

Apologetics of the diachronic aspect in teaching Latin
Lucie Pultrová (Charles University, Prague)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I received the invitation to this conference and was considering what could be my contribution to the topic, the first thing that crossed my mind was that I - as a Czech citizen - should probably speak about one of the greatest men of my nation, the so called „teacher of the nations“, Johann Amos Comenius. His *Ianua linguarum reseerata*, a Latin textbook from 1631, was a real revolution in teaching languages and it can be inspirational for us in many ways even now.

But, as I believe that the shoemaker should better stick to his last, as the well-known proverb says, and my personal field of study is the historical and comparative linguistics, I decided to give a short talk on the usefulness of the diachronic and comparative aspects in teaching Latin.

Let me start in a lighter vein: Recently, I was present at the discussion of my former schoolmates, who are now in most cases teaching Latin at grammar schools (that I personally have had no experience with). They were discussing the usual question: How on earth can we arouse interest of the 14-15-year-old children in studying Latin at the very beginning? I expected answers like „put on a Hollywood film with an antiquity setting“, or „show them the Latin inscriptions in the nearest church“, or „bring the Asterix“, or even „translate the magic formulas of Harry Potter“, but I was completely wrong. They all agreed on one thing: what always works is a demonstration that the students in some measure actually understand Latin naturally. It is clear that I say „understand“ with a touch of irony, but if the teacher is not lacking in phantasy and finds apposite examples, he will be able to bring the students the delight that they have found out something themselves, that they have already known something very special, which is always very good motivation for the further effort.

“Mater et pater sunt domi. Pater dormit, nam totum per diem agros arabat. Et boves iugo soluti in stabulo dormiunt. Mater autem ad focum stat. Porcum et anserem coquit et sale condit. Ignis fumat. Hieme, cum longae sunt noctes, mater fabulas narrat.

Parentibus sunt sex pueri, tres fratres et tres sorores. Frater primus fagum securi secat. Lignum capit, intus it et dat in flammis. Alter fratrum oves pascit. Muscas, vespas, formicas in herbis vidit. Frater tertius non valuit, sed nunc iam esse et bibere vult.

Omnes sorores intus sedent. Soror prima granum et fabas molit. Lucentes oculi ei sunt et nasus formosus. Altera sororum vestem novam patri suit. Vetus vestis iam trita est. Soror tertia e lacte et melle suavia parat.

Ita omnes vivunt.”

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With a simple text like this the class of students can have real fun, because with the bit of imagination, maybe with the help of English or the other modern languages they know, they will understand if not every word, then surely every other word.

What I intend to say in this introduction is that in learning foreign languages, the feeling of "foreignness", or "nearness", on the contrary, is always relative and that in the language courses, the method of comparing with other languages and pointing out the coincident elements is so to say naturally attractive.

To those who deal with the Latin linguistics only marginally it could seem that the diachronic aspect in teaching Latin grammar does not need any apologetics. It used to be always the leading line of thought in researching the ancient languages. On the contrary, what had needed to be pushed and supported were the methods of the general linguistics, the synchronic point of view.

However, nowadays, the situation is completely different. Recently, the synchronically oriented linguistics has prevailed in so far that in the 13th International Colloquium on Latin linguistics that took part last year in Brussels, there were hardly any papers given that would fall within the scope of the diachronic linguistics.

Moreover, as I can hear from my colleagues from other universities, in the study plans of the departments of Classics, the courses of the historical grammar are being cut down. It is worth noticing that the books on the Latin historical grammar are nowadays being written in most cases by the scholars from the departments of Indo-European comparative linguistics, not of Classics.

There are many instances in the content of the basic Latin courses where the purely synchronical perspective makes the comprehension more difficult and, on the contrary, the historical view brings real and immediate aid. These are the instances where the students are compelled to memorize long lists of exceptions and irregularities, such as the forms of the nouns and adjectives of the 3rd declination or the forms of the Latin perfect.

Needless to say the historical aspect is essential in the field of the Latin word-formation, that should not be neglected; by long-lasting concentration on the rules of Latin (or even Indo-European) word-formation, the vowel lengths, always problematic, become absolutely clear at once.

