

A synchronic and diachronic analysis of root-adjacent vocalic pieces (a.k.a Theme Vowels) in Latin verbal morphology: A case for ornamental bleaching

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This paper will look at the historical development of reconstructed VP shell and actional/aspectual formatives from Proto-Indo-European (PIE) into Latin. Thus, on the one hand, it will look at the outcomes of formatives such as **-eye-* characteristic of causatives in PIE, the **-ye* of denominatives, the **-eh₁-* characteristic of statives, and on the other at the outcomes of actional/aspectual like **-e*, **-ye*. These formatives developed into the Latin root-adjacent vocalic pieces *-ā-*, *-ē-*, *-ĕ-*, *-ĭ-*, *-ī-*. The pieces *-ā-*, *-ē-*, *-ī-* developed from VP-shell elements. Thus, the *-ā-* conjugation developed mostly from denominatives in *-ye-* whose bases were the nominal stems of the *-ā-* (<**-eh₂-*) declension: */-ā-/* < **-eh₂-ye* (with loss of the intervocalic glide, subsequent merging of the vowel sequence and eventual reanalysis of the resulting piece as a *v⁰*-derivative): e.g., *curāmus* 'cure' (cf. *curā* 'cure'). The *-ē-* conjugation developed mostly from the stative suffix *-ē-* (<**-eh₁-*) or from causatives in **-eye-* (with *o*-grade of root): */-ē-/* < **-eh₁-*: e.g., *sedēmus* 'we sit' (<**sed-eh₁-*; cf. *sido*, **si-sd-* 'I sit down'), */-ē-/* < **-eyē-*, e.g., *monēmus* 'we warn' (<**mon-eye-*). The *-ī-* conjugation developed mostly from denominatives in **-ye-*, */-ī-/* < **-denominative *-yē-*, e.g., *finīmus* 'limit' (cf. *finis* 'end'), but also from original stems in **-ye-*: *venīmus* 'come' (<**g^wen-ye-*). The pieces */-ĕ-/* and */-ĭ-/* developed from actional/aspectual **-e*, **-ye* (*legimus* <**legy-e* 'collect'; *capio* <**kap-ye-ti* 'takes'). I will argue against recent proposals by Bertocci & Pinzin (2020, 2022), who hypothesized that all these elements preserved their functional status in their development from PIE to Latin so that */-ā-/* and */-ī-/* are functional elements in the VP shell whereas */-ĕ-/* and */-ĭ-/* (as well as */-ē-/* in Bertocci & Pinzin's analysis) are actional/aspectual markers. In contrast, I will support Aronoff's (1994) original hypothesis that all root-adjacent vocalic pieces in Latin are simply ornamental elements. I will show how Latin root-adjacent vocalic pieces lost semantic specificity and were bleached in meaning due to their disparate etymological sources; for example, */-ā-/* did not develop only from the denominative sequence **eh₂-ye* but also from de-adjectival factitive with the suffix **-h₂*: *novare* 'to renew' from *novus*, *nova*, *novum* 'new', and even possibly from a root-final laryngeal as in the case of primary verbs in */-ā-/*, which do not have a clear etymology: *amāre* 'to (make) love', *arāre* 'to plow', *volāre* 'to fly', *cubāre* 'lie down', *flagrāre* 'to glow'. (Note the semantic inhomogeneity of these verbs, which can be transitive, intransitive and also unaccusative.) I will propose that this bleaching finally led to a major reanalysis of Latin morphophonology. Inflectional consonantal pieces were reinterpreted as exponents of functional nodes, and inflectional vocalic pieces as exponents of ornamental nodes. This will lead to a radical theoretical simplification of Latin verbal morphology.

The analysis of the development of the PIE formatives into Latin will require a detailed investigation of the morphosyntactic structure of the PIE verbal forms and specifically of the PIE VP-shell. The original status and the development of the *v⁰*-formatives will be of crucial importance in the analysis. It will be shown that they don't need to be phonologically overt. The consequences of this fact will be explored.