VARIATION AND CHANGE
IN GREEK AND LATIN

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Contents

What Does 'Latin' Mean? A Terminological Pamphlet*

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This pamphlet concerns the term vulgar Latin and elaborates on a point I have made earlier.[1] The aim is, by making explicit the implications of this term, to discuss methodological problems in studying variation and change in Latin. The main argument is that variation in Latin is so complex (as always in languages) that it cannot be captured in one term, vulgar Latin. It is easy to take a general and theoretical approach on this theme now that the scope of variation in Latin has been clarified in detailed studies, the overwhelming majority of which has been produced by J. N. Adams.[2] I will draw predominantly on this wealth of data. New non-literary material that has been coming into light during the recent decades often shows vulgar variants in contexts that challenge the old conceptions of their social distribution. The most important discussion on this topic is in Adams (1995, 131–133), both concerning linguistic evidence and terminological issues.

Despite serious criticism, voiced in recent years by leading scholars,[3] the term vulgar Latin continues to be used. Awareness of this criticism causes it to be often used in inverted commas, or accompanied by a modifier such as 'so-called', or 'convenient but imprecise' (Eleanor Dickey in this volume). According to the traditional definition of the term, vulgar Latin is the spoken language of the uneducated (or even illiterate) masses of the Roman empire. The associated time span is usually from the early imperial period onwards.

In the following pages I will approach the term from two perspectives. First, I will look in detail at some of those linguistic features that are usually said to belong to vulgar Latin, and discuss the grounds for this labelling. After this I will turn to traditional definitions of the term, and analyse them. Finally, these considerations will prompt me to address the question posed in the title, and to ask what we actually mean when we talk about 'Latin'.

The discussion in the first section is arranged according to linguistic levels. I consider first the distribution of three phonological phenomena, and their association with vulgar Latin.

I will make one noteworthy omission in linguistic levels, and that is lexicon. Concerning the relevance of lexical issues there is an abundance of information and discussion. I refer to various studies by Adams where he shows the technical nature of much of that layer of vocabulary that was earlier simply labelled vulgar.[4]

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[1] Halla-aho 2009, 29–31; Kruschwitz and Halla-aho 2007, 38–41.

[2] For example, Adams 1977, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2005 and 2007.

[3] See Adams 1995 and Clackson and Horrocks 2007, both cited further below. But this criticism is not a new invention. An important early voice is Pulgram 1950 whose central points remain valid today.

[4] One may start with Adams 1995, 133.

Do phonological changes happen in vulgar Latin?

Among the commonest misspellings in Latin non-literary sources of the early empire are the loss of final *m* and writing the single *e* for the digraph *ae*. These reflect, respectively, the weakness or loss of final *m*, and the monophthongization of the diphthong that is behind *ae*. At the face of it, both are prototypical examples of 'vulgar Latin sound changes'. This appears to be the common verdict despite general knowledge concerning the ancient roots of these phenomena, both of which are attested already in the republican inscriptions. The third case presented here is the variation concerning short *i*, a somewhat more complicated case. I use these three to address the terminological problem. If vulgar Latin predominantly means 'innovations in popular speech during the imperial age', as it often seems, then how should the same features be called when they appear in the early period?

Did the change ae > e happen (first) in vulgar Latin?
Even if more substantial evidence for the monophthongal pronunciation of this phoneme appears only in the early imperial age (this is also due to the fact that non-literary sources survive in greater numbers from this period), there already is evidence in early Latin for variation in the graphic sign used for this phoneme (e.g. *CIL* I² 350 *Grecia* (Praenestine), *CIL* I² 388 *Victorie* (a dative singular, Lacus Fucinus) and Lucil. 1130 *Cecilius pretor ne rusticus fiat*). Adams connects inscriptional evidence with literary testimonies and concludes that during the republic, the monophthongal pronunciation was favoured in the rural areas whereas in Rome the diphthong was retained. The monophthongization thus happened earlier in rural areas than in the city.[5]

Accordingly, in the republican period the question of *ae* and *e* seems to have been a case of regional variation. In this case, the rustic pronunciation was innovative, and showed early on the direction that also urban Latin was to follow.[6] The spread in the urban variety happened supposedly via the sub elite classes, so that the feature (that was originally regional) was turned into an instance of social variation in the city of Rome. Was vulgar Latin spoken outside Rome in the early period or should the same feature be called vulgar only after it enters the urban variety?

