

Transformation of the quantitative vowel system as a type of *Barbarism* in the late antique grammatical tradition

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ABSTRACT

The contribution aims to study in detail the ancient Latin grammarians' texts related to errors in vowel quantity among the categories of barbarisms. The goal is to demonstrate that the examples that seem to contradict the Romance vowel quantity development do not attest to unexpected changes in the contemporary language. Rather, these illustrative forms indicate the continuation of a tradition regarding the discussion of barbarisms, with its own specific rules. When selecting examples to explain a barbarism, grammarians took into account many aspects, and actual linguistic processes were only one of them.

KEYWORDS

vulgar Latin, vowel quantity, Latin grammarians, barbarisms, vocalic isochrony

1. INTRODUCTION

The quantitative vowel system that characterized Classical Latin underwent a radical transformation during the Imperial Age. As a result, a new vowel quantity system emerged in the modern Romance languages, leading to a different type of language rhythm.

The starting and ending points of the Latin quantity collapse are well known. In Classical Latin, there were phonological oppositions between short and long vowels, meaning that vowel quantity

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could differentiate between two lexemes or two grammatical categories. Additionally, the position of the word accent was subordinated to vowel quantity, at least in open syllables. For instance, *venit*¹ is a present tense form, while *vēnit* is the perfect active indicative form of the verb *venīre* ('to come'). Similarly, *occīdit* means 'he/she kills somebody', while *óccidit* – with its antepenultimate word accent caused by the shortness of the penultimate vowel in an open syllable – means 'he/she dies'.

The early Romance languages did not inherit this system. In these languages, the phonological opposition between short and long vowels was absent, and the relationship between vowel quantity and word accent changed. Vowel quantity became conditioned by the presence or absence of the word accent in open syllables: vowels were always long in open stressed syllables, but short in closed stressed and unstressed syllables (whether open or closed). Naturally, this system evolved throughout the history of the Romance languages, but it can still be seen, for example, in standard Italian:

CL *lācus* > It. *lāgo*
 CL *crēscit* > It. *crēsce*
 CL *cēnāre* > It. *cenāre*

The diphthongization of Latin short *e* and *o* in open stressed syllables – found in many modern Romance languages – suggests that at an earlier stage, these vowels were generally lengthened throughout the territory of the Western Roman Empire:

CL *mél* > It. *miele*, Sp., Fr. *miel*, Rom. *miere*

The Romance quantity system is the result of three preceding phonological changes. The first, the shortening of unstressed vowels, was a long-term process that had already begun before the normalization of Latin during the late Republican period. Notable examples include the archaic syncope (*ióvesat* > CL *iúrat*), iambic shortening (*bénē* > CL *béne*), abbreviation of vowels in closed final syllables (*hónōs* > CL *hónor*), and the unstable quantity of the final *-o* in the poetry of the Golden Age (e.g. Ov. Am. III. 2. 26. ... *en egō tollō meis*). The shortening of unstressed vowels (independent of syllable structure) became widespread in the early imperial centuries.²

Regarding the more problematic stressed vowels, linguists and philologists debate the chronology and dialectology of the quantitative transformation. The so-called *Open Syllable Lengthening* (OSL) is the most discussed part of the quantitative transformation, because it marked the final step in the collapse of the Classical Latin quantitative system, leading to the total disappearance of the phonological opposition between long and short vowels. Thereafter, phonological differentiation relied only on qualitative vowel differences.

CL *légit* (3.sg. pres.) > **lēgit* (> It. *légge*)
 CL *lēge* (abl. sing.) > **lēge* (> It. *légge*)

¹In this paper, to illustrate vowel quantity and the position of the word accent, I will use the diacritical marks as commonly employed in classical philology. The sign *ˉ* above a vowel refers to its long quantity, while *´* indicates the position of the word accent.

²Mancini (2015, 360–61); Loporcaro (2011, 60, 2015, 59–60); Weiss (2009, 127–28).

Where did the *Open Syllable Lengthening* begin and when was it completed? The vast majority of researchers, though not in agreement on the chronological details, believe that *OSL*, marking the birth of the Romance quantity, took place in all Latin-speaking regions. This suggests that the process was completed before the linguistic diversification of the Western Roman Empire.³ However, some linguists reject this theory, arguing that vowel lengthening under stress exclusively in open syllables developed later in certain early Romance dialects. In their view, this phenomenon belongs to the history of the Romance languages.⁴

This second theory does not imply that vowel lengthening under stress was a particularly late phenomenon in Latin. Its most recent exponent, Marco Mancini, states that a general quantitative change in accented vowels (regardless of syllable structure) occurred during the imperial age, but the Romance quantity system – with long vowels only in open stressed syllables – emerged centuries later and was present only in the central regions of the former Western Roman Empire. Thus, the imperial age was a period of *vocalic isochrony*, when word accent was related to vowel quantity, in contrast to earlier and later periods of *syllabic isochrony*, when word accent depended on syllable quantity (penultima-rule), or vice versa, affected syllable quantity (Romance quantitative system).

In a paper published in 2001, Mancini suggested the “neutralization” of accented vowels in the imperial age, at least in African Latin. This means that there was only one universal vowel quantity, and African speakers were unable to differentiate between short and long vowels in stressed positions.⁵ In 2015 (and again in 2019), he revised this theory, replacing “vowel quantity neutralization” with the idea of general vowel lengthening caused by the word accent, irrespective of syllable structure.⁶

Mancini’s opinion is well known in the scientific discourse on the topic. It is mentioned by James N. Adams⁷ and by Philomen Probert⁸ without critical annotation, while Tommaso Mari briefly expressed his doubts about the theory, at least regarding examples of vulgarism written by

³For the list of the works based on this theory see Mancini (2015, 361) (note 7).

⁴Schürr (1970); Mancini (2001, 2015, 2019).

