

Ablaut and the Latin verb: the (non)destructive effect of sound change

In this presentation, I examine the effect of regular sound change on the ablaut patterns in the Latin verb system. The main questions are, to what extent the observed loss of such patterns is caused by sound change, and which individual changes in particular act towards the deletion or the preservation of the patterns. Having singled out a number of cases, in which the loss is demonstrably *not* an effect of sound change, I turn to looking for alternative, theory-oriented solutions (e.g. analogy, isomorphism, morphological naturalness, various functional factors) in order to conclusively explain the neutralization of the inherited contrasts.

The “destructive” effect of sound changes is often implicitly or explicitly (e.g. Sihler 1995: 109, Meiser 1998: 33) stated as the main factor for the loss of ablaut patterns in Latin. Indeed, in isolated cases such effect is indisputable, e.g. **deuk-e-ti* > **douket* > *dūcit*, **tḡ-tó-* > **tento-* > *tentus* (cf. Gr. τατός), **stṛh₃-tó-* > *strātus*, Lachmann’s Law (e.g. **teg-to-* > *tēctus*), etc. Vowel weakening (see Nishimura 2010) and the subsequent coloring effect of neighboring consonants also neutralize important qualitative contrasts and make certain stem vocalisms submerge, e.g. in the reduplicated perfects. In some cases, however, Latin preserves the PIE vocalism and the inherited ablaut alternations rather faithfully, e.g. *decet* vs. *docēre*, *precārī* vs. *pōscere* (<**prék-ské-*), *vōcāre* vs. *vōx*, *stātus* vs. *Stātius*, *genus* vs. *gener-is*, *tegere* vs. *toga*, *facere* vs. *fēcī*, *fīdere* vs. *foedus* vs. *fīdēs*, etc. It would be expected that irregular verbs would also have preserved the PIE vocalism almost intact; this, however, often turns out not to be the case, e.g. *sum* (< ESOM, Garigliano Bowl, 500 BC), *sumus*, *sunt* vs. *es*, *est*, *estis* (< PIE **h₁s-té-*); *eō* < **ejō* < PIE **h₁ej-mi* vs. *īmus* < **ejmos* ← **imos* < PIE **h₁i-més*; *dās*, *dat* (from *dare*) instead of **dōs*, **dot* < PIE **deh₃-* vs. *dāmus*, *dātis*, *dānt* < PIE **dh₃-*.

The positive identification of non-*lautgesetzlich* modification of the inherited ablaut patterns indicates that the loss of the alternations is not primarily caused by regular sound change, meaning that ablaut-loss ought to be investigated in the context of historical morphology. In this presentation, I first examine the effect of a number of sound changes that result in local neutralization of ablaut vocalism, and then present cases from the verb system in which a non-*lautgesetzlich* vocalism requires an alternative explanation. Such cases include the irregular verbs *esse*, *īre*, *dare* (all old athematics), the perfect stem of the verb *facere*, the root vocalism of some 2nd conjugation verbs, and a number of participle stems with e- or o-grade looking vocalism.

References

Meiser, Gerhard 1998. *Historische Laut- und Formenlehre der lateinischen Sprache*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

- Nishimura, Kanehiro 2010. 'Patterns of Vowel Reduction in Latin: Phonetics and Phonology', *HS* 123, pp. 217-257.
- Sihler, Andrew 1995. *New Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.