

Latin belongs to the Italic branch of the Indo-European (IE) language family, which is one of the world's major language families and consists of several hundred languages and dialects. At first, the spread of Latin was limited to Rome and the rural areas surrounding Rome. It was not until the political rise of the city of Rome in the first and second centuries AD that Latin spread over vast parts of Europe, within which even today the Romance languages “the direct descendants of Latin” are spoken. Two other representatives of the Italic language branch were Oscan, spoken in southern Italy, and Umbrian, spoken in northern Italy. Appendix 5 presents an overview of the Indo-European, Italic and Romance languages. The IE languages exhibit systematic correspondences in grammar and vocabulary which enable to reconstruct a common proto-language out of which the individual IE language branches evolved. This proto-language, known as Proto-Indo-European (PIE), is not attested in writing but only reconstructed by the systematic comparison of correspondences within the Indo-European languages.

- **Synchronic and diachronic approach to language study**

A study of texts of a certain era, such as Classical Latin, invariably includes an analysis of the synchronic stage of the language system. It is likewise possible to study the linguistic changes that have led to a certain language system or developed it further. The study of these changes in words and categories is known as the diachronic approach. The structure of Latin around 700 BC differed from its structure in 100 BC even as it differs from today's Romance languages because languages are subject to constant change. These developments can be modeled systematically and regularly up to a certain point. This book deals with the developments from PIE to Latin as well as developments within Latin itself. Firstly, those changes will be examined which can be deduced from Latin itself before dealing with the undocumented prehistory, which can only be deduced by comparing Latin with other IE languages.

- **Diachronic periodization of Latin language history**

The history of Latin is traditionally divided into the following stages, which exhibit characteristic phonological features that are summarized in appendix 4.

Early Latin (EL)	ca. 700 BC – ca. 240 BC	Start of inscriptional attestation
Old Latin (OL)	ca. 240 BC – ca. 100 BC	Start of literary attestation
Classical Latin (CL)	ca. 100 BC – ca. 14 AD	Standardization of Latin grammar
Post-classical Latin	ca. 14 AD – ca. 200 AD	First deviations from the standard

Early Latin (EL) is the oldest language stage attested by inscriptions that often differ considerably from Classical Latin (CL). This can be illustrated by the two EL forms *duenos* and *iouksmenta*, which developed to CL *bonus* ‘good’ and *iumenta* ‘draft animals’. The amount of significant linguistic data that we possess for this preliterate language stage is, however, so scant that we can reconstruct only the barest of pictures of the language system extant at that time.

The onset of the literary activity of Livius Andronicus, a Greek who wrote in Latin, can be regarded as the starting point of the next language stage, known as Old Latin (OL). Other representatives of that time include Plautus, Ennius and Cato. Already the works of the comedy playwright Plautus exhibit many features of the common speech known as Vulgar Latin, e.g. the use of intensive and diminutive forms, the use of the negated command with *nē*, and indirect questions employing the indicative instead of the subjunctive, all of which were not permitted in CL. The next language stage, that of Classical Latin, was strongly influenced by the language of Cicero, Vergil and Horace and started around 100 BC. One of its main features was a heavy standardization in opposition to Old

Latin and Vulgar Latin. Word choice, sentence structure and pronunciation of CL differed greatly from the common speech. From the time of Augustus's death at around the year 14 AD until around 200 AD, one speaks of post-classical Latin, the most known representatives of which include Seneca, Pliny and Tacitus.

- **Language is a multi-layer system of different registers**

A language is not a uniform structure but consists rather of numerous heterogeneous groups of speakers speaking different variant forms of the same language. The Latin spoken in Rome was known as *sermo urbanus*, in contrast to rural Latin, which was called *sermo rusticus* and employed such forms as *Clōdius* and *prēndō* for the standard *Claudius* and *prehendō*. This variation among the speakers of one language is known as a **dialect** or **diatopic difference**. A community of speakers can be further divided into subgroups sharing similar occupations or age. The characteristic use of language of such a subgroup is known as a **sociolect** or **diastratic difference**. Examples include the language of soldiers, known as *sermo militaris*, or the language of lower social status, known to the upper class as *sermo plebeius* or *sermo vulgaris*. Be it consciously or unconsciously, every person adapts his or her language style to the requirements of the situation. Cicero's speeches delivered before the senate do not give an insight into the normal conversation at a market fish stand. The Latin term *sermo familiaris* designated the style of language employed when speaking to familiar persons and the term *sermo cotidianus* designated everyday language. These differences of language usage are called **diaphasic differences** (cf. Müller-Lancé 2006:52–58).

- **Classical Latin (CL) and Vulgar Latin (VL)**

The usage of diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic registers of a language may change and overlap over a period of time. In classical times, the educated speech was equated with the *sermo urbanus*, and the uneducated speech was equated with the *sermo rusticus* regardless of where the speaker came from. The diatopic contrast shifted to a diastratic contrast. When even educated speakers like the patrician Publius Claudius, by calling himself Clōdius, adapted to the everyday language of the common people, the contrast shifted from diastratic to diaphasic. The commonly spoken language of everyday life is called Vulgar Latin (VL), in contrast to the written language of Classical Latin (CL), which is mainly represented by Cicero's writings. Furthermore, in this book the term VL is phonologically defined by starting from CL because already in classical times VL showed a stronger tendency to integrate the phonological features illustrated in appendix 4 into its language system. The given sound change numbers (SCN) refer to the index of the book in which all phonological changes are enumerated.