

Outline of the book

This book is a revision and an update of my doctoral dissertation defended in May 2020, at the end of my doctorate in Filologia, Letteratura e Linguistica held between the University of Pisa and University of Gent (Belgium). During those years, I investigated different topics concerning historical sociolinguistics, with special reference to Roman Britain. Compared to the original draft, this work has gone through a profound and careful review, adding new considerations and new data to the extent that its form and structure are no longer the same. I hope this has been in a positive way as I had the chance to further refine my knowledge of socio-historical phenomena in the broader framework of historical linguistics.

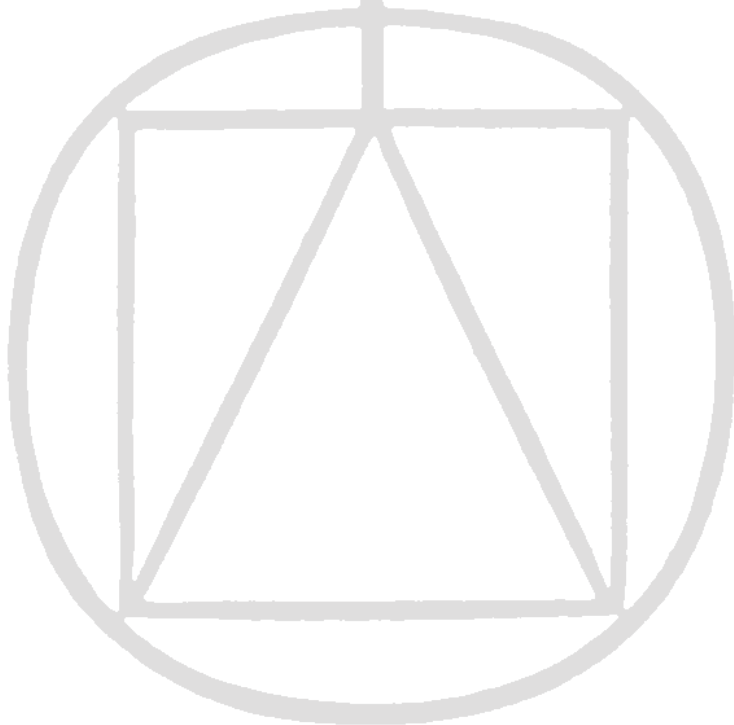
The first part of this book is devoted to the theoretical framework, with a short presentation of the corpora analysed (Chapter I) and considerations concerning the methodological background (Chapter II). In Chapter I, the corpora are presented according to their historical, palaeographic, and sociolinguistic traits. Chapter II tackles key-concepts including the ‘micro-histories of Latinization’, because each of the corpora analysed carries different linguistic, cultural, and historical backgrounds. It is also possible to account for a short survey of writing materials and the systems of scripts, analysed as relevant key-elements that define these different micro-histories. Chapter III discusses the concept of literacy and how it is entwined with writing materials and scripts, particularly evident if we are dealing with Capital writing vs Cursive writing. Cursive script is the script par excellence in practical life, not only in Roman Britain, but also in the whole Roman Empire. Between the 1st and 3rd century CE it was widely attested in military documents (cf. Vindolanda and Carlisle), but also in the interactions of people dealing with bureaucracy (in particular the Vindolanda corpus), personal correspondence (mainly Londinium–Bloomberg and Vindolanda), and because it was used in every aspect of everyday life, also with curse tablets.

In this chapter the idea of ‘gradience’ for assessing the level of formality of the documents is also introduced. We are leaving behind the dichotomy between formal and non-formal as ‘absolute measurement’ and are moving towards the concepts of spectrum and gradience, in which the different documents can rest in specific areas characterised by a gradience of lower or higher level of formality. To assess the level of formality of a document, is not sufficient ‘to count’ all the evidence but it is mandatory to focus analysis on the writer – even if unknown – while also implementing analysis of the emotional sphere.

The second part of the book consists of five chapters focusing on relevant case studies, chosen according to different phenomena of divergence from the classical norm and according to the number of their attestations, and comparing them with other relevant corpora from other provinces. All the divergent forms available in the corpora have been collected during my doctorate, but only the most relevant of them have been selected to represent the intriguing linguistic situation of Roman Britain. It is also noticeable that the corpora from Vindolanda have been fully lemmatized and uploaded on CLaSSES,¹ a digital resource which gathers non-literary Latin texts from different periods and provinces of the Roman Empire, where both linguistic and extra-linguistic features have been implemented in order to analyse the spelling variations in Latin epigraphic sources in the light of their sociolinguistic context. Chapters IV and V are devoted to a thorough analysis of the phenomena concerning the vowel system: vowel alternation of the front vowels and vowel syncope. The subsequent chapters

1 <http://classes-latin-linguistics.fileli.unipi.it/>.

