# A history of *uel*: From Latin to Castilian

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**Abstract**

Focussing specifically on evidence from the Iberian Peninsula, this paper will trace the history of the Latin disjunctive particle *uel*, from its use in Classical Latin to its eventual disappearance in Romance. It will look at the wider question of the similarities between Latin and Romance and will argue that although much can be learnt by concentrating on the similarities between Latin and Romance, such an approach can actually lead to the neglect of features that are not shared. Although there is much still to be done to bridge the gap between the histories of Latin and Romance, it will be argued that it is nevertheless important to continue to write separate histories.

**Keywords:** Latin, Romance, language change, semantics, Roger Wright, disjunctives.
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# 1 Introduction

In historical linguistics it is an accepted paradigm that out of all the Latin particles that possessed a disjunctive function (*aut*, *uel*, *an*, *siue*, *seu* and the enclitic *-ue*), *aut* was the principal survivor into Romance, with only a few exceptions such as those found in Provençal *sivals* and Romanian *sau* (Meyer-Lübke 1935, 9117a). It is the sole etymon of Castilian *o* and prevocalic *u* (Penny 2002, 245) and moreover reflected generally in Ibero-Romance: Catalan *o*, Portuguese, Galician *ou*. This state of affairs existed certainly by the time of the first substantial Ibero-Romance texts from the twelfth century onwards. Exactly when *aut* gained prominence is impossible to tell, but other forms presumably at some point had at least some currency in the spoken language owing to the existence of the Provençal and Romanian reflexes. Nevertheless, the disappearance of the other particles is to date a relatively untold story.

This paper will discuss in particular the history of *uel*.[1] This particle has been chosen because most Latin grammars generally agree that it is one of the principle disjunctive particles used in Latin alongside *aut*. Furthermore, its history is made all the more interesting by the fact that in post-classical Latin it undergoes a semantic shift and comes to be used as a copulative, synonymous with *et*. In addition, the example of Ibero-Romance for this study carries with it various advantages: firstly, the linguistic data encompassing the entire Latin- and subsequent Romance-speaking population is enormous and it is simply more practical to use a well-defined case-study, both in terms of the handling of the linguistic evidence and of understanding it; secondly, the Iberian Peninsula boasts a large amount of Romance vernaculars, including four national languages, all with a comparatively well-recorded history; thirdly, recent work, especially that undertaken by Roger Wright, has ensured that the linguistic situation in the early medieval peninsula in particular has been the subject of intense and illuminating study; fourthly, the amount of literary evidence in the post-Roman and Visigothic periods is particularly good compared to other regions in western Europe. In its conclusion, the paper will look at how the history of *uel* influences the understanding of spoken Latin and early Romance, especially with reference to the theory of R. Wright.

# 2 A linguistic history of *uel*

The particle *uel* appears frequently in Latin writing of all genres and in all periods and is typically defined by its relationship with *aut* (Kohlmann 1898; Kirk 1921; Weston 1933). Within such a schema, *aut* is normally promoted as an exclusive disjunctive (i.e. a choice between *p* or *q*, but not both) and *uel* as an inclusive disjunctive (i.e. a choice between *p* or *q*, or perhaps both; see Kennedy (1879, 318); Ernout & Thomas (1972, 446); Weston (1933, 47)). The

[1] Although *uel* most typically appears as a disjunctive, it also appears sometimes as an adverb to mean 'certainly', 'actually', and the like; see Kühner & Stegmann (1976, 99-112) for further discussions of this aspect. However, only its use as a disjunctive will be treated here.

