

# Velle-type prohibitions in Latin

## The rise and fall of a morphosyntactic conspiracy\*

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### 1. Introduction

Certain Roman legal documents, in particular the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* (CIL 581), contain a construction that is quite rare in Latin. In the *senatusconsultum* there are a number of prohibitions stating what is not to be done under the law, but these prohibitions exhibit a syntactic peculiarity. They are all periphrastic, containing what looks like a “meaningless” occurrence of a form of the verb *velle* ‘to wish’ (Nussbaum 2008); in the *senatusconsultum*, the form used is *vellet*, the third person singular imperfect subjunctive. *Vellet* should not be present in these prohibitions if it does not serve some semantic or syntactic purpose, and it appears to be semantically void; therefore its motivation must be syntactic. I argue that a form of *velle* is inserted in these constructions by a Last Resort operation that simultaneously avoids both a syntactic Sequence of Tense (SoT) violation and a semantic anomaly created by a punctual prohibited act not bearing punctual aspect, which can only manifest as perfect tense morphology.

Furthermore, I propose a diachronic explanation for the introduction of *vellet* into command clauses, as well as its later elimination in Classical Latin. Although the presence of a form of *velle* in a prohibition is peculiar, imperative forms of *nolle* ‘to be unwilling, refuse’ are commonly found in matrix prohibitions in Classical Latin. The historical link between *velle* and *nolle* provides the basis for the innovation of the periphrastic construction with *velle*. Since *velle-* is grammaticalized, just like *noli(te)* in matrix prohibitions, both types of prohibitions have the same semantic value, and I show that they actually have identical representations at LF. The difference between the two constructions is reduced to an optionality between overt and covert

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movement. The established use of lexicalized *nolle* preempts prohibitions containing *velle* except in those cases where they are required for independent reasons. The fact that Latin is a Sequence of Tense language in combination with a syntactic restriction on third person commands explains the attested residual distribution of *velle*-type prohibitions.

## 2. The construction

### 2.1 Characteristics of *velle*-type prohibitions

The construction under consideration, which I will call *velle*-type prohibitions, contains three essential parts. First, all such prohibitions are introduced by the clause-marking complementizer *ne*. Second, the finite verb governed by *ne* is a form of the verb *volo*, *velle*, and either a present or imperfect subjunctive.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, the form of *velle* takes an infinitival complement which always exhibits perfect morphology. This perfect infinitive conveys the semantic force of the prohibition. Although *velle*- appears to be the verbal head of the complement of *ne*, it will become apparent that it is in fact behaving as a functional head in this position. *Velle*-type prohibitions should have the same interpretation as their matrix clause imperative paraphrases, as would be found in Classical Latin prose.

- (1) a. *matrix imperative prohibition*  
*nolite Bacchanal habere*  
 not-wish.PRES.IMP Bacchanal have.PRES.INF
- b. *embedded velle-type prohibition*  
*ne Bacchanal habuisse vellet*  
 NEG Bacchanal have.PERF.INF wish.IMP.SUBJ.3S

Although there are various ways of rendering the embedded nature of (1b) in English, both (1a) and (1b) convey the basic prohibitive meaning “Do not hold a Bacchanal.” Traditional analyses, such as that of Daube (1956), interpret these two phrases differently, rendering *vellet* literally as “should wish”. However, this interpretation is off base, as Daube himself concedes, citing Cato’s contemporary analysis of the legal language. From a linguistic standpoint, it is clear that *nolite* is purely functional in matrix prohibitions (Risselada 1993), and does not convey the lexical

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1. I will refer to these inflected subjunctive forms collectively as *velle*- in the remainder of the paper.

meaning “refuse” or “be unwilling”; *velle-* serves a parallel role. Additionally, de Melo (2007:122) makes the same observation regarding the use of *cave* in prohibitions found in Plautus and Terence: it is a “prohibition marker”, not to be interpreted in a literal sense.

## 2.2 Historical and literary context

The contexts in which *velle*-type prohibitions are found is important, since the construction is relatively rare. They are first attested in 198 BC (Daube 1956:40), and their productivity was already extremely limited at that time. The majority of attestations are in legal documents, especially *senatusconsulta*. The source which I will focus my primary attention on is the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* (CIL 581), which contains no fewer than ten instances of *velle*-type prohibitions. Other legal documents which contain the construction are the *senatus consulta et edicta de campo Esquilino* (Bruns 1968:189–90) and one of a list of *iura sepulcrorum* (Bruns 1968:379). Another *senatusconsultum* which uses *velle*-type prohibitions is indirectly mentioned by Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita* XXXIX.17.3). Unlike the other legal texts, which uniformly use *velle*-type prohibitions throughout,<sup>2</sup> Livy gives one *velle*-type prohibition and three standard embedded prohibitions (*ne* + imperfect subjunctive).