⁵Mancini (2001, 319–20): “Occorre ammettere, in sostanza, che il latino provinciale africano, pur mantenendo le originarie distinzioni alfoniche tra vocali tese e vocali rilassate, assegnava in maniera del tutto indifferente la quantità in sillaba tonica tanto da produrre prosodicamente devianti come *Rōma* per *Rōma*, *pīper* per *pīper*, *rōsa* per *rōsa*, etc. Questi allungamenti e questi abbreviamenti al di fuori della auctoritas imposta dalla scuola erano il frutto di maldestri tentativi di imitazione della prosodia classica da parte di parlanti per i quali non esistevano più opposizioni di natura quantitativa.” (“It must be acknowledged, essentially, that African provincial Latin, while maintaining the original allophonic distinctions between tense and lax vowels, assigned vowel quantity in stressed syllables in an entirely indifferent manner—so much so that it produced prosodically deviant forms like *Rōma* instead of *Rōma*, *pīper* instead of *pīper*, *rōsa* instead of *rōsa*, etc. These lengthenings and shortenings, occurring outside the *auctoritas* imposed by the school, were the result of clumsy attempts to imitate Classical prosody by speakers for whom quantitative oppositions no longer existed”).

⁶Mancini (2015, 358, 2019, 40): “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”.

⁷Adams (2013, 48).

⁸Probert (2019, 176) (note 12).

the grammarians.⁹ Conversely, Andrea Bramanti interpreted such an example within the framework of *vocalic isochrony*.¹⁰

Beyond these brief mentions, the theory of vowel quantity neutralization was decisively refuted by Michele Loporcaro in his 2015 monograph *Vowel Length from Latin to Romance*, published just before Mancini released his second study on the topic. Loporcaro focused on evidence from the Romance languages.

Mancini argues that *OSL* affected only the central regions of the Roman Empire and was absent in peripheral territories, as evidenced by the modern languages of these regions, where we see diphthongization – which presupposes a long vowel – even in closed syllables.

- Rom. *iarba* (* < *hērba*) vs. It. *erba* (< *herba*)
- Sp. *puerta* (* < *pōrta*) vs. It. *porta* (< *porta*)

If *OSL* was not productive everywhere, we should assume that the process was completed after the collapse of the relative unity of the Latin language in the Western Roman Empire.

Loporcaro demonstrated that this claim cannot be substantiated. *OSL* may have been present in the preliterate forms of these languages, because all evidence referring to vocalic (i.e. not syllabic) isochrony is later than the 10th century. Thus, syllabic isochrony may have existed in late antiquity, even in the peripheries, and vocalic isochrony could have been the result of later developments in these regions. This assumption is more plausible than the alternative – that vocalic isochrony characterized the Latin of late antiquity, and *OSL* (i.e. syllabic isochrony) emerged independently and simultaneously in almost all Romance languages during the early medieval period.¹¹

Mancini has not accepted these arguments and continues to maintain his theory of vocalic isochrony, replacing vowel quantity neutralization with the idea of general vowel lengthening in stressed positions. His reasoning is based on examples provided by grammarians of late antiquity. The great majority of these examples illustrate a particular kind of linguistic vulgarism, *barbarismus temporis*, which refers to potential phonological errors regarding vowel quantity.

2. VOWEL QUANTITY ERRORS IN THE LATIN GRAMMATICAL LITERATURE¹²

The majority of examples illustrating errors related to vowel quantity highlight changes that led to the Romance vowel system. For example, we know from Consentius that pronouncing the

⁹Mari (2021, 192–95).

¹⁰Bramanti (2022, 400–401).

¹¹Loporcaro (2015, 79).

¹²I have to note here that – though almost all of the late ancient grammarians' works has a recent edition, I will cite them from the *Grammatici Latini* (Keil 1855–), since they are referred like this traditionally, thus the identification of the cited passages is easier using this edition as reference. Of course, I apply the rich commentaries of the recent editions for my argumentation, but I cite the text of the grammarians based on them only when they have relevant difference from the GLK.

word *píper* with a long *í* (in a stressed open syllable),¹³ or saying *ōrátor* with a short *o* in the first (unstressed) syllable,¹⁴ were considered barbarisms. However, Mancini notes that in addition to these, there are many examples of vowel quantity errors provided by the grammarians that do not align with the Romance quantity development. In these instances, we can observe vowel shortenings in stressed open syllables or lengthening in stressed closed syllables.

The examples of the grammarians are presented in Table 1. The grey-highlighted words are those that do not conform to the Romance vowel quantity system and thus form the basis of Mancini’s argument. With the exception of examples from Gellius and Augustinus, all the words exemplify the *barbarismus temporis*.

Table 1. Grammarians’ examples related to vowel quantity errors

Syllables:	Unstressed		Stressed			
			Open		Closed	
	Shortening	Lengthening	Lengthening	Shortening	Lengthening	Shortening
Gellius	<i>succídanae</i> <i>ăctitavi</i>		<i>ususcāpio</i> <i>pignoriscāpio</i>			<i>ăctito</i> <i>quiěscit</i>
Sacerdos	<i>Cērēs</i>		<i>Cērēs</i>		<i>pērnix</i>	
Donatus	<i>dēōs</i>		<i>dēōs</i>			
Victorinus		<i>rēpōno</i>		<i>rēpōno</i>		
Augustinus	<i>primīs</i>		<i>cāno</i>		<i>ōs</i>	
Servius			<i>rōsam</i>	<i>Rōmam</i>		
Consentius	<i>ōrator</i> <i>picēs</i>		<i>pīper</i> <i>pīces</i> <i>pīces</i>		<i>ōssua</i>	
Pompeius			<i>aequus</i> (< <i>equs</i>)	<i>Rōma</i> <i>Rōma</i>		
Iulianus T.	<i>dēōs</i>		<i>dēōs</i>			
Commentator Prisciani	<i>dēūs</i>		<i>dēūs</i>			
n. of data	9	1	12	4	3	2
n. of lexemes	7	1	9	2	3	2
n. of authors	7	1	9	3	3	1

¹³GLK V. 392, 3–4.

¹⁴GLK V. 392, 6–12.

I believe that Loporcaro and Mari were correct in rejecting the notion of vocalic isochrony in relation to late antique Latin. I think that the examples which do not align with the Romance development were not drawn from the spoken language of the grammarians' era and can be interpreted differently. The description of *barbarisms* (i.e. phonological and morphological errors) was not meant to document contemporary language use but rather served as a quasi-obligatory section of Latin grammars, governed by its own specific rules. To support my perspective, let us explore the tradition of describing grammatical barbarisms in Latin from the beginning.

