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## CHAPTER 2

# The use of the past to explain the past

## Roman grammarians and the collapse of quantity

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This paper aims to demonstrate the caveats called for in the reconstruction of the so-called quantity collapse from Late Latin to Pre-Romance. The Uniformitarian Principle does not necessarily require the inspection and explanation of “bad data”. The past, in other words, is not always aligned with our predictive synchronic paradigms. As a matter of fact, a rather significant number of passages by the ancient grammarians shed light on the mechanisms which led to the neutralization of prosodic feature [ $\pm$ long] in spoken Latin stressed syllables. The *testimonia* of Consentius, Pompeius, and Sacerdos all hint at an interesting and unexpected solution for the reconstruction of the aforementioned phonological process. Ultimately, the overall picture emerging from the metalinguistic testimonies allows us to formulate an alternative hypothesis to the macro-structural thesis on Romance Quantity currently considered part of mainstream Romance Linguistics. This work demonstrates that the very first outcome of the collapse of vowel quantity in spoken Latin was a neutralization, which surfaced as a general lengthening of stressed vowels, both in heavy and light syllables.

**Keywords:** historical phonology, Late Latin, vocalic isochrony, Roman grammarians, anti-uniformitarian principle

*in memory of Alberto Vårvaro*

“wir ziehen hieraus die Erklärung der Philosophie.  
Sie ist Bearbeitung der Begriffe”

(Herbart 1813:2)

### 1. Historical linguistics and the anti-uniformitarian principle

As put forward by Collingwood (1946: 223–224) “social orders are historical facts, and subject to inevitable changes, fast or slow. A positive science of mind will, no doubt, be able to establish uniformities and recurrences, but it can have no guarantee that the laws it establishes will hold good beyond the historical period from which its facts are drawn”. This warning sounds like an important *caveat* to a generalized application

of uniformitarianism, that principle defined by Hock (1991:630) as “the general processes and principles which can be noticed in observable history [...] applicable in all stages of language history”. Uniformitarianism, a source of heated discussions between gradualists and catastrophists within the subject of biological evolution, has often been pondered by historical linguists, as well. For instance, Lass (1997:24–32) made it a sheer neopositivist dogma, Labov (1994:24–25) diminished its importance, whilst Janda and Joseph (2005:37) recently reviewed it, talking – rightly so, in my opinion – of “informational maximalism”, that is “the utilization of all reasonable means to extend our knowledge of what might have been going on in the past, even though it is not directly observable [...] it is in fact more realistic just to say that we wish to gain a maximum of information from a maximum of potential sources”.

Even if uniformitarianism aims at a maximum of information from a maximum of potential sources, sources always have an historical and social collocation. The key point is that if a theory, no matter how general and satisfactory it may seem, accounts for almost all the sources, but not for *all* of them, then it must be questioned once again. Everything that the past delivers is important, especially if one takes into account the particular and microscopic social configuration of linguistic events in the remote past.<sup>1</sup> And between an unknown past (*ignotum*) not aligned with a known present (*notum*), our choice must be that of patient hermeneutics: from the unknown to the known and not necessarily the other way round.<sup>2</sup> Quoting Collingwood (1946:235) once again: “historical truth, so far as it is at all accessible to the historian, is accessible to him only because it exists ready made in the ready-made statements of his authorities. These statements are to him a sacred text whose value depends wholly on the unbrokenness of the tradition they represent. He must therefore on no account tamper with them. He must not mutilate them; he must not add to them; and, above all, he must not contradict them”.

In historical linguistics, data are mainly obtained from occasional findings; there is no majority rule, but, rather, each empirical datum (necessarily textual or reconstructive in nature) is subject to a specific interpretation connected also (but not exclusively) with the nature of the text and the socio-cultural context where it is found.<sup>3</sup> It is Andersen’s (2006:64) “historical level”, pertaining to the “language historians” whose approach “is predominantly idiographic, it is descriptive and interpretive” or, as we would prefer to define

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1. This approach can best be considered as micro-historical, according to the foundational work of Kracauer (1995:104–138).

2. On the relationships between the so-called *notum* and *ignotum* in historical linguistics, with special reference to the epigraphic data collected in the *Restsprachen*, see also Prosdocimi (2004:501–529).

3. On the reconstruction of socio-historical variables, together with a brief discussion of the scientific literature involved, see Mancini (2012); for a review of the first Italian contributions to historical socio-linguistics, see Mancini (2013). The anti-uniformitarian principle should not be confused with the catastrophist approach of the “punctuated equilibrium model” in comparative linguistics (Dixon 1997). See also the socio-historical approach to this issue in Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003:26–52).

them, the “linguistic historians” dealing with facts where “the agent’s purpose is central” (Anttila 1992: 18) and the explanations “exhibit *non-nomic* necessity” (Itkonen 2011: 7).

This is even more pressing when we are faced with what Janda and Joseph (2015: 18) call “garbage project’s raw data” – a term drawn from the archaeologist William Rathje – or, more simply, with “bad data”, as labelled by Labov (1994: 11). Such data can also be referred to as “dirty” data, that is, data of uncertain value or of difficult interpretation. Spoken Latin certainly belongs to this type of data. And grammatical testimonies are the typical benchmark for these types of facts, facts which often seem to be contradictory and difficult to interpret.

We are firmly convinced that the information protocols that can be acquired from the grammarians, especially if they are found in the so-called “third part” of the Roman treatises (Baratin & Desbordes 1986), the *vitia orationis*, if correctly interpreted, can convey perhaps faded but nonetheless reliable pictures of the “old-time synchrony” (Janda & Joseph 2005: 86).

Many recent studies demonstrate this reliance on such information, starting from Adams’ (2007, 2013) research on the grammarians and De Paolis’ (2010a; 2010b) essays on *scriptores rerum ortographicarum*. All writers, including the grammarians *de differentiis verborum* (Mancini 2005), help us to discover the synchronic conditions of the *non-standard* varieties of Latin, which would be otherwise unattainable, and clarify aspects of Pre-Romance Latin (Vainio 1999: 21–37). It is merely a matter of being able to listen to and understand with care the voices of the ancient grammarians and to place them within a coherent, overall picture. It is in this sense that I refer to “the use of the past to explain the past”.

The discussion is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the loss of vowel quantity in Latin, analysed in the light of the testimonies of Roman grammarians in Section 3. The mainstream perspective(s) are illustrated in Section 4, and an alternative hypothesis is put forward in Section 5, examined in Section 6 in light of vocalic isochrony in Late Latin, and further evidence is provided in Section 7. Finally, Section 8 draws the conclusions.

## 2. The *Quantitätskollaps* in Late Latin

We will first turn to recent studies of the progressive loss of contrastive vowel length in the spoken varieties of Latin, with the aim of drawing as homogeneous a picture as possible. We will start from the most recent interpretation – undoubtedly one of the most influential – found in the extensive chapter by Michele Loporcaro (2011a) devoted to “Syllable Segment and Prosody” in the first volume of the *Cambridge History of Romance Languages*.

Loporcaro’s (2011a) chapter gives a structural, and at the same time general, explanation of a rich collection of phenomena which typically characterise the diachronic development from spoken Latin to its Romance varieties. The chapter builds on a large body of important earlier work, referring especially to the author’s previous work

(Loporcaro 1997: 55–70). The author has now published a comprehensive synthesis by Oxford University Press with the title *Vowel Length from Latin to Romance* (Loporcaro 2015), where new materials from contemporary Italian dialects are presented and thoroughly inspected. In this book, the overall thesis is corroborated by important evidence and new arguments; yet, the second chapter, devoted to the metalinguistic sources, recalls the previous paths of interpretation.

Here we come immediately to the crucial point of method. A structured, all-encompassing explanation, to be persuasive, presupposes a qualitative (what we may term an “idiographic”) analysis of all the elements at one’s disposal, preferably leaving no element out. After such an analysis – and only after such an analysis – can a quantitative classification and an overall interpretation be implemented.

With regard to how such an ordering of methodological principles impacts the hypothesis of an early “Romance Quantity” (hereafter RQ) already structurally present in late Latin, we should note that there are two categories of records. These two levels are not recognized by Loporcaro (2011a, 2015) or many other researchers, who simply confine the data to a marginal, residual position, or, sometimes, merely do not refer to them at all. The two levels of data are as follows: (a) the grammatical testimonies (including, as we will see, those from the metricists); (b) the data obtained from meticulous research on the prosody of some compositions in the African area, passed on either through literary work or via inscriptions (see Mancini 2015).

