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Latin Verb-Object Compounds: Deep Archaism or (Failed) Borrowing?

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PROGRAM IN
INDO-EUROPEAN STUDIES

Sept. 15th – 17th, 2025 – Prague

1. Introduction

Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 8.15.12 (transl. Shackleton Bailey)

*Merito uirorum commemorationi Sulpicia Serui Paterculi filia, Q. Fului Flacci uxor, adicitur. quae, cum **senatus libris Sibyllinis per decemuiros inspectis censuisset ut Veneris Verticordiae simulacrum consecraretur, quo facilius uirginum mulierumque mens a libidine ad pudicitiam conuerteretur, et ex omnibus matronis centum, ex centum autem decem sorte ductae de sanctissima femina iudicium facerent, cunctis castitate praelata est.***

To the commemoration of men Sulpicia, daughter of Ser. Paterculus and wife of Q. Fulvius Flaccus, deserves to be added. After the Sibylline books had been inspected by the Board of Ten, **the Senate ordained that an image of Venus Verticordia be consecrated**, the more easily **to turn the minds** of virgins and married women **from lust to chastity**; and that from all the matrons one hundred and from the one hundred ten drawn by lot should make a judgment, who was the most blameless of the sex. Sulpicia was placed above them all for purity.

1. Introduction

Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 8.15.12

[...] *cum senatus censuisset ut Veneris **Verticordiae** simulacrum consecraretur, quo facilius uirginum mulierumque **mens** a libidine ad pudicitiam **conuerteretur** [...]*

the Senate ordained that an image of Venus **Verticordia** be consecrated, the more easily to **turn the minds** of virgins and married women from lust to chastity

- Historical facts:
 - The **statue** was dedicated during the Second Punic War (**218–202 BCE**)
 - A **temple** followed later after a case of unchastity among the Vestals (**114 BCE**)
- Historiographical observations:
 - The name **Verticordia** is only given by Valerius Maximus in this passage (**ca. 30 CE**)
 - Other authors mention these facts:
 - Ovid, *Fasti* 4.157-160 (1–8 CE)
 - Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 7.120 (ca. 60 CE)
 - Iulius Obsequens, *Liber Prodigiorum* 37 (**Verticordia**; 4th cent. CE)

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the Senate ordained that an image of Venus **Verticordia** be consecrated, the more easily to **turn the minds** of virgins and married women from lust to chastity

- Can the form **Verticordia** be traced back to the **3rd cent. BCE**, or did the author employ a **1st cent. CE** word anachronistically?
 - **3rd cent. BCE: deep archaism**
 - **earliest** example of a **VO** compound in Latin
 - **only** uncontroversial example containing a **present** stem (*verte-* ‘to turn’; φερέοικος type) vs. all other compounds containing a *-si-* morpheme (cf. τερψίμβροτος type)
 - **1st cent. CE: early sign of innovation**
 - **first literary attestations** of the VO type which later becomes a productive compounding strategy in **Late Latin and Romance** languages

1. Introduction

Archaism or innovation?

- In order to answer this question, we have to review all the evidence for **Classical Latin VO compounds** (scarce; cf. Nielsen Whitehead 2012).
- I propose that the attested Classical Latin compounds are **not inherited**, but **attempts at borrowing** the compositional structure of verb-initial Ancient Greek compounds.
- I argue that this borrowing is governed by the **Resistance Principle** (Guardiano et al. 2016; 2020), which explains both the **existence** of this compositional structure in Classical Latin and its **failure** to enter later Latin permanently.
- In my analysis, a crucial role is played by Latin **deponent structures** which are pivotal in the borrowing process.
- Based on independent conclusions on Latin syntax reached by Danckaert (2017), I reconstruct a timeline that supports the **adoption of a later date (1st cent. CE) for the form *Verticordia***.
- I argue that the word *Verticordia* was employed by Valerius Maximus anachronistically: **it is not an archaism, but an early sign of innovation**.