2.1. Quintilianus (1st century)

1. 6. *Interim vitium, quod fit in singulis verbis, sit barbarismus. (...) Aut quis hoc nescit, alios barbarismos scribendo fieri, alios loquendo (quia quod male scribitur male etiam dici necesse est, quae vitiose dixeris non utique et scripto peccant), illud prius adiectione, detractioe, inmutatione, transmutatione, hoc secundum diuisione, complexione, adspiratione, sono contineri?*

For the present I will define barbarism as an offence occurring in connexion with single words. (...) But who does not know that some barbarisms occur in writing, others in speaking? For although what is incorrect in writing will also be incorrect in speech, the converse is not necessarily true, inasmuch as mistakes in writing are caused by **addition** or **omission**, **substitution** or **transposition**, while mistakes in speaking are due to **separation** or **combination** of syllables, to **aspiration** or **other errors of sound**.¹⁵

17. (...) *Plus exigunt subtilitatis quae accidunt in dicendo vitia, quia exempla eorum tradi scripto non possunt, nisi cum in uersus inciderunt, ut diuisio Europai' Asiai, et ei contrarium uitium, quod συναίρεσις et ἐπισυναλιφήν Graeci uocant, nos complexionem dicimus, qualis est apud P. Varronem: tum te flagranti deiectum fulmine Phaethon. 18. Nam si esset prosa oratio, easdem litteras enuntiare ueris syllabis licebat. Praeterea quae fiunt spatio, siue cum syllaba correpta producitur, ut Italiam fato profugus, seu longa corripitur, <ut> unius ob noxam et furias, extra carmen non deprendas, sed nec in carmine uitia dicenda sunt. (Inst. Or. I. 5.)*

The faults which arise in the course of actual speaking require greater penetration on the part of the critic, since it is impossible to cite examples from writing, except in cases where they occur in poetry, as when the diphthong is divided into two syllables in *Europai* and *Asiai*; or when the opposite fault occurs, called synaeresis or synaloephe by the Greeks and complexio by ourselves: as an example I may quote the line of Publius Varro: *tum te flagranti deiectum fulmine Phaethon*. If this were prose, it would be possible to give the letters their true syllabic value. I may mention as further anomalies peculiar to poetry the lengthening of a short syllable as in *Italiam fato profugus*, or the shortening of a long such as *unius ob noxam et furias*; but in poetry we cannot label these as actual faults.

¹⁵The citations from Quintilian are translated by Butler (1920).

The first appearance of the word *barbarismus* is in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,¹⁶ but the first systematic categorization of barbarisms is found in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. This categorization distinguishes between barbarisms that can arise in writing and those that occur in speech. In writing, Quintilian identifies four ways (*adiectio*, *detractio*, *inmutatio*, *transmutatio*)¹⁷ whereby a barbarism appears and two linguistic levels (*littera* and *syllaba*) in which it can be manifested. The four categories for oral barbarisms are less clear. We can find among them two ways (*divisio* and *complexio*), which refer to the pronunciation of diphthongs, and two linguistic levels (*aspiratio* e *sonus*). Additionally, there is one more category that falls outside the oral-written distinction: *spatium*, which refers to the shortening or lengthening of syllables.

The examples that Quintilian provides¹⁸ are all drawn from hexameters of renowned Latin authors, primarily Virgil. For instance, to demonstrate syllabic lengthening, Quintilian uses the line *Italiam fato profugus...*, an excerpt from the *Aeneid*. Similarly, for shortening, he cites another half-verse from the same poem: *unius ob noxam...* (with a shortened *i* in *unius*).¹⁹

Table 2. Quintilianus

BARBARISMUS				
LOQUENDO		SCRIBENDO		
			litterae	syllabae
Divisio		Adiectio		
Complexio		Detractio		
Aspiratio		Inmutatio		
Sonus		Transmutatio		
Praeterea quae fiunt spatio				
syllaba correpta producitur	<i>Italiam fato profugus</i> ... (Aen. I. 2)			
longa corripitur	<i>unius ob noxam et furias</i> ... (Aen. I. 41)			

¹⁶Barbarismus est, cum verbis al<iquid> vitiose efferatur. (Rhet. Her. IV. 12. 17)

A barbarism occurs if the verbal expression is incorrect. (trans. by Caplan 1954).

¹⁷In the ancient philosophic, grammatic and rhetoric literature, these four ways (called traditionally *quadripertita ratio*) were used for describing rhetorical operations and lexical etimologies since Aristoteles. (cf. Calboli 2020, 479–751). It can be found also in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (IV. 21. 29), but not in relation with, the barbarisms.

¹⁸Table 2 and the following ones present only those examples that illustrate barbarisms of quantity.

¹⁹The exact references of the cited poetic passages are given in the illustrative tables, at the first occurrence of each passage.

In the *Institutio Oratoria*, written in the 1st century AD, we find a categorization of barbarisms that already includes errors related to vowel quantity. This is significant because it predates the collapse of the Latin quantitative vowel system, meaning that the appearance of these categories cannot be explained by a contemporary linguistic process. Quintilian was cataloguing theoretically possible errors that could occur within the boundaries of a word, and since he could not find examples related to vowel quantity change in the spoken language of his time, he had to rely on poetic texts to illustrate these errors. (Thus, these illustrative examples are not barbarisms but metaplasms²⁰).

Although I have not done any research on Quintilian’s sources, the inclusion of aspiration among the categories suggests Greek antecedents.

2.2. Cominianus²¹ & Diomedes²² (4th century)

After Quintilian, we know of two grammarians from the 4th century who made similar categorizations: Cominianus and Diomedes (see Table 3).²³ Unlike Quintilian, they did not differentiate between oral and written barbarisms, but the four ways of making a barbarism (*adiectio*, *detractio*, *inmutatio*, *transmutatio*), which we have already seen in Quintilian, occurred in their discussion. We can see that quantity, which Quintilian mentioned as an extra category, has been inserted into the system as a linguistic level, under the name of *tempus*. So, we can find here the first appearances of categories such as *adiectio temporis*, *detractio temporis*, etc., which would later be used by all grammarians when classifying types of barbarisms. The example of *adiectio temporis* is the same as that of Quintilian (*Italiam fato...*), while to illustrate *detractio temporis*, they chose a different verse from the *Aeneid*: *fervere Leucaten...*, where the second *e* of the infinitive *fervēre* is shortened. These two grammarians mentioned changes in vowel quantity among the barbarisms, but – like Quintilian – they did so without referring to the contemporary spoken language. Their examples were exclusively taken from poetic texts.