In syntax, every student has learnt very easily the rules of *consecutio temporum*, but quickly he becomes frustrated, almost betrayed, seeing, how numerous the cases are where these rules do not stand – one mere sentence about the original independence of the phrases sheds always light on the problem.

The situations like this are innumerable.

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Another question is whether there is still something in the field of the Latin historical linguistics that has not been discovered yet: looking into the handbooks, everything seems to be once and for all solved.

The Indo-European comparative linguistics has made an immense progress in the last decades – especially in the field of the Indo-European accent and ablaut, in the field of the noun-paradigms or in the reconstruction of the Indo-European roots. This all not only allows us, but also urges us to rethink some Latin rules (or “sound laws”, as we call them), that have been believed to be clear and definite for long time.

Finally, there is no need to mention that the modern technology is of great utility for the linguistical research. The possibility of classifying, searching, verifying the relevance of examples in computer databases – that all means a real revolution in the philological and linguistical work. In earlier times, the common practice while composing a new handbook was to copy the examples from the older books, without proving in what context they had been used, what was the frequency, whether there were some counter-examples and so on. As a consequence of this tradition you can see in the handbooks long lines of quotations, for which we find in fact no support in the ancient texts.

Now, in the second part of my paper, I would like to show, as an example, a new theory that has been based on the modern outcomes of the Indo-European diachronic linguistics. It is necessary to state clearly that this theory is so to say “brand new”, the monograph on it has been published only recently and I have had no reactions to that yet. Therefore, I definitely cannot say that this theory has already been accepted and finished, but if it sometimes wins through, it will have consequences even for the basic or intermediate Latin courses. Naturally, as the time is very limited now, I can explain it only as a rough draft.

What is concerned is the phenomenon traditionally called „Vowel Weakening” or „Vowel Reduction”, in German Vokalschwächung (*fāciō* – *cōnfiō*, *sedeō* – *assideō*, *nōmen* – *nōmīnis* etc.). For the sake of clearness, I quote the rules of the vowel changes as formulated in current handbooks:

Open syllables:

<i>a</i> > <i>i</i>	<i>faciō</i> – <i>cōnfiō</i> ; <i>cadō</i> – <i>occidō</i>
<i>e</i> > <i>i</i>	<i>sedeō</i> – <i>obsideō</i> ; <i>medius</i> – <i>dīmidius</i>
<i>o</i> > <i>i</i>	<i>locus</i> – <i>ilicō</i> < * <i>en stlocōd</i> ; <i>hospitem</i> < * <i>hostipotem</i>
<i>u</i> > <i>i</i>	<i>caput</i> – <i>capitis</i> ; <i>cornū</i> – <i>corniger</i>
<i>Vr</i> > <i>er</i>	<i>dare</i> – <i>reddere</i>
<i>io</i> > <i>ie</i>	<i>pius</i> – <i>pietās</i>
<i>Vl</i> > <i>ul</i> × <i>Vl'</i> > <i>il'</i>	<i>famulus</i> × <i>familia</i> ; <i>exulāns</i> × <i>exilium</i>
<i>u/i</i> before a labial	<i>capīō</i> – <i>incipiō</i> × <i>occupō</i>

Closed syllables:

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a > e
o > u
aj > ij
af > uf

Diphthongs:

ai > ī
au > ū

aptus – ineptus; damnō – condemnō
*industrius < *endostruos; alumnus < *alomnos*
frangō – cōnfringō; tangō – attingō
calcō – inculcō; salsus – īnsulsus

caedō – incīdō; aequus – inīquus
claudō – inclūdō; causa – incūsō

This problem of Latin historical grammar seems to be – at least when judging from the existing handbooks – once and for all solved, which is, naturally, the view I do not share. In that event, the researcher has primarily to persuade other researchers in the field that the question needs further investigation and revision of the present interpretation; only then he can offer a new hypothesis for discussion. I shall start with the first task, then.