Today's presentation

1. Introduction
2. Classical Latin Verb-Initial Compounds
 - 2.1. The Data
3. Phase I: Borrowing
 - 3.1. Present Stem(s)
 - 3.2. Participial Stems
4. The Borrowing Process
 - 4.1. Preliminary Considerations
 - 4.1. The Resistance Principle
 - 4.2. VOAux Deponent Structures
 - 4.3. A Look at Diachrony (the Failure)
5. Phase II: Innovation
 - 5.1. *Verticordia*
6. Conclusions

2. Classical Latin Verb-Initial Compounds

2.1. The Data

- Bork 1990: most exhaustive list
- Nielsen Whitehead 2012: list is trimmed down with new analyses that exclude some forms
- My list (until 2nd cent. CE):
 - **Phase I: borrowing**
 - **Phase II: innovation (“Romance type”)**

2.1. The Data

- Bork 1990: most exhaustive list
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- My list (until 2nd cent. CE):
 - **Phase I: borrowing**
 - **present stem(s)**
 - *Conterebromnia* ‘All-piercer’ Plautus (3rd – 2nd cent. BCE), *Curculio* 446
 - **participial stems**
 - *flexanimus* ‘soul-bending’ Pacuvius (2nd cent. BCE), *Hermione* (fr. trag. 177)
 - *versipellis* ‘skin-changing’ Plautus (3rd – 2nd cent. BCE), *Amphitruo* prol.123+
 - *versicolor* ‘color-changing’ Cicero (1st cent. BCE), *De finibus* 3.18.13+
 - *tentipellium* ‘skin-stretcher’ Grammarians (1st cent. BCE – 1st cent. CE) in Festus (2nd cent. CE)
 - **Phase II: innovation (“Romance type”)**

2.1. The Data

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- My list (until 2nd cent. CE):
 - **Phase I: borrowing**
 - **Phase II: innovation (“Romance type”)**
 - **present stems**
 - *poscinummius* ‘money-offering’ Apuleius (123–180 CE), *Metamorphoses* 10.21.8
 - *negātinummius* ‘money-denying’ Apuleius (123–180 CE), *Metamorphoses* 10.21.8
 - *Verticordia* ‘Heart-turner’ Valerius Maximus (1st cent. CE), *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* 8.15.12
 - **not included** (different analysis; cf. Nielsen Whitehead 2012)
 - *agipennis* ‘feather-driving’ Varro (116 – 27 BCE), *Menippean Satires* 489
 - *mōtācilla* ‘wagtail’ Varro (116 – 27 BCE), *De Lingua Latina* 5.76
 - *laudicēnus* ‘dinner praiser’ Pliny (61 – 114 CE), *Epistulae* 2.14.4–6

3. Phase I: Borrowing

3.1. Phase I: Present Stem(s)

Conterebromnia ‘All-piercer’

- Analysis (following Nielsen Whitehead 2012)

(1) **[[[con]_P-[terebrā-]_V]_V** – **[omn]_A +ia_N** → *Conterebromnia*
through-pierce.PRS – all +NOUN.F.NOM.SG.
‘All-piercer’ (place name)

- Plautus (3rd – 2nd cent. BCE), *Curculio* 446
 - Greek-inspired comedy
 - List of mythological places located in the East Mediterranean world (i.e. Greek-speaking area)
 - Uncertain reading

3.1. Phase I: Present Stem(s)

Conterebromnia ‘All-piercer’

- Plautus is well-known for his creativity with language:

- (2.a) Classical Latin: $[[\text{mero-}]_N \text{ – } \bullet \text{ – } [\text{bib-e-}]_V \text{ +us}]_N \rightarrow \text{merobibus}$
wine – LINK – drink-NPST+NOUN.M.NOM.SG (not *mer(i/u)bibus*)
‘wine-drinker’
- (2.b) Ancient Greek: $[[\text{akrat(o)-}]_N \text{ – } \bullet \text{ – } [\text{pot-}]_V \text{ +ēs}]_N \rightarrow \text{akratopotēs}$
wine – LINK – drink-NPST+NOUN.M.NOM.SG.
‘wine-drinker’

- **Contact-induced neologism** which supports the contact hypothesis but is not a witness to a systematic phenomenon
- In this case, the borrowed structure is the φερέοικος type, where the verbal head is a present stem:

- (3) $[[\text{p}^h\text{er-e-}]_V \text{ – } [\text{oiko-}]_N \text{ + os}]_A \rightarrow \text{p}^h\text{eréoikos}$
bring-NPST – house + ADJ.NOM.M.SG.
‘snail (i.e., house-carrier)’

3.2. Phase I: Participial Stems

- Even if rarely, Classical Latin allows past participles as first members of compounds:

(4) $[[aucto-]_{PTCP} \quad - \quad [[fic]_V \quad + \quad us]_A]_A \rightarrow auctificus$
enlarge.PTCP - make +er
'making enlarged, enlarging'

- When used as a compound first member, we expect the analysis in (12), which is attested in Pacuvius:

(5) $[[flexo-]_{PTCP} \quad - \quad [anim]_N + us]_A \rightarrow flexanimus$
bend.PTCP - **soul** +ADJ.M.NOM.SG.
'bent-souled, with a bent soul, affected' (*Teucer* fr. trag. 422)

- However, always in the same author, we also find the analysis in (13):

(6) $[[flexo-]_{PTCP} \quad - \quad [anim]_N + us]_A \rightarrow flexanimus$
bend.PTCP - soul +ADJ.M.NOM.SG.
'soul-bending' (*Hermione* fr. trag. 177)

3.2. Phase I: Participial Stems

Expected Analysis: Passive Modifier

[[*flex-*]_{PTCP} – [*anim*]_N +*us*]_A
bend.PTCP – **soul** +ADJ.M.NOM.SG.
‘bent-souled, with a bent soul, affected’

*[[*versi-*]_{PTCP} – [*pell*]_N +*is*]_A
turn.PTCP – **skin** +ADJ.M.NOM.SG.
‘with/having turned/changed skin’

*[[*versi-*]_{PTCP} – [*color*]_N]_A
turn.PTCP – **color**
‘with/having turned/changed color’

*[[*tento-*]_{PTCP} – [*pell*]_N +*ium*]_N
stretch.PTCP – **skin** +NOUN.N.NOM.SG.
‘with/having stretched skin (as a result)’

Borrowed Analysis: Active Head

[[*flex-*]_{PTCP} – [*anim*]_N +*us*]_A cf. pf. *flexī*
bend.PTCP – soul +ADJ.M.NOM.SG.
‘soul-bending, persuasive’

[[*versi-*]_{PTCP} – [*pell*]_N +*is*]_N cf. pf. *vertī*
turn.PTCP – skin +ADJ.NOM.SG.
‘werewolf (i.e., skin-changer)’

[[*versi-*]_{PTCP} – [*color*]_N]_A cf. pf. *vertī*
turn.PTCP – color
‘color-changing, iridescent’

[[*tento-*]_{PTCP} – [*pell*]_N +*ium*]_N cf. pf. *tetendī*
stretch.PTCP – skin +NOUN.N.NOM.SG.
‘skin-stretcher’

3.2. Phase I: Participial Stems

- In this case, the borrowed structure is the $\tau\epsilon\rho\psi\acute{\iota}\mu\beta\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma$ type, where the **verbal head** is a **perfective** stem:

(7) $[[\mathbf{or-s-}]_V \quad -i- \quad [lok^h\omicron-]_N + os]_A \quad \rightarrow \quad ors\acute{\iota}lok^hos$
stir-PST.PFV-link- ambush + ADJ.NOM.M.SG.
'ambush-stirrer, who stirs up ambushes'

- Why are the **Greek aorist** stems replaced with **participial** stems in **Latin**?
- The Latin perfect may have played a role for *flex-* which has ambiguous morphology (8), but not for the remaining forms (9a–b):

(8) *flex-* ← ptcp. *flexus* ~ pf. *flexī*
(9) a. *versi-* ← ptcp. *versus* (vs. pf. *vertī*)
b. *tenti-* ← ptcp. *tentus* (vs. pf. *tetendī*)

Why participles?

