Lecture 5**: Latin Vowel Changes**

1. Monopthongisation in initial syllables

[**ei**]

- Preserved in early inscriptions, but > [ẹ:] > [i:] by mid-C2 BC.

    Old Lat. *deico* (class. *dīco*), cf. Gk. δείκνυμι

    O.L. *nei* > class. *nī*

    class. *fīdo*, cf. Gk. πείθω (<*φείθω by Grassmann's Law)

    class. *īt* cf. Gk. εἶσι

- The [ẹ:] stage is attested in inscr. spellings

    eg DEVOS for *dīnus*

- Preserved in some dialects

    vēlla for *vīlla* (Varro R.R. 1.2.14)

- Reverse spellings

    decreivit for *decrēvit* and *audeire* for *audīre* which never had diphthongs

[**ai**]

- Becomes written <ae> early in C2 BC:

    O.L. *aidilis*, class. *aedes*

- NB diffusion of change

    aedem and *aiquom* on same inscription 186 B. C (VL 60)

- May represent slight narrowing.

- In rural and lower-class Latin > [e:]

- Hypercorrections *scaena* < σκηνή and *scaeptrum* < σκηπτρόν

[**au**]

- In dialects & vulgar speech > [ō], eg. *plōstrum* for *plaustrum*.

- Vespasian, on being corrected to plaustrum by one Mestrius Florus next greeted him as Flaurus

- Some penetration into urban Latin

  lōtus, pōllulum, ōricula in Cicero (VL 61)

- Hypercorrection *plaudo* for *plōdo*

  the [au] is not original

  compound would be *explūdo

  cf. *claudo* : *conclūdo*

  ([au] > [ū] in medial syllables — see below).

- Quintilian (vi1.52): *plōdite* ends old comedies.

- In Imperial times [au] > [a] if next syllable contains [u] (dissimilation), hence inscr. AGVSTVS (> It.*agusto*)

- Continues into most Romance langs e.g. *chose > causam*

[ou] : > [uː]

- O.L. *loucom*, class. *lūcus*;

  O.L. *noutrix*, class. *nūtrix*

- Some archaic spellings found in inscriptions

  ious beside *iudicem*

[eu] : > [ou] > [uː]

- O.L. *abdoucit* > class. *abdūcit* (< *deuk-);

  O.L. *Loucilios*, class. *Lūcilius, Lūcius, lūcem*, = Gk. λευκός.

  L. *ūro* = Gk. εὔω < *eusō

[oi] : > [uː]

- O.L. *oino* > class. *ūnus*, cf. Gk. οἰνή, 'the 1-spot on a die';

  O.L. *commoinem* > class. *commūnem*

  O.L. *coiravit* > class. *cūravit*

- In initial syllables starting with [u] > [ei] (dissimilation) > [iː]

  vīde = Ϝοῖδα;

  vīcus = Ϝοῖκος;

  vīnum = Ϝοῖνος

- Old spelling retained as *oe* in conservative spheres of law and religion:

  poena (ποινή) ~ *pūnire*;

  foedus, O.L. *foidere*

  moenia ~ *mūrus* (O.L. *moiros*)

  Poeni ~ *Pūnicus* (Φοίνικες)

  Preceding nasal may also be relevant (VL 62)

- Spelt <oe> - like <ae> > <ai> - may represent some narrowing

2. Role of accent in language change

- Accent important in language change

  Cf. Verner's Law

  PIE *ph₂tēr* > PGmc *faðēr* (instead of expected *faþēr*)

  cf *bʰreh₂tēr* 'brother' > *brōþēr* as expected

  PIE accent - Sanskrit *pitắ* versus *bhrā́tā*

- Classical Latin accent follows rule of the penultimate

  Falls on penultimate syllable unless that is short

  crud'ēlis

  'facĭlis

- Some arguments for pitch accent in Latin as in Greek

  Statements of contemporary writers

  BUT this borrowed from Greek

  Little evidence for syncope – feature of stress accent based language

- Very clear evidence that Prehistoric Latin had accent on the initial

  see below

- Late Lain period also stress accent

  Servius talks about accent as stress

  Large amount of syncope

  e.g. *oculus > oclus*

- Difficult to claim that stress > pitch > stress

3. Vowel weakening

- Characteristic of non-initial syllables

- Final syllables protected - carrying morphological info?

- Particularly clear in **open** medial syllables

- In open syllables all short vowels generally > [i]

- cf English *horses, village* (English V also weaken to ə e.g. father)

[a]   *facio ~ conficio*

            cado ~ cecidi

            ratus ~ irritus

            māc(h)ina < Doric Gk. μᾱχᾰνᾱ

[e]   *sedeo ~ obsideo*

            lego ~ colligo

[o]   *locus ~ īlicō < in stlocō*

            novitās, Gk. νεϝότας

            *hospitem < *hostipotem*

[i]   *video ~ invideo*

[u]   *caput ~ capitis*

            cornu ~ corniger

- Not consistent in all environments

            familia (clear l)

            famulus (dark l)

            abluo (> lavo)

            peperi ([i] > [e]/__r)

            cineris ([i] > [e]/__r)

- In **closed** syllables [a] > [e]; [o] > [u]; but [e, i, u] remain unaffected.

[a]   *aptus ~ ineptus*

[o]   *euntis < *eīontes*

               alumnus < *alomnos

- Diphthongs in medial syllables generally undergo same development as in initial syllables

- BUT [ai] and [au] undergo change as a result of weakening

[ai] : > [ei] > [iː]

               oliva < ἐλαιϜᾱ

               aequus ~ inīquus

               aestimo ~ exīstimo

[au] : > [ou] > [u_]

               fraudo ~ O.L. *defrūdo; claudo ~ inclūdo*

               cf. hypercorrection *audio : *obaudio > *obūdio* **Ä** *oboedio*

4. Exceptions to vowel weakening:

1. Occasional total loss of vowel (syncope),

esp. if originally ĭ or ĕ

dexter ~ δεξιτερός

Some more violent examples of syncope:

sestertius > semistertius

officina > opificina

pergo > perrego

pono > posino

2. Restoration of vowel by analogy with related forms:

*integer (*intiger) : integra, integrum*

*impatiens (*impitiens) : patior*

(BUT *insipiens* : *sapio*

*admodum (*admidum) : modum*

3. Where the medial syllable comes to bear the classical accent:

*recúpero (*recipero);*

*Postúmius (*Postimius)*

4. 'Vowel harmony':

*calamitas (*calimitas);*

*alacer (*alicer);*

*elementum (*elimentum)*

Bibliography

W.S. Allen *Vox Latina* (CUP 2rd edn. 1978)