

# A problem of romance accentuation

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## A PROBLEM OF ROMANCE ACCENTUATION<sup>1</sup>

Among the very few instances in which popular Latin accentuation appears to have differed from that of the Classical tongue is that of proparoxytones of the type represented by *tonitrum*, *intēgrum*, *tenēbrae*, *colūbra*, etc., whose short penultimate vowels were followed by plosive + *r*. The continuants of these words in the Romance languages, with a few probable exceptions (*vide infra*, p. 453-4), indicate a general shift forward of the stress accent from the antepenultimate to the penultimate syllable (cf. O.Fr., O.Cat., Prov *entir*, Fr. *entier*, Ital. *intero*, Span. *entero*, Port. *enteiro*, etc.). This is mentioned in nearly all works on the history of Romance languages, but, as a relatively small point, it is not usually considered in any great detail, and is in fact often noted without comment, as a phonetic « law » of Vulgar Latin<sup>2</sup>. One should therefore perhaps first consider whether in fact the problem justifies any special investigation. Is it sufficient to state as a « law » of Romance phonology that in popular Latin the accent shifted forward on to a short penultimate vowel followed by plosive + *r*, just as it shifted forward from the first of two vowels in hiatus (*linteolum* > \**lintjolu*, etc.)? The two cases are in fact not quite on a par: in the first place, the shift of accent on to a short vowel which is not followed by a consonant in the same syllable seems to run completely counter to

1. I should like to thank my colleague Mr. M. J. McGann, a classicist, for helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

2. Cf., for instance, F. Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, Vol. I, 3rd ed., Paris, 1924, p. 64, A. Ewert, *The French Language*, 2nd ed., London, 1943, p. 30, K. Nyrop, *Grammaire historique de la langue française*, Vol. I, 3rd ed., Copenhagen, 1914, p. 165, M. K. Pope, *From Latin to modern French*, 2nd ed., Manchester, 1952, p. 100, H. Rheinfelder, *Altfranzösische Grammatik*, Vol. I, Munich, 1953, p. 11, Schwan-Behrens, *Grammaire de l'ancien français*, 2nd ed. of French transl. by O. Bloch, Leipzig, 1914, p. 24, H. van Daele, *Phonétique historique du français*, Paris, 1929, p. 15; L. R. Palmer, *The Language*, London, 1954, p. 155; J. Anglade, *Grammaire de l'ancien provençal*, Paris, 1921, p. 40; R. Menéndez-Pidal, *Manual de gramática histórica española*, 6th ed., Madrid, 1949, p. 38; H. Lausberg, *Romanische Sprachwissenschaft*, Vol. I, Berlin, 1956, p. 92.

the general pattern of accentuation in the Classical Latin of the Empire ; in the second, there appear to be exceptions to the « law ». Some comment would therefore seem to be necessary.

Various attempts have certainly been made to explain the phenomenon, but they are all to a greater or lesser degree unsatisfactory, if only because they fail to account for the exceptions. Most explanations involve *contamination* of the proparoxytone forms by paroxytone ones with (i) geminated plosives (e. g. *colū-bra* + \**colūb-bra* > *colū-bra*)<sup>1</sup>, (ii) with a different syllabic division (*colū-bra* + \**colūb-ra* > *colū-bra*)<sup>2</sup>, (iii) with a long penultimate vowel (*tenēbrae* + *tenēbrae* > *tenēbrae*)<sup>3</sup>, and (iv) with forms having a short vowel intercalated between plosive and *r* (*tenēbrae* + *tenēberae* > *tenēbrae*)<sup>4</sup>. None of these explanations is impossible, but one is somewhat reluctant to ascribe a change to contamination if some more elegant and economical explanation can be found. Forms with a long penultimate (short vowel + consonant in same syllable, or, less probably <sup>5</sup>, long vowel) are certainly attested in Classical Latin, but it is difficult to see why they should not have *replaced*, rather than contaminated, those with short, unaccented penultimate, since they fitted more harmoniously into the normal patterns of accentuation in Classical Latin. The fact remains that the penultimate vowel, when preserved in the Romance languages, has developed as an open, free tonic vowel, deriving in the last resort from Classical Latin *short, free* vowels. Intercalated vowels are also attested<sup>6</sup>, but they are fairly rare, and provide no real proof of any *general* tendency (postulated by A. W. de Groot)<sup>7</sup> to introduce a glide

1. E. Bourciez, *Précis de phonétique française*, 9th ed. Paris, 1958, p. 6.

2. C. H. Grandgent, *Introducción al latín vulgar*, 2nd ed. of Spanish transl. by F. de B. Moll, Madrid, 1952, p. 104, C. Tagliavini, *Le origini delle lingue neolatine*, Bologna, 1959, p. 193.