Did the weakening of final m happen in vulgar Latin?
The weakness and falling out of final *m* is another typical vulgar feature that, however, has its roots in early Latin. In contrast to the monophthongal pronunciation of *ae* that seems to have been a non-Roman feature in the republic, the weakness of final *m* is attested in the republican period even in Roman inscriptions. There is a difference according to the status of the commissioner. Official inscriptions show the *m* but private ones, for example the Scipio *elogia* often lack it.[7] Leumann states that in old Latin the pronunciation of final *m* was often "reduziert", and meant the dropping out of *m* and nasalization of the preceding vowel. In the refined language of the Classical period the *m* was then restored

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[5] On *ae/e* and the examples cited in the text see Adams 2007, 19; 78–88 and 109–110.

[6] One may note in this connection that the general trend is rather the opposite: retention of older features in the periphery and innovation in the urban centre, see Adams 2007, 19. The spread of the urban variant is caused by its prestige, see Adams 2007, 118–119 on the prestige of the Roman variety.

[7] Leumann 1977, 224 and Wachter 1987, 305 and 308.

in speech (Leumann 1977, 225). In this perspective, apparently, the *m*-less forms became vulgar only when this happened. But this does not seem to make any sense: can we really call the *m*-less forms first just 'Latin' or even 'archaic Latin' and then suddenly a shift in status happens and they become part of 'vulgar Latin'?

A more probable sketch of the situation could be that this feature exhibited persisting variation according to different situations, speakers, social classes and regions, from the earliest period onwards. The fact that the final *m* appears in the standard orthography does not automatically mean that it was universally 'restored' in speech (it may have been restored or favoured all along in the prestige variety of Rome). We do know, after all, that in classical poetry final *m* was metrically weak and elided between vowels.

Variation in the spelling of short i
In early Latin, the occasional use of the letter *e* to render the sound that is usually a short *i* is explained by referring to the indeterminacy in the pronunciation of this phoneme (e.g. *Tempestatebus* in *CIL* I² 9, see Wachter 1987, 488 and Adams 2007, 70–72).[8] But when the same graphic variation takes place in a later text, e.g. in a Pompeian wall inscription, the explanation given is usually the 'vulgar Latin merger' of *ē* and *ĭ* (the outcome of which was a closed short *ę* in Romance with the exception of Sardinian).[9] It is normally assumed that the old indeterminacy was resolved, and the sound was established as a short *i* universally, before later on the merger of long *e* and short *i* again started to produce forms where *e* is written for short *i*.[10]

But what is this merger actually? It consists of two developments, the opening of short *i* to a closed *e*, and the loss of the quantitative opposition between long *e* and short *e*. The latter is part of the general reconstruction of the vocalic system and not particular to long *e*. The first marks of the quantitative rhythm disappearing in poetry are found in Pompeii, and the change probably was in full swing by the late 3rd century.[11] The spelling of *e* for short *i*, testifying to an open pronunciation, is attested in the Pompeian inscriptions, papyri, tablets and ostraca. But because such spellings are found already in early Latin, it is not impossible to imagine a situation of persisting phonological variation. This would mean that the open pronunciation never died out, but was there all the time, enjoying varying popularity, until it gained ground in the early imperial age.[12] Finally it merged with long *e* when the quantitative distinctions had ceased to exist.