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existence of some kind of semantic differentiation between the two is a sensible notion and illustrates the no-doubt complex reality that must have existed in spoken Latin. In a similar vein, R.E. Jennings (1994) has recently brought to attention the complex nature of the English *or*, and the fact that it is not solely an exclusive disjunctive. Absolute synonymy, where two words have *exactly* the same meaning in all registers and situations, is generally accepted to be at the least extremely rare, if not impossible. Indeed, it is most likely found only in technical languages where there exists both a technical and a lay term (Langslow 2000, 16-22), or else in syntax that includes foreign language elements, such as the popularly attested pleonasm of the Greek and English definite article in the phrase «the hoi polloi», or the English toponym Pendle Hill in Lancashire, whose etymology is made up of Celtic *pen*, 'hill' + Old English *hyll*, 'hill' + modern English *hill*. Otherwise, synonymous words are taken to exist within a relationship of 'collocation ranges' (Lyons 1995, 62), meaning that they convey a similar meaning only in certain situations. For example, «big» and «large» are roughly synonymous in the sentence «this is a large/big house», yet convey different meanings in the sentence «this is my large/big sister», with the former suggesting that the sister is overweight, and the latter suggesting that the sister is older. A Spanish example could be «cuéntame una historia / cuéntame un cuento», where *historia* and *cuento* are roughly synonymous and mean 'story' or 'tale'. However, in the phrase «libro de historia» and «libro de cuentos» they imply different meanings, with the former meaning perhaps an academic text and the latter a story book for children. If two or more lexical items have *exactly* the same meaning, it follows that normally one of them will undergo a semantic change, typically in the form of restriction or expansion, or else will disappear from use. This is a well-established tenet of historical linguistic theory (Ullmann 1963, 174-178; McMahon 1994, 174-199).

Despite modern observations that *uel* represented an inclusive disjunctive, ancient commentators were silent on the subject. The main observations are to be found in Priscan (*Institutiones* 17.11), who notes that «ut *uel*, *aut* non solum disiunctiuae sed etiam copulatiuae reperiuntur, ut Terentius in Eunucho, "uel rex semper maximas mihi gratias agebat", pro "etiam rex"» ("*uel*, *aut* are not only found as disjunctives but also copulatives, as in Terence's The Eunuch, 'and (*uel*) the king always paid me great thanks', instead of 'the king also (*etiam*)'"). Elsewhere, grammarians may talk about the disjunctive particle, but tend simply to observe the existence of *uel*; Donatus, for example, in his *Ars Maior* (*De coniunctibus*) merely lists the disjunctive particles but offers no further explanations for their use. Copying of this scheme is evident in later grammarians. Neither is there reference to the word amongst the earlier grammatical quips of Aulus Gellius, although he does make reference to the multifaceted nature of the participle *atque* (*Noctes Atticae* 10.29); there is nothing in Varro's works; Festus, through Paul the Deacon (Lindsay 1965, 507), remarks that «*uel* conligatio quidem est disiunctiua, sed non ex earum rerum quae natura disiuncta sunt [...] sed earum quae non sunt contra, e quibus quae eligatur, nihil interest» ('*uel* is a disjunctive conjunction, but not for those things that are divided by nature [...] but for those which there is nothing between them, and it makes no matter



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which is chosen'); Cicero is similarly empty, as is Isidore of Seville and the *Ars Grammatica* of Julian of Toledo; Asconius (*Orationum ciceronis quinque enarratio* 24), meanwhile, discusses the stylistics of the negative disjunctive *neque*.

There are various reasons for this lacuna. Importantly, writings may simply have been lost; Varro's *De lingua Latina*, for example, is woefully incomplete. However, more likely is that the widespread process of imitation in ancient literature will have influenced what was and what was not written about, depending on what others had considered of value. It has long been established that writing in classical antiquity was based heavily on imitation, or *mimesis*, and this continued into the early medieval period. The widespread imitation of Donatus, for example, meant that discussions of the conjunctions were kept to much the same form throughout the Late Antique and Medieval periods; this is certainly evident in Julian of Toledo's *Ars Grammatica*. Grammarians were also typically prone to concentrate on forms relating to metrical or rhetorical composition, and so it is perhaps understandable why the linguistics of grammatical particles may have been of little interest to them. Whilst ancient literature is replete with references to linguistic change and variation, this exists normally as an observation and nothing else (see especially Adams (2007)). Finally, it must be emphasised that the ancient writers themselves did not appreciate the grammatical implications of semantic theory. The scientific basis of the understanding of semantics is a recent phenomenon, and the investigation of synonymy from the perspective of logic in particular has only become recently disseminated. Ancient authors, then, should not be chastised for omitting details regarding grammatical points that could not understood.