3. A. Dauzat, *Phonétique et grammaire historiques de la langue française*, Paris, 1950, p. 22.

4. Cf. W. M. Lindsay, *The Latin Language*, Oxford, 1894, p. 130, F. Neumann, « Zu den vulgärlateinisch-romanischen Accentgesetzen », *Zts. rom. Phil.*, XX (1896), p. 519-522, A. W. de Groot, *Die Anaptyxe im Lateinischen*, Göttingen, 1921, p. 37, 41, E. Richter, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Romanismen*, Halle-Saale, 1934, p. 46, R. K. Spaulding, *How Spanish grew*, Univ. of California Press, 1943, p. 34.

5. *Vide infra*, p. 453.

6. Cf. M. Leumann in Stolz-Schmalz, *Lateinische Grammatik*, 5th ed., Munich, 1928, p. 98, W. M. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 40 f.

between consonants which formed common consonant groups in Latin; and which neither in the Classical period nor later appear to have been treated as « difficult » groups<sup>1</sup>. The sporadic notation of forms with a vowel intercalated between plosive and *r* may well be due to an attempt to render a semi-vocalic quality of the liquid. The « anaptyctic vowel » theory is nevertheless in many ways the most satisfactory of this group.

W. Meyer-Lübke<sup>2</sup>, E. Bourciez (in his *Éléments de linguistique romane*)<sup>3</sup> and A. W. Baehrens<sup>4</sup> attempt to account for the Romance forms by postulating a cleavage between upper and lower class usage: the « Classical » accentuation was never accepted by the lower classes, who accented words of this type on the penultimate. Against this must be cited the fact that « popular » authors such as Plautus supply no support for any such hypothesis. No evidence is in fact put forward other than the Romance accentuation of the words. This is not necessarily damning — but it is a little too convenient to assume, without further explanation, that popular speech had from an early period a different system of accentuation. Basically, it is again equivalent to stating a « law » of popular Latin phonology.

The unsatisfactoriness of some explanations is no doubt due in some degree to the fact that they are presented *en passant*, in the wider framework of the history of a language. They can be so condensed and incomplete as to be positively misleading: for instance, in his *Historische Grammatik*

1. On the contrary, the only groups of three consonants in Latin end in plosive + *r*. Elise Richter (*op. cit.*, p. 46) supports her case for an intercalated glide (or at least a « Schallgipfel ») between plosive and *r* by reference to the difference between the development of plosive before *r* and before other consonants. There is surely no necessity to postulate a glide: any difference in treatment can surely be accounted for by the fact that plosive + *r* (and in some degree plosive + *l*) were particularly cohesive groups in the same syllable.

2. *Einführung in die romanische Sprachwissenschaft*, 3rd ed., Heidelberg, 1920, p. 138. Professor Meyer-Lübke appears to have modified a theory put forward by E. Hermann (*Zts. vgl. Sprachforschung*, XLVIII, 1918, p. 102-110) according to which a secondary accent remained on the penultimate (eventually attracting the main stress) in popular Latin after the change in the change in the syllabic division which caused the accent to shift back to the antepenultimate. The weaknesses of this hypothesis were pointed out by de Groot (*op. cit.*, p. 37-41).

3. 4th ed., Paris, 1946, p. 37: .. « dans le latin parlé, l'accent s'était aussi fixé sur la voyelle brève d'une syllabe pénultième ouverte, quand elle était suivie d'un groupe occlusive + *r* ». This was due, according to Bourciez, to a survival of the accentuation proper to an earlier syllabic division (*intēg-rum*).

4. *Sprachlicher Kommentar zur vulgärlateinischen Appendix Probi*, Halle, 1922, p. 10.

*der italienischen Sprache*<sup>1</sup>, Gerhard Rohlfs states : « Der schon im Vulgärlatein eingetretene Akzentwechsel in dreisilbigen Wörtern, die mit *gr, br, kr, dr* schlossen, scheint durch Längung des Vokals der mittleren Silbe bedingt zu sein : *intēgrum* > *intēgrum*, *palpēbra* > *palpēbra*, *alācrem* > *alācrem*, *tenēbrae* > *tenēbrae*, *colūbra* > *colūbra*, *cathēdra* > *cathēdra* ». Lengthening there certainly was, but it has to be shown that it was the cause, and not the consequence, of the shift. Even if we admit for the sake of the argument that the change is bound up with a lengthening of the penultimate vowel, two qualifications are necessary : (i) that the lengthening was conditioned by the presence of the following consonant group (otherwise the penultimate vowel of the words such as *cubitum* would also have attracted the accent), and (ii) that the lengthening was subsequent to the change from a vowel-system based on quantity to one based on quality (otherwise *\*tonītrum* would have developed to *\*tonirre* in French, and so on).