Table 3. Cominianus & Diomedes

BARBARISMUS					
	litterae	syllabae	temporis	(aspirationis)	(sonus)
Adiectio			<i>Italiam fato profugus ...</i>		
Detractio			<i>Fervere Leucaten ...</i> (Aen. VIII. 67)		
Inmutatio					
Transmutatio					

²⁰Servius: *si in prosa oratione fiat, tunc barbarismus dicitur; si autem in poemate, metaplasmus vocatur.* (GLK IV. 444. 8–10)
If it arises in prose, it is termed a barbarism; but in poetry, it is called metaplasma.

²¹GLK I. 265. 10–15 (The work of Cominianus has survived in Charisius’ grammar, cf. Barwick 1997).

²²GLK I. 452. 1–16.

²³The work of Sacerdos grammaticus (3rd cent.) is treated separately, since his categorization differs from the system of Quintilian.

2.3. Donatus (4th century)²⁴

2. (sc. barbarismus fit) per transmutationem (...) temporis ut siquis **deos** producta priore syllaba et correpta posteriore pronuntiet. (GLK IV. 392. 19–21)

(Sc. barbarism arises) by transposition (...) of quantity, when someone pronounces the word **deos** with the initial syllable lengthened and the final one shortened.²⁵

If we turn to Donatus’ categorization (still in the 4th century), we can see how the four types of barbarism can appear combined with the five linguistic levels where the error can be realized (see Table 4). Donatus mentions that barbarisms can occur both in oral and written texts, but he treated the two types together. Based on his examples, we can infer that he used both Quintilian and Cominianus or Diomedes, since we find both *unius ob noxam...* and *fervere Leucaten...* illustrating *detractio temporis*. In any case, Donatus was the first to provide an example for the category of *transmutatio temporis*, and it was a prosaic one:²⁶ *dēos*, pronounced with a lengthened *e* in an open stressed syllable, and a shortened *o* in an unstressed position.

Table 4. Donatus

BARBARISMUS					
(PRONUNTIATIONE ET SCRIPTO)					
	litterae	syllabae	temporis	aspirationis	sonus
Adiectio			<i>Italiam fato profugus ...</i>		
Detractio			<i>Unius ob noxam et furias ...</i> <i>Fervere Leucaten ...</i>		
Inmutatio					
Transmutatio			<i>dēos</i>		

2.4. Servius (late 4th century)²⁷

3. Fit autem barbarismus principaliter modis duobus, pronuntiatione et scripto: <pronuntiatione>, si aut naturaliter longas syllabas breuiter proferamus, ut **Romam**, aut si naturaliter breues producamus, ut **rosam** (GLK IV. 444. 12–14)

In principle, barbarisms arise in two ways: in pronunciation and in writing. In pronunciation, they occur either when we articulate syllables that are long by nature as short, e.g. **Roma**, or when we vocalize syllables that are short by nature as long, e.g. **rosa**.²⁸

²⁴GLK IV. 392. 4–21 (cf. Holtz 1981).

²⁵The citations from Donatus are given in my translation.

²⁶According to the *Pedecerto* database (<https://www.pedecerto.eu/>), there is no occurrence of *dēos* (with long *ē*) in the ancient poetic literature.

²⁷GLK IV. 444. 12–26 (cf. Zago 2016).

²⁸The citations from Servius are given in my translation.

Turning to Servius, writing at the end of the 4th century, we encounter the first problematic examples (see Table 5). Servius wrote a commentary on Donatus’ grammar, so it is not surprising that his description of barbarisms closely mirrors that of Donatus.

However, Servius (like Quintilian) differentiated between oral and written barbarisms, and based on the examples, his distinction was more nuanced. According to Servius’ categorization, written barbarisms are those that can be detected visually. Regarding vowel quantity, these are the ones that occur in verse, as they can be observed even by reading the text. Servius used the verse *Italiam fato...* to illustrate *adiectio temporis* in writing. But for *detractio temporis* he cited a half-line (taken, not surprisingly, from the *Aeneid*) that was not used by Quintilian or his followers, at least not in this context. His example of written shortening is *obstipui steteruntque ...*, where the second – originally stressed – *e* of the word *stetērunt* has been shortened.²⁹

In contrast, according to Servius, an oral barbarism refers to an error that exists only in speech, and thus can only be observed by hearing the poorly pronounced word, while it remains completely hidden in the written text. But how could such an error be presented in a written grammatical work? Servius chose two words that he had used earlier to illustrate the qualitative distinction between short and long *o*: *rosa* and *Roma*.³⁰ The words that seemed appropriate for demonstrating the classical vowel quantity (*rōsa*, *Rōma*) were also suitable for showing potential errors in the same linguistic element (*rōsa*, *Rōma*).

The choice of the word *Rōma* – which was in Mancini’s theory a hypercorrect form that indicates a linguistic process divergent from the Romance development – was, in my opinion, a didactic decision. Servius did not use examples to describe contemporary linguistic changes in detail. He had to provide non-metric examples because of how he interpreted the category of

Table 5. Servius

BARBARISMUS							
PRONUNTIATIONE		SCRIPTO					
	temporis		litterae	syllabae	temporis	aspirationis	accentus
Adiectio	<i>rōsa</i>	Adiectio			<i>Italiam fato ...</i>		<i>hic</i>
Detractio	<i>Rōma</i>	Detractio		Obstipui steteruntque ... (Aen. II. 774)			<i>deinde</i>
		Inmutatio					
		Transmutatio					

²⁹135 GLK IV. 444. 12–26 (We must mention that the form *–erunt* (with a short *e*) was already present in classical Latin as an alternative variant of the word ending *–ērunt*, and based on Romance forms (e.g. It. *dissero*), we can suppose that in this case, the word accent fell on the antepenultimate syllable (cf. Sihler 1995, 589). Thus, the example is related to a morphological phenomenon, rather than to the transformation of the quantitative system).