Nevertheless, the modern observation of *uel* as an inclusive disjunctive is by and large correct in Classical Latin (taken here to imply here works represented by the literary genres of Republican and Imperial Rome). Semantically it is sensible to conclude that both *aut* and *uel* contained an optative value; that is, a choice between two or more objects. Given that theoretically they could not be absolutely synonymous, the implication must therefore be that they contained differing levels of optativity, and a literary analysis confirms that whilst *aut* is almost always exclusive, *uel* can illustrate either exclusivity or inclusivity. Although its use as an inclusive disjunctive is more prominent, it is by no means rare for it to appear as an exclusive disjunctive. It is therefore more flexible than *aut*. This ability is demonstrated by a review of some selected Hispanic writers from the classical period:[2]

### *Uel* as an exclusive disjunctive

- Lucan (*Bellum Ciuile* 1.409–411) «*quaeque iacet litus dubium, quod terra fretumque uindicat alternis uicibus, cum funditur ingens Oceanus, uel cum*

[2]The works surveyed included: Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*, Seneca the Elder's *Controuersiae* and *Suasoriae*, the entire works of Seneca the Younger, Columella's *De agri cultura* and *De arbooribus* and Martial's *Epigrams*. «Hispanic» here has been taken to mean that an author was born in the Iberian Peninsula; only selected examples are given here. On the methodological problems of this approach, see §4.

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*refugis se fluctibus aufert*» ('and frees the strip of disputed coast, claimed in turn by land or sea, when the enormous Ocean either flows or withdraws with ebbing waves')

- Martial (*Epigrams* 6.13) «*quis te Phidaico formatam, Iulia, caelo uel quis Palladine non putet artis opus?*» ('Julia, who would not think you moulded by Phidus' chisel or a work of Pallas' artistry?')

- Columella (*De agricultura* 2.3.2), «*sed et compluribus iterationibus sic resoluatur ueruactum in puluerum, ut uel nullam uel exiguam disideret occationem cum seminauimus*» ('but fallow land should be pulverised by much re-ploughing that it will require no harrowing, or very little, after we have put in the seed')

- Seneca the Younger (*Epistle* 9.16) «*quails tamen futura est uita sapientis, si sine amicis relinquatur in custodiam coniectus uel in aliquo gente aliena destitutus uel in nauigatione longa retentus, aut in desertum litus eiectus?*» ('what is the future of the wise man if he is left friendless, thrown into prison, or abandoned in some foreign land, or detained on a long journey or thrown onto a deserted shore?')

- Seneca the Elder (*Suasorium* 7.8), «*crede mihi, uitissima pars tui est quae tibi uel eripi uel donari potest*» ('believe me, the worst part of you is that which can either be torn out or bestowed').

### *Uel* as an inclusive disjunctive

- Lucan (*Bellum Ciuile* 5.270–271), «*cepimus expulso patriae cum tecta senatu, quos hominum uel quos licuiut spoliare deorum?*» ('when we drove forth the senate and captured our native city, what men and/or what gods did you suffer us to rob?')

- Martial (*De spectaculis* 7.7–10) «*ille parentis uel domini iugulum foderat ense nocens, templa uel arcano demens spoliauerat auro, subdiderat saeuas uel tibi, Roma, faces*» ('he in his guilt had with his sword pierced his parent' and/or masters' throat, and/or in his madness robbed a temple of its hidden gold and/or had set his fearsome flames to you, oh Rome')

- Columella (*De arboribus* 1.6.2), «*peractu repastinatione, mense Februario uel prima Martii semina legito*» ('when the trenching is finished, in the month of February and/or the early part of March')

- Seneca the Younger (*Epistle* 18.9), «*certos habebat dies ille magister uoluptatis Epicurus, quibus maligne famem extingueret, uisurus, an aliquid deesset ex plena et conumata uoluptate, uel quantum deesset et an dignum quod quis magno labore pensaret*» ('even Epicurus, the teacher of pleasure, used to observe stated intervals during which he satisfied his hunger in niggardly fashion; he wished to see whether he thereby fell short of full and complete