The main theory at the basis of Loporcaro’s research (2011a, 2015) is well known: the collapse of vowel quantity in Latin, dating to the stage of Herman’s (1996: 57) “second dialectalization” (therefore starting at least from the 3rd century CE), became at its very beginning an allophonic re-distribution of segmental length in both stressed and unstressed syllables, respectively. In other words, during the Vulgar Latin period, this peculiar isochronic syllable structure typical of the RQ must have already been in existence. The core of this theory was first put forward by Harald Weinrich (1958: 12–42) in his *Phonologische Studien*, directly linking the *Quantitätskollaps* with syllable structure, even though Loporcaro’s (2011a) interpretation is different and more ambitious. As a matter of fact, he does not simply talk about syllable structure but argues for a general reconstruction of the phonological length from Latin to the Romance languages, taking into account all the features involved, from stress to phonotactic position of the vowel.

Thus, in syllable structures vowel length is distributed depending on the heavy vs. light nature of the syllable. This new syllabic isochronism caused, at the segment level, those vowels which originally were long in a closed stressed syllable to shorten and converge with the old, short vowels; conversely, in open stressed syllables all vowels lengthened, even those which were originally short (see (1)–(2)):

(1) V → V: / \_\_\_\_ ]  
           [+stress]

(2) V:C → VC / \_\_\_\_ ]  
           [+stress]



- (4) *barbarismus [...] fit per immutationem accentuum, ac si dicas 'Ceres' 'Ce' longa, cum brevis sit, et 'res' brevi, cum sit longa*  
 'a barbarism [...] arises through stress modification, as if you say 'Ceres' with a long 'Ce', whereas it is short, and 'res' with a short, while it is long'  
 (Plotius Sacerdos, *Artes grammaticae* 6, 451, 13–14 Keil) (3rd century CE)
- (5) [*barbarismus fit per transmutationem*] *temporis ut siquis 'deos' producta priore syllaba et correpta posteriore pronuntiet*  
 '[a barbarism arises through quantity replacement], as if anyone utters 'deos' lengthening the first syllable and shortening the second one'  
 (Aelius Donatus, *Ars maior* 4, 392, 21 Keil = 654, 6–7 Holtz; cfr. n. 7) (4th century CE)
- (6) *Itaque verbi gratia cum dixeris, 'cano', vel in versu forte posueris, ita ut vel tu pronuntians producas huius verbi syllabam primam, vel in versu eo loco ponas, ubi esse productam oportebat; reprehendet grammaticus, custos ille videlicet historiae, nihil aliud asserens cur hunc corripi oporteat, nisi quod hi qui ante nos fuerunt, et quorum libri exstant tractanturque a grammaticis, ea correpta, non producta usi fuerint*  
 'And so, for example, when you say *cano*, or put it in verse, in such a way to prolong its first syllable when you pronounce it or in such a place as to make it necessarily long, the grammarian will censure you; he, of course, the guardian of history, giving no other reason why this syllable should be contracted than that those who lived before us and whose books survive and are discussed by grammarians used it as a short syllable, not as a long one' (Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica* 2, 1, 1 (Transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 206–207; see also Adams 2013: 44) (4th–5th century CE)
- (7) [*per adiectionem sic fit*] *temporis, ut quidam dicunt 'piper' producta priore syllaba, cum sit brevis, quod vitium Afrorum familiare est*  
 '[a barbarism by addition arises], when some people say 'piper' lengthening the first syllable, while it is short, which error is typical of Africans'  
 (Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasmis* 5, 391, 3–4 Keil = 11, 3–4 Niedermann) (5th century CE)
- (8) *per inmutationem fiunt barbarismi sic [...]; temporis, ut si quis 'pices' dicens priorem extendat*  
 'barbarisms through replacement [...] of quantity, as if someone, saying 'pices', lengthens the first syllable'  
 (Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasmis* 5, 392, 18 Keil = 12, 2–3 Niedermann)
- (9) *per transmutationem fiunt barbarismi sic. [...] temporis, ut si quis 'pices' producta priore et correpta sequenti pronuntiet*  
 'barbarisms through transposition [...] of quantity, as if someone utters 'pices' lengthening the first syllable and shortening the following one'  
 (Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasmis* 5, 392, 25–25 Keil = 12, 12–14 Niedermann)
- (10) *per transmutationem [...] temporis, ut siquis 'deos' producta priore syllaba et correpta posteriore pronuntiet*  
 '(a barbarism) through transposition [...] of quantity, as if someone utters 'deos' lengthening the first syllable and shortening the second one'  
 (Iulianus Toletanus, *Excerpta, de barbarismo*, 5, 324, 19–20 Keil; cfr. n. 2) (7th century CE)

- (11) *non enim convenit 'deus' priore syllaba producta et correpta posteriore enuntiare*  
 'it is not convenient to pronounce 'deus' lengthening the first syllable and shortening  
 the second one' (Prisciana, *Anecdota Helvetica*, CLXXVI) (10th century CE ?)

On an empirical level, the following excerpt on metrical clausulae (*structurae*) used in prose is also relevant (Appendix, I):

- (12) [...] *quodsi dicat, hanc structuram se facere existimans: copiam esse ciborum, barbarismum fecerit. subtrahit enim tempus de molosso in prima syllaba et, dum structurae vult satisfacere, producit primam syllabam, ut dicat ciborum, cum 'ci' brevis sit. adiectione ergo temporis in pronuntiando facit barbarismum*  
 '[...] if he were to say *copiam esse ciborum* ('there is abundance of food'), he will commit a barbarism. In fact, he removes a quantity from the molossus in the first syllable and, when he wants to accomplish the clausula, lengthens the first syllable, uttering *ciborum*, although the 'ci' is short. Therefore he commits a barbarism in speech, by addition of quantity'  
 (Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasms* 5, 393,  
 10–21 Keil = 13, 15–14, 4 Niedermann) (5th century CE)

This excerpt couples with another one, often quoted, from Plotius Sacerdos taken from the final part of the 2nd book which represents a *gesonderte Überlieferung*, as described by De Nonno (1983: 387). This excerpt is mirrored, with just a few formal differences, in Pseudo-Probus' *De catholicis* (Appendix, II):

- (13) [...] *si non fuerit spondeo uel trochaeo post dactylum finita, ut primus ab oris et in quo meam voluntatem p(opulus) R(omanus) perspicere possit. sic enim versum heroicum hexametrum faciunt, quae sola versificatio est oratoribus devitanda*  
 '[...] as long as it is not concluded with a spondee or trochee after a dactyl, as in the case in *primus ab oris* and in *in quo meam voluntatem populus Romanus perspicere possit*. For these (patterns) produce a heroic hexameter (ending), which is the only metrical pattern that must be avoided by orators'  
 (Plotius Sacerdos, *Artes grammaticae*  
 6, 492, 20–27 Keil = Pseudo-Probus, *De catholicis*, 4, 7–14,  
 transl. Adams 2013: 46, see Adams 2007: 264) (3rd century CE)

However, despite the opinions on this matter found in the literature, Consentius' Excerpt (12) does not explain a current pronunciation with lengthening in open stressed syllables, but simply describes an *impromptu* expedient used, apparently, to comply with the *clausula* (in itself a barbarism) consisting of the sequence of a trochee (- U) and a molossus (- - -).

Plotius Sacerdos' passage (13), on which much has been written, is more controversial. At a first reading it would seem that the grammarian interpreted the clausula *perspicere possit* as consisting of a dactyl (therefore counting the stressed antepenult as long) and a trochee. This is also Adams' (1999: 117) interpretation, as well as Cocchia's (1919: 219) who commented correctly: "*ci è proprio di che far levar le berze*" ('there is enough to get one running like hell').



At any rate, as noted for the Consentius' excerpt, the example seems to be typical of an imperfect metrical technique, rather than a true example of the spoken language.<sup>4</sup>

With regards to this corpus of eight records, excluding (12) and (13), upon which I will not dwell and which are about clausulae, and (10) and (11), which are quite late and clearly based on (5), only (6) explicitly refers to an African localization. The others talk about a "barbarism" classified as social, rather than geographical, at least, according to the standard metalinguistic value assigned to the word "barbarism" by grammarians. Let us not forget that it was Gellius who reported on the progressive substitution of the label "rustic" with that of "barbarian":

- (14) *quod nunc autem "barbare" quem loqui dicimus, id vitium sermonis non barbarum esse, sed "rusticum" et cum eo vitio loquentes "rustice" loqui dictitabant. P. Nigidius in commentariis grammaticis: "rusticus fit sermo", inquit "si adspires perperam". Itaque id vocabulum, quod dicitur vulgo "barbarismus", qui ante divi Augusti aetatem pure atque integre locuti sunt, an dixerint, nondum equidem inveni*

'but the fault which we designate when we say now that anyone speaks *barbare*, or "outlandishly", they did not call "outlandish" but "rustic"; and they said that those speaking with that fault spoke "in a countrified manner" (= *rustice*). P. Nigidius, in his *Grammatical Notes*, says: "Speech becomes rustic, if you misplace the aspirates". Whether therefore those who before the time of the deified Augustus expressed themselves purely and properly used the word *barbarismus* (outlandishness), which is now common, I for my part have not yet been able to discover'

(Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13, 6, 2–4, transl. Rolfe 1927:427)

In Gellius *barbarismus*, according to what will later become the most common explanation, refers to the way of speaking of those who learnt standard Latin incorrectly: not only foreigners ("barbarians") speaking another language, but also those who spoke a substandard variety or "sub-substandard" (Varvaro 2014:49).<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. The mainstream positions in the *Quantitätskollaps* controversy

It should be borne in mind that Loporcaro's (2011a) view on the above mentioned excerpts is shared by the majority of scientific literature which preceded him, even though, it must be said, it is not always equally as clear.