³⁰Servius: *Nam o productum quando est, ore sublato vox sonat, ut Roma, quando correptum, de labris vox exprimitur, ut rosa. Item e quando producitur, vicinum est ad sonum i litterae, ut meta, quando autem correptum, vicinum est ad sonum diphthongi, ut equus.* (GLK IV. 421, 16–21)
For the vowel *o*, when it is lengthened, the voice sounds with a raised mouth, as in *Roma*; but when it is shortened, the voice is produced from the lips, as in *rosa*. Similarly, when *e* is lengthened, it is close to the sound of the letter *i*, as in *meta*; but when it is shortened, it is close to the sound of the diphthong, as in *equus*.

oral barbarisms, and he chose the “flag-words”³¹ that were already familiar to his readers in relation to vowel quantity. It was not a problem that one of the two examples (*rōsa*) was probably natural to their ears, while the other one (*Rōma*) sounded strange.

2.5. Pompeius (5th century)³²

4. *Omnis barbarismus fit modis duobus, pronuntiātu aut scriptu. (...) Est alter, qui fit in pronuntiātu. Plerumque male pronuntiamus et facimus uitium, <ut> aut brevis syllaba longo tractu sonet aut iterum longa breuiore sono: siqui uelit dicere Rōma, aut si uelit dicere ēquus pro eo quod est ēquus.* (Comm. in Art. Don. III. 8–9).³³

All barbarisms arise in two ways, in pronunciation and in writing. (...) The other type occurs in pronunciation. We commonly mispronounce words, and commit an error that either a short syllable is articulated with long duration, or a long one is pronounced too briefly: when someone were to say *Rōma*, or when he or she were to say *ēquus* for the word *ēquus*.³⁴

5. *Detrahimus accentum, si uelis dicere Rōma, cum tractim debeas dicere: longiorem enim illum accentum ad breuem traxisti.* (Comm. in Art. Don. III. 16)³⁵

We remove the accent if you were to say *Rōma*, while you ought to say it in a drawn-out manner; for you reduced the longer accent to a short one.

Pompeius – another commentator on Donatus, whose dependence on Servius is widely accepted in the literature on the topic³⁶ – offers a similar categorization (see Table 6). His distinction between oral and written barbarisms is the same as that of Servius and he uses the same metrical examples. We even find *Rōma* (with a short *o*) as the illustrative example of *detractio temporis* in pronunciation. However, instead of *rōsa*, Pompeius has chosen *ēquus*. This example was also drawn from Servius, who cited its classical form, *ēquus*, to illustrate the qualitative character of

Table 6. Pompeius

BARBARISMUS								
PRONUNTIATU			SCRIPTU					
	litterae	temporis		litterae	syllabae	temporis	aspirationis	toni
Adiectio		ēquus	Adiectio		Italiam fato ...			ârma
Detractio		Rōma	Detractio		Obstipui steteruntque ...			Rōma
			Inmutatio					
			Transmutatio					

³¹cf. Mancini (2001), 316–17.
³²GLK V. 284. 29 – 285. 34. (cf. Zago 2017).
³³Text according to Zago (2017) (cf. GLK V. 285, 5–9).
³⁴The citations from Pompeius are given in my translation.
³⁵Text according to Zago (2017) (cf. GLK V. 285, 30–32).
³⁶See Kaster (1988, 140); Zago (2017, XCVI).

the short *e*.³⁷ Thus, I agree with Tommaso Mari, who believes that the form *Róma* as an example of *detractio temporis* should be interpreted as a citation from Servius,³⁸ rather than as a hyper-correction from the vulgar Latin of Pompeius' time.

(I would also like to briefly note that *Rōma* and *ēquus* are written with diphthongs – *Ruoma*, but also *Rouma* and *aequus* – in several manuscripts and even in some editions. Based on this, some philologists have argued that we are witnessing the documentation of qualitative changes in the mid vowels.³⁹ However, Anna Zago has proved that the letter *u* appeared in the manuscripts due to a misinterpretation of the diacritical mark indicating the short quantity of the vowel in *Rōma*.⁴⁰ Her interpretation has since become widely accepted,⁴¹ and earlier theories suggesting that this example demonstrates qualitative vowel transformation are no longer considered part of scholarly discourse).

The other instance of *Róma* in Pompeius' categorization appears among the examples of barbarisms related to word accent, illustrating the category of *detractio accentus*. According to Mancini, this example actually pertains to vowel quantity, but I find this interpretation unconvincing.

In this context, *detractio* refers to a (theoretically) circumflex word accent being reduced to an acute accent. In the categorization of accent types in Latin grammatical literature, which is largely based on Greek antecedents,⁴² the circumflex accent usually refers to the word accent of a disyllabic word that falls on a long vowel in an open syllable (while the other, unstressed syllable of the word is short).⁴³ In all other cases, the word accent is considered acute. As Pompeius' description shows,⁴⁴ this theoretical system resulted in (not perfect) parallelism between accent and vowel quantity: short vowels had acute accent, and long ones with certain conditions (but not always!) had circumflex accent. Thus, both *detractio temporis* and *detractio accentus* could be exemplified with the word *Roma*, in which something (either the quantity of the stressed vowel, or the hypothetical circumflex accent) was reduced. Still, this theoretical parallelism does not mean

³⁷See note 27.

³⁸Mari (2021, 195).

³⁹Loporcaro (1997, 66); Mancini (2001, 316–17).

⁴⁰Zago (2013).

⁴¹e.g. Mancini (2019, 38).

⁴²Allen (1973, 151).

⁴³e.g. Servius: *In disyllabis vero unus modus est, qui circumflexum ostendit accentum, quotiens prior naturaliter longa est et ultima naturaliter brevis, ut meta, Creta, Roma. Aliter vero acutum habet, sive ambae natura longae fuerint, ut leges, sive positione longae, ut princeps, sive naturaliter breves, (...) sic et sive prior positione longa sit, ut arma, sive posterior, ut Arabs, ubique acutus, ut diximus, accentus est.* (GLK IV. 426. 31–37)

In disyllabic words, there is only one case in which a circumflex accent appears: when the first syllable is long by nature, and the second one is short by nature, as in *meta*, *Creta*, *Roma*. In all other cases the word has an acute accent: whether both syllables are long by nature, as in *leges*, or long by position, as in *princeps*, or both short (...). The same applies whether the first syllable is long by position, as in *arma*, or the second, as in *Arabs*. In all such cases, as we have said, the accent is acute.