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happiness and/or, if so, whether this amount was worth purchasing at the price of great effort')

- Seneca the Elder (*Controuersiae* 2.1.10), «*illa tum in multitudine cadauerum uel spoliantium sic quasierit aliquis: quae causa hominem aduersus hominem in facinus cogeret?*» ('suppose someone amid that mass of corpses and/or looters should ask: what was it that compelled man to commit crime against man?')

In Classical Latin, then, it would appear that both *aut* and *uel* possessed relatively stable semantic positions: *aut* was used to express an exclusive disjunctive, *uel* was able to be used to express both exclusivity and inclusivity. However, it was more likely to be used as the latter; to give an example, out of thirty-seven incidences of *uel* in Columella's *De arboribus*, twenty-nine are inclusive disjunctives and only eight represent exclusive disjunctives. Meanwhile, in Lucan's work there are thirty-nine incidences of *uel* and only fourteen of them represent an exclusive disjunctive. *Aut* has not been represented in the above examples because in almost all examples is represents without exception an exclusive disjunctive. The review of classical Hispanic authors therefore confirms the observations of modern commentators.

However, the situation changes considerably in post-classical Latin. Commentators from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century began to note an expanded semantic use of *uel* in post-classical texts as a copulative, equatable with *et*. Bonnet (1890, 315) notes the phenomenon in the works of Gregory of Tours; Löfstedt (1911, 198) informed that, «im Spätlatein [...] eine disjunktiv Partikel statt einer kopulativen eintreten kann» and, «in Late Latin *uel* is often in the sense of *et*» (Löfstedt 1951, 21); Leumann, Hofmann & Szantyr (1925, 676) highlight the distinction, stating simply that «im Spätlatein ist uel = et» and quoting various examples; Souter (1949, 437) illustrates how *uel ... uel* = ET ... ET; Bassols de Climent (1963, 114) notes that, «en el latín decadente asume con frecuencia una acepción copulativa, y por tanto uel=et, uel ... uel = et ... et.» The feature has now become a practical factoid as one of the distinguishing qualities of post-classical Latin writings.

In the Iberian Peninsula this situation seems to have become established by the fourth and fifth centuries.[3] Whilst in Classical Latin the employment of *uel* as an exclusive disjunctive was not uncommon, in the fourth-century writers it is comparatively rare. Instead, *uel* almost always appears either as an inclusive disjunctive or else as a copulative. In the *Peregrinatio* of Egeria, for example, *uel* occurs a total of sixty-three times and in all but six incidences is used as a copulative or an inclusive disjunctive. Even in Orosius, whose Latin is far more successful at aping the classical standard, the incidences of *uel* as an inclusive disjunctive are roughly two times more frequent than its role as an exclusive disjunctive. In addition, there are several circumstances when it is employed

[3]The information for this section was gathered from the works of Orosius' *Historiae* and *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, Egeria's *Peregrinatio* and Hydatius' *Chronicle*.

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purely as a copulative, although this is not as common as in Egeria. It is not the intention here to list examples of the varied employment of *uel*; instead, a selection of examples will be given to demonstrate its use as a copulative so as to show its distinctiveness from an inclusive disjunctive:

- Egeria (*Peregrinatio* 4.4), «*facta ergo et ibi oblatione accessimus denuo ad alium locum non longe inde ostendentibus presbyteris uel monachis*» ('having done these things and made an offering, we again went to another place not far away shown by the presbyters and monks')
- Orosius (*Prologue* 14-15), «*illam penitus nullam futuram, cum haec sola regnabit, exceptis uidelicet semotisque illis diebus nouissimis sub fine saeculi et sub apparitione Antichristi uel etiam sub conclusione iudicii*» ('[Death] shall have absolutely no future when [Christianity] reigns solely, except clearly on those final days set aside at the end of the earth with the appearance of the Antichrist and the day of Judgement')
- Hydatius (*Chronicle* 44.2), «*legatos Remismundus mittit ad Theudoricum; qui similiter suos ad Remismundum remittit, cum armorum adjectione uel munerum*» ('Resimund sent envoys to Theudoric; he similarly sent his own to Resimund with an offering of arms and gifts')