In fact, unless we are prepared to accept the theory of contamination, or to believe that the Classical Latin rules of accentuation did not correspond to linguistic reality in so far as they concern this type of proparoxytone, we seem to be forced to the conclusion that the prime factor in the shift of accent was the change in the vowel system. This point has been made, to my knowledge, only by the late W. D. Elcock : « Since in the syllabic division of Latin this consonantal group [plosive + *r*] was normally inseparable (the word *INTEGRUM*, for example, was pronounced *INTEGRUM*), the second syllable, possessing neither a long vowel nor a closing consonant, was necessarily short, and in Classical Latin a short penultimate syllable in a word of more than two syllables could not carry the accent. But this difficulty vanished with the disappearance of distinctions of vocalic length, and thereafter the pronunciation of all these words as paroxytones, of which there is early evidence, soon came to predominate »<sup>2</sup>. It is not clear from the above exactly what type of paroxytone forms Professor Elcock had in mind : did they have short or long penultimate vowels, and did they exist before the change in the vowel system ? The reference to « early evidence » suggests that he was thinking of the paroxytones noted by Richter and others in the works of Nævius, Virgil and Horace<sup>3</sup>, *inter alia*, and which are mentioned by Quintilian<sup>4</sup>. A

1. Berne, 1949, p. 505.

2. *The Romance Languages*, London, 1960, p. 40.

3. Cf. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

4. *De institutione oratoria*, Book I, v, 28.

number of scholars have seen the Vulgar Latin forms as a survival of, or emergence of, the paroxytone variants existing in Classical Latin <sup>1</sup>. There are, however, a number of difficulties about this. According to Leumann and A. Maniet, such forms are archaisms going back to a different system of syllabic division in pre-Classical Latin <sup>2</sup>. They are comparatively rare, and it is an exaggeration to state without qualification that the penultimate could be either short or long in Classical Latin <sup>3</sup>. The paroxytone variants are not found in the works of the dramatists, particularly Plautus, an author who is generally thought to render popular speech much more accurately than the other writers mentioned. The paroxytone variants occur in metres (especially the hexameter) copied from the Greek and may well be based on Greek usage, which allowed short vowels before plosive + liquid to count as long syllables, when the metre demanded it, in certain genres <sup>4</sup>. Even if the Classical Latin paroxytone forms are not Hellenisms, usage in high poetry is a poor guide to usage in speech, since the rules of scansion can maintain archaisms for a very long time (cf. the use of « e muet » in French poetry).

Even if we disregard these points, we shall still find it difficult to relate the paroxytone forms of Classical Latin *directly* with the Vulgar Latin (or Romance) ones : whether the penultimate of the Classical variants was long « by nature » or « by position » — and the testimony of Quintilian points clearly to the latter <sup>5</sup> — we cannot use them to explain the development of the Romance forms, except through contamination. Whether long « by nature » or « by position », they do not prove that penultimate vowels could be accented, while short in a short syllable. One final point : if the Romance forms are based on variants dating back to the days of Virgil, let alone Nævius, how is it that there are some words which appear to have preserved proparoxytone accentuation — Fr. *poulre*, Sp. *potro*, Port. *poldro*, etc. (< L. Lat. *pullitrum*), Fr. *fiertre*,

1. Cf. C. Tagliavini, *Le origini delle lingue neolatine*, 3rd ed., Bologna, 1959, Spaulding, *op. cit.*, p. 33 f, Grandgent, *op. cit.*, p. 104, etc.

2. Leumann, *op. cit.*, p. 182, A. Maniet, *L'évolution phonétique et les sons du latin ancien*, 2nd. ed., Louvain, 1955, p. 24.

3. Cf. Dauzat, *op. cit.*, p. 22, C. H. Grandgent, *From Latin to Italian*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1927, p. 11, Spaulding, *op. cit.*, p. 34, J. J. Nunes, *Compêndio de gramática histórica portuguesa*, Lisbon, 1919, p. 33, etc.