- (2) *edixerunt*      *deinde, ne*      *quis*      *quid*      *fugae*  
 decree.PERF.3PL    then    NEG    someone    something    fleeing.GEN  
*causa*      *vendidisse*      *neve emisse*  
 purpose.ABL    sell.PERF.INF    nor    buy.PERF.INF  
*vellet;*      *ne*      *quis*      *reciperet,*  
 wish.IMPF.SUBJ.3S    NEG    someone    receive.IMPF.SUBJ.3S  
*celaret,*      *ope*      *ulla*  
 hide.IMPF.SUBJ.3S    help.ABL    any.ABL  
*iuuaret*      *fugientes*  
 aid.IMPF.SUBJ.3S    fleeing-ones.ACC

Then they decreed that nobody buy or sell anything for the purpose of fleeing; nor anyone take in, hide, or otherwise aid the fugitives.

Since the original text of the law is not extant, it is impossible to know whether the mixed usage was present in it, or whether it was merely a license of paraphrasing on the part of Livy. Regardless, the fact that Livy uses even one *velle*-type prohibition

2. Except when the verb expressing the content of the prohibition is *esse*; see §3.3.

shows that he was aware of the existence of the construction and its use, even if it was likely no longer productive.

There are a handful of early, non-legal uses of *velle*-type prohibitions in Roman comedy. The pragmatics of the scenes in which they appear make it unclear whether they are truly productive uses or whether they are intended to parodically cite what must have been perceived as a feature of formal legal language. Later uses, such as an occurrence in Horace's *Satires* mocking the notion that Agamemnon's word had the force of law, appear to be clearly ironic.

- (3) *interdico ne extulisse extra aedis*  
 forbid.PRES.1S NEG carry-out.PERF.INF out building.ABL  
*puerum usquam velis*  
 boy.ACC anywhere wish.PRES.SUBJ.2S

I forbid you to carry the child anywhere out of this house.

(Terence *Hec.* 563)

- (4) *nequis humasse velit Aiacem,*  
 no-one bury.PERF.INF wish.PRES.SUBJ.3S Ajax.ACC,  
*Atrida, vetas cur?*  
 Agamemnon.VOC forbid.PRES.IND.2S why

Agamemnon, why do you prohibit anyone from burying Ajax?

(Horace *S II.3.187*)

A further example from Cato's *De Agri Cultura* is a perfectly ordinary prohibition, outside a legal context; as such, Cato's choice of phrasing is likely to have been required by the syntax. I return to this problem in §4.3.

- (5) *ne quid emisse velit*  
 NEG something buy.PERF.INF wish.PRES.SUBJ.3S  
*insciente domino, neu quid dominum*  
 not-knowing.ABL master.ABL nor anything master.ACC  
*celavisse velit*  
 hide.PERF.INF wish.PRES.SUBJ.3S

He must not make any purchases without the knowledge of the master, nor keep anything hidden from the master. (Cato *De Agri Cultura* 5.4)

### 3. Synchronic analysis

As mentioned in §2.1, there are three essential components of *velle*-type prohibitions. It must be explained why these components are chosen in favor of other ways of expressing embedded clauses with prohibitive force. There are other

possible (and impossible) paraphrases of prohibitions, which will be considered in this section.

### 3.1 Formalizing sequence of tense

In Latin, the possible tense reflexes of an embedded verb are determined by the *consecutio temporum*, or Sequence of Tense (SoT). Traditional grammars segregate the six morphological tenses into primary and secondary sequences. The sequence of the subordinate verb is determined by the sequence of the superordinate verb. The fact that each sequence has two possible subordinate tenses can be attributed to an independent variation of relative tense, representing action anterior or posterior to the reference time established by the superordinate verb.

#### (6) *The consecutio temporum in Latin*

Primary sequence		Secondary sequence	
superordinate	subordinate	superordinate	subordinate
present (PRES)		imperfect (IMPF)	IMPF
future (FUT)	PRES	perfect (AOR)	
perfect (PERF)	PERF	pluperfect (PLUP)	PLUP
future perfect (FUTP)			

The morphological perfect tense is split between the two sequences because it is the result of the collapse of the historical present perfective and aorist tenses. Despite the homophony resulting from this merger, the inherited aspectual distinction between the two was preserved in Early Latin (although lost by Classical Latin); the sequence of a morphologically perfect form can be determined by its aspectual meaning. As such, I treat the two as distinct tenses in my syntactic discussion. I use ‘perfect’ as a cover term for the present perfective (PERF) and aorist (AOR). §3.3 will deal with a morphosemantic restriction that applies strictly to PERF forms.