In these examples, *uel* is clearly meant as a copulative: it does not signify a possible choice between two objects but rather shows parity between both. In this sense it has come to be synonymous with *et*. This is a feature not found in classical writings and represents a semantic development specific to post-classical Latin texts. However, similarly to the relationship between *uel* and *aut*, this situation has been noted for some time, although it has yet to be interpreted from a linguistic perspective. Modern approaches to the disjunctive draw upon the notion of logic to explain its position as a truth function: «disjunction is the conjunction of two elementary prepositions, *p* and *q*, by the logical participle *or*, which is true if and only if at least one of the prepositions is true» (Bussman 1996, 133). Any particle that unites two or more conjuncts, at least one of which is true, is a truth function. This includes both the copulative (e.g. *et*, *-que*) and the disjunctive, meaning that *and* and *or* are semantically related. If the disjunctive is used in its exclusive sense then it is semantically distanced from the copulative because only one of the conjuncts is true. However, when used in its inclusive sense, that is where both *p* and *q* can be true, then its distinction from the copulative is minimal. As a purely exclusive disjunctive, *aut* is the farthest distanced from the copulative, because normally only one of its conjuncts will be true. Their semantic scope is therefore proposed as Illustration 1.

This demonstrates how it is possible that there exist a semantic overlap between the inclusive disjunctive (*uel*) and the copulative (*et*). That *uel* has always been able to imply inclusivity is evident from the classical authors, but it seems that by the post-classical period it has slid far over to the left of the scale towards the copulative, to the extent that it is now able to be used in a situation



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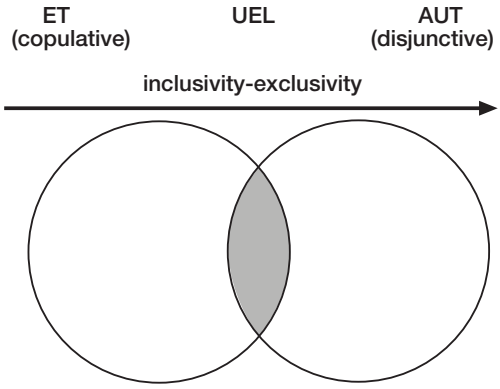



Illustration 1.

where there is parity between the two conjuncts and no choice, whether it be inclusive or exclusive, at all.

The important question to be asked is to what extent this semantic expansion was reflective of spoken language? The first task is to admit that it is very difficult to ascertain exactly how much written Latin was reflective of spoken Latin. The codification of a written norm is true of many languages, meaning that literary conventions often disguise spoken realities, and this has always been a methodological problem for scholars working on what has traditionally, and erroneously, been called «Vulgar Latin». It could be argued, for example, that *aut* had always been predominant in the spoken language and that the other disjunctives were essentially literary forms. This is, of course, a possibility, but it is nevertheless true that texts written in a lower-register of language are often reflective of trends in the spoken language, and the fact that *uel* appears in so many of these texts means it is difficult to understand why they would be used here if they were not used in the spoken language.

It is important to mention here that other languages make use of variable disjunctive particles and Latin is far from being unique in this feature. An exploration of these examples will help to illuminate further the situation in Latin. It is likely that the Latin disjunctive system was a reflection of other ancient central Italic dialects to which it was related (Coleman 1986); both Oscan and Umbrian, for example, seemed to have made use of at least two different disjunctive particles, although their exact semantic implications can now only be hypothesised (Hale & Buck 1903, 150). Ancient Greek possessed the disjunctive particle ἤ, but also used εἴτε ... εἴτε and πότερον ... ἤ to denote 'whether ... or'; the latter is normally taken to imply that the second alternative carried more importance. In modern languages, the situation is reflected in a similar conspectus. From the Iberian Peninsula, Basque is an obvious example, with *ala* normally expressing exclusivity and *edo* with the ability to express inclusivity (Patrick & Zubiri 2001, 275). Elsewhere, Polish similarly has different particles to imply both exclusivity (*albo*) and inclusivity (*lub*); it can also use the normally