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[8] Adams 2007, 68–72 discusses *e* for *i* in hiatus (*filea*) separately from other instances of *e* for *i*. The distribution of these instances, together with Plaut. *Truc*. 691 and an association with Praeneste, may point to a non-Roman (rustic) feature, but nothing decisive can be said on the basis of these scattered examples.

[9] Väänänen 1966, 21, Adams 1977, 7–9, Herman 2000, 31, Adams 2003c, 533 n. 11 and Kramer 2007, 68 and 117. Väänänen 1966, 21, however, refers to the antiquity of this phenomenon.

[10] Adams 2007, 137–138. The vowel merger seems to have started in final syllables, since the 'open' spelling (*e* for *i*) is predominantly attested in 3rd conjugation verbal endings *-et* for *-it* and *-es* for *-is*, see Adams 1977, 9 and 2007, 442. But the *e* spelling also appears in other unstressed syllables and sometimes even in stressed syllables, see Väänänen 1966, 21–22 for Pompeii, Adams 1977, 7–9 for Claudius Terentianus and Adams 2003c, 533–535 for *T. Vindol*. III 628. For the inverse orthography, *i* for long *e* (*filix CIL* IV 4511), see Väänänen 1966, 20 and Väänänen 1981, 36.

[11] See Väänänen 1981, 31 and Leumann 1977, 55.

[12] What Cicero says in *de orat*. 3.46 about the pronunciation of Cotta can be interpreted to refer to the (rural) variant pronunciation of short *i* as *e*, and taken as evidence of variation in short *i* in the late republican period. However, Adams 2007, 137–140 opts for a different explanation, the development of original *ei* to a long *e* instead of long *i*. Generally, for variation in spelling concerning the letters *i* and *e*, see Adams 2007, 67–72; 137–140; 149–152; 442–443; 635–670.

On the basis of this short discussion I am not claiming that this is what happened, but I would like to see the standard view (that the later examples are not connected to the early variation) based on something else than simply referring to the 'vulgar Latin merger of long *e* and short *i*'. It seems that the concept of vulgar Latin has its part to play in this. 'Vulgar' is not 'early' and because of this, 'early *e* for *i*' and vulgar '*e* for *i*' have to be two different things.

An assumption often made to account for the discrepancy of the classical period (when compared with both preceding and postdating periods) is that the 'standard version' was restored in speech after an earlier period of variation or even change. An example of such an alleged restitution in cultivated speech is final *s*.[13] Similar developments have been suggested for final *m* and short *i* (see above), but for these latter two phenomena this is not the only possible explanation. It is also possible (and to my mind more probable) that in real life there was variation (geographical, social and situational) in the pronunciation of these phonemes. The restitution may have happened only in the Roman prestige variety, or the 'standard pronunciation' might have been prevalent there all the time, and hence found its way into the orthographic standard. This, however, does not mean that the change in actual linguistic behaviour would have affected everybody.

The final point here concerns the definition of Classical Latin. However one defines Classical Latin, everyone certainly agrees on one thing: It is a written language. Phonological changes do not happen in written languages. Thus, statements such as 'In vulgar Latin a sound change *ae*/*ai* > *e* happened, whereas Classical Latin retained the diphthong' are, by definition, absurd, and should be compared to statements like the following about the Great Vowel Shift in English 'In colloquial English, a sound change *ā* > *ei* happened in certain context (e.g. in the verb 'to make') between Chaucer and Shakespeare, but standard written English retained the monophthong'. Standard written English may be many things, but it certainly is not the place where phonological changes happen or do not happen. English speakers probably think that the phonological change actually happened in *English*. Accordingly, instead of talking about vulgar Latin and Classical Latin as the two varieties of Latin (of which one changed and the other did not) we should talk, for example, about Classical Latin (and its long written tradition with a history of its own) and Latin, the language that was alive, varied and changed.