With the subdivision of the morphological perfect established, it is possible to encode primary and secondary sequence with a single morphosyntactic feature, [ $\pm$ Past], with primary sequence forms being [ $-$ Past] and secondary sequence forms being [ $+$ Past]. In order to avoid a violation of SoT, the superordinate and subordinate clauses must match in their values of the [ $\pm$ Past] feature. Since the embedded clause is a CP, and therefore a phase, it is not possible to enforce this matching via Agree. Following Hollebrandse (2005), I analyze SoT as a property of the complementation process. In order to achieve this, the [ $\pm$ Past] feature must not be restricted to T<sup>0</sup>. Analyses such as that put forth in Pesetsky and Torrego (2004) extend tense features so that they can be present on a variety of heads; C<sup>0</sup> that heads embedded clauses in SoT

languages is one such head.  $C^0$  can value its  $[\pm\text{Past}]$  feature via Agree with  $T^0$  in its own clause; this value is expressed on the CP as a whole. SoT is then enforced by requiring that the CP complement of a superordinate V must match the  $[\pm\text{Past}]$  value of V.

### 3.2 SoT in *velle*-type prohibitions

*Velle*-type prohibitions do follow the *consecutio temporum*; present subjunctives (*velis*, *velit*) are found in clauses governed by primary sequence verbs, and imperfect subjunctives (*vellet*) are found in clauses governed by secondary sequence verbs. All of the instances of *velle*-type prohibitions in the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* are introduced by the AOR indicative *cesnuere*, and therefore follow secondary sequence.

The fact that *velle*- obeys Sequence of Tense in embedded prohibitions would scarcely be noteworthy, except for the fact that *velle*- has no bearing on the semantics of the embedded clause. Also of interest is the fact that the complement of *velle*-, which contains the core semantic content of the prohibition, is uniformly a perfect infinitive, regardless of whether SoT prescribes a present or imperfect subjunctive form of *velle*. It is expected that SoT will not apply to the content verb, since non-clausal infinitival complements are not subject to SoT; that is, the formulation of SoT given in §3.1 is properly restricted to the selection of CP complements. However, if the tense of the content verb is not restricted by SoT, it should have full optionality of tense forms, expressing variation of action time versus reference time within the command, yet non-perfect forms are unattested in Early Latin.<sup>3</sup> There must be an independent restriction of the grammar that forces these content verbs to exhibit perfect morphology. In §3.3 I explain this as a morphosemantic constraint that can be treated syntactically as a filter on LF representations. Since this constraint mandates perfect morphology on the content verb, it will be unable to raise to T (and subsequently pass its tense features to CP) without causing an SoT violation. Thus, neither of these properties of the grammar alone accounts for insertion of *velle*-; rather, as shown in §3.4, *velle*- resolves the morphosyntactic conspiracy set up by the interaction of these restrictions.

### 3.3 Morphosemantic restrictions on prohibitions

The property of the grammar of Latin that, through its interaction with SoT, explains the existence of *velle*-type prohibitions is a morphosemantic restriction on verbs in

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3. *Velle*- can and does take a present infinitival complement in Classical Latin. This is an innovation in the grammar of that period, made possible by the relaxation of the punctuality constraint and analogically modeled on the already-common *noli(te)* + PRES infinitive prohibition construction. (Nussbaum, p.c.)

prohibitions. In Early Latin, retention of the aspectual distinction between PERF and AOR required that any punctual prohibited action must be represented with a PERF form. In a minimalist framework, this restriction is best treated as applying to LF representations. The fact that it only applies to content verbs in prohibitions may at first seem *ad hoc*, but this domain limitation can be precisely defined within the syntax. The constraint applies precisely to a V head that is (a) semantically telic, as determined by its entry in the lexicon; (b) part of the numeration for the given derivation; (c) dominated by a NegP; and (d) subsequently dominated by an imperative CP. If any of these conditions is not met, the restriction does not apply.<sup>4</sup>

In the period when *velle*-type prohibitions were productive, the restriction applied in nearly all prohibitions. The overwhelming majority of actions found in prohibitions are either truly punctual or are telic actions that are pragmatically interpreted as occurring in an atomic unit of time. However, it is possible to command someone to not be in a particular state, and since these prohibitions target an inherently durative, atelic action, they are not subject to the morphosemantic constraint (Nussbaum, p.c.). This accounts for the fact that when *esse* ‘to be’ is the content verb of a prohibition, a standard embedded prohibition is used, since punctual instances of being are semantically anomalous.