Schuchardt (1868:43–44) was the first to link RQ on one side and grammatical *testimonia* on the other: "*die Afrikaner scheinen sie hauptsächlich durch Quantitätsfehler ausgezeichnet zu haben [...] danach haben sie am frühesten romanisch gemessen, d.h. betonte Vokale bei folgendem einfachen Konsonanten lang, unbetonte kurz gesprochen*".

4. See discussion in Mancini (2016:387–391), with a review of the scientific literature on barbarism, and see recent commentary in Zago (2017:131–156), with an interesting point of view on Consentius' interpretation of the well-known *quadripertita ratio*.

5. On the different values of Gellius' metalinguistic terms see now Mancini (2015:27–32).

This opinion led the way for other, similar views. Abbot (1909: 240) noted that in Consentius' Examples (7)–(9) the vowels affected by lengthening are short. However he did not draw all the possible structural conclusions. Following in Schuchardt's (1868) footsteps, Brück (1921: 576) sees in (7) a clear example of Proto-Romance lengthening, whilst Weinrich (1958: 24–25) uses (7) and (17, below) as good evidence of his theory on the early redistribution of syllabic lengths. In contrast, Haadsma and Nuchelmans (1963: 20) simply say that Consentius and Pompeius mention the *nouvelle quantité*, noting that in Gaul and Italy, the closing of the syllable would eventually cause even long vowels to shorten, whereas Acquati (1971: 158) notes: “perhaps Africa replaced, rather early on, Classical Latin quantity with a new type of quantity, one which is documented later in Romance languages, and for which stressed vowels in open syllable seem long”. Reichenkron (1965: 293) instead talks dispassionately about the “*Vernachlässigung der Quantität*” with regards to (7), to (17) and to Consentius 5, 392, 11 Keil on *ōrator*, in spite of canonical *ōrator*, but, in an immediately subsequent piece on the meter of African inscriptions, he explains that it is a case of a “*neue Quantität*” used to measure “*die betonte Kürze in freier Silbe lang, die unbetonte Länge als Kürze*”.

Closer to our times, Herman (1990: 229; see also Herman 1970: 38 on (4)) believed Consentius' and Augustine's evidence, i.e. (7) and (17), to be reliable and, with regards to the former, he did not mention the RQ explicitly but referred to it only implicitly: “*il existait une tendance plus sensible qu'ailleurs à allonger les brèves accentuées de la syllabe initiale (exemple piper de Consentius) et à abrégier les longues non accentuées (exemple orator de Consentius)*”. Pisani (1960: 167), on the other hand, quotes Consentius (7)–(9): “*in pīper colla prima vocale allungata abbiamo un esempio dell'allungamento che nei dialetti volgari [...] ha colpito le vocali accentate in sillaba aperta*”. Leumann (1977: 55) mentions Consentius' passage generically talking about lengthening: “*die betonten Vokale werden gleichmässig länger gesprochen als alle Vokale in anderer Stellung; also der Akzent allein, offenbar ein im Wesen seiner Artikulation veränderter Akzent, bedingt oder bewirkt Vokallänge*”. Sommer-Pfister (1977: 106) talks about the new “*Quantitätsunterschiede, die nur von den Betonungsverhältnissen abhängen*” and quotes (4), (7)–(9). Wartburg (1950: 81), discussing (7), believes that “*der Grammatiker Consentius bezeugt uns im 5. Jahr. eine neue Etappe in der Entwicklung der lateinischen Vokale. Er sagt 'quidam dicunt piper producta priore syllaba, cum sit brevis', das heisst: pīper, dessen ī zu ē geworden war, verlängert seinen Tonvokal. Dieser Passus bezeugt also, dass im Allgemeinen der Tonvokal in freier Stellung gelängt wird*”. Later, Bonfante (1999: 86) quotes Consentius as a source for the possible African origin of the “lengthening of vowels in open syllables” (see also Bonfante 1987: 642–643 with reference to (7), and (17), (18), (23) below, who talks about “new quantity, the quantity of old Italian and French”). Conversely Bonfante (1956: 354) remains generic, whilst Maltby (2012: 731–732), in a recent paper, simply identifies in excerpts from Consentius (7)–(9), Iulianus Toletanus (10) and Augustine (17) cases of “lengthening of a short stressed vowel in open position”. Finally, Lupinu (2000: 19a–20a) on (7) (i.e. Consentius' *pīper*) accepts Loporca's (2011a; 2015) interpretation, and, whilst regarding an excerpt from Augustine (17), he simply says that it is evidence of the de-phonologization of the short vs. long opposition.

A neutral position towards possible explanations is maintained by Seelmann (1885: 106), who quotes Consentius' (7)–(9) and Augustine's (17) as evidence of "Quantitätsstörungen", Lindsay (1894: 129), Bonioli (1962: 5note), Tekavčić (1980: 13–14), who discusses (7), (17–18), Giannini & Marotta (1989: 273) on (5), (7) (17–18), and Kramer (2007: 25note). We must add also Crevatin (1992: 30), who believes the "known evidence of the grammarians" on the alleged African insensitivity to length to be simply "inconclusive".

The excerpts at issue, on the contrary, are considered of little importance by those who see in the RQ a relatively recent phenomenon. For instance, Schürr (1970: 5–6) drastically minimizes the value of (7) and (17): "*Il faut réduire ces témoignages à leur juste valeur. Ils parlent de la confusion dans l'observation des quantités qui régnait parmi les Africains parlant latin, ni plus ni moins. [...] ne sauraient donc être interprétés dans le sens d'un allongement général des voyelles accentuées libres [...]*".

As already mentioned, Schürr's (1970) position is completely opposite to Loporcaro's (2011a, 2015), according to whom the diphthongization due to the RQ was general during the transition, disappearing in the "peripheral" regions. The idea that behind the aforementioned judgments of the grammarians (never quoted in their totality, nonetheless), that there was no vowel lengthening is supported also by Castellani (1991: 21), who quotes (7) and (17), and by Fanciullo (1992: 177–178), who, with regards to (7), (17)–(18), agrees with Schürr's (1970) "more balanced position". On similar views, see Mancini (2001: 321).

We will instead discuss Straka's (1979), Lüdtke's (2005) and Adams' (2013) views below.

The review of the opinions in the literature clarifies the situation well: the use of excerpts from grammatical testimonies is often cursory and, for the most part, superficial; they are never complete and their interpretation derives from the dischronic model supported each time by the author alone, rather than from a close analysis of the excerpts. Basically the excerpts are never the true starting point.

## 5. An alternative interpretation of the *testimonia*: Lengthening and shortening both in closed and open syllables

Compared to those already mentioned, however, there is another group of *testimonia* which delineates a different phenomenology: the lengthening and shortening both in closed and open syllables. Loporcaro's (2011a; 2015) criticism of these passages is hardly conclusive.

But before proceeding further, we should note how most of the scholars completely neglect two relevant excerpts. The first one is from Consentius:

- (15) *nam barbarismum non uno modo in una dictione posse fieri, ut si quis hoc ipsum quod diximus ossua producta priore syllaba pronuntiet. erit enim barbarismus per adiectionem temporis in prima syllaba et per adiectionem litterae in secunda syllaba*

‘actually, a barbarism can occur in a single word but not in only one way, as if anyone were to pronounce, what we say *ossua*, lengthening the first syllable; in this case, there will be a barbarism by the addition of time in the first syllable, and by the addition of a letter in the second syllable (scil. *ossua*, with <u>, instead of *ossa*)’

(Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasmis* 5, 396, 32–33 Keil = 20, 3–7 Niedermann) (5th century CE)

The passage, which did not escape Adams’ (2013: 47–48) attention, refers to the lengthening of an original short vowel in a closed syllable, exactly the same occurrence recalled by Sacerdos in a second excerpt, which has been equally neglected by the scholars, including Loporcaro (2011a, 2015).

