Roots and stems between PIE and Latin

Davide Bertocci
Università di Padova
davide.bertocci@unipd.it

The goal of this talk is to discuss the morphological status of IE roots in the light of the distinction between "strong" verbal systems in which aspect/tense/agreement morphs are applied directly on the root, and "weak" verbal systems in which paradigms are built on stems, that is, on roots implemented by other morphological elements. I will show that these tendencies are the result of a parametric property of roots, which changed in the Proto-Italic branch.

The starting point is the distinction within IE languages between a group of languages with prevalent strong verbal morphology and other languages which display weak strategies mainly. On the one hand in Sanskrit and Greek the inflected forms come from stems which are quite independent from each other (*yu-ná-kti* vs. *áyaukşa*, ζεύγ-νυ-μι vs. ἔζευξα), even if exceptions are known as well. On the other hand Latin paradigms frequently look grounded on single predictable stems, different form bare roots (at least in the most productive verb classes): present stems like *amā-* and even *iu-n-g-* are the only principal parts (Finkel-Stump 2006) of their paradigms. In this light the distinction between strong and weak morphology could be rephrased in terms of root-based systems vs. stem-based ones (Kurzová 1993). In languages like Latin, in other words, many inherited roots are not able to host inflectional morphs, unless they are converted into stems. Furthermore, it is crucial that the stem markers in Latin come all from inherited aspectual/actional morphology (Rix 1986), and that their semantic values look partially blurred, cf. *ā- < *-eh₂-ie/o-* in *amō*, *-ī- < *-ei-* in *sentiō*, *-n-* in *iu-n-g-ō*-(De Vaan 2012, De Vaan 2011, Meiser 1993, Weiss 2009 a.o.).

The switch from aspectual morphs to stem markers and the structural change in paradigmatic type have to be related. My proposal is that the former process is triggered from a change affecting the inherited roots. In order to demonstrate this I follow some principles of D(istributed) M(orphology), since it is the only theoretical perspective whose positions about the concept of root are largely consistent with the entities of IE linguistics. Under DM, roots are usually thought as fully defective entities, namely as lexical elements without any kind of functional feature, while a stem (Embick 2010) is a marked element, conditioned by a specific morpho-syntactic environment. I argue that PIE roots were interpretable as +v/+n just according to the syntactic structure they were embedded under, but in historical Latin some of them lost this property. The loss of verbal character triggered disallowed [-v] feature configurations, which were repaired by insertingf morphs carrying [+aspectual] features, leading to the formation of proper stems with empty aspectual morphs, that is thematised roots. Morphs like *-ā-*, *-ī-*, and even *-n-* were required since their aspectual features were able to assign [+v] reading to impoverished roots. Therefore, the origins of the "weak" Latin morphology can be analysed as the consequence of a change in the morpho-syntactic properties of the roots, rather than as a sudden typological shift.

References

De Vaan, **M., 2011**, "PIE -i presents, -s presents, and their reflexes in Latin", *Glotta* 87, pp. 23-36. **De Vaan**, **M., 2012**, "Latin deverbal presents in *-ā-*", in C.H. Melchert (ed.), *The Indo-European Verb*, Wiesbaden, pp. 315-332. **Embick, D., 2010**, *Stem alternations and stem distributions*, ms. **Finkel, R., G. Stump**, **2006**, "Principal parts and morphological theory", *Morphology* 17, pp. 39-75. Kurzová, H., 1993, From IE to Latin. The evolution of a morphosyntactic type, Amsterdam. **Meiser, G., 1993**, "Zur Funktion des Nasalpräsens im Urindogermanischen", .in G. Meiser (ed.), *Indogermanica et Italica. Festschrift für H. Rix*. Innsbruck, pp.289–313. **Rix, H., 1986**, *Zur Entstehung des urindogermanischen Modussystems*, Innsbruck. **Weiss**, **M., 2009**, *Outline of the Historical and Comparative Grammar of Latin,* Ann Arbor, MI.