- (7) a. *sacerdos ne quis vir esset*  
 priest.NOM NEG someone man be.IMPF.SUBJ.3S
- b. \**sacerdos ne quis vir fuisse vellet*  
 priest.NOM NEG someone man be.PERF.INF wish.IMPF.SUBJ.3S  
 no man should be be a priest

### 3.4 Last Resort insertion of *velle*-

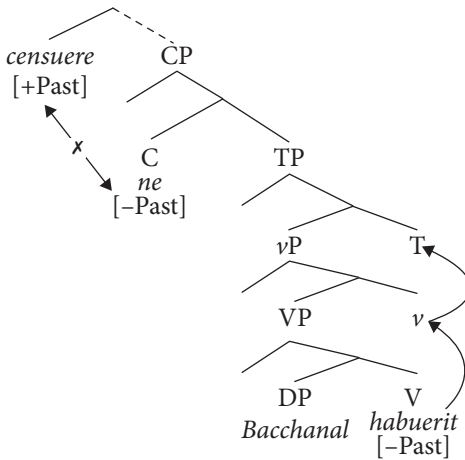
As evidenced by the distribution of *velle*-type prohibitions in the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*, the inclusion of *velle*- in these embedded clauses is crucial to the grammaticality of the sentences in which they occur. I show that *velle*- is inserted by a Last Resort operation to resolve a conflict between the SoT and the morphosemantic restriction described in §3.3.<sup>5</sup>

4. See §4.2 for an account of how grammaticalization can lift the restriction by eliminating the NegP in a negative command construction.

5. Throughout this paper, Last Resort refers to an operation which externally merges an element that is not part of the derivation's numeration. Last Resort is only appealed to when there is no other convergent derivation for the given numeration. This operation is different than the Last Resort principle used as motivation for syntactic movement in Chomsky (1995). It is, however, consonant with the Government and Binding notion of Last Resort,

If *velle-* were to be hypothetically removed from an embedded prohibition, two possibilities would remain for the content verb of the prohibition. One option is that it could retain its tense features while raising to fill the T position of the embedded clause. The context in the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*, where embedded prohibitions are introduced by an AOR verb *censuere* ‘they decreed’, is a secondary sequence environment. If a PERF verb were to raise to T, the embedded CP would be valued [-Past], and would cause the derivation to crash. This rules out the ungrammatical standard embedded prohibition \**censuere... ne Bacchanal habuerit*.

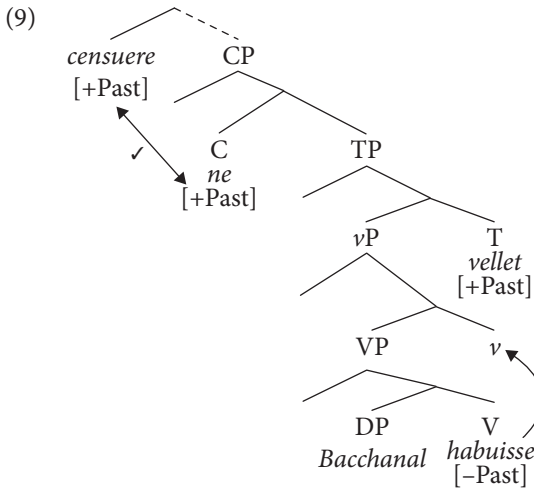
(8) crash caused by mismatch of [ $\pm$ Past] values (SoT violation)



The other option if *velle-* is absent is to dispense with the perfect tense and have the content verb simply obey SoT. If the superordinate verb is perfect, then the content verb should surface as an imperfect subjunctive. However, if the content verb denotes a telic action, the fact that it bears imperfect morphology necessitates that it does not bear punctual aspect. Thus it is in violation of the perfect restriction on prohibited punctual actions, and the derivation will crash at LF.