- (16) *barbarismus est vitiosa dictio unius verbi, qui fit modis octo: per productionem, ac si dicas p̄ernix <et> per producās, quae correpta est*

‘barbarism is an erroneous pronunciation of a single word, which occurs in eight ways: by lengthening, as if you utter *p̄ernix* and lengthen *per*, which is short’

(Plotius Sacerdos, 6, 451, 4–6 Keil) (3rd century CE)

These two excerpts, as a whole, hint, without a shadow of a doubt, at such a confusion over vowel quantity even in closed syllables, as to make the assignment of the feature at issue unpredictable. There is a well-known excerpt from Augustine which matches perfectly Consentius’ (15) and Sacerdos’ (16) conclusions:

- (17) *cur pietatis doctorem pigeat imperitis loquentem ‘ossum’ potius quam ‘os’ dicere, ne ista syllaba non ab eo quod sunt ‘ora’ intellegatur, ubi Afrae aures de correptione vocalium vel productione non iudicant?*

‘why should a teacher of piety when speaking to the uneducated have regrets about saying *ossum* (‘bone’) rather than *os* in order to prevent that monosyllable (i.e. *ōs* ‘bone’) from being interpreted as the word whose plural is *ora* (i.e. *ōs* ‘mouth’) rather than the word whose plural is *ossa* (i.e. *ōs*), given that African ears show no judgement in the matter of the shortening of vowels or their lengthening?’ (Aurelius Augustinus,

*De doctrina Christiana* 4, 10, 24, transl. Adams 2013: 48) (4th–5th century CE)<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, the nominative *ōs* is a closed syllable. Certainly, as Adams (2013: 50) rightly points out, the pronunciations discussed are not solely confined to Roman Africa. We would like to take this opportunity to mention that nobody has ever noticed that the example of the minimal pair *ōs* ~ *ōs* used by Augustine must have been a canon (another “flag-word” as I defined them elsewhere, see Mancini 2001: 316–317). The numerous excerpts where grammarians are concerned about differentiating one from the other supports this (see Pseudo-Probus, *De catholicis* 4, 18, 31–35 Keil; Servius 4, 452, 24–26 Keil; Priscian, *Partitiones XII versuum Aen.* 3, 474, 3–6 Keil; *Ars Palaemonis* 5, 538, 35–539, 6 Keil; *Fragmentum Bobiense de nomine* 5, 561, 10–12 Keil; Pseudo-Augustinus, *Regulae* 5, 500, 6–9 Keil; *De dubiis nominibus* 5, 585, 15–19 Keil).

6. The cultural and linguistic context of this famous passage has been examined in Mancini (2001: 309–311).

The phenomena at issue, by removing the opposition between short and long vowels, could produce inverted hypercorrections with the shortening in open syllables. The assignment of the feature, therefore, was really unpredictable. Another rather rich set of excerpts supports this hypothesis. Consider the following:

- (18) *plerumque male pronuntiamus et facimus vitium, ut brevis syllaba longo tractu sonet aut iterum longa brevior sono: siqui velit dicere 'Ruoma', aut si velit dicere 'aequus' pro eo quod est 'equus'*

'often we use a bad pronunciation and we make a mistake, when a short syllable sounds long or, conversely, a long syllable sounds short: as if anyone wanted to say *Ruoma*, or *aequus* instead of *equus*'

(Pompeius, *Commentum in artem Donati* 5, 285, 5–9 Keil) (5th century CE)

Loporcaro (2015: 23), discussing my previous interpretation of this passage (see Mancini 1994), simply maintained that this was an isolated testimony, whereas “it is undeniable that such testimonies [*scil.* our (6)–(11)] mostly report O[pen]S[yllable]L[engthening]” (emphasis mine). In Loporcaro (2011a) the passage was completely ignored. What I would like to propose, rather, is that we are looking at a crucial datum which invalidates Loporcaro’s (2015: 23) formulation.

Today, some twenty years after my original observations on this issue, I am inclined to accept the hypothesis that Zago (2013) put forward in her very recent and rather brilliant work. There Zago (2013: 5–11) maintains that the written form <*Ruoma*>, accepted by many publishers (including Keil) and itself the source of considerable misunderstanding at an interpretative level, can be simply explained as the corruption of the original <*Rōma*>, with the *brakhú*, the semicircle written above. On the other hand, Filipponio (2006: 54) demonstrated that the pronunciation of the transcribed “diphthong” <*ae*> was clearly bimoraic and that, therefore, the opposition was by then between /ε:/ (in the written “flag-word” <*aequus*>) and /ε/ (the latter “*simpliciter sonat*” according to Pompeius 5, 102, 6 Keil, in the written “flag-word” <*equus*>). There seems to be no doubt concerning the interpretation of the excerpt.<sup>7</sup>

Now, Pompeius’ excerpt is a fact; a fact which must be taken into account as with all the others and as such it requires an explanation. Loporcaro (1997: 66) talks about *testis unus* but, actually, this is hardly the case.

Actually, the aforementioned Pompeius’ excerpt is not an isolated case. There are three more excerpts, the third of which, found in the *De barbarismis et soloecismis* by Pseudo-Victorinus, has eluded everyone.

Let us begin with an excerpt from Servius:

- (19) *barbarismus autem dicitur eo, quod barbari prave locuntur, ut siqui dicat Rōmam pro Roma. [...] fit autem barbarismus principaliter modis duobus, pronuntiatione et scripto: <pronuntiatione>, si aut naturaliter longas syllabas breviter proferamus, ut Romam, aut si naturaliter breves producimus, ut rosam*

7. On this passage see now Zago (2017: 146–149), where the author offers a new hypothesis about the pair <*aequus*>~<*equus*>.

‘moreover it is called a barbarism, for barbarians speak badly, as if someone says *Rōmam* instead of *Roma*. There are two main types of barbarism, i.e. in speech and writing: in speech, if we either pronounce short syllables which are long by nature as in *Romam*, or we pronounce long syllables which are short by nature as in *rosam*’

(Servius, *In Donati artem maiorem* 4, 444, 4–14 Keil) (4th–5th century CE)

Even in this case, Zago’s (2013: 10) hermeneutic explanation accounts for the meaning of the excerpt. In (19), both in the first instance (where Zago, with excellent palaeographic arguments suggests the reading <*Rōma pro Roma*>, again with the *brakhú* above the letter <*o*>, instead of <*Ruma*>, transmitted by the Vossianus), and in the second, we are facing unequivocal evidence of a double incorrect assignment of the quantitative feature under stress and in an open syllable: the lengthening of an old, short vowel (*rōsa*) and the shortening of an old, long vowel (*Rōma*). Loporcaro (2015: 23–24) argues that this could be an “*exemplum fictum*”, but clearly this is not an explanation.

Another excerpt, which Loporcaro (2015) keeps silent about, is the following:

- (20) *detrahimus accentum, si velis dicere Róma, cum tractim debeas dicere: longiorem enim illum accentum ad brevem traxisti*

‘we remove an accent, as if you were to say *Róma*, whereas you should pronounce it slowly (i.e. with a long accent)’

(Pompeius, *Commentum in artem Donati* 5, 285, 30–32 Keil) (5th century CE)

The remark amplifies a generic reference in Donatus’s *Ars*, which, “*pour un désir de faire bref*” (Holtz 1981: 144), was never supported by any evidence (Aelius Donatus, 4, 392, 22–24 Keil = 654, 7–9 Holtz: “*quorum exempla ultro se offerent, si quis inquirat*”), unlike with other types of barbarisms.

I remain of the opinion that this *testimonium* refers to possible shortenings, not only because it cites once again an atypical pronunciation of the toponym /‘ro:ma/, but also because the expression *longior accentus* (compared to the usual *tractim*, in turn opposed to *cursim*, see also Zago 2013: 6; 2017: 155) could refer to the intrinsic feature of vowel quantity.

Lastly, I am now able to add to these examples another taken from an excerpt of Victorinus edited by Max Niedermann:

- (21) *quid [scil. barbarismus] temporis? ut si quis dicat repono producta prima correptaque media*

‘what is (a barbarism) of time? as if anyone utters *repono*, lengthening the first syllable and shortening the following one’

(Victorinus, *Fragmentum de barbarismis et soloecismis* 36, 22–23, Niedermann) (4th century CE)

## 6. Vocalic isochrony in Late Latin

Let us attempt to summarize the value of the texts analysed so far. A careful examination of the grammarians' judgments helps us to draw a different picture from that which emerges from mainstream interpretations. Apart from the excerpts on *clausulae* used in (12) and (13), there are three certainties:

- a. Eight passages show lengthening in open stressed syllables, (4)–(11), among which only (7) is explicitly attributed to African Latin, with (6) probably also belonging to African Latin, since it occurs in Augustine. The remaining examples are cited without any geolinguistic connotation, whilst (10) and (11), as mentioned above, are simply a reference to (5).
- b. Three passages refer to lengthening also in closed syllables (15)–(17), one of which, i.e. (17), can probably be localized to Africa, in Augustine; the other two, (15)–(16) have no geographical attribution.
- c. Four passages (18)–(21) show shortening of long vowels in open syllables, but none of them has a geographical attribution.

