puero* asturconem... donabo, cum hac tamen exceptione si *ille* non senserit (86, 4).

28°. proxima nocte... mutavi optionem et « si hunc » inquam « tractavero improba manu et *ille* non senserit gallos... duos donabo patienti (86, 1).

Petersmann observes (: 46): « wie überflüssig das Personalpronomen an diesen Stellen (scil. (26°) and (27°) - HP) ist, lehrt ((28°) - HP) », that is (26°) and (27°) are regarded as redundant varieties of the normal situation in (28°). However, (*ego*) in (26°) and (27°) are justified on account of at least two considerations: (a) the sentences contain promises for which the *ego* is responsible, a normal pragmatic condition for the occurrence of the subject pronoun, and (b) the *ego* is in contrast with *ille*. Therefore one could just as well ask: why is *ego* lacking in (28°)? Firstly, (28°) differs from the first two utterances in that it is not an address and an oath to Venus or the

gods; the utterance is just a normal continuation of a preceding coordinate clause with identical subject. So there is no need for the speaker to identify himself expressis verbis. Secondly, there is another focal element in the sentence, viz. *improba* in *improba manu*, as appears from its position in front of the noun. Of course, there still is some contrast between « *I* » and *ille*, but this seems to be less important than *improba*.

Concluding I cannot find differences in the behaviour of *ego* in Petronius and Cicero, apart from the fact that the number of occurrences is much higher, due, of course, to the fact that this is a narrative text about an *ego*.

### 3. Third person (*ille*).

The overwhelming frequency of *ille* in comparison with *is* has been noted by many linguists (details in Nelson: 122, 154). As for nominative forms, *ille* occurs ca. 74 times, *is* 5 times. This fact is usually regarded as a sign of the historical development in which *is* finally disappeared completely. There is some discussion about the date of the replacement of *is* by *ille* in spoken Latin. Adams (1977: 44) states that it is likely that « *is* had been largely replaced by *ille* in all forms by the end of the first century », arguing on the basis of Claudius Terentianus' use of these pronouns. However, the frequency of the nominative forms of *ille* in Petronius - and the same may well be true for Claudius Terentianus - is fully explainable if one analyses the cases in detail.

In classical Latin *is*, being an anaphoric pronoun, typically has a Topic continuing function. (29°) serves as an illustration of this function.

29°. et Chrysippus tibi acute dicere videbatur, homo sine dubio versutus...; *is* igitur « si aliquid est » inquit... (Cic., *N.D.*, 3, 25)

Notice the presence of *igitur* which also marks continuity. Topic continuity is also clearly the function of *is* in Petronius with three of the five instances exactly similar to (30°), in that after some sort of digression *ergo* is used to pick up the storyline:

30°. interpellavit iam dulces fabulas Trimalchio; nam... *is* ergo « ... » inquit (39, 2; cf. 96, 5; 83, 8)

Turning now to *ille*, we can distinguish various kinds of use. It is used as a purely deictic pronoun (« he there ») in a few places (for example: 38, 11). We find it once as support in an apposition-like utterance (31°):

31°. notavit me miles, sive *ille* planus fuit sive nocturnus grassator, et « ... », inquit... (82, 2)

There are a number of instances of the *hic... ille* (the former... the latter) type. The overwhelming majority - at least 60 examples - consist of instances like (32°):

32°. perturbatus ego habitu fratris quid accidisset quaesivi. Et *ille* tarde quidem et invitus... « ... » inquit...

*Ille* marks the change of Topic. As such it is often found in contrastive sentences with *at*, *sed*, *autem*. *Ille* as of marker of Topic change occurs frequently in Cicero's dialogues. In the *Brutus* and a number of philosophical works in which Cicero himself plays a role turntaking often has the form:

33°. tum/at/et: ego, Brutus/Atticus, *ille* (e.g. *Brut.* 11, 42, 125, resp.).

or *inquit ille*. We do not find *is* in a similar function, at least the *Brutus* and the relevant philosophical dialogues do not contain any instances. We do find an occasional *is autem* expression, but these can be explained as indicating Topic continuity, for example (34°):

34°. post idem ad Antiphontem. *Is* autem « ... » inquit... (Cic., *Div.*, 2, 144)

*Is* refers to the preceding *Antiphontem*. So, in the various kinds of use of *ille* in Petronius discussed so far, and especially in the case of *ille* as a Topic change indicating device, *ille* can not be said to have replaced *is*, nor can the frequency of *ille* be regarded as a deviation of classical usage: *ille* is used there precisely where it ought to be used in classical Latin. Its frequency is due to the quick succession of actions which are so typical for this literary genre.

Of course, this does not cover all the uses of *ille*. There are a number of instances where no explanation of the type discussed so far is available. Petersmann (: 48) gives a number of instances where, according to him, the occurrence of *ille* « dem Verständnis geradezu Verwirrung schaffen kann ». These are his examples:

35°. nam mutae bestiae laboriosissimae boves et oves: boves, quorum beneficio panem manducamus; oves, quod lana *illae* nos gloriosos faciunt (56, 4).

36°. itaque dabimus operam ne quis hoc sciat. Tu modo deos roga, ut *illi* facto tuo ignoscant (137, 8).

37°. nam Sibyllam quidam Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum *illi* pueri dicerent: « ... » respondebat *illa*: « ... » (48, 8).

- / n 38°. votum feci et « domifa » inquam « Venus », si ego hunc puerum basiavero, ita ut *ille* non sentiat, cras *illi* par columbarum donabo » (85, 4).  
 39°. consurrexi... « dii » inquam « immortales, si ego huic dormienti abstulero coitum plenum... cras *puero* asturconem... donabo, crum hac tamen exceptione si *ille* non senserit (86, 4).

Even in these instances, where the anaphoric pronoun seems to be possible as well, the expression chosen need not be synonymous to one with *is*. There may be a pragmatic, focal motivation for the use of *ille*. For the nominative instances this seems indeed to be the case. In (35°), we have sentence internal contrast between *illae* (*oves*) and *nos*: what is remarkable is that they make *us* « gloriosos ». In (36°) Oenothea reassures the young man that he will have nothing to fear from any mortal being. He only has to take care that the *Gods* will forgive him. In (37°) *illi* might be regarded as indicating Topic change. Perhaps *illa* is also due to Topic change and seems to be clumsy (as *ea* would be as well), but must perhaps be explained as due to the wish to obtain a nice contrasting symmetry *pueri... illa*. (38°) and (39°), finally, can be understood in their situation. The boy - who is pretending to sleep - must be informed as clearly as possible that *he* is not to notice anything and that *he* will get a nice present.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have examined for this article all the instances of the subject pronouns *ego* (*nos*), *tu* (*vos*), *ille* and *is* in Petronius. I have confined the discussion of individual instances as much as possible to those which are being quoted in the literature as more or less evident cases of « weakened » use of these pronouns. I tried to show that systematic application of the pragmatic notions of Topic and Focus Petronius' use of the pronouns can be shown to differ much less from classical usage than is usually assumed. In fact, his use of the pronouns is quite well motivated. I am aware that the focal motivation can sometimes be only discovered by an extremely detailed analysis, which may verge on artificial argumentation and *ad hoc* explanations. Given the fact that the presence of subject pronouns in Latin is dependent upon pragmatic conditions the necessity of detailed analysis is only to be expected. Since in most Romance languages subject pronouns are still pragmatically motivated (cf. Duranti, 1984) there is no need to try to discover early instances of grammaticalisation of the pronouns too readily (7).

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