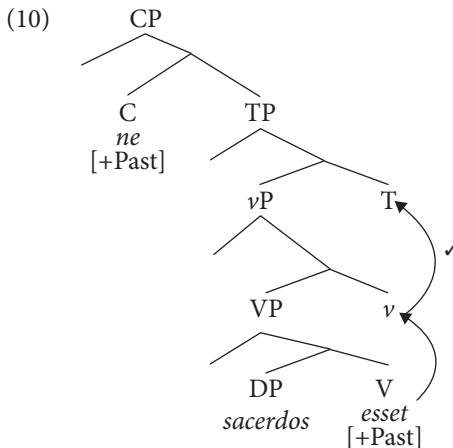
The only way to avoid this conspiracy between the requirements of the syntax and semantics is to insert an additional element that will satisfy both constraints. This item is *velle-*, which is merged directly in T by a Last Resort operation. Since *velle-* is inserted as a Last Resort measure, it is not a member of the numeration and does not contribute to the semantic content of the clause.





This analysis additionally explains why the content verb in *velle*-type prohibitions is always a perfect infinitive. I assume that lexical items can be morphologically underspecified in the numeration; the valuation of their syntactic features in the course of the derivation determines their morphological form at spellout. In this case, the tense of *habuisse* is mandated by the prohibited punctual action constraint, which rules out derivations that assign non-perfect features to the content verb of a prohibition. Although not shown in the tree in (9), verbs in imperatives and prohibitions are [-Realis], and so can either be represented as a subjunctive or infinitive. Due to the insertion of *vellet*, the content verb never raises to T, so its person features are not valued. The reflex of a personless [-Realis] verb is the infinitive form.

Of course, the major exception to the scenario represented in (9) is when the content verb is atelic, such as the copula *esse*. Since *esse* is not subject to the punctuality constraint, it may simply undergo V to T raising. All that is necessary for the derivation to converge is that the content verb bears the appropriate value of [ $\pm$ Past].



Another benefit of having *velle-* inserted directly in T, rather than being merged in V and subsequently raising, is the way it functions with coordinated prohibitions. When several individual prohibitions are coordinated within the same clause, only one instance of *velle-* surfaces.

- (11) *neve post hac inter se coniurasse neve*  
 nor after this between selves conspire.PERF.INF nor  
*comvovisse neve conspondisse neve*  
 take-VOW.PERF.INF nor pledge.PERF.INF nor  
*compromisisse vellet*  
 enter-agreement.PERF.INF wish.IMPF.SUBJ.3s

Henceforth let no-one be minded to conspire, collude, plot or make vows in common among themselves or to pledge loyalty to each other.

(*senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*)

This is relatively strong evidence that *velle-* is the sole determinant of SoT agreement in the embedded clause. If multiple actions are being prohibited in a single clause, they tend to be represented as a conjoined *vP*, the complement of TP headed by *velle-*.<sup>6</sup>

- (12) [<sub>CP</sub> *neve* [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> *post hac inter se coniurasse neve* [<sub>vP</sub> *comvovisse neve* [<sub>vP</sub> *conspondisse neve* [<sub>vP</sub> *compromisisse*]]]]] *vellet*]]<sup>7</sup>

Each content verb is independently specified as perfect by the punctuality constraint; in terms of the syntactic representation, the head of the highest conjunct (*coniurasse* in (11) and (12)) is the head of the entire conjoined *vP*. This coordinated *vP* construction is significantly simpler than one in which each content verb is associated with a T<sup>0</sup> inserted by Last Resort, and the multiple TPs are conjoined. To create such a model would not only increase the complexity of the grammar, but perhaps fatally harm its explanatory adequacy. Any sort of ellipsis of T<sup>0</sup> elements would require there to be a phonetically null counterpart to *velle-*, identical in all respects except for the fact that it is not pronounced.

- (13) [<sub>CP</sub> *neve* [<sub>TP</sub> *post hac inter se coniurasse*  $\emptyset_T$  *neve* [<sub>TP</sub> *comvovisse*  $\emptyset_T$  *neve* [<sub>TP</sub> *conspondisse*  $\emptyset_T$  *neve* [<sub>TP</sub> *compromisisse vellet*]]]]]

6. Note that this does not preclude the possibility of the superordinate verb taking a conjoined CP complement, in which each prohibited action would be represented by a full CP containing *ne*, *velle-*, and a content verb.

7. This bracket representation is a simplified bare phrase structure version of the Adjoined BP model. See Munn (1993) for more on the specifics of this model; see also Johannessen (1998) for details on the competing model, known as the Spec/Head CoP.