All the testimonies date between the 3rd and 5th century CE. The records are, so to speak, asymmetrical, since they lack any mention of shortening of long vowels in closed syllables. This, however, is not a surprise, because, on the one hand, it is a case of collocation, which is metrically irrelevant to vowel quantity, and, on the other hand, because the percentage of closed syllables with long vowels ("super-heavy") is very low in Latin, as both Kiss (1971: 13–14) and Loporcaro (2015: 11–12) have correctly observed.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, it is possible to draw a first conclusion. And it is no minor one, compared to the prevailing interpretations of this collection of excerpts.

The overall evidence does not support at all an early appearance of the RQ, but, rather, a simple phonemic neutralization between short and long stressed vowels ("vocalic isochrony"). This neutralization would hint at a "systemic" opposition between stressed and unstressed syllables exclusively. In stressed syllables, from the "normal" and phonetic point of view (in Coseriu's (1973: 142–152) terminology), a general lengthening of the vowels takes place, regardless of the syllabic structure; symmetrically, in unstressed syllables, a general shortening of the vowels takes place, regardless of the syllabic structure. Concerning this, let us recall a well-known excerpt from Marius Victorinus, where the traditional notion of mechanical *ictus* is placed side by side with what Nicolau (1930: 45, 50–56) called "vocalic *ictus*" (for the grammarians' *excerpta* on *ictus* see Mancini 2016: 362–372) with the explicit reference to the culminative effects of lexical stress:

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8. The point has been recently underlined by Marotta (2017: 68); for a new in-depth study of inscriptive data, see Marotta & De Felice (forthcoming).

- (22) *arsis igitur et thesis quas Graeci dicunt, ... id est sublatio et positio, significant pedis motum. Est enim arsis sublatio pedis sine sono, thesis positio pedis cum sono; item arsis elatio temporis, soni, vocis, thesis depositio et quaedam contractio syllabarum*  
 ‘therefore, the Greek terms *arsis* and *thesis*, namely upward and downward beats, mean foot tapping. In fact, *arsis* is lifting the foot without any sound, and *thesis* is putting down the foot with sound; likewise, *arsis* means raising of quantity, sound, voice, and *thesis* falling and, so to speak, shortening of syllables  
 (Marius Victorinus, 6, 40, 14–16 Keil) (4th century CE)

Sometimes there could be cases of hypercorrection, which involved the shortening of originally long vowels in open syllables, see (18)–(21). Notice that only the existence of vocalic isochronism could presuppose these forms of hypercorrection. In fact, if the RQ rule applied, within a very predictable pattern of syntagmatic distribution of syllabic quantity and its consequent shortening of long vowels in closed syllable and lengthening of short vowels in open syllable, the shortening of old, long vowels in open syllables would not make sense. Those examples, in fact, seem to falsify Loporcaro’s (2011a, 2015) and many others’ structural reconstruction.

The phenomenology herewith reconstructed presupposes that, at least between the second half of the 2nd century CE (Gellius’ testimony) and the 5th century CE (Augustine, Consentius), the neutralization of the quantitative feature of stressed vowels was quite widespread in Romània.

The opposition between stressed and unstressed vowels (regardless of the syllabic structure) was clearly based, from an acoustic point of view, on a segmental length perceptibly different in the two syntagmatic positions. Straka (1979) and Lüdtkke (2005) seem to be only mildly convinced by this interpretation, which, in our opinion, emerges clearly and forcefully from the materials examined so far. Straka (1979: 183) writes: “*en latin parlé dont l’accent dynamique était sans aucun doute aussi très forte, l’allongement des voyelles accentuées devait être particulièrement sensible [...]. L’accent allonge plus ou moins la voyelle non seulement en syllabe libre, mais aussi en syllabe entravée...*”

Lüdtkke (2005: 201–202) is more or less of the same opinion: “*als dieser [scil. der spontane, frühkindliche Erwerb der Unterscheidung von Kurz- und Langvokalen] allmählich ausblieb, entstand eine neue Situation, weil die meisten Sprecher/Hörer nun im Einzelfall nicht mehr genau wussten, ob ein gegebener Vokal in offener Silbe lang oder kurz gelesen war. Alle betonten Vokale waren nun in geläufiger Aussprache gleichermassen lang und alle unbetonten kurz*”.

The closest and, at the same time, most relevant case which can be quoted in this regard is that of the Italian language. As is known “vowel quantity in Italian is determined by various factors: only stressed vowels can be long [...]. All the other vowels, including those under stress in monosyllables and oxytone words ending either with a vowel or with a consonant are short” (Muljačić 1972: 105).

This binary definition, impeccable at the phonological level, overshadows rather interesting data at the acoustic level which Loporcaro (2015: 65–75) himself has thoroughly examined; for interesting dialect data, which Loporcaro (2015: 80–226) has detected in many previous works, which is also the core of the book.



Bertinetto (1981:79) had already stated in no uncertain terms that vowel duration in Italian represents the most stable acoustic *pendant* of lexical stress: “the achievement of stress in Italian seems mainly entrusted, at the acoustic level, to a greater duration of the stressed vowel” (see also the literature review in Calamai 2004: 211–217).

A study by Farnetani & Kori (1982) confirms these data. In the study it is demonstrated that the vowel in stressed syllables, either light or heavy, is always longer than in unstressed syllables. In fact, if the stressed vowel varies, in its average values, between 100–150 ms for speaker LC, and between 98–144 ms for speaker GG, the unstressed vowels vary respectively between 61–83 ms for LC and between 49–80 ms for GG. Ultimately, under equal conditions, the length of the unstressed vowel is half that of the stressed vowel. The lowest average value reached by a stressed vowel (in the oxytones) is nevertheless systematically longer than the highest average value in unstressed vowels.

As a matter of fact, the position of the vowel nucleus in a syllable under stress is undoubtedly significant in Italian, as, *ceteris paribus*, the unstressed vowels are certainly shorter than their stressed counterparts. In contrast, especially in connected speech and aside from occurrences of a pragmatic nature, the dispersion space of stressed vowels is quite wide due, evidently, also to the redundancy of the difference between [V] and [V:] *vis-à-vis* the syllabic structure. MacCrary Kambourakis’ (2007: 117) experiments also seem to confirm this scenario: “syllable structure is not implicated in this phenomena” [*scil.* in the average duration of vowels] (see also Dell’Aglia, Bertinetto & Agonigi 2002; Bertinetto, Dell’Aglia & Agonigi 2008). It does not matter here, if “the issue is whether these phonetic facts have to be encoded in the phonology”, as Loporcaro (2015: 71) points out, perhaps correctly. It is sufficient to remark that what occurs in spoken Italian looks very similar to what occurred in spoken Latin.

## 7. Augustine’s *De musica* and the stressed syllables

What I am claiming is that what happens today in standard Italian corresponds, in our interpretation of the entire corpus of ancient metalinguistic evidence, to what happened in the Pre-Romance stage in most parts of Romània. It will be necessary to start from this synchronic *status* of syllabic structures and their corresponding vowel nuclei to understand the next development of Romance vocalism. Vocalic isochronism, ultimately, did not exclude lengthening in stressed position, regardless of syllabic structure. From this point of view, the vocalic isochronism of the Western and Eastern peripheries of Romània (Daco- and Ibero-Romance) turns out to be crucial for any diachronic reconstruction.

The thesis herewith presented, at least with reference to some of the testimonies cited, seems to be shared by Adams (2007), who is the only other author, aside from Loporcaro (2011a, 2015), who has conducted an in-depth analysis on the grammatical judgments.

In his volume *Social Variation and the Latin Language*, Adams (2013) once again looks at African Latin, building upon his previous work in *The Regional Diversification of Latin* (2007). Yet, the nature of his comments seems to change radically.

Actually, Adams' (1999) first comments were extremely cautious from the point of view of critical examination. In any case, it is not possible to say that he openly views Consentius and Augustine as the obvious supporters of the new RQ, either in 2007 or in 2013.