Morphological variation: distribution

In this part I use mainly the letters on papyri (most importantly those of Claudius Terentianus) and documents on wooden tablets (the Vindolanda texts) to discuss what vulgar Latin is. I concentrate on the distribution of certain nonstandard features. The phonological examples presented above show a pattern where an old feature (in those cases the variation concerning certain phonological items) is attested in non-literary sources of the imperial age. Sometimes even in morphology it is possible to discern continuity where an old feature apparently continued to be used in speech although it was not accepted in the classical standard. Such an example is the reinforced demonstrative *illic*. Common in comedy, it is not used by the classical prose authors but is found in

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[13] See the discussion in Adams 2007, 140–141. Variation concerning final *s* persisted until the later period Adams 2007, 635–670.

Pompeii, the letters of Claudius Terentianus and in a Vindolanda letter (*T. Vindol.* II 343, a letter at some remove from the Vindolanda 'standard').[14] Should such an example be called vulgar?

The letters of Claudius Terentianus show morphological phenomena that are not paralleled elsewhere, and seem to belong to a variety definable as vulgar Latin. A morphological vulgarism is for example the analogical nominative *lites* for *lis* (*P. Mich.* VIII 471.27 *qu[a]ndo tam magna lites factam est*; Adams 1977, 42–43). Cases like this are arguably strong candidates for representing vulgar Latin.[15]

But there are also morphological items where the distribution is somewhat more complicated. An interesting case of verbal morphology is the ending *-unt* in the 3rd person plural of 2nd declension verbs. This ending appears in Claudius Terentianus in the form *valunt* (*P. Mich.* VIII 468.40; Adams 1977, 51). The same phenomenon appears even in the so-called *renuntia* from Vindolanda where the form *debunt* seems to be attested several times, in a formulaic and semi-official report, as if the form appeared in the exemplar. It is possible that the *optiones* themselves wrote the texts, including the exemplar.[16] In addition, the form *habunt* is now attested in a letter sent by a decurion (*T. Vindol.* III 628; see Adams 2003c, 544). Thus, the feature is attested in the language use of ordinary soldiers (Terentianus) and subordinate officers (Vindolanda). Is it part of vulgar Latin? With this distribution, many would probably vote for the affirmative answer. However, Adams (1995, 131) does not accept *debunt* as a vulgarism because those who produced the form were literate, and there is thus a contradiction with the traditional definition of vulgar Latin as the language of the illiterate majority of the Latin-speaking population. Adams concludes: "Those usages which were departures from the educated norms as represented in high literature might differ in the degree and nature of their acceptability to the educated."

Another example with a less than clear-cut distribution is the use of the adjectival indefinite pronoun *quod* for the substantival *quid*. This is attested in an early papyrus letter written by a freedman called Suneros: *deinde ego clamare debeo si quod video devom atque hominum [[fidem* (*P. Oxy* XLIV 3208, date probably Augustan)[17] and in a letter of recommendation from Vindolanda: *rogo ergo domiṇẹ ṣị quod a te petieriṭ [v]ẹḷịṣ ẹi subscribere* (*T. Vindol.* II 250.5, a letter probably written by a fellow-prefect of Flavius Cerialis, the commander of the Ninth Cohort of Batavians). Here we see a phenomenon that earlier was attributed to late Latin,[18] attested in the 1st century AD (and possibly even earlier).[19]

The point of the above has been to show how the distribution of certain morphological features in the non-literary corpus makes it difficult to draw a line between

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[14] Adams 1977, 45 and 1995, 101. In the case of *illic*, contrary to the phonological developments, the feature as such does not continue into Romance.

[15] In certain areas, Terentianus' Latin can be shown to be restricted when compared with the Vindolanda texts. This happens at least in verbal morphology, see Adams 2003a, 741–749, esp. 745.

[16] On the reading, interpretation and implications of this form, see Adams 1995, 102–103 and Bowman and Thomas 1994, 74–75.

[17] This letter shows archaizing orthography, see Adams 2007, 138 n. 69 on the phrase *devom atque hominum fidem* in this text.