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interrogative particle *czy* (note here the similarity with the Latin word *an*, also an interrogative particle but with the ability to function as a disjunctive). The use of the Polish disjunctive particles is demonstrated here:

- *Idziemy (albo) do kina albo de teatru*
  We are going (either) to the cinema or to the theatre
  (implies a decisiveness of action but an exclusive choice)

- *Idziemy do kina czy do teatru?*
  Shall we go to the cinema or the theatre?
  (implies a suggestion, not necessarily exclusive)

- *Czy idziemy do kina albo do teatru?*
  Are we going either to the cinema or the theatre?
  (implies an exclusive question —*czy* is used here as the interrogative, not the disjunctive)

- *Idziemy do kina lub do teatru*
  We are going to the cinema or the theatre
  (implies an undecided statement and no decisiveness of action, with the possibility of inclusivity)

As the above examples illustrate, there is no reason to therefore doubt that a language can function on a daily basis with two or more disjunctive particles. Moreover, individual particles are easily able to occupy synchronistically stable semantic fields in relationship to each other; a native Polish speaker, for example, would never confuse the varied semantic implications of the differing disjunctives. In English the situation is at first sight more transparent since it functions perfectly well with just one specific disjunctive particle, (*either...*) *or*. Nevertheless, other words exist that are capable of possessing a disjunctive function: «I'll walk into town, *else* I'll catch a bus» or «I might buy a new car, *perhaps* not». The implication is therefore that even in languages where there exists only one obvious disjunctive particle, there are always methods of expressing degrees of optativity depending on both lexical choice and, presumably, both prosodic and paralinguistic factors.

There is no linguistic reason, therefore, to doubt the possibility that *uel* was, at least to some extent, in use in spoken Latin since it has been seen not only that other languages function with two or more disjunctive particles, but also that the ability to imply degrees of optativity is frequently required in language. It is similarly considered likely that the semantic expansion of *uel* in the literary sources was reflective of a semantic expansion in the spoken language. The reason for this is principally in the fact that it is used by authors who are generally taken to have written in a lower-register, such as Egeria, whose writings have been studied for their reflection of the spoken form since they were first discovered in the early twentieth century. Egeria does not write in a register that would be considered «correct» by classical purists (although this is nothing to say of her ability to write in what was considered by herself to be a high



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register). However, since her inability to write in a very literary style means that her writings often reflect aspects of the spoken language, it follows that she would not have used *uel* if it were not in currency.

To summarise then, so far it has been argued that in Classical Latin *uel* occupied a stable position as a disjunctive, often with an inclusive meaning. However, by post-classical Latin, nominally the fourth century, it appears to have taken on an additional meaning as a copulative, and is either found in this role or else as an inclusive disjunctive. Very rarely is it found in an exclusive function during this date.

However, what of its afterlife? At some point *uel* disappeared from the spoken language, although it has been argued that it was still in use in the fourth and fifth centuries. A leap to the seventh-century shows that the situation has once again changed. The literary output of Visigothic Iberia up until 711 AD is rich in comparison to other areas of the post-Roman west and a review of selected literature shows that by the end of this period, *uel* had regained its position as an exclusive disjunctive, which had always nevertheless represented a minority of its usage, as well as maintaining its status both as an inclusive disjunctive and a copulative.[4] All three implications are often evident within the same text:

- Fructuosus of Braga (*Monastic Rule* 3), «*Uiuant enim solis oleribus, et leguminibus, raroque pisciculis fluuialibus, uel marinis*" ('they should live soley from vegetables and beans and occasionally some fish from the rivers and / or sea': **inclusive disjunctive**); (*Monastic Rule* 4), «*Autumni uero uel hiemis tempore, usque ad tertiam legant, usque ad nonam operentur*» ('in autumn and winter, [the monks] shall read until the third hour and work until the ninth': **copulative**); (*Monastic Rule* 3), «*Quilibet ex monachis ieiunium soluere non praesumat, nec priusquam in commune reficiant cum caeteris, uel postquam refecerint*» ('no monk shall dare to break his fast and eat either before the others or after': **exclusive disjunctive**).