With reference to (6) (*cāno* for *cāno* in Augustine), Adams (2007:261) notes: “the tendency hinted at here (it is made more explicit in the passages shortly to be discussed) is for the stress accent to effect lengthening of short stressed vowels”; furthermore, in reference to (17), about the lexical pair *ōs* vs *ōs*, Adams (2007:261) writes: “Augustine suggests that uneducated Africans (note *imperitis*) would not be able to differentiate the two terms because they cannot distinguish short and long vowels. In both terms the *o* is under accent. If the stress accent lengthened a short stressed vowel, *ōs* ‘bone’ would be indistinguishable from *ōs* ‘mouth’”.

Adams' (2007:262–263) opinion here is that (17) hints at a merger of quality of the Sardinian type:<sup>9</sup> “the distinction of quality as well of length must have been lost in Africa also if the two words could be confused, and that would suggest that the vowel system was of Sardinian type, at least on the back-vowel axis”. However, no conclusion is drawn about the syllabic structure of the graphic minimal pair <*os*> ‘mouth’ ~ <*os*> ‘bone’. Then, the passages of Consentius (7) and Pompeius (18) are cited, but, once again, Adams (2007:264) does not emphasize the issue of the syllabic contour and notices only that the two grammarians talk about “*the role of the stress accent in undermining phonemic distinctions of vowel length*”.

Things sound slightly different in Adams (2013), who, with reference to (6), seems to be convinced by Loporcaro's (2011a:53) argument, that is explicitly quoted. His comment is almost identical to the one of Adams (2007), but he adds that the lengthening of /a/ in *cano* is due to the effect of the stress accent on the short vowels “or, at least, those in open syllables”. Accordingly, the passage (7) in Consentius is now considered perfectly in line with that of Augustine (17), testifying to the RQ.

Moreover, Adams (2013:47) reviews the Excerpts (4) in Sacerdos, (5) in Aelius Donatus and (8)–(9) in Consentius. Interestingly, he quotes (15) in Consentius, where we find *ōssua*, in spite of *ōssua*, and rightly observes: “here Consentius envisages lengthening of a stressed vowel in a closed syllable, and this suggests that at this period grammarians were conscious of a tendency of some speakers to lengthen stressed vowels, whether they were in open or closed syllables”.

On (17) (*ōs* for *ōs* in Augustine), which is clearly connected with (15), Adams (2013:48) finally remarks: “Augustine suggests that uneducated Africans (*imperitis*) would not be able to differentiate the two terms because they cannot distinguish short

9. It is a well-known fact that the available evidence argues for a close similarity between the vowel system of African Latin and the Sardinian one (see Weinrich 1958:24; Lausberg 1976:204; Fanciullo 2002:178–180; Adams 2007:262; Loporcaro 2011b:113; Loporcaro 2015:49).

and long vowels. The argument seems to be as follows. In both terms the *o* is under accent. If the stress accent lengthened a short stressed vowel, *ös* ‘bone’ would be indistinguishable from *ös* ‘mouth’ (with both having a long vowel).”

Adams (2013: 48) correctly points out that the amount of these *testimonia* do not allow any direct conclusion. At least, this is a positive premise in favour of our thesis.

As is known, the only writer who often “supported” the grammarians’ evidence (he himself in part a grammarian) on the issue of the collapse of vowel quantity in late Latin was Augustine. There are also numerous excerpts from grammatical treatises which confirm the objective impossibility to foresee and to assign vowel quantity, especially in open syllables (see Servius, 4, 423, 33–35 Keil; Sergius 4, 522, 24–26 Keil, with special attention to the initial syllable Sergius, 4, 522, 8–9 Keil; Pompeius 5, 106, 30–31 Keil; Maximus Victorinus 6, 231, 1–3 Keil and 6, 242, 20–24 Keil). This outcome is well known and we will not dwell on it in this paper.

The excerpts from Augustine, however, deserve a more thoughtful commentary, as they substantiate the idea we have been developing. We may recall that, in a famous Excerpt (17) quoted earlier, Augustine remarked: “*Afrae aures de correptione vocalium vel productione non iudicant*”. I shall reiterate once more that another excerpt from Augustine, one which is often cited on the distinction between *ös* ‘mouth’ and *ös* ‘bone’, is not relevant to our discussion, as it obviously deals with the correct reading of the written segment <*os*>:

- (23) *non est absconditum os meum a te, quod fecisti in abscondito. Os suum dicit; quod vulgo dicitur ossum, Latine os dicitur. Hoc in Graeco invenitur. Nam possemus hic putare os esse, ab eo quod sunt ora; non os correpte, ab eo quod sunt ossa*

‘My frame (*os*) was not unseen by you when I was made secretly; *os suum* (‘his frame’), he says; what the people say is *ossum*, in ordinary Latin *os*. This may be confirmed in the Greek version. In fact, we could also think that the word here is *os* (‘mouth’), whence the plural *ora*, and not *os* with a short syllable, whence the plural *ossa*’

(Aurelius Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 138: 20)

Hermann Koller (1981: 266) reaches the conclusion that Augustine was talking exclusively about the balance of vowel quantities (“vocalic isochrony”) in open syllables and that “*die Zeitdauer geschlossener Silben unterscheidet sich wohl noch von der offener Silben*”. He establishes this claim by going over all the excerpts in the second book of the *De musica*, where Augustine talks about the phonemic deletion of quantity. One of the most interesting passages is the brief dialogue between teacher and student which confirms the persistence of quantity in the spoken language:

- (24) *T. Age iam, saltem illud eloquere, utrum tu ipse per te nunquam animadverteris in locutione nostra alias syllabas raptim et minime diu, alias autem productius et diutius enuntiari. S. Negare non possum non me ad ista enim surdum fuisse*

‘T(eacher) Well, then, tell me whether you yourself, by your own observation, have ever noticed that some syllables are enunciated very rapidly and briefly, but others more slowly and in a longer time. S(tudent) It is certainly true I have not been unaware of (lit. deaf to) such things’

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 1, 1, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 206)

This excerpt shows sufficiently that in the language the teacher (that is, Augustine) spoke was an obvious and noticeable “*syllabarum brevium longarumque distantia*” as mentioned above. Banniard (1995:302–304) is right to underline this: the perception of quantitative opposition had not at all disappeared; what had changed, we argue, was the distribution of short and long syllables and the prosodic structure of the language, even though, later on, Banniard (1995) himself endorses the RQ hypothesis.

This rhythmical distinction (*distantia*), different from the old one, could correspond to the standard sequence of syllables marked by stress prominence and, consequently, by vowel length vs. unstressed short syllables.

In parallel, Augustine cleverly identifies two language registers with regards to syllabic quantity: one based on the old way (“*inveterata consuetudo*”), therefore that of the everyday spoken language; the other based on pre-established authority (“*praeiudicata auctoritas*”). In the former the ignorance of the old syllabic quantity (“*istarum syllabarum imperitia*”) dominates, as reported in the excerpt below (Appendix, III):

- (25) [...], *syllabarum brevium longarumque distantiam*; [...] *ut ad omnia nos ratio potius perducat, quam inveterata consuetudo, aut praeiudicata cogat auctoritas. Ita plane malle me, non modo ipsa ratio, sed istarum etiam syllabarum imperitia (quid enim fateri dubitem?) impellit. [...] alias syllabas raptim et minime diu, alias autem productius et diutius enuntiari. Negare non possum non me ad ista enim surdum fuisse*  
 ‘[...] the difference between long and short syllables; [...] in order to have reason bring us to all these conclusions rather than having inveterate habit or the authority of another’s judgment force us. Not only reason, but also inexperience – I might as well admit it – in matters of syllables certainly leads me to prefer a radical beginning. [...] some syllables are enunciated very rapidly and briefly, but others more slowly and in a longer time. It is certainly true I have not been unaware of (lit. deaf to) such things’  
 (Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 1, 1, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002:206)

The notion of the old quantity is entrusted to the second register, as confirmed in a passage of the 5th book (Appendix, IV):

- (26) [...] *non enim ut in producenda corripiente syllaba non nisi auctoritatem veterum hominum quaerimus*  
 ‘In fact, by lengthening or shortening a syllable, we do not only require the ancients’ authority’  
 (Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 5, 5, 10, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002:206)

The linguistic difference between short and long syllables is, for Augustine, something other than musical rhythm, other than that “meter” which gives pleasure as long as the sequential rules of long and short are followed. In other words, we can abide by the meter, even if we ignore the original quantity of the syllables, a quantity which was known exclusively by grammarians, the “guardians of tradition”, as shown by the excerpt below (Appendix, V):

- (27) [...] *reprehendet grammaticus, custos ille videlicet historiae, nihil aliud asserens cur hunc corripere oporteat, nisi quod hi qui ante nos fuerunt, et quorum libri exstant tractanturque a grammaticis, ea correpta, non producta usi fuerint. [...]. At vero musicae ratio, ad quam dimensio ipsa vocum rationabilis et numerositas pertinet, non curat nisi ut corripiatur vel producat syllaba, quae illo vel illo loco est secundum rationem mensurarum suarum [...]*

‘[...] the grammarian will censure you; he, of course, the guardian of history, giving no other reason why this syllable should be contracted than that those who lived before us and whose books survive and are discussed by grammarians used it as a short syllable, not as a long one. [...] On the contrary, the reason of music, whose province is the rational and numerical measure of sounds, takes care only that the syllable in this or that place be contracted or prolonged according to the rationale of its measures [...]