[18] Löfstedt 1933, 81 n.2. The reverse phenomenon, *quid* used for the adjectival *quod* is well attested already before the later period and may be found from Plautus onwards (e.g. Plaut. *Trin.* 889 *quid est tibi nomen*?)

[19] See Halla-aho 2009, 98–101 for a more detailed discussion.

what is vulgar and what is not. To some extent, it is possible to maintain that the language of Claudius Terentianus is vulgar Latin but the language for example in the majority of the Vindolanda tablets is less so. But the *-unt* ending connects Claudius Terentianus with the subordinate officers of Vindolanda, and the use of *quod* for *quid* connects a Vindolanda officer with an Egyptian freedman.

It seems to be very difficult to pin down the dividing line between vulgar and non-vulgar. As Adams has convincingly argued, everything that is not found in the (assumed) literary or written standard is not necessarily vulgar Latin. The implied answer usually is that only the lowest part, so to say, of this variation belongs to vulgar Latin. Candidates for vulgarisms in the Vindolanda tablets (Adams 1995, 133) are *exungia* (for *axungia,* in the account *T. Vindol.* II 182.16) and *quem* for *quam* with a feminine antecedent (the masculine form of the relative pronoun instead of the the feminine, in the letter *T. Vindol.* II 343.40[20]). But these forms are found in a business letter and in an account, respectively, and it remains unclear why the dividing line between vulgar and non-vulgar should go precisely here (e.g. including *exungia* but excluding *debunt*).

If the association of *debunt* with vulgar Latin can be rejected on the grounds that it appears in documents that were written by literate persons, does the same argument not apply in nearly all non-literary texts?[21] We face here the old paradox of a 'vulgar Latin text'. Even the nominative *lites* in Claudius Terentianus can be excluded from vulgar Latin on these grounds. Claudius Terentianus undoubtedly was literate, and so obviously was the scribe who wrote the letter.

Is there vulgar Latin syntax?

A typical example of a syntactic vulgarism is the use of the accusative with prepositions that in standard Latin take the ablative case. Because of the weakness of final *m* it is often difficult to tell accusatives and ablatives apart in the singular (1st and 3rd declensions). However, there are indisputable examples of the accusative in Claudius Terentianus, e.g., *con tirones* (*P. Mich* VIII 471.22). But even in Claudius Terentianus there is variation concerning the case usage with *cum*. In the same letter we find *cum* used with the ablative: *con rebus meis* (*P. Mich.* VIII 471.32). Should we conclude that Claudius Terentianus sometimes uses vulgar Latin but sometimes not?

In the same letter with *con tirones* (*P. Mich*. VIII 471) there is a use of the locative as a directional expression (*Alexandrie* with for example *venire*, 5 times).[22] Is this vulgar Latin? In addition to sources that are traditionally associated with vulgar Latin (most importantly the Pompeian inscriptions), this phenomenon is attested also in Vindolanda in a letter that was probably written by Flavius Cerialis, the prefect of the Ninth cohort of Batavians, and a thoroughly Romanized officer (*T. Vindol.* III 617 *festinabitis Coris*).[23]

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[20] Bowman and Thomas 1994, 328 point out that a similar use of the masculine form is found in Novius Eunus (*quem suma* at *T. Sulpicii.* 68.2.8–9), also in a business context.

[21] Possible exceptions would be those cases where a literate (= non-vulgar) scribe produced a vulgar form used by an illiterate (= vulgar) person dictating a letter.

[22] On this phenomenon, see Mackay 1999, Adams 1995, 108–110 and 2003c, 551 and Kruschwitz and Halla-aho 2007, 41–43.

[23] See the editors' comments in the introduction to *T. Vindol.* III 616 and 617 (Bowman and Thomas 2003, 78–80). On Flavius Cerialis' Latin, see Adams 1995, 129.