Briefly about the history of this phenomenon: it was a German scholar Dietrich, in the middle of the 19th century, who noticed that there are regular vowel changes in Latin words, like *facio – conficio – aurifex*, and that such vowel changes never occur in the first (initial) syllables. From that fact he concluded that the initial syllables must have had some special characteristic, which prevented their vowels from being changed, and this special characteristic should have been, according to Dietrich, the accent. This was the origin of the famous theory of the archaic Latin accent bound on the initial syllables (as opposed to the classical penultima-accent). The theory spread quickly and we can say it has been generally accepted. In today's handbooks, the existence of the initial accent in archaic Latin is taken for granted and the explication of the problem goes the other way round than it was in the beginning: "In the archaic period, Latin had a strong accent bound on the initial syllables and this accent caused a weakening of inner syllables and the changes of their vowels."

Handbooks generally speak about this phenomenon as about a "sound law", generally valid, with few exception like *benefacio, posthabeo* etc., which they explain mostly as „more recent compounds“, created only after the process of changing the vowel quality had been finished.

First thing that raises doubts is that there is no strong evidence of the supposed original forms like *confacio* on the archaic inscriptions. In fact, the only occurrence is the famous *FHE FHKED* and probably *NUMASIO* from the *Fibula Praenestina*, which is itself very uncertain (concerning the origin) and cannot serve as a proof (or, the only proof).

Secondly, all the examples of the so-called „more recent compounds“, as the said *benefacio, posthabeo* etc., are in fact commonly present in the oldest Latin literary texts. It can be true that they were new in the time of the oldest authors, but how can we prove it? This argument thus must be assumed to be irrelevant.

The next argument against the current theory is the number of exceptions of the formulated rules. What I did was the following: from a middle-size Latin dictionary, limited to archaic and classical vocabulary, I excerpted all the compounds from base

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words of such form that should be affected with the weakening (it means with short vowels or diphthongs in the root); the result was for me a bit shocking: Firstly, there is in fact no evidence of any vowel changes in the prefixed words with the root vowel *o* and *u*. And secondly, as for the words with the root vowels *a* and *e* or diphthongs *ae* and *au*, I have not found few exceptions but, in fact, hundreds of exceptions. I let circulate two lists of words: the first one contains 932 words from the said dictionary that can be used as examples of the Vowel weakening, but the second list contains 939 words where there should be the Vowel weakening according to the rules and there is not! And more, if we look at the two lists more precisely, we can observe that in the first list, there is in fact only about 75 word bases (from which all the words on the list are derived), whereas in the second list, there is about 242 word bases – that means there is three times more word bases that do not comply with the rules, than those that do comply.

Having researched the excerpted material, I reached a view that the vowel changes, or let us say “alternations”, occur only in delimited word-formative categories: With few exceptions, the vowel alternations do not occur in the denominative verbs:

Deadjectives (in total 32):

1. *acerbus* > *ex-acerbō*
2. *acervus* > *co-acervō*
3. *aequus* > *ad-aequō*
4. *albus* > *dē-albō*
5. *aliēnus* > *ab-aliēnō*
6. *amārus* > *in-amārēscō*
7. *angustus* > *co-angustō*
8. *artus* > *co-artō*
9. *asper* > *ex-asperō*
10. *cavus* > *con-cavō*
11. ...

Desubstantives (in total 50):

1. *acus* > *ex-acuō*
2. *ager* > *per-agrō*
3. *anima/-us* > *ex-animō*
4. *aqua* > *ad-aquor*
5. **argus* > *co-arguō*
6. *arma* > *de-armō*
7. *augur* > *ex-augurō*
8. *aurum* > *in-aurō*
9. *calx* > *re-calcitrō*
10. *damnum* > *prae-damnō*
11. ...

Similarly, with few exceptions, they do not occur in the prefixed adjectives of non-verbal origin:

1. *aestimābilis* > *inaestimābilis*
2. *agrestis* > *subagrestis*
3. *alpīnus* > *cisalpīnus*
4. *altus* > *praealtus*
5. *amārus* > *subamārus*
6. *amoenus* > *inamoenus*
7. *amplus* > *peramplus*
8. *angustus* > *perangustus*
9. *antīquus* > *perantīquus*
10. *arātus* > *inarātus*
11. ... (in total 74)

Not clear is the situation of the prefixed primary verbs:

With alternation (in total 47):

1. *agō* > *abigō*
2. *arceō* > *coerceō*
3. *baetō* > *adbītō*

No alternation (in total 37):