The presence of a null T would be a great hindrance to explaining a crucial diachronic change in the language, namely that bare imperfect subjunctive prohibitions are allowed in Classical Latin (due to the loss of aspectual distinction between PERF and AOR and the subsequent elimination of the constraint on prohibited punctual actions). The binary optionality between empty T (and resultant V-to-T) movement and overtly filled T (*velle*-type prohibitions) accounts for the possible phrasings found in Livy and elsewhere. If null T<sup>0</sup> were a valid option, prohibitions which look identical to *velle*-type prohibitions but lacking *velle*- itself should be attested.

- (14) \**censuere...*      *ne quis Bacchanal habuisse*       $\emptyset_T$   
 decree.PERF.3PL    NEG    someone    Bacchanal    have.PERF.INF

Sentences such as (14) look like SoT violations or worse (and would thus likely have sounded ungrammatical to the Roman ear) and are not found in the *senatusconsultum*, Livy, or elsewhere.

#### 4. Diachronic analysis

By their first attestation in 198 BC, *velle*-type prohibitions were already primarily being used as a formula in legal language, and had minimal productivity. But since the construction is a Latin innovation, there must have been a stage of Early Latin or Proto-Latin when they were first innovated, and at that time they coexisted with standard prohibitions. The residual distribution of *velle*-type prohibitions in the extant Latin corpus makes it possible to reconstruct an account of the innovation, use, and decline of the construction, even in the period before it was attested. In §4.1, I explain why the verb *velle* is used in the construction, based on its etymological relation to *nolle*, which is used in Classical Latin prohibitions. I then show in §4.2 how an early process of grammaticalization led to *velle*-type prohibitions falling out of use. Finally, in §4.3 I account for the extremely limited context in which *velle*-type prohibitions remained fully productive, even in Classical Latin.

##### 4.1 The *nolo* connection

Given the grammatical necessity for *velle*-, an overt T<sup>0</sup> inserted by Last Resort to obviate a conflict between SoT and a morphosemantic restriction on prohibitions, an attempt should be made to explain why *velle* in particular was the verb employed in this role. The exact reason cannot be directly determined, since the period in which *velle*-type prohibitions were innovated was well before their first attestation. The

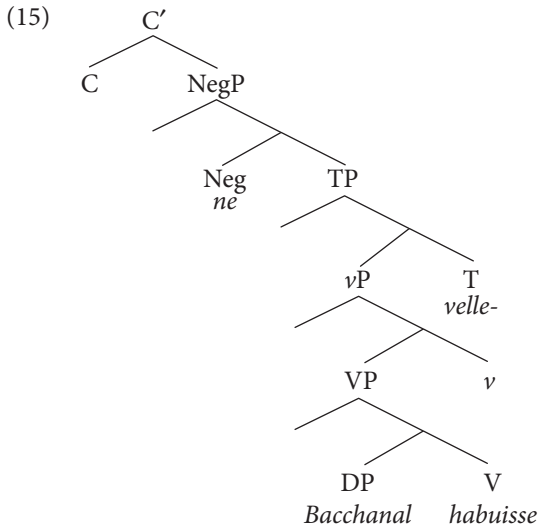
construction was known, but certainly considered an archaism, in the time of imperial Rome; Daube quotes Aulus Gellius (c. 125–180 AD), who called the construction *ex vetere forma perpetua* “from an enduring ancient form” (XIII.15.1), indicating that except as a frozen formula it was no longer productive by his time.

In Classical Latin, there are two methods of representing independent (i.e. matrix clause) prohibitions: an imperative form of *nolo*, *nolle* ‘to forbid’ (*noli*, *nolite*) plus a present infinitive, or *nē* plus a perfect subjunctive.<sup>8</sup> Independent prohibitions containing *nolle* show similarity of form with *velle*-type prohibitions, due to the fact that *nolle* and *velle* are etymologically linked: some forms of *nolo* are the result of PF contraction of compounds of *ne* + *volo* (Weiss 2009). What merits exploration is to what extent these two elements remained syntactically independent. *Velle*-type prohibitions appear to be good evidence that the compounding process went through an intermediate stage, so *nolo* was not immediately lexicalized (and thereby frozen). During this stage between complete independence and lexicalization, PF contraction would have been possible, but both *ne* and *volo* remained as individual syntactic heads, bearing their own distinct features. I contend that *velle*-type prohibitions that were retained beyond this stage (e.g. into the Classical period) reflect this previous syntactic state.