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 1, 1, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 206–207)

The overlapping of the prosodic structure of spoken language (by now far from the old sequence of short and long syllables of the classical tradition) and the metrical structure takes place there, where the verb *cāno* is placed in a tempo forte (“*in versu eo loco ponas, ubi esse productam oportebat*”).

On an empirical level Augustine, aside from (24) (= 6) with *cano*, offers another example of the possible discrepancy between the spoken language rhythm and the traditional rhythm. This is illustrated in the passage below (Appendix, VI), which should have received much more attention:

- (28) [...] *Si quis ergo in versu, quo audito delectaris, eo loco quo ratio eiusdem versus non postulat, vel producat syllabas, vel corripiat, num eodem modo delectari potes? Immo audire hoc sine offensione non possum. [...] dimensio quaedam numerorum delectet, qua perturbata delectatio illa exhiberi auribus non potest. [...] quid intersit, utrum dicam, Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris: an qui primis ab oris. [...] idem sonat. [...] primis autem, ambae producendae sunt: sed ego ultimam earum corripui; ita nihil fraudis passae sunt aures tuae. [...] et illam syllabam quam, ne tuae aures offenderentur, corripui, producā, ut grammatici iubent: [...] Nunc vero negare non possum, nescio qua soni deformitate me offensum. [...]*

‘[...] If, then, someone, in a verse which delighted you in hearing it, should lengthen or shorten the syllables contrary to the rationale of the verse, you can’t enjoy it in the same way, can you? On the contrary, hearing it is offensive. [...] you enjoy a certain measuring out of numbers in the sound you say pleases you and which when disturbed cannot give you that pleasure. [...] what differences does it make whether I say *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris* or *qui primis ab oris*. [...] Both sound the same to me [...] And in *primis* both ought to be long, but I shortened the last one. So your ears were right. [...] the syllable I shortened, not to offend your ears, I shall lengthen, as the grammarians order: [...] No, I can’t deny I am disturbed by a sort of deformity of sound. [...]

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De Musica*, 2, 2, 2, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 207–209)

According to the prosodic structure of the spoken language, Augustine in the first case pronounces *quī primūs āb ōris* (the final position of the hexameter is irrelevant, as is known); in the second case *quī primīs āb ōris*, by uttering a “barbarism” “*per*

*detractionem temporis*”, as Consentius would have it, therefore by pronouncing *prīmīs* instead of the expected *prīmīs*. The student does not notice any difference from a metrical point of view nor does he know if the ending of the plural ablative should contain an intrinsically long vowel. It is exactly as if the “vulgar” *cāno* had been placed in a tempo forte of the verse. But when Augustine, breaking the meter, pronounces *quī prīmīs āb ōrīs*, then the student notices it and gets annoyed.

## 8. Epilogue: Robin G. Collingwood and the historical “bad data”

The overall picture which emerges from the metalinguistic testimonies allows us to formulate an alternative hypothesis to the macro-structural thesis on the RQ, which today is part of mainstream Romance Linguistics. The very first outcome of the collapse of vowel quantity in spoken Latin was a neutralization, which surfaced as a general lengthening of stressed vowels, both in heavy and light syllables, a structural representation still encoded in the conservative Western and Eastern varieties of Romania.

This alternative interpretation can be derived only by working on all the available and scattered documents, which the distant past has delivered us, like the wreckage of a ship landed ashore. What we need to do, to paraphrase Collingwood (1946: 235), is: “not to mutilate them; not to add to them; and, above all, not to contradict them”. The past helps us to explain the past, without the need for that which is known (*notum*) to prevail unilaterally over the unknown (*ignotum*). Once more in Collingwood’s (1939: 86) words: “knowledge advances by proceeding not ‘from the known to the unknown’, but from the ‘unknown’ to the ‘known’. Obscure subjects, by forcing us to think harder and more systematically, sharpen our wits and thus enable us to dispel the fog of prejudice and superstition in which our minds are often wrapped when we think about what is familiar to us”.

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## Appendix

### I (= 12)

*qui structuram congruam non facit, cum facere se structuram putet, temporis illic praecipue ratione peccat, interdum ut numero syllabarum non peccet, interdum ut etiam syllabarum numero peccet, idque bifariam facit sic, ut vel addat uel detrahat. nam utique si addit aut detrahit tempus unum, quod non congrua ratione prolatum est, in barbarismi nomen incidat necesse est. unum ad hanc rem probandam duove exempla sufficient. vult struere aliquis ex trochaeo et molosso, ut si dicat: 'copiam esse doctorum', structuram optimam facit. quodsi dicat, hanc structuram se facere existimans: 'copiam esse ciborum', barbarismum fecerit. subtrahit enim tempus de molosso in prima syllaba et, dum structurae vult satisfacere, producit primam syllabam, ut dicat 'ciborum', cum 'ci' brevis sit. adiectione ergo temporis in pronuntiando facit barbarismum*

‘a person who thinks he is making a clausula and makes an improper one, makes a mistake concerning chiefly quantitative rules, at times such that the mistake does not involve the number of syllables, at times such that it does it, and he does this in one of two ways: by means of either addition or removal, because if he adds or removes a quantity, which is uttered in an improper way, this will necessarily fall into the category of barbarism. One or two examples will be sufficient to

demonstrate this. Someone wants to form a clausula with a trochee and a molossus: if he were to say *copiam esse doctorum* ('there is abundance of scholars'), he will form a perfect clausula; but, while he believes he is forming such clausula, if he were to say *copiam esse ciborum* ('there is abundance of food'), he will commit a barbarism. In fact, he removes a quantity from the molossus in the first syllable and, when he wants to accomplish the clausula, lengthens the first syllable, uttering *cīborum*, although the 'ci' is short. Therefore he commits a barbarism in speech, by addition of quantity'

(Consentius, *De barbarismis et metaplasmis* 5, 393, 10–21 Keil = 13, 15–14, 4 Niedermann)  
(5th century CE)

## II (= 13)

*disyllaba structura, quae non valde quibusdam placet, antiquos viros vehementissime delectabat. est enim fortis admodum vitansque etiam nostri temporis barbarismum, si non fuerit spondeo uel trochaeo post dactylum finita, ut "primus ab oris" et "in quo meam voluntatem p(opulus) R(omanus) perspicere possit". sic enim versum heroicum hexametrum faciunt, quae sola versificatio est oratoribus devitanda*

'the disyllabic structure which is not particularly pleasing to certain persons, greatly delighted the ancients. For it is very strong and also avoids (what is considered) a barbarism of our age, as long as it is not concluded with a spondee or trochee after a dactyl, as in the case in *primus ab oris* and in *in quo meam voluntatem populus Romanus perspicere possit*. For these (patterns) produce a heroic hexameter (ending), which is the only metrical pattern that must be avoided by orators'

Plotius Sacerdos, *Artes grammaticae* 6, 492, 20–27 Keil = Pseudo-Probus, *De catholicis*, 4, 7–14, transl. Adams 2013: 46, see Adams 2007: 264) (3rd century CE)

## III (= 25)

T. "*ac primum responde, utrum bene didiceris eam quam grammatici docent, syllabarum brevium longarumque distantiam; an vero sive ista noris sive ignores, malis ut ita quaeramus, quasi omnino rudes harum rerum simus, ut ad omnia nos ratio potius perducat, quam inveterata consuetudo, aut praediudicata cogat auctoritas. S. Ita plane malle me, non modo ipsa ratio, sed istarum etiam syllabarum imperitia (quid enim fateri dubitem?) impellit. T. Age iam, saltem illud eloquere, utrum tu ipse per te nunquam animadverteris in locutione nostra alias syllabas raptim et minime diu, alias autem productius et diutius enuntiari. S. Negare non possum non me ad ista enim surdum fuisse*