(Chapters VI and VII) will be devoted to the analysis of phenomena concerning the consonant system, dealing with the phenomena of gemination and degemination (Chapter VI) and an investigation of the phenomenon of <h> in initial position (Chapter VII). The final chapter (Chapter VIII) summarises the analyses undertaken, offering an overview of the linguistic patterns in the corpora considered also by comparing it with documents from other provinces. It is also available as an Appendix in which different tables concerning the precise amounts and locations of the different non-literary corpora are presented.



Introduction

This book aims to record sociolinguistic variation in the non-literary texts written on tablets found in Roman Britain (1st–4th century CE). In general, the term ‘non-literary’ refers to documents including personal correspondence, private communication, lists, reports, curses, and documents written on a wide range of materials, for example papyrus, ostraka, wood or stone (Chahoud 2010: 56). For Roman Britain, the tablets written on wood (whether wax or ink-written tablets) represent the expressions of a single individual or community situated in a precise geographical space between the 1st and 3rd centuries. The curse tablets cover up until the 4th century of this era.

The main corpora considered in this analysis are the Londinium–Bloomberg tablets (Tomlin 2016), the Carlisle writing tablets (Tomlin 1998), the Vindolanda writing tablets (Bowman, Thomas 1983, 1994; Bowman, Thomas, Tomlin 2010, 2011), and the curse tablets (available in Kropp 2008, with constant updates, see Tomlin 2021). At the present time, there is not an encompassing edition of all these non-literary documents. Nonetheless, this book does not offer a critical edition of these documents but discusses the most important socio-historical linguistic features available which sometimes came in a poor second. We are going to provide a socio-historical linguistic study aiming to explain the orthographic variation in non-literary corpora from Roman-Britain, looking for the tiniest traces of language contact through an interdisciplinary approach involving history, palaeography, and archaeology as ancillary supports to the linguistic analysis and not *vice versa*.

This work is sited within the historical sociolinguistic framework. The main aim of historical sociolinguistics is to give an insight of the linguistic behaviour of the population who came from the continent or were (allegedly) from Roman Britain. This has been made through a comparison of the classical and non-classical forms. What we should not expect from this book is an analysis of archaeological settlements, or how the tablets came to be at the site. This can be very interesting information, but does not add any useful information to the linguistic investigation. What we need from the interdisciplinary investigation is help in understanding the diverse historical framework.

As Adams (2013) and other scholars (Herman 1978, Adamik 2012, 2016, Kruschwitz 2014, Mullen 2007a, 2016, Marotta 2017, *ex multis*) remarked, Latin is not a monolithic entity, nor should be anything related to it, such as the system of writing scripts, the text types, and the writing habits. This is now obvious; what is not so obvious is how the Latin language, like all languages, offered its intriguing and intricate array of cultural and socio-linguistic features to the linguistic analysis, thanks to its wide distribution caused by Roman imperial expansion. In this sense, Roman Britain offers an important research context for the critical application of the historical sociolinguistic paradigm. Indeed, Roman Britain had rich non-literary evidence, multiple linguistic groups detached all around the province and coming from different areas of the continent, thus representing a well-defined cultural melting pot, in which language contact was the norm rather than the exception. Each of these linguistic groups offers, through their non-literary documents, a different level and quality of Latinization.

Because the core of this work heavily relies on language change, this book has been arranged considering the different diachronic, diastratic, diatopic, and stylistic dimension of language variation. Moreover, as there are different writing materials (ink written tablet, stylus tablet, and lead tablet) and scripts (Old and New Roman Cursive, and Capital writ-

ing), Fiormonte's (2003) 'diatechnic'¹ variation has been implemented in order to analyse the number and quality of phenomena of divergence from the classical norm. Given the linguistic nature of this study, a detailed inventory of all the writing material falls outside the scope of this work. The analysis offered in this book will follow both a quantitative approach, which will consider the distribution and general amount of linguistic evidence known to us, and also a qualitative one, which sketches the sociolinguistic context in which the different linguistic variants occurred.

1 In sociolinguistics, diamesic variation concerns the variation of the communicative medium (Mioni 1983: 508–510). For closed-corpus languages there is only one choice – the written medium. The possibilities are limited as there are no acoustic records of the spoken language but, as observed by Cuzzolin and Haverling (2009: 37–38), speech can be mimicked in the written text, at least to a certain extent. This is the case for the non-literary documents on tablets, where it is possible to collect forms that do not adhere to the classical norm. Therefore, for this investigation, it has been considered appropriate to adopt the variable of diatechny. It was first proposed by Fiormonte (2003: 112–113) as a fifth dimension of language variation but, as a matter of fact, there is no formal definition of this type of variation, and it is not clear whether it is a sub-dimension of the diamesic axis or a dimension on its own. It would be preferable to conceive of it as a subdimension of the written medium, but, in the framework of historical linguistics where there are only written texts, defining the variation among the different kinds of writing material is imperative.