For the purposes of consistency, I presume that at the early stage, *velle*- was already being treated as a T head. This is the same as what is represented in trees (9) and (10) in §3.3. However, those trees are simplified, having omitted a movement step for the sake of focusing on the properties which affect the head-to-head raising of  $V^0$ . For example, in (9), the  $Neg^0$  *ne* already sits in the C position, although in actuality it should begin in a lower  $NegP$  projection, between CP and TP. The tree below in (15) shows the base positions for the elements in a prohibition at this stage. At this point in the derivation, the fact that *ne* and *velle*- are syntactically independent allows for optionality of construction.

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8. This construction differs significantly from those involving *vellet*, whether compounded or stranded. While *nē* + perfect subjunctive looks superficially like the two constructions discussed above with a conspicuous lack of *vellet*, it is in fact quite different syntactically and historically (Weiss 2009: 636). The complementizer *nē* is a separate lexical item from the  $Neg^0$  *ne*, and does not interact in the same way with forms of *volo*. The type of verbs found in clauses introduced by *nē* also demonstrates that *nē* has different syntactic features than *ne*. Since *nē* + PERF SUBJ clauses are not historically linked to *velle*-type prohibitions, I will not examine them further.



The first option is that *velle-* can remain in its low position in T. If that happens, the only additional movement step in the derivation will be raising of Neg to C (which is mandatory, for independent reasons that are outside the scope of this analysis). *Velle-* in T will express its person feature, irrealis nature, and appropriate tense as either a present or imperfect subjunctive, depending on the SoT environment. That is, if *velle-* does not move from T, a *velle-*-type prohibition is derived.

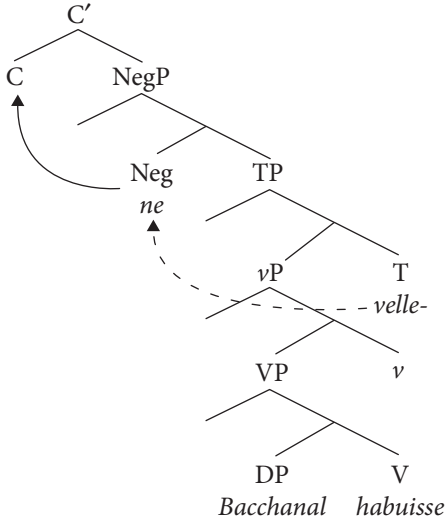
The second option is that *velle-* in T raises to Neg and adjoins to it. The features of Neg which cause it to raise to C would then cause the entire Neg+T complex to raise. At the morphological level, the adjoined complex *ne+velle-* is contracted and spelled out as an imperative form, *noli* or *nolite*.<sup>9</sup> This structure is identical to that of matrix prohibitions in Classical Latin; it is unclear whether in the earlier stage this derivation was used for matrix clauses, or whether the situation in Classical Latin is the product of an embedded to matrix clause reanalysis.

Representing *nolite* prohibitions as the result of Neg-to-T adjunction is the simplest way to represent the optionality found between the two constructions, reducing it to a single syntactic operation. To summarize, the tree in (16) shows the movement steps involved in deriving both *velle-*-type and standard prohibitions from a single base

9. The motivation for spelling out *velle-* as a subjunctive form in T but an imperative in C can be attributed to a feature in C expressing imperative force. For accounts of the featural content of imperative C<sup>0</sup>, see e.g. Zanuttini (1997) and Han (2000).

structure, and (17) and (18) show the linear strings as derived by the syntax and the subsequent morphophonological spellout.

- (16) *optional T-to-Neg adjunction and mandatory Neg-to-C movement*



- (17) *Velle-type prohibition*  
 a. ne Bacchanal habuisse velle- (just prior to spellout)  
 b. ne Bacchanal habuisse vellet (after PF)
- (18) *matrix imperative prohibition*  
 a. ne+velle- Bacchanal habuisse (just prior to spellout)  
 b. nolite Bacchanal habere (after PF)

Finally, the fact that *velle*-type and standard prohibitions have the same semantic interpretation can be explained if in *velle*-type prohibitions, adjunction is simply delayed until after spellout. If this is the case, when *velle*- adjoins to Neg in C at LF, the *velle*-type prohibition will have the same form as the standard prohibition.