'T(eacher). "But first, say whether you have learned well one of the things grammarians teach, that is, the difference between long and short syllables, or whether you prefer, knowing them or not, that we explore those matters as if we were altogether ignorant of them, in order to have reason bring us to all these conclusions rather than having inveterate habit or the authority of another's judgment force us". S(tudent). "Not only reason, but also inexperience – I might as well admit it – in matters of syllables certainly leads me to prefer a radical beginning". T. "Well, then, tell me whether you yourself, by your own observation, have ever noticed that some syllables are enunciated very rapidly and briefly, but others more slowly and in a longer time". S. "It is certainly true I have not been insensible of such things"

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 1, 1, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 206)

## IV (= 26)

*non enim ut in producenda corripiendave syllaba non nisi auctoritatem veterum hominum quaerimus, ut quemadmodum sunt usi verbis quibus nos quoque loquimur, ita et nos utamur; quia in huiuscemodi re et nullam observationem sequi desidia est, et novam instituere licentiae: ita in metiendo versu inveterata voluntas hominum, ac non aeterna rerum ratio cogitanda est*

‘In fact, by lengthening or shortening a syllable, we do not only require the ancients’ authority, but we also use their own words in the same way; for, in this subject, if you do not respect the rules, it is a question of negligence; but if you create a new rule, it is a question of permissiveness; therefore, by scanning a verse, we must take into account the traditional habit of speakers, not the eternal law of things’

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 5, 5, 10, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002:206)

## V (= 27)

*itaque verbi gratia cum dixeris, ‘cano’, vel in versu forte posueris, ita ut vel tu pronuntians producas huius verbi syllabam primam, vel in versu eo loco ponas, ubi esse productam oportebat; reprehendet grammaticus, custos ille videlicet historiae, nihil aliud asserens cur hunc corripere oporteat, nisi quod hi qui ante nos fuerunt, et quorum libri exstant tractanturque a grammaticis, ea correpta, non producta usi fuerint. Quare hic quidquid valet, auctoritas valet. At vero musicae ratio, ad quam dimensio ipsa vocum rationabilis et numerositas pertinet, non curat nisi ut corripiatur vel producat syllaba, quae illo vel illo loco est secundum rationem mensurarum suarum. Nam si eo loco ubi duas longas syllabas poni decet, hoc verbum posueris, et primam quae brevis est, pronuntiatione longam feceris, nihil musica omnino succenset: tempora enim vocum ea pervenere ad aures, quae illi numero debita fuerunt. Grammaticus autem iubet emendari, et illud te verbum ponere cuius prima syllaba producenda sit, secundum maiorum, ut dictum est, auctoritatem, quorum scripta custodit*

‘and so, for example, when you say *cano*, or put it in verse, in such a way to prolong its first syllable when you pronounce it or in such a place as to make it necessarily long, the grammarian will censure you; he, of course, the guardian of history, giving no other reason why this syllable should be contracted than that those who lived before us and whose books survive and are discussed by grammarians used it as a short syllable, not as a long one. And so, whatever prevails as authority. On the contrary, the reason of music, whose province is the rational and numerical measure of sounds, takes care only the syllable in this or that place be contracted or prolonged according to the rationale of its measures. For, if you should put this word where two long syllables ought to be, and should make the first syllable, which is short, long by pronunciation, the science of music will not for that be outraged in the least. For those sound-rhythms have been heard which were necessary to that number. But the grammarian orders its emendation and bids you put in a word whose first syllable must be long according to the authority, he says, of our ancestors of whose writings he is the watchdog’

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 1, 1, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002:206–207)

## VI (= 28)

M. “quamobrem nos, cum rationes musicae persequendas susceperimus, etiam si nescis quae syllaba corripienda, quae producenda sit; possumus tamen non impedi hac ignorantia tua, satisque habere, quod te animadvertisse dixisti alias syllabas correptiores, alias productiores. Quare illud nunc quaero, utrum sonus versuum aliquando te aliqua per aures voluptate commoverit”. D. “Prorsus saepissime, ita ut nunquam fere sine delectatione versum audierim”. M. “Si quis ergo in versu, quo audito delectaris, eo loco quo ratio eiusdem versus non postulat, vel producat syllabas, vel corripiat, num eodem modo delectari potes?” D. “Immo audire hoc sine offensione non possum”. M. “Nullo modo igitur dubium est, quin te in sono quo te delectari dicis, *dimensio quaedam numerorum delectet, qua perturbata delectatio illa exhiberi auribus non potest*”. D. “Manifestum est. M. Dic mihi deinceps quod ad sonum versus attinet, *quid intersit, utrum dicam, ‘Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris: an ‘qui primis ab oris’*”. D. “Mihi vero utrumque, quantum ad illam dimensionem pertinet, *idem sonat*”. M. “At hoc mea pronuntiatione factum est, cum eo scilicet vitio quod barbarismum grammatici vocant: nam ‘primus’, longa est et brevis syllaba; ‘primis’ autem, *ambae producendae sunt: sed ego ultimam earum corripui; ita nihil fraudis passae sunt aures tuae. Quamobrem illud etiam atque etiam tentandum est, utrum me pronuntiante sentias, quid sit in syllabis diu et non diu, ut nostra disputatio, me interrogante ac te respondente, sicut instituimus possit procedere. Itaque iam eundem versum in quo barbarismum feceram, repetam, et illam syllabam quam, ne tuae aures offenderentur, corripui, producam, ut grammatici iubent: tu mihi renuntiato, utrum illa versus dimensio sensum tuum eadem afficiat voluptate: sic enim pronuntiem, ‘Arma virumque cano. Troiae qui primis ab oris’*”. D. “Nunc vero *negare non possum, nescio qua soni deformitate me offensum*”. M. “Non iniuria: *quanquam enim barbarismus factus non sit, id tamen vitium factum est, quod et grammatica reprehendat et musica: grammatica, quia id verbum, cuius novissima syllaba producenda est, eo loco positum est ubi corripienda poni debuit; musica vero tantummodo quia producta quaelibet vox est eo loco, quo corripui oportebat, et tempus debitum quod numerosa dimensio postulabat, redditum non est. Quocirca si iam satis discernis quid sensus, quid auctoritas postulet, sequitur ut videamus, ille ipse sensus cur alias delectetur in sonis vel productis vel correptis, alias offendatur: id est enim quod ad diu, et non diu pertinet. Quam partem nos explicandam suscepisse credo quod memineris*”. D. “Ego vero et illud discevi, et hoc meminere, et ea quae sequuntur intentissime exspecto”.

‘T(eacher). “Therefore, since we have undertaken to follow the theory of music, even if you do not know which syllables are to be shortened and which lengthened, we can nevertheless overlook this ignorance of yours and consider sufficient your saying you have noticed some syllables were shorter and some longer. And so I now ask you whether the sound of verses has ever moved you with pleasure”. S(tudent). “In fact, so often I have almost never heard a verse without pleasure”. T. “If, then, someone, in a verse which delighted you in hearing it, should lengthen or shorten the syllables contrary to the rationale of the verse, you can’t enjoy it in the same way, can you?”. S. “On the contrary, hearing it is offensive”. T. “So there is no doubt about it, you enjoy a certain measuring out of numbers in the sound you say pleases you and which when disturbed cannot give you that pleasure”. S. “That’s evident”. T. “Then tell me, in so far as it concerns the verse’s sound, what differences does it make whether I say *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris* or *qui primis ab oris*”. S. “Both sound the same to me as far as measure is concerned”. T. “And that’s because of my pronunciation, with a fault, of course, grammarians call barbarism. For ‘*primus*’ is made up of a long and a short syllable. And in ‘*primis*’ both ought to be long, but I shortened the last one. So your ears were right. Therefore, we must repeatedly test to see

whether, on my pronouncing, you sense what is long and not long in syllables, in order to have the discussion continue, with me questioning and you replying as we began it. So I shall repeat the same verse I committed the barbarism in, and **the syllable I shortened, not to offend your ears, I shall lengthen, as the grammarians order.** You will tell me whether the rhythm of the verse gives your senses the same pleasure. So let me recite this way *Arma virumque cano Troiae qui primis ab oris*. S. “**No, I can’t deny I am disturbed by a sort of deformity of sound.**” T. “You are quite right. For, although there was no barbarism, yet there was a fault both grammar and music condemn: grammar, because a word whose syllable is to be pronounced long has been put where a syllable to be pronounced short should be, but music only because some sound has been lengthened where it ought to have been shortened, and the proper time demanded by the numerical measure has not been rendered. And so, if you now discriminated between what the sense of hearing demands and what authority demands, it follows we should see why that sense sometimes enjoys either long or short sounds and sometimes does not. For that is what concerns ‘for a long time’ and ‘not for a long time’. And I am sure you remember we undertook to explain just that”. S. “I made the discrimination, I remember, and I am waiting very eagerly for what follows”.

(Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica*, 2, 2, 2, transl. Catesby Taliaferro 2002: 207–209)

