

*Qui pro quo*  
in Plautus Grammar

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# *Qui pro quo* in drama



# The aims of my talk

- 1) to trace, how the Latin language plays with this technique,
- 2) to find out, what effect may be created by the "grammatical" *qui pro quo*,
- 3) to understand, why Latin resorts to such strategy.

# “Canonical” and “non-canonical” meanings

Every element of a grammatical category is endowed with its own (“canonical”) meaning:

“When using the **indicative mood**, as opposed to the subjunctive or the imperative, the speaker asserts a state of affairs, that is, presents an event as factual.

When using **the present (indicative) tense** form, the speaker presents a state of affairs as simultaneous with the time of speaking” (Pinkster 2015, 395).

Temporal *qui pro quo*

***Praesens pro futuro***

Meaning: immediate future

(1) {Phaedr.} *Iamne ego huic **dico**?*

{Palin.} *Quid dices?* (Plaut. *Cur.* 132)

*Futurum pro praesente – 1*  
*(Futurum gnomicum)*

Meaning: common knowledge,  
reportative evidentiality

- (2) *Pulchra mulier nuda **erit** quam purpurata pulchrior.* (Plaut. *Most.* 289)

‘A beautiful woman is [thought to be] more beautiful naked than dressed in purple.’

## *Futurum pro praesente - 2*

Meaning: a conclusion based on the evidence from a context (inferential evidentiality)

- (3) *Haec **erit** bono genere nata. Nil scit nisi verum loqui.*  
(Plaut. *Per.* 645)

‘She is **evidently** from a good family; she knows how to speak nothing but the truth.’

- (4) *Sed profecto hoc sic **erit**:*

*centum doctum hominum consilia sola haec devincit dea, Fortuna.* (Plaut. *Pseud.* 677–679)

‘In fact, this **is always** the case: the decision of a hundred wise men is won by this one goddess, Fortune.’

## *Praesens pro perfecto (Praesens historicum)*

Meaning: eyewitness report, direct evidentiality

(5) {LYCUS} *Quis hic est?* {ADVOCATI} *Nescimus nos quidem istum qui siet.*

*Nisi dudum mane ut ad portum processimus,*

*atque istum e navi exeuntem oneraria*

***videmus.** Adiit ad nos extemplo exiens.*

***Salutat. Respondemus.** {COLLYBISCUS} *Mortalis malos,**

*ut ingrediuntur docte in sycophantiam.*

{L.} *Quid deinde?* {A.} *Sermonem ibi nobiscum **copulat.***

***Ait** se peregrinum esse huius ignarum oppidi. (Plaut. Poen. 649–656)*

- ‘{L.} Who is he? {A.} We actually don’t know who he is; but when we went towards the harbour a while ago, early, we saw him leave a cargo ship. On leaving he approached us at once. He greets us, we reply. {C.} What sly mortals! How cleverly they’re embarking on the trick! {L.} What next? {A.} He starts a conversation with us there. He says he’s a stranger and doesn't know this.



# *Imperfectum pro praesente – 1*

(Imperfect of truth just recognized)

Meaning: deferred realization (mirativity)

- (6) *Divom atque hominum quae spectatrix atque era eadem es hominibus,*
- *spem speratam quom obtulisti hanc mihi, tibi grates ago.*
- *ecquisnam deus est, qui mea nunc laetus laetitia fuat?*
- *domi erat quod quaeritabam: sex sodales repperi,*
- *vitam, amicitiam, civitatem, laetitiam, ludum, iocum* (Plaut. *Merc.* 841–846).
- ‘Thou who art the overlooker of Gods and of men, and the mistress of mortals as well, inasmuch as thou hast indulged me in this hope that I entertained, I do return thee thanks. What Deity is there now that is joyous with gladness like mine? That **was** at home which I was in search of. There did I find six companions, life, friendship, my native land, festivity, mirth, and jollity.’ (transl. by H. Th. Riley).

## *Imperfectum pro praesente – 2*

Meaning: more polite or less direct request

(7) {LIB.} *Sed quid venis? Quid quaeritas?*

{MERC.} *Demaenetum volebam.* (Plaut. *As.* 392)

{LIB.} But why have you come? What are you looking for?

{MERC.} I **wanted** to see Demaenetus.'

## *Perfectum pro futuro*

Meaning: categorical warning or threat

- (8) *Disperistis, ni usque ad mortem male mulcassitis* (Plaut. *Mil.* 162-163).
- **'You're done** if you don't beat them to death.'

# Modal *qui pro quo*

Modal *qui pro quo* patterns deal with the interplay of the verbal moods: as a matter of fact, practically any mood, including the infinitive (since the first grammarians defined it this way), may be involved in this game in the Plautus' plays.