#### 4.2 Loss of optionality

The pure optionality explained in the previous section was lost by the 2nd century BC, when *velle*-type prohibitions were limited to specific contexts. This too can be explained in terms of the adjunction operation that was responsible for the optionality in the first place. Through frequent adjunction and subsequent PF contraction, *ne+volo* became strongly identified as a unit, and was lexicalized. It is important to note that this lexicalization took place well before 198 BC, as standard prohibitions are attested from very early Latin onward. Once treated as a single lexical item, it was no longer possible for *ne* and *velle*- to be disjoint in the syntax, so *velle*-type prohibitions

were lost except in the situations where an instance of *velle-* is added by Last Resort. In matrix prohibitions, this meant that forms introduced by imperative *noli* and *nolite* were exclusively retained. A further consequence of this lexicalization is the fact that matrix imperative prohibitions are semantically negative, but lack a syntactically distinct NegP projection. Since one of the conditions of the morphosemantic constraint on punctual prohibited actions requires the presence of a NegP projection dominating the content verb, this explains why the constraint is not active in those prohibitions, allowing the content verb to surface as a present rather than perfect infinitive.

#### 4.3 Filling a syntactic gap in third person

There is just one environment in which *velle*-type prohibitions retained their productivity into the Classical period, namely third person prohibitions. Third person prohibitions are most frequent in legal texts, and this distribution created the sense that *velle*-type prohibitions were a legal formula.

Standard prohibitions of the form *nē* + SUBJ were originally restricted to second person. One possible reason for this is that standard prohibitions were syntactically (although not morphologically) imperative, due to the featural content of their C heads. Cross-linguistic evidence shows that if a language does not contain multiple, overt imperative C heads that express distinct person features, imperative C is limited to second person (Cormany 2009). In matrix prohibitions, no person features are specified in T, so they are valued by the lexically specified second person feature on C. In contrast, *velle*-type prohibitions allow valuation of person features in T, and thus are not affected by this restriction. Therefore only *velle*-type prohibitions were available for third person embedded prohibitions, regardless of sequence, even in Classical Latin.<sup>10</sup> This distribution persisted, and is the reason a *velle*-type prohibition that does not require a Last Resort explanation is found in Cato's *De Agri Cultura*:

- (19) *ne quid emisse velit*  
 NEG something buy.PERF.INF wish.PRES.SUBJ.3S  
*insciente domino, neu quid dominum*  
 not-knowing.ABL master.ABL nor anything master.ACC  
*celavisse velit*  
 hide.PERF.INF wish.PRES.SUBJ.3S

He must not make any purchases without the knowledge of the master, nor keep anything hidden from the master. (Cato *De Agri Cultura* 5.4)

10. A similar construction would be expected in a hypothetical first person prohibition, but such clauses are semantically anomalous and not attested.

Thus although *velle*-type prohibitions became disfavored over time, in these third person contexts they had to be retained, as there was no viable alternative.

## 5. Conclusion

It was known even in Roman times that *velle*-type prohibitions were an archaic form, preserved primarily in legal contexts. Although generally eliminated by the Classical period, they were retained in environments that required *velle*- syntactically. In the subordinated contexts such as those found in the *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*, the presence of *velle*- is necessary to block V to T movement. If it were absent, the content verb of the prohibition would undergo V to T movement, resulting either in ungrammaticality (Sequence of Tense violation) or morphosemantic anomaly (non-perfect prohibited action). *Velle*- is crucially inserted by Last Resort in the T position, obviating the conflict between these two constraints.

A diachronic analysis of the innovation and subsequent loss of *velle*-type prohibitions can be based on their ties to matrix prohibitions containing *nolle*, which is etymologically derived from compounding *ne+velle*. For some time, *ne* and *velle* existed as separate functional heads. An optionality between overt and covert movement created the possibility for *velle*- to either adjoin to *ne* or be separate from it when morphological and phonological operations take place at spellout. When adjoined, a PF process contracted the two, yielding an imperative form *noli* or *nolite*. Over time this process was simplified by the lexicalization of *nolle*. This led to the inability to strand *velle*-, effectively eliminating the *velle*-type prohibitions in all contexts that did not require Last Resort insertion of *velle*-.

Finally, the syntax also accounts for the use of *velle*-type prohibitions in matrix clauses when the prohibition is in the third person. This distribution is not a direct result of the features of *velle*-, but in fact results from the fact that its alternative, *nē* plus a bare subjunctive, was only syntactically viable in the second person. *Velle*-type prohibitions filled this paradigm gap and historically persisted due to lack of another possible paraphrase.

Thus the syntactic distribution of a rare construction, already an archaism at the time of its first attestation, has revealed significant information about the synchronic grammars of Early and Classical Latin. The limited contexts in which *velle*- appears, along with the etymological connection between *velle* and *nolle* allows for a reconstruction of the innovation and elimination of *velle*-type prohibitions despite the fact that the period in which these changes took place is unattested. Employing similar reconstructive methods may prove to be a productive research program for syntactic reconstruction both in other areas of Latin and in other languages.



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