Many would probably agree that using a finite complement clause (introduced by *quod* or *quia*) instead of the accusative and the infinitive with verbs of speaking and thinking is a specimen of vulgar Latin syntax. The interesting fact is that the finite variant is attested only in literary sources (most notably as part of Petronius's linguistic parody in the *Cena Trimalchionis*), and not in texts where we would expect it to turn up (most importantly the letters of Claudius Terentianus, but also other letters on papyri, ostraca and wooden tablets).[24] The possible conclusions are that Terentianus used the construction when he spoke but chose the non-finite variant when writing or that it in fact was not a dominant feature in his spoken language. If we insist that he spoke vulgar Latin, we must infer either that Claudius Terentianus' language in his letters represents in this respect a higher register than vulgar Latin or that the finite construction was not part of vulgar Latin (at least not at this time, early 2nd century AD).

Sometimes features associated with vulgar Latin syntax come close to such notions as colloquial and 'umgangssprachlich'. These often have to do with a loose textual structure and syntactic incoherencies. Perhaps the most striking example of such language use is the letter *P. Mich*. VIII 471 (where many of the above examples appear) that with its simple but agitated narrative gives the feeling of being, for once, a truly vulgar Latin text. The sentences are connected to each other by *et*, *item* or *autem*, and the construction where direct speech is combined with *dico* (e.g. *dico illi, da mi, di[c]o ạ[e]s paucum; ibo, dico, ad amicos patris mei*, *P. Mich*. VIII 471, 10–11) is exceptional in the Latin textual evidence. Such phenomena, however, do not testify to a distinct variety of Latin but are rather born in a particular situation and are instances of normal context-bound syntactical variation. They may, of course, be telling of the fact that the author did not fully govern the more sophisticated strategies of the written register.

The aim of the above discussion has been to show that adhering to the term vulgar Latin inevitably leads to problems when we try to apply it to actual linguistic phenomena, and classify these into vulgar and not vulgar. The same is even more true of individual texts. The point in criticizing the Classical vs. vulgar distinction is that in it we are not comparing like with like. In any language, if we take a literary work of art of some Classic period and a private letter of an ordinary and less educated person, these are bound to look as if they belonged to two different (even diglossic) varieties of the same language, the Classical / standard and the vulgar. It is however clear to everybody that the scope of variation in the particular language is a much more complicated phenomenon than looking at these two 'extremes' would suggest. Linguistic variation is a continuum where it is difficult to posit exact boundaries. Naturally, even in modern linguistics scholars use terms like 'lower class speech' but it is different from vulgar Latin because modern linguists are able to hear, record and analyse 'lower class speech'.

I do not think there are plausible reasons for reconstructing two separate entities, one that changed (vulgar Latin) and the other that did not (Classical Latin), especially when the second one is a written norm that by its very definition resists variation and change. The range of variation below the level of the elite is so great that it cannot be captured in a single term like vulgar Latin.

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[24] See Adams 2005. Instead of complement clauses introduced by *quod*, the usual alternative for AcI in everyday language apparently was a paratactic clause without any conjunction: *de roṭụlis quas spero cito ex[pl]ịcabiṭ, T. Vindol*. III 648.

Views on vulgar Latin

In this section I approach the matter from a different perspective, and look at the ways in which vulgar Latin has been defined. The usually given or implied definition is that vulgar Latin is the language of the illiterate masses or, in any case, of the lower socio-economical classes with a relatively small amount of education.[25]

A recent book by Reinhardt Kiesler (2006) collects a wide range of definitions concerning vulgar Latin. In addition to citing the definitions, Kiesler also classifies and analyses them, including a discussion of the different dimensions that have been used in defining vulgar Latin (Kiesler 2006, 10–13).

Firstly there is the medium, speech versus writing. The traditional definition, that vulgar Latin is the spoken language of the uneducated, rules out all written language. Vulgar Latinists usually overcome the apparent contradiction in terms here, considering the fact that all we have is written, by saying that there in fact is no text available written in pure vulgar Latin. Nevertheless, Kiesler himself thinks that vulgar Latin should not be restricted to speech, but that it existed also in writing, and a good example of this are private letters.