# *Coniunctivus pro imperativo*

Meaning: less categorical, more polite request

- jussive directives

- (9) *Dicas uxorem tibi necessum ducere.* (Plaut. *Mil.* 1118)

‘Say that you have to marry.’

- (10) *Qui autem auscultare nolet, **exurgat** foras* (Plaut. *Mil.* 81)

‘But if anyone doesn’t want to listen, let him get up and get out . . . ’

- prohibitive directives

- (11) . . . *da mihi hanc veniam, ignosce, irata **ne sies.*** (Plaut. *Amph.* 924)

‘ . . . give me this pardon, forgive me, don’t be angry.’

# ***Coniunctivus pro imperativo* -2**

## extra-paradigmatic forms

- (12) {ARG.} *Ne dixis istuc.*  
    {DEM.} *Ne sic fueris.* (Plaut. As. 840)
- ‘{ARG.} Don’t say that.  
    {DEM.} Don’t be like that.’

# *Futurum pro coniunctivo*

Meaning: optative or potential

(13) *Ita me **amabit** sancta Saturitas,  
Hegio, itaque suo me semper **condecoret**  
cognomine, ut ego vidi.* (Plaut. *Capt.* 877–879)

‘**May** holy Nourishment so **love** me always, so **adorn**  
me with her sweet name,  
as I have seen him.’

## *Futurum pro imperativo*

Meaning: more categorical directive

- (14) *Non me appellabis, si sapiis* (Plaut. *Mos.* 515)
- **'Don't call me, if you are not a fool.'**



*Infinitivus pro indicativo*  
(*Infinitivus historicus*)

Meaning: more emotional, expressive  
statement

- (15) *Obiurigare haec pater noctes et dies.*

(Plaut. *Mer.* 46)

‘My father **scolded** me about this night and day.’

# Sentential *qui pro quo*

- Van Valin R. D., Lapolla R. J. *Syntax. Structure, Meaning and Function*. Cambridge, CUP, 1997, 41:

Illocutionary force “refers to whether an utterance is an **assertion**, a **question**, a **command** or an expression of a **wish**. These are different types of illocutionary force, which means that we can talk about interrogative illocutionary force, imperative illocutionary force, optative illocutionary force, and declarative illocutionary force.”

There is no strict correspondence between the illocutionary force and sentence type.

“A command can be phrased using a statement, or as a question. A question may imply a statement rather than seeking information or pronounced with command intonation, and then be understood as a plea, a request, or an order. The versatility of sentence types is often rooted in cultural conventions and strategies of “saving face.” (Aikhenvald 2016, 165).

- “One and the same expression may be used to perform, in different contexts, various speech acts, and, conversely, various expressions can be used to perform one and the same speech act.” (Risselsada 1993, 64).

# *Interrogative sentences instead of exclamatory ones*

Meaning: mirative semantics

- (16) {PEN.} – *Salta sic cum palla postea.*
- {MEN.} – *Ego **saltabo**?! Sanus hercle non es!* (Pl. *Men.* 197–198).
- ‘{PEN.} – Do dance afterwards with the mantle on in this way.
- {MEN.} – I – **dance**? I believe, you’re not in your senses!’ (transl. by H. Th. Riley).

# ***Interrogative sentences instead of directive ones***

Meaning: command

- (17) {TR} *sed tu, etiamne astas nec quae dico optemperas?*
- {TH} *quid faciam?*
- {TR} *cave respexis, fuge, [atque] operi caput!* (Plaut. Mos. 522-523)
- {TR} 'But you, you're still standing there and not minding what I say?'
- {TH} What shall I do?
- {TR} Don't look back, run, and cover your head!
  
- (The example is from Risselada 1993, 193)

# ***Rhetorical question as an affirmation in reaction to a question*** (Meaning: assertion)

- (18) {ARG.} *An tu me tristem putas?*
- {DEM.} ***Putem ego, quem videam aequae esse maestum ut***
- ***quasi dies si dicta sit?*** (Plaut. *As.* 837–8)
- ‘{ARG.} Do you think I’m sad?’
- {DEM.} Do I think so? I can see that you’re as sad as if you
- were in for trial.’
- (19) {PHIL.} *Egone osculum huic dem?*
- {PER.} ***Quor non, quae ex te nata sit?*** (Plaut. *Epid.* 574)
- ‘{PHIL.} I should give her a kiss?’
- {PER.} Why not, since she was born from you?’

## *Declarative sentences instead of directive ones*

Meaning: plea, request

- (20) *Oiei, **satis sum verberatus**, opsecro*. (Plaut. *Mil.* 1406)
- ‘Ow! I’ve been beaten enough, I entreat you!’
- 
- (21) *Amabo, Libane, **iam sat est***. (Plaut. *As.* 707)
- ‘Please, Libanus, it’s enough now.’