1. *amō* > *adamō*
2. *arō* > *circumarō*
3. *audiō* > *exaudiō*

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- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 4. <i>cadō</i> > <i>accidō</i> | 4. <i>augeō</i> > <i>adaugeō</i> |
| 5. <i>caedō</i> > <i>abscidō</i> | 5. <i>cacō</i> > <i>concacō</i> |
| 6. <i>canō</i> > <i>concinō</i> | 6. <i>caleō</i> > <i>recaleō</i> |
| 7. <i>capiō</i> > <i>accipiō</i> | 7. <i>caveō</i> > <i>praecaveō</i> |
| 8. <i>carpō</i> > <i>concerpō</i> | 8. <i>cremō</i> > <i>concremō</i> |
| 9. <i>*-candō</i> > <i>accendō</i> | 9. <i>crepō</i> > <i>concrepō</i> |
| 10. <i>claudō</i> > <i>conclūdō</i> | 10. <i>decet</i> > <i>condecet</i> |
| 11. ... | 11. ... |

What is apparent is that once a verb accepts a prefix, the following derivatives of it preserve the vocalism of the base-word (*laus* > *laudo* > *collaudo* > *collaudatio* etc.).

Now, this is not yet the final explanation, but what is in my opinion clear right now, is that we cannot speak about a mechanical change caused by the accent. If the accent were the cause, it would affect all the words (as it is in certain modern languages: English, Russian etc.), and certainly not only words of defined word-formative categories!

Now, how to interpret it – I shall begin with my new hypothesis: What are then the vowel alternations like *facio* – *conficio*, if not the weakening of the vowels caused by the archaic initial accent? As I said, the time is very limited and I am conscious of the impossibility to explain everything exhaustively and in details, but I will try to do it at least in general features. What I am aiming for primarily is to show that on the basis of the modern outcomes of the Indo-European diachronic and comparative linguistics we are now able to come to the completely different conclusions in the Latin historical grammar, to the completely different wording of the Latin sound laws.

The key to the solution is the Indo-European ablaut, that means the regular vowel alternations, depending on the position of the Indo-European accent. In a very simplified way, the stressed syllables were in the so-called full-grade or e-grade and the unstressed syllables in the so called zero-grade:

full grade (e-grade):	zero grade:
* <i>séd-</i>	* <i>sd-</i> (* <i>s_ed-</i>)
* <i>d^héh₁k-</i>	* <i>d^hh₁k-</i>
* <i>mér-</i>	* <i>mr-</i>

Every Indo-European word is reconstructed, in simple terms, with one accent, that means with only one syllable in the full grade; the accent can lie on different syllables, but not randomly: according to the type of the word.

Now, the most important thing was, how to explain the inconsistent behaviour of the primary verbs. With reference to the *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben* (2001²) I reached a view that – with very few exceptions – the reconstruction of the Latin verbs

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with the vowel alternation is such that they should have had in the Indo-European stage a root in the zero grade :

1. *apiō* < **h₁p-jé-* (LIV, p. 237)
2. *arceō* < **h₂r^k(')-éje-* (273)
3. *capiō* < **kh₂p-jé-* (344)
4. *faciō* < **d^hh₁k-jé-* (139)
5. *farciō* < **b^hrk^w-jé-* (93)
6. *frangō* < **b^hr-né/n-g(')-*(91)
7. *habeō* < **g(')^hHb-h₁jé-* (195)
8. *iaciō* < **Hih₁k-jé-* (225)
9. *pacō* < **ph₂k'-e-* (461)
10. *pangō* < **ph₂-né/n-g'-* (461)
11. ...

And, on the contrary, the verbs with no vowel alternation had originally the root in the full grade:

1. *amō* < **h₂émh₃-* (265)
2. *arō* < **h₂érh₃-je-* (272)
3. *audiō* < **h₂wéis-* (288)
4. *cremō* < **k^(')rémH-je-* (369)
5. *crepō* < **KrépH-je-* (370)
6. *edō* < **h₁éd-* (230)
7. *fleō* < **b^hléh₁-* (87)
8. *fremō* < **b^hrém-e-* (94)
9. *gemō* < **gém-e-* (186)
10. *legō* < **h₂lég^(')-e-* (276)
11. ...