4. Cf. Leumann, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

5. *Op. cit.*, Book I, v, 28.

(< Lat. *feretrum*), O. Fr. *entre* (< Latin. *intēgrum*) and possibly Ital. *coltre*, Sicilian *cuntra*, Engadine *cultra*, Franco-Provençal *coutre*, *coudtre*, etc. (< variant *culcitra* of Lat. *culcita*)<sup>1</sup> ? One answer, given, for instance, by Professor W. von Wartburg in his *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, is that they are not true exceptions to the rule : *fietre* is a learned term<sup>2</sup>, *poutre* a back-formation from a derivative<sup>3</sup>, and *entre* influenced by the accentuation of the nominative *integer*<sup>4</sup>. There is no comment on the development of *culcitra*<sup>5</sup>. The ecclesiastical use of the term *feretrum* may well account for its special development. On the other hand, it is difficult, in view of their wide geographical distribution, to accept the theory that back-formation is responsible for Fr. *poutre*, O. Prov. *poutra* (and many other Northern Fr. and Occitan forms), Corsican *póltru*, Sicilian *putru*, Avezano *pultrus*, Leonese and Asturian *poltro*, Sp. *potro*, Port. *poldro*, Cat. *poltre*, and others<sup>6</sup>. There seems little reason for believing with von Wartburg that the Italo-Romance forms are borrowings from French (cf. the difference in gender), and von Wartburg himself is doubtful about the possibility of the Ibero-Romance forms also being borrowings from Gallo-Romance<sup>7</sup>. Taken together, these would appear to provide sufficient evidence for the survival in popular Latin of a form accented on the antepenultimate. Finally, the explanation by which the Old French word *entre* is to be ascribed to the analogical influence of the nominative is described in the self-same dictionary as « highly improbable » when applied to *pulliter*<sup>8</sup>. An analogical influence is more likely in the case of the *culcitra* variant of *culcita*. In fact, the two forms appear to have exerted analogical influences on each other : the paroxytone accentuation of some of the variants of the former (cf. Ital. *coltrice* and O. Span. *colcedra*, *cocedra*) seems to have affected the development of certain continuants of *culcita*

1. Cf. *FEW* II, p. 1492-1494.

2. *FEW* III, p. 462.

3. *FEW* IX, p. 532.

4. *FEW* IV, p. 734.

5. *FEW* II, p. 1494

6. Cf. *FEW* IX, p. 530-32.

7. *FEW* IX, p. 532. I cannot agree with Professor von Wartburg that the Ibero-Romance forms are irrelevant to the history of the Gallo-Romance ones. If proparoxytone accentuation survived in the former, why not in the latter ?

8. *Ibid.*, p. 533, note 13 : « Doch ist es höchst unwahrscheinlich, dass der nom. auf diese weise dem akkus. eine den betonungsgewohnheiten widersprechende form zu geben vermocht hätte ».

(e. g. Herault *coussèdo*, Montauban *kulsèdo* <sup>1</sup>). The probable interplay of paroxytone and proparoxytone forms, plus the difficulty of establishing when the variant in *-tra* first appeared, make it difficult to draw any firm inferences from the treatment of *culcit(r)a*.

How, then, are we to account both for the shift of accent and for the exceptions to it? In my view, we must first stop trying to explain the Vulgar Latin shift by reference to the paroxytone forms attested in Classical Latin <sup>2</sup>. It seems most likely that the latter are purely « poetical » forms, but even if they represent a genuine phonetic trend, the Vulgar Latin forms cannot be, as I have tried to show, the direct continuants of those which appear sporadically in the Classical texts.

The main factor to be taken into consideration in accounting for the shift in Vulgar Latin would seem to be, as Elcock suggested, the change from a system based on vowel quantity to one based on vowel quality. This destroyed the earlier bases of the system of accentuation. In the event, the accent nearly always remained on the vowel which had borne it earlier: in most cases, there was no over-riding reason for it to shift. There were a number of cases where the accent was shifted for morphological reasons from prefix to stem (*convēnit* > *convēnit*, *retinet* > *retēnet*, etc.), but apart from these, only two groups of paroxytones were affected: those in which the accent fell on the first of two vowels in hiatus, and those of the type under consideration. Both shifts are to be seen in the light of the strong (though far from universally effective) paroxytonizing tendency in popular Latin, but the particular phonetic structures of the different groups were no doubt the deciding factor. *Tenēbrae*, *intēgrum*, *tonitrum* and their like differ from paroxytones of the type represented by *calidum*, *cūbitum*, etc., in that their penultimate vowels were followed, not by a single consonant, but by plosive + liquid. It seems reasonable to conclude that the shift of accent was conditioned by that difference.