4. The Borrowing Process

4.1. Preliminary Considerations

- The Greek φερέοικος and τερψίμβροτος types are **left-headed** (VO)

(10) [[**p^her-e-**]_V – [oiko-]_O + os]_A ‘snail (i.e., house-carrier)’

(11) [[**terp-s-**]_V -i- [mbrot-]_O + os]_A ‘delighting mortals’

- Latin compounds are regularly **right-headed** (OV; except for those under discussion)

(12) [[agro-]_O – [**col-**]_V + a]_N ‘farmer’

- By creating compounds such as *versipellis*, Latin is borrowing a **left-headed** structure (VO)

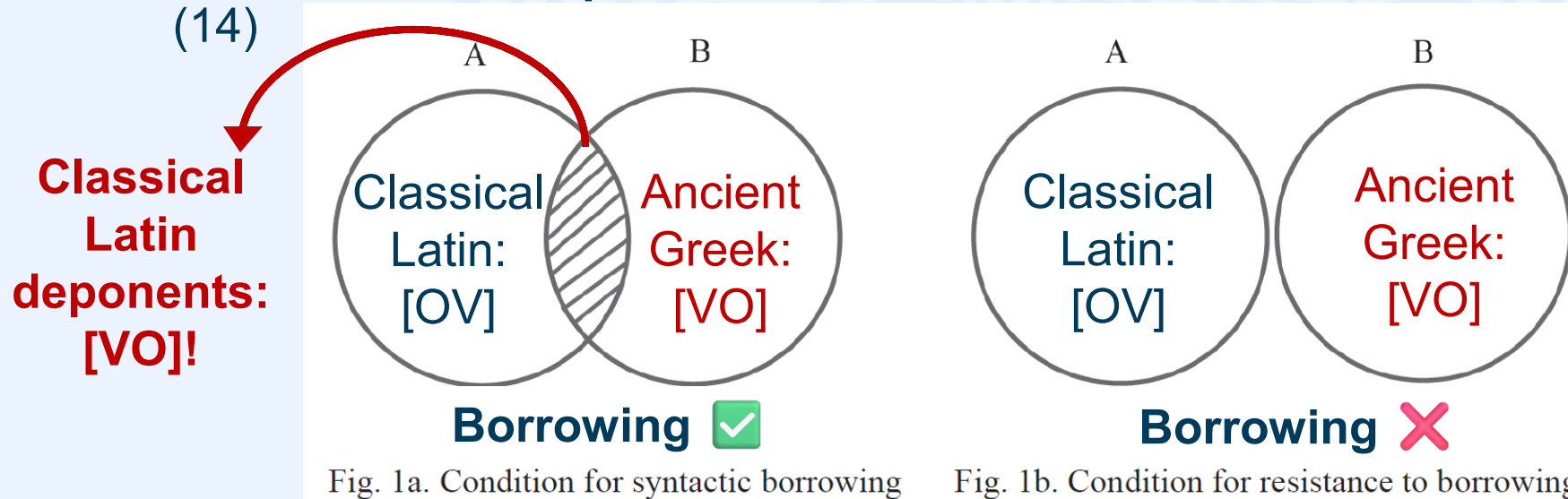
(13) [[**versi-**]_V – [pell-]_O +is]_N ‘werewolf (i.e., skin-changer)’

How is this possible?

4.2. The Resistance Principle

- The borrowing of syntactic structures is governed by the **Resistance Principle** (Guardiano et al. 2016:148; 2020:180):

parameter α : order of V and O



- Languages don't like to borrow complex structures like the headedness of compounds. They usually **resist** syntactic borrowings.
- However, if the target language (here **Latin**) already contains a structure that can be **repurposed** to follow the source language (here Greek), then the syntactic borrowing can happen.

4.3. VOAux Deponent Structures

- The relevant elements of a deponent structure, V, O and Aux, appear in all possible orders:

(15) **O** **V** Aux (Danckaert 2017:130)
imperium *adeptus* *est*
‘He obtained the empire’ (Tac. *Ann.* 2.42.3)

(16) (S) **V** **O** Aux (Danckaert 2017:133)
consules praetoresque ***sortiti*** ***provincias*** *sunt*
‘the consuls and the praetors exited the provinces’

- Structures like that in (16) provided a **Latin point of contact with Greek syntax** that made it possible to **borrow the VO structures** in other contexts as well.