Another restriction concerns social standing. The traditional definition (i.e. the spoken language of the uneducated) associates vulgar Latin with the lower socio-economic classes, with less education and little or no access to the standard language. Probably this is where most definitions of vulgar Latin agree, about vulgar Latin as the socially defined variety. However, even here opinions have differed and Kiesler himself is willing to abandon this social dimension of vulgar Latin as well.

The third aspect is that of chronology. The traditional definition does not include a chronological aspect, but for most vulgar Latinists vulgar Latin usually is a thing from the late republican or early imperial period onwards, and not earlier than that (see my discussion on this point above). Even here Kiesler opts for a wide definition, without any chronological barriers.[26] His definition is the following:

> Wir schliessen uns demgegenüber der weiten Auffassung an und betrachten das Vulgärlatein als **zu allen Zeiten der Latinität existierende**, **diastratisch** und **diatopisch** variable **Umgangssprache aller Mitglieder** der lateinischen Sprachgemeinschaft (Kiesler 2006: 13)

This is a very inclusive definition, and many might disagree with Kiesler here. But in fact the same very inclusive definition has been adopted by Veikko Väänänen (Väänänen 1981, 6) and Jószef Herman (Herman 2000, 7), perhaps the two most prominent scholars of the field in past decades. There can be no doubt about the fact that such great linguists as Väänänen and Herman both knew very well what they were studying, including all the problems related to Latin language research and vulgar Latin.

I have already made the point (Halla-aho 2009, 29–31) that if we look at these definitions, the term vulgar Latin equals "variation and change in Latin".[27] The sources of vulgar Latin are texts that we look at to find out what was happening in Latin and how the

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[25] See the discussion in Chahoud 2010, 53–54.

[26] This view may be taken as another formulation of Pulgram's 1950, 462 diagram that shows spoken Latin diverging from written Latin ever since the latter's introduction.

[27] This excludes the development of the literary language and style.

language was changing. The term vulgar Latin and its continued use reflect the nature of the preserved Latin textual evidence: the texts either tell us something about variation and change in spoken language, or do not do so (to simplify things to the extreme).

What does 'Latin' mean?

But texts do not equal language. If we turn the question upside down, we may ask what 'Latin' means: texts or language. The concept of vulgar Latin, even if legitimate when we look at the preserved texts and want to classify or characterize them, does not reflect any real life linguistic situation, a variety or a register, or anything. It is a tool for classifying texts. I argue that the definition problem in fact derives from the fact that the concept that is sometimes useful in this classifying function has been projected onto the actual linguistic level, the level of the Latin language as a living and variable entity.

I naturally am not the first one to say all this and criticize the term vulgar Latin. Prominent Latinists have said it all before me:

James Clackson and Geoffrey Horrocks in their *Blackwell History of the Latin Language* write the following (Clackson and Horrocks 2007, 231):

> But what was happening to the language of those who were not members of the Roman elite? What did they speak?
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> [Model one: Peasants spoke the old native vernaculars, and switched to Latin at a considerably late date]
>
> Another model, now discredited among linguists but still tenacious among non-specialists, holds that the lower classes in the Roman Empire spoke 'vulgar' Latin, a debased form of Classical Latin which was to evolve into the Romance languages. Neither of these models can be correct, and it is becoming clearer that the actual picture is a good deal more complicated than either of them.

But already well before this, in his 1995 article on the Vindoland tablets, J. N. Adams wrote the following:

> The term 'Vulgar Latin' has been often criticized, and it is unsatisfactory, implying as it does that there was a single entity 'Vulgar Latin' distinct from another entity such as 'literary Latin' … It is perhaps best to think of Latin as a single language which embraced the usual types of sociolinguistic and dialectal variations. (Adams 1995, 131)

It is easy to agree.

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