⁴⁴Pompeius: *Acutus dicitur accentus, quotiens cursim syllabam proferimus, ut si dicas arma, árcus: non possumus dicere arma, non possumus dicere árcus. (...) Circumflexus dicitur, quando tractim syllabam proferimus, ut méta, Músa.* (GLK V. 126. 11–27)

An accent is called acute in all cases whenever we pronounce the syllable rapidly, as when you say *arma*, *árcus*; we cannot say *arma*, and we cannot say *árcus*. (...) It is called circumflex when we pronounce the syllable in a drawn-out manner, as in *méta*, *Músa*.

that the word *Róma* with a so-called acute accent as stigmatized by the grammarian, was evidence of the form pronounced hypercorrectly with a short *o* in the everyday language of the 5th century.

2.6. Consentius (5th century)⁴⁵

6. (*sc. Sic fit per adiectionem*) *temporis, ut quidam dicunt piper producta priore syllaba, cum sit brevis, quod uitium Afrorum familiare est.* (GLK V. 392, 3–4)

(...) a barbarism is made through the addition (...) of a quantity, as some people say *piper* with a long first syllable while it is short, a mistake which is customary with Africans.⁴⁶

7. *Per detractiōem fiunt barbarismi sic: (...) temporis, ut si quis dicat orator correpta priore syllaba, quod ipsum vitium Afrorum speciale est.* (GLK V. 392, 6–12)

By means of removal barbarisms are made as follows: by removal (...) of a quantity, as for instance if someone were to say *orator* with a short first syllable, another mistake which is specific to Africans.

8. *Per inmutationem fiunt barbarismi sic: (...) temporis, ut si quis pices dicens priorem extendat.* (GLK V. 392, 14–18)

By means of substitution barbarisms are made as follows: by substitution (...) of a quantity, as for instance if someone were to say *pices* lengthening the first syllable.

9. *Per transmutationem fiunt barbarismi sic (...) temporis, ut si quis pices producta priore et correpta sequenti pronuntiet.* (GLK V. 392. 25–25)

By means of transposition barbarisms are made as follows: by transposition (...) of a quantity, as for instance if someone were to pronounce *pices* with a long first syllable and a short second syllable.

10. *Hoc sic animadvertamus: qui dicit ossua, barbarismum facit per adiectionem litterae; item qui dicit strenuas, barbarismum facit per adiectionem eiusdem litterae. Debit enim dicere ossa et strenas. Porro qui dicit strenuam, dicitur et barbarismum facere et soloecismum per artis regulas, quod strenae singulari numero non dicuntur. Et ad hoc talem rationem adferunt scriptores, capaces esse per naturam singulas partes orationis, ut vitia multiplicata suscipiant. Nam barbarismum non uno modo in una dictione posse fieri, ut si quis hoc ipsum quod diximus, ossua, producta priore syllaba pronuntiat. Erit enim barbarismus per adiectionem temporis in prima syllaba et per adiectionem litterae in secunda syllaba.* (GLK V. 396. 25–35)

Let us consider this issue in the following way: he who says *ossua* commits a barbarism by the addition of a letter; likewise, he who says *strenuae* commits a barbarism by the addition of the same letter, for he should have said *ossa* and *strenae*. On the other hand, it is said that he who says *strenua* commits both a barbarism and a solecism—namely, a barbarism by the addition of a letter and a solecism by the violation of grammatical rules, because the word *strenae* does not have a singular. And the grammatical authorities explain this phenomenon by arguing that single words are naturally susceptible to incurring multiple vices, because a

⁴⁵GLK V. 391. 25 – 397. 3 (cf. Mari 2021).

⁴⁶The citations from Consentius are translated by Mari (2021).

barbarism can be made in more than one way in one word, as for example if someone were to pronounce the aforesaid *ossua* with a long first syllable. For this will be a barbarism by addition of a quantity in the first syllable and by addition of a letter in the second syllable.

Analyzing Consentius’ description, although he was a contemporary of Pompeius, we move further away from the tradition founded by Quintilian. The system of the categories (see Table 7) does not follow Servius’ strict differentiation between oral and written barbarisms, although he mentions these two groups, as Donatus did.

Consentius expressed his disapproval because his predecessors mixed barbarisms and metaplasms among the illustrative examples of the barbarism categories, and promised not to make this mistake.⁴⁷ As other researchers have already observed, Consentius kept his promise,⁴⁸ at least in the simple cases he treated. Those poetic examples that I presented in the previous pages were cited even by Consentius, but always as metaplasms. His prosaic examples, chosen to illustrate the categories of barbarisms (*pīper*, *orator*, *pīces*), aligned with the Romance development of vowel quantity, except for one: the word *ōssua* with a “lengthened first syllable.” (By this expression, the grammarian probably refers to the lengthening of the vowel, as the closed syllable *os-* is already long).

I think that Tommaso Mari was correct when he interpreted this form as an *exemplum fictum*.⁴⁹ The form *ōssua* is found in a paragraph where Consentius describes how a barbarism and a solecism, or two barbarisms, can occur in a single word. To illustrate the coexistence of a barbarism and a soloecism, he cites the form *strenua*, corrupted from the plural-only *strenae*, while *ōssua* is used to show how two barbarisms can manifest in one word.

Table 7. Consentius

BARBARISMUS					
ENUNTIATIONE ET SCRIPTO					
	litterae	syllabae	temporis	aspiratione	accentus
Adiectio	X	<i>ōssua</i>	X <i>pīper</i>		
Detractio			<i>ōrator</i>		
Inmutatio			<i>pīces</i>		
Transmutatio			<i>pīcēs</i>		

⁴⁷*Nunc iam quibus modis barbarismus fiat, tempestivius proferemus. In quo equidem non imitabor eos scriptores, qui exempla huius modi vitiorum de auctoritate lectionum dare voluerunt, quo factum est ut eorum vitiorum confusione paene iam nemo intellegat, quid barbarismus sit, quid metaplasmus. (...) Nos exempla huius modi dabimus, quae in usu cotidie loquentium animadvertere possumus, si paulo ea curiosius audiamus.* (GLK V. 391. 25–33)

Now at last it is time for us to set forth the ways in which a barbarism is made. In so doing, I for one shall not imitate those scholars who have wanted to give examples of such mistakes from literary authority, as a consequence of which it has happened that, because of the confusion of those mistakes, now almost nobody understands what is a barbarism and what is a metaplasms; (...). We shall give the type of examples which we can observe in the usage of everyday speakers, if we listen a little more carefully.