4.4. A Look at the Diachrony (the Failure)

- According to the Resistance Principle, the Ancient Greek VO compounds can be borrowed into Classical Latin because the VO deponent structures provide a point of contact
- This analysis explains two facts:
 1. Voice
 2. Productivity

1. Voice

The connection with the **deponent** structure, which is **indifferent to morphological voice**, explains why the **typically passive** perfective participles can receive **active interpretation** in VO compounds

Expected Analysis: Passive Modifier

[[*flexo-*]_{PTCP} – [*anim*]_N +*us*]_A
bend.PTCP – **soul** +ADJ.NOM.M.SG
'bent-souled, with a bent soul, affected'

Borrowed Analysis: Active Head

[[*flexo-*]_{PTCP} – [*anim*]_N +*us*]_A
bend.PTCP – soul +ADJ.M.NOM.SG
'soul-bending, persuasive'

→ *flexanimus*

4.4. A Look at the Diachrony (the Failure)

2. Productivity

- VO compounds: The dataset analyzed here contains all the instances of VO compounds with participles, which are only **attested in Classical Latin** until the 1st cent. CE. Afterwards, the structure disappears.
- VOAux deponents: according to Danckaert (2017:209–13), this structure is **only productive in Classical Latin** and starts to decline already around 40 CE.
- The VO compounding structure remains available so long as the VOAux deponent structure is accessible to the speakers.
- The borrowing process **fails** when the Latin point of contact dies out and fails to provide the borrowing pivot, some time during the 1st cent. CE.

5. Phase II: Innovation

5.1. *Verticordia*

- Can the form ***Verticordia*** be traced back to the **3rd cent. BCE**, or did the author employ a **1st cent. CE** word anachronistically?
 - **3rd cent. BCE: deep archaism**
 - **1st cent. CE: early sign of innovation**

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 - **earliest** example of a **VO** compound in Latin
 - **only** uncontroversial example containing a **present** stem (*verte-* ‘to turn’; φερέοικος type) vs. all other compounds containing a *-si-* morpheme (cf. τερψίμβροτος type)
 - **only** form that does **not** participate in the borrowing process
 - this VO type is only attested **once** in the 3rd cent. and then **disappears for centuries**, until it reappears in Apuleius (2nd cent. CE)
 - **1st cent. CE: early sign of innovation**

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 - **3rd cent. BCE: deep archaism**
 - **1st cent. CE: early sign of innovation**
 - **first literary attestations** of the VO type which is going to become a productive compounding strategy in **Late Latin and Romance** languages
 - first attestation around the **same time when the VO type with participles stops being productive** (1st cent. CE)
 - **next closest** attestation in **Apuleius** (2nd cent. CE) with *poscinummius* and *negātinummius*, followed by a handful of examples until 5th cent. CE (Nielsen Whitehead 2012:147–8)

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- Can the form ***Verticordia*** be traced back to the **3rd cent. BCE**, or did the author employ a **1st cent. CE** word anachronistically?
 - **3rd cent. BCE: deep archaism** ✗
 - **1st cent. CE: early sign of innovation** ✓
- This date also explains why the verb *vertō* produces two equivalent verbal first members with different morphology:
 - *versi-* during the Phase I via borrowing
 - *verti-* during Phase II via independent morphosyntactic innovation

6. Conclusions

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- With the exception of *Conterebromnia* ‘All-piercer’ (Plautus (3rd – 2nd cent. BCE, *Curculio* 446)—which is a contact-induced neologism—
- I proposed that the Classical Latin compounds with a participial first member are **attempts at borrowing** the compositional structure of Ancient Greek with a **verbal head as the first element**.
- I presented this borrowing process as governed by the **Resistance Principle** (Guardiano et al. 2016: 148; 2020:180), whereby VO compounds with participles are borrowed from Ancient Greek into Classical Latin thanks to the point of contact of **VOAux deponent structures**.
- VO compounds with participles **fail** to enter Latin permanently because the VOAux structure **ceased to be productive** during the Classical Latin period (1st cent. CE).
- A different type of VO compound starts to spread since then, which later becomes a productive compounding strategy **in Late Latin and Romance** languages.
- *Verticordia*, attested in Valerius Maximus (1st cent. CE) is the first example of that type.

Thank you!

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