What, then, of the exceptions, whose existence is one of the main reasons for querying the validity of earlier explanations? These (with the exception of the learned term *fiertre*, Ital. *feretro*) can in my opinion be explained by reference to another phonetic trend in Vulgar Latin, i. e. the

1. Cf. *FEW* II, p. 1494.

2. In 1877, L. Havet (« Colubra en roman », *Romania* VI, p. 433-37) pointed out the difficulties involved in attempting to relate directly the Classical and Vulgar Latin forms, but his article appears to have been generally ignored. Cf. also de Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 39 ff.



tendency to elide the unaccented vowel of proparoxytones. This tendency and the change from vowel quantity to vowel quality were both long-drawn-out processes, overlapping chronologically over an extensive period; the former, however, was almost certainly effective in certain phonetic environments before the change in the vowel system could have had any general impact on the system of accentuation<sup>1</sup>. If we examine the exceptions, we find that *pullitrum* falls into one of the categories of proparoxytone earliest affected by syncopation (unaccented penultimate between liquid and consonant<sup>2</sup>). Admittedly, the conditions are not quite the same: the vowel is followed not by a single consonant, but by a consonant group. Nevertheless, the absence of voicing of *t* (except in the case of Port. *poldro*) indicates an early syncopation of the unaccented penultimate vowel, suggesting that the presence of following *r* did not greatly delay the elision of the unaccented vowel<sup>3</sup>. This was probably due to the fact that there does not appear to have been any resistance to the formation of the consonant group *-lrr-*, which occurred in *cultrum*, \**peltrum* (> Fr. *peautre*) and early elided forms such as *ali(e)rum*. Variations in the date at which the elision took place in different parts of the Empire could then account for the fact that many (predominantly Italo-Romance) forms derive from *pullitrum* (or *pullētrum*), with shift of accent: this is what we should expect to happen where the penultimate vowel still remained intact when the tendency to shift the accent made itself felt. The fact that the *tr* group of *culcitra* also escaped voicing of the plosive when the accent remained on the antepenultimate, also indicates early syncopation of the unaccented vowel. This must, I think, be ascribed to the analogical influence of the form *culcita*. One other word, *colūbra*, also presents penultimate vowel between liquid and plosive + *r*, but the elision of the vowel would have created a consonant cluster *lbr* which did not occur in Classical Latin or Vulgar Latin — and, according to my hypothesis, if the unaccented penultimate had not been elided when the change

1. Grandgent, *Introducción al latín vulgar*, p. 159-60, cites examples of elision between liquid and consonant in the works of Plautus, Cato, Varro, Petronius, Ovid, Martial, Juvenal, Pliny, Caesar and Horace.

2. Cf. G. Straka, « Observations sur la chronologie et les dates de quelques modifications phonétiques en roman et en français pré-littéraire », *Rev. Langues Rom.*, 1953, p. 259, 271, etc.

3. E. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 144, places its elision among changes occurring between the 4th and 6th centuries A. D.

from vowel quantity to vowel quality became general, the accent shifted on to it. It may be objected that, if my theory is correct, penultimate between *n* and *tr* (*tonitrum*) would have been at least as likely to fall as the unaccented vowel of *pullitrum*, since *-ntr-* was a group which was quite common in Latin. This is a serious objection, but the whole point of the argument is that there was a delicate balance between the tendency towards syncopation and that towards the shift of accent (witness the varying treatment of *pullitrum*).

The last exception, O. Fr. *entre*, comes into a rather different category. The treatment of *integrum* in the Romance languages clearly shows a general shift of the accent on to the penultimate : *entre*, then, is a localized variant. It cannot be explained by a particularly early fall of the unaccented penultimate, since an early reduction to *\*intgru* is unparalleled. The most probable explanation, to my mind, is that *entre* derives from a variant *\*interum*, resulting from the operation of the sporadic tendency, observed elsewhere, to reduce *gr* to *r* in unaccented syllables (cf. the development of *pigritia* and *peregrinum* in some areas).

Because of the difficulty — indeed the impossibility — of establishing an accurate relative chronology for the interaction of syncopation and of the general impact of the vowel changes, no final proof of my hypothesis is possible : my excuse for putting it forward is that it seems to fit the known facts rather better than existing theories, without resorting to the *deus ex machina* of contamination.

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