## ***Directive sentences instead of concessive ones***

- (21) {MAT.} *Quas fabulas? non, inquam, patiar praeterhac,*
- *quin vidua vivam quam tuos mores perferam.*
- {MEN.} ***Mea quidem hercle causa vidua vivo / vel usque dum regnum optinebit Iuppiter.*** (Plaut. *Men.* 725–8)
- ‘{MAT.} I'd rather live alone than put up with your shameless temper.’
- {MEN.} Even if you were living in a divorce, for all I care, as long as Jupiter keeps his kingship.’



## ***Insubordinate clauses with different meanings***

The last group of sentences, for which the oxymoron "*independent subordinates*" would be fitting, includes subordinate clauses separated from the governing (main) clauses. According to the researchers, they gain independence through the ellipsis of the main clause. This process is called "desubordination" and is attested in many Indo-European languages (Aikhenvald 2016; la Roi 2022). Having become independent, the former subordinate clauses can be used with different illocutionary force.

## *Insubordinate clauses with Ut and Si as optatives*

(22) ***Ut eas maximam malam crucem!*** (Plaut. *Men.* 328)

‘Yes, go and be hanged.’

(23) ***quod male feci crucior! Modo si infectum fieri posset!*** (Plaut. *Capt.* 996)

‘I’m in agony because I treated him badly; if only it could be undone!’

- (Examples are from la Roi 2022)

# *Insubordinate clauses with Quasi as assertives*

- (24) {Men.} *quid hoc est, uxor? quidnam hic narravit tibi? quid id est?*
- *quid taces? quin dicis quid sit?*
- {Mat.} ***quasi tu nescias.*** (Plaut. *Men.* 638–639)
- {Men.} ‘What’s this, my wife? What on earth did he tell you? What is it? What are you silent for? Why don’t you tell me what it is?’
- {Mat.} **‘As if you didn’t know.’**

# Conclusions. *Qui pro quo* as a manifestation of the neutralization principle

I suggest to explain this phenomenon as a manifestation of the neutralization principle proposed by R. Jakobson and developed by K. Pozdniakov. Building on this concept, I consider any grammatical category as a sort of paradigm with a number of elements that are normally mutually exclusive. From this angle, the use of one element instead of another one in a given context should be treated as neutralization of the opposition between the elements of such a paradigm.

Jakobson R. O. To the General Case Study, in: *Roman Jakobson. Selected works*. Moscow, 1985a, 176–197. (In Russian)

Jakobson R. O. Morphological Observations on Slavic Declension, in: *Roman Jakobson. Selected works*. Moscow, 1985b, 176–197. (In Russian)

Pozdniakov, K.I. (2009). On the nature and functions of non-morphemic signs. *Voprosy Yazykoznanija* [*Questions of linguistics*] 6, 35–64.

## *Neutralization as a creative mechanism*

- Neutralization is a creative mechanism which by means of reducing the opposition in a given semantic feature may, in turn, create another semantic feature, that can be significant for the language.
- Actually, in each case of neutralization, the *qui pro quo* technique creates a new semantic value, additional meaning, connotation or nuance and, thus, helps the speaker to implement a certain communicative strategy that could not be implemented by other grammatical means.

Table 1. Semantic values resulting from the *qui pro quo* techniques

Temporal <i>qui pro quo</i>	Resulting semantic value
<b>Praesens pro futuro</b>	immediate future
<b>Futurum pro praesente</b>	1) common knowledge, generally accepted opinion, 2) deductive inference
<b>Praesens pro perfecto</b>	1) 'diegetic' narrative mode, impression of an eyewitness report (direct evidentiality)
<b>Imperfectum pro praesente</b>	1) deferred realization (mirativity), 2) polite request
<b>Perfectum pro futuro</b>	categorical warning or threat

<b>Modal <i>qui pro quo</i></b>	<b>Resulting value</b>
<b>Futurum pro coniunctivo</b>	optative or potential meaning
<b>Coniunctivus pro imperativo</b>	less categorical, more polite request
<b>Futurum pro imperativo</b>	more categorical directive
<b>Infinitivus pro indicativo</b>	more emotional or expressive statement

<b>Sentential <i>qui pro quo</i></b>	<b>Resulting value</b>
<b>Interrogative sentences instead of exclamatory ones</b>	unpreparedness of speaker's mind, mirative semantics
<b>Interrogative sentences instead of directive ones</b>	directive illocutionary force
<b>Rhetorical questions as an affirmation in reaction to a question</b>	assertive illocutionary force
<b>Declarative sentences instead of directive ones</b>	directive illocutionary force
<b>Directive sentences instead of concessive ones</b>	concessive meaning
<b>Insubordinate clauses with <i>Ut</i> and <i>Si</i> as optatives</b>	optative meaning
<b>Insubordinate clauses with <i>Quasi</i> as assertives</b>	assertive illocutionary force



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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH  
FOR YOUR TIME!**