Therefore I conclude, that the Latin reduced root vowel is a successor of the original zero grade of the root.

There are the following preconditions for this hypothesis:

Firstly: Suppose this is the case, the zero grade would need to vocalize differently in the initial syllables and in the medial syllable. It sounds strange but, in fact, it is not at all unusual among the Indo-European languages. (The zero grade is very often formed by the interconsonantic laryngeal and for example in Germanic languages or Albanian the interconsonantic laryngeal vocalizes differently in the different position in the word.)

The second precondition is that the univerbation of the prefix and the base-word must have preceded the vocalization of the zero grades. This would explain the absence of the vowel alternations in the denominatives and the other derivatives, which could be justifiably assumed to be prefixed later. It means the prefixation in these derivatives succeeded the final constitution of the base-word.

The third assumption is that after the univerbation of the prefix and the base word, the original accent of the verb stayed on the same syllable, as it was in the primary verb before the prefixation. (This is generally one of the two possible alternatives of what could have happened with the accent after the prefixation in Indo-European languages: either the accent could stay where it was, or move to the prefix. In such case, if the prefix were accented, the root would have to turn to the zero grade, and we would not be able to explain the absence of the vowel alternations in some verbs. It

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means, we have to assume that the accent stayed on the verb; and we can assume it, because there is no proof for the converse.)

To sum up the hypothesis: **Latin root syllables with reduced vowels replace the original zero-grade root syllables.** Chronology of the whole process is such:

- 1) First step is the univerbation of the prefixes and the primary verbs.
- 2) The accent of the newly compounded verb remains on the verb, in the same place where it was before the prefixation. Therefore, the zero grades and the full grades remain the same as well.
- 3) Then the zero-grade syllables vocalize, and they vocalize differently according to their position in the word (as it is for example in Germanic languages, Albanian etc.).
- 4) Subsequent derivatives of the prefixed verbs preserve the vocalism of its founding word.

As for the prefixed denominative verbs, adjectives etc., such a process does not take place, because the prefixation is chronologically more recent than the vocalization; it means that what was being derived by prefix, was already a "complete" word (and the potential zero-grade root syllable in the base word had already vocalized before the prefixation = when it was an initial syllable).

According to the newly presented hypothesis, the basic principle of vocalic alternations remains actually the same as it was under the original theory: what it is concerned with is again the stressed and unstressed character of a syllable, and again there plays a role the difference between „older“ and „younger“ compounds – all that, however, in the entirely different period of development.

I am not sure, whether such a short and condensed performance could have been convincing, but – to put it briefly – even if my new hypothesis about the origin of the vowel alternations were not accepted, what is in my opinion absolutely clear is that we cannot talk about a general, mechanical change of all Latin short medial vowels; in view of that it is precisely on this presumption that the theory of archaic Latin accent bound on the first syllable was constructed, we must, rejecting at the same time general vocalic changes, query the whole theory as unfounded.

And now I return back to the topic of this session, this is already a finding that would intervene even in the intermediate courses of Latin and moreover, in another field than grammar: I am thinking for example of the, so far questionable, Saturnian verse. The discussion about how to measure it mostly oscillate between quantitative verse and accentual verse, but in an absolute majority counting on the hypothetical archaic initial

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accent. When we accept that there was in fact no archaic initial accent, the discussion takes a new direction. But this would be a topic for another paper.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words that steer a bit away from the theme of this conference, namely about the usefulness of Latin for the Indo-European comparative linguistics. Latin today, surprisingly, is a sort of Cinderella of the Indo-European comparative linguistics. There are two reasons for this: firstly, it is considered to be "too young" to be able to contribute to the reconstruction of the proto-language – the languages with even older documentation are preferred. And further, the attention is being paid to the languages that have been by far less explored. Latin actually pays for having been so thoroughly explored and described already in the 19th century and since then, not much has been changed in its description until recently. But, what I am positive about is that once the Latin sound laws will have been revised on the basis of the modern outcomes of the comparative linguistics, Latin will become highly relevant for the comparative linguistics again. After all, it would not be easy to find another language like Latin, together with the Romance languages, with such a long-running and colourful development and with such a copious documentation.