⁴⁸Vainio (2000, 39–40).

⁴⁹Mari (2021, 192–95).

Mari suggests that the motivation for choosing *óssua* may lie in the inserted *u* in the form, a feature shared with the previously mentioned *strenua*. This was undoubtedly a real vulgar Latin phenomenon dating back to the Republican Age,⁵⁰ while the lengthened vowel of the first syllable was likely a theoretical barbarism. Consentius may have chosen the word because of the first, real error, thus needing to present another one to fit his own criteria. Perhaps the idea of vowel lengthening originated from the grammatical work of Pseudo Palaemon (written in the 4th century), in which the stigmatization of the form with the inserted *u* (*ossua* instead of *ossa*) and the mention of the short quantity of the *o* can be found in close proximity.⁵¹ Based on these facts, I do not believe that this example supports the theory of vowel lengthening in closed stressed syllables.

2.7. Marius Victorinus (early 4th cent.)

11. *Quid (sc. barbarismus) temporis? Ut si quis dicat repono producta prima correptaque media.* (Fragm. de barb. et sol. 36, 22-23 Niedermann)

What is a (sc. barbarism) of quantity? E.g. if someone says *repono*, with the first syllable lengthened and the second shortened.

Let us go back in time and examine the problematic case of Marius Victorinus from the 4th century, who wrote a description that reminds us of Cominianus’ and Diomedes’ categorization (see Table 8). The combination of error types and linguistic levels in which the error occurs is present, but we cannot find any trace of differentiation between oral and written barbarisms. An even more important fact is that Marius Victorinus’ examples are completely different from those I have discussed up to this point.

Table 8. Marius Victorinus

BARBARISMUS					
	litterae	syllabae	temporis	aspiratione	accentus
Adiectio			'exercet <i>Diana</i> choros ... (Aen. l. 499)		
Detractio			<i>emērunť</i>		
Inmutatio					
Transmutatio			<i>rēpōno</i>		

⁵⁰e.g. CIL I. 1219. 1–3. (Rome, 150–100 BC): *PRIMAE* | *POMPEIAE* | *OSSVA HEIC* (There are 65 occurrences of the form *OSSVA* in the *Epigraphik Datenbank Clauss / Slaby* https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi.php?s_sprache=en).

⁵¹Ps. Palaem. (...) *nec u exit, nec nominativus pluralis ossua facit (...) Sed hoc nomen corripimus in nominativo singulari; ab eo vero quod sunt ora, id est vultus, nominativo singulari producitur.* (GLK V. 538. 40–539. 4) It does not end in *u*, nor does its nominative plural make *ossua*. (...) But we shorten this noun in the nominative singular; by contrast, from that, which are *ora*, that is faces, it gets lengthened in nominative singular. (My translation).

Instead of *Ītaliā fātō...*, he cited *Exercet Dīāna choros...* as an example of *adiectio temporis*. This verse was used even by Charisius, Diomedes and Consentius, but always as an illustration of metaplasm.⁵² In the category of *detractio temporis*, we can see the *emērunt* form,⁵³ which was probably drawn from Terence, as Diomedes cites it with its metrical context, in the morphological section of his work.⁵⁴

In contrast, we cannot identify any poetic text as the source of *rēpono*, a form that is not attested by other grammarians. Marius Victorinus was the one who presented it as an example of *transmutatio temporis*. Consequently, we cannot exclude the possibility that we are dealing with a form that truly existed in the spoken language of Marius Victorinus' age. Mancini argues that *rēponō* was an example of shortening in a stressed open syllable, (similar to *Róma* in the works of Servius and Pompeius, which I treated above).⁵⁵ Conversely, I believe that this form reflects theoretical hypercorrectism in relation to the position of the accent: the grammarian may have supposed a shift of the word accent onto the first (antepenultimate) syllable (*repóno* > **rēpono*), and in this framework, the vocalic changes in the word aligned with the Romance development.

We know that the position of the word accent in compound words changed in the Romance languages: the prefix, which could be stressed in classical Latin as an integral part of the word (e.g. *sústinet*),⁵⁶ has been separated in this sense (cf. It, Sp. *sostiene*). I think that *rēponō* can be interpreted as a hypercorrect form, but in relation to the position of the accent. Believing – incorrectly – that classical Latin *repóno* was a vulgar form, where the word accent was shifted from the prefix to the penultimate syllable (** *répōno* > *repóno*, ad an. *sústinet* > **susténet*), the theoretical speaker may have shifted the word accent back to the first syllable, where they believed it originally belonged.

If this hypercorrect shift in word accent did occur, the transformation of vowel quantity within the word (the cited barbarism) corresponds perfectly to the vowel quantity system of the Romance languages: lengthening in an open stressed syllable and shortening in an unstressed syllable.

repóno > **répōno* > *rēpono*

⁵²Char. GLK I. 278. 25–26, Diom. GLK I. 442. 1–3, Cons. GLK V. 389. 6.

⁵³See n. 18.

⁵⁴Diomedes: *Praeterea id obseruandum fuit, quod fere in tertio ordine plerumque ueteres tertia persona finitiua temporis perfecti numeri pluralis e mediam uocalem corripunt, quasi legērunt, emērunt dicentes; ut apud Terentium quoque legitur in prologo Eunuchi: postquam aediles emērunt, et his similia.* (GLK I. 350. 9–14)

In addition, it was to be observed that, generally in the third conjugation, most of the old authors shorten the middle vowel *e* in the third person plural of the finite perfect tense, saying, for example, *legērunt, emērunt*; This can also be read in the prologue of the Eunuch by Terence: *postquam aediles emērunt*, and other similar axamples. (My translation).

⁵⁵Mancini (2019, 39).

⁵⁶cf. Norberg (2004, 8–9).

If my interpretation cannot be excluded, Marius Victorinus’ example cannot be taken as evidence of hypercorrect shortening in open stressed syllables, which according to Mancini, would support the theory of vocalic isochrony in the vulgar Latin language.⁵⁷

2.8. Sacerdos (late 3rd cent.)⁵⁸

12. *Barbarismus est uitiosa dictio unius uerbi, qui fit modis octo: per productionem, ac si dicas **pernix** <et> per- producas, quae correpta est, (...) (GLK VI. 451. 4–5)*

A barbarism is the faulty expression of a single word, which arises in eight ways: by lengthening, as if you were to say **pernix**, and lengthen *per-*, which is short.⁵⁹

13. (sc. *barbarismus fit*) *per immutationem accentuum, ac si dicas **Cēres** Ce- longa, cum brevis sit, et -res brevis, cum sit longa. (GLK VI. 451. 13–14)*

(sc. A barbarism arises) by substitution of the accent, if you were to say **Cēres** pronouncing Ce- long, though it is short, and -res short, though it is long.

I placed the earliest description of barbarisms (after Quintilian’s) at the end of my paper. Marcius Plotius Sacerdos probably lived and wrote his grammar in the late 3rd century, and he likely based his categorization (see Table 9) of barbarisms on sources other than Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*. In Sacerdos’ grammar, we do not find traces of the combination of the ways whereby a barbarism can be realized and the linguistic elements in which the error might appear. Instead, there are simply eight categories, within which both of these aspects are mixed, and the names of these categories differ from those that we have seen previously. The first and second categories refer to errors in vowel quantity: based on the examples, *productio* means

Table 9. Sacerdos

BARBARISMUS	
Productio	<i>pērnix?</i>
Correptio	<i>stetērunt</i>
Aspiratio	
Lenitas (= aspiratio omissa)	
Inmutatio litterarum	
accentus	
Inmutatio loquellarum (= graecismus, latinismus)	
Inmutationem accentuum	<i>Cēres</i>

⁵⁷Another, though highly improbable explanation for the example would be to suppose that Marius Victorinus had seen (perhaps as an illustrative example cited by another grammarian) only the end of Martial’s hendecasyllabic line *Et totum mihi nunc repono, quidquid* (Mart. Ep. XII. 18. 15.) and had interpreted ... *repono quidquid* as a hexameter ending. However, this suggestion is worth mentioning only in a footnote.

⁵⁸GLK VI. 4–24.

⁵⁹The citations from Sacerdos are translated by me.

adiectio temporis, while *correptio* is used instead of *detractio temporis* following the more widespread terminology.

In illustrating the category of *correptio*, Sacerdos cites *stetērunt* (probably from the *Aeneid*, though without context).⁶⁰ This example (placed in context) would illustrate *detractio temporis* in Servius' grammar, about a hundred years later. This is the only point at which Sacerdos' grammar connects with the known Latin tradition of describing barbarisms.

More interesting is the example of *productio*: *pérnix*, which attests to a lengthening of a closed stressed syllable. This form could support Mancini's theory of the general lengthening of the stressed syllables (regardless of syllable structure), since it seems difficult to explain in any other way. The stressed *é* in the root had already been short in Proto-Italic (PIE **tspērsn-h₂* > PIIt. **persnā*),⁶¹ so we can exclude the possibility that the form with the long *é* was an archaism.

The word does not occur in grammatical works before Sacerdos, but later Latin grammarians discuss it, specifically in relation to vowel quantity. However, they do not address the first, stressed syllable, but rather the short quantity of the unstressed *i*. The word is typically mentioned in the discussions of 3rd declension nouns with the *-ix* ending, where grammarians note that the *-i-* before the ending is long in some words (e.g. *felix -icis*), but short in others (e.g. *pernix -icis*).⁶²

I must confess that I cannot solve this problem. Based on my preliminary investigations, it seems to me that the *r* at the end of a closed syllable may have been weakened during the imperial period, especially in Rome.⁶³ Perhaps the lengthening of the *e* was necessary to preserve the syllable's quantity, which would have been shortened as a result of consonantal weakening at the end of the syllable. However, this is only my speculation, and further research will be needed to verify or refute it.

3. SUMMARY

To sum up, I believe that Mancini's theory on vocalic isochrony (which refers to general vowel lengthening in stressed syllables, irrespective of syllable structure) in vulgar Latin cannot be proved by the examples of *barbarismi temporis*, discussed in the works of late Latin grammarians.

The description of the system of barbarisms was a tradition in Latin grammatical literature, largely based on the works of Quintilian. The similar categorization, the large number of excerpts from poetic texts, and the frequent use of the same examples in the discussions of different authors show that when selecting illustrative forms, tradition played a more important role than contemporary pronunciation, with the exception of Consentius.

Regarding the vowel shortenings in stressed open syllables (which, according to Mancini, were hypercorrect forms that confirm general lengthening), I think the three instances of *Róma*

⁶⁰GLK VI. 451. 5–6.

⁶¹Vaan (2008, 460–61).

⁶²Char. GLK I. 29. 24, Prisc. GLK II. 166. 3, Mart. Cap. De nuptiis filologiae et Mercurii III. 308.

⁶³There are inscriptions from Rome in which the letter *r* is missing at the end of a syllable, e.g. *LIBETABVSQVE* for *libertabusque* (CIL VI. 22069. 5., 51–200 AD), *SATVNIVS* for *Saturninus* (ICUR I. 628. 1., 291–325 AD).

(with a short *o*) are examples of theoretically possible errors, and Pompeius chose this form following his predecessor, Servius. The form *rēpono*, as described by Marius Victorinus, is indeed hypercorrect, but hypercorrection here refers to a shift in word accent to the first syllable, and then vowel quantity changes according to the Romance development.

Among the examples of barbarisms, there are two that show lengthening in closed stressed syllables. As for *óssua*, I agree with other researchers who interpret the form as an *exemplum fictum*, created to illustrate two barbarisms within a single word. The other evidence, *pérnix* in the work of Sacerdos, could support Mancini's theory, though alternative explanations (e.g. a possible compensatory lengthening) should not be ruled out. Still, even if Mancini is correct in interpreting *pérnix*, this form alone cannot prove the theory of vocalic isochrony in the Latin language of the imperial age.

Based on the evidence provided by the examples of barbarisms, the simpler suggestion – that the Latin (as Romance) quantitative system was continuously based on syllabic isochrony – seems more plausible.

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