- Valerius of Bierzo (*Life of Frucutuosus* 14), «*quem dum multi ciues praefatae ciuitatis uel etiam antistes ipsius urbis obnixe ibidem retinere uellent, ut quia dies Dominicus erat, uel certe quia aerum non esset temperies, si non amplius*» (since many of the citizens of that city, and also the bishop (**copulative**), wished to keep him there since it was Sunday, and/or (**inclusive disjunctive**) certainly to stay at least until the end of mass, if not longer, since the weather was bad'); (*Life of Fructuosus* 12), «*Sed ita eos reperit siccos, ut illos fluuialis liquor nullo modo contigisset, nec madidus humor uel tenuiter inficere potuisset*» ('but he recovered [the books] dry, as though no water from the river had touched them, or the wet moisture had been unable to taint them at all': **exclusive disjunctive**).

[4]The texts used in this analysis included Isidore of Seville's *Monastic Rule*, the *Common Rule*, and the Fructuosus' *Monastic Rule*, and the hagiographical works, Sisebut's *Vita Desiderii*, Braulio of Saragossa's *Vita Aemiliani*, Ildefonsus' *De uiris illustribus*, Valerius' *Vita Frucutuosi* and the *Uitas Patrum Emeritensium*.

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- Isidore of Seville (*Monastic Rule* 6.3), «*Post uespertinum autem, congregatis fratribus, oportet, uel aliquid meditari, uel de aliquibus diuinae lectionis quaestionibus disputare*» ('after dusk, with the monks having come together, they should meditate and/or discuss questions from some divine lessons': **inclusive disjunctive**); (*Monastic Rule* 6.4), «*In Dominicis uero diebus, uel festiuitatibus martyrum, solemnitatis causa singulae superadjiciendae sunt missae*» ('on Sundays and the days of saints, masses are to be focussed on the cause of a single solemnity': **copulative**); (*Monastic Rule* 9.1), «*Qui autem ad mensam tardius uenerit, aut poenitentiam agat, aut ieiunus ad suum opus, uel cubile recurrat*» ('the monk who comes late to the table will either suffer a punishment, fast, or return to his cell': **exclusive disjunctive**).

How is this to be explained? The ability to occupy a place on differing levels of the scale of inclusivity is interesting but considered unlikely to have been mirrored in the spoken language. Notwithstanding the fact that historical linguistics demonstrates that the particle had probably dropped out of spoken use by the early medieval period simply because it does not exist by the time of the earliest evidence of Ibero-Romance, it would be difficult for *uel* to continue to be used because it was so semantically unstable. It is therefore proposed that its polysemy had weakened its position as a conjunction and it was not able to compete as a copulative with *et*; neither was it able to compete as a disjunctive with *aut*. Both words were semantically much stronger and better established and these were the forms that would form the basis for the eventual Ibero-Romance reflexes. As such, *uel* disappeared from the spoken language following a period of semantic expansion and subsequent instability. This is likely to have occurred sometime soon after the fifth century because it could not occupy such an unstable position for long. The results of this disappearance are seen in the seventh century texts, when *uel*, by now no-longer used in the spoken language, occupies a semantic scope of considerable range. It now existed as a grammatically empty particle, unconstrained by the rules of the spoken language.

Grammatical particles are particularly prone to diachronic polysemy and disappearance (Carter 1987, 419); examples from the development of English demonstrate this perfectly. Some words have remained virtually unchanged, such as Old English *wiþinnan*, 'within' or *nēah*, 'near'. However, some have disappeared from the modern idiom, such as *ac*, 'but' or *samod*, 'together with'. Meanwhile, others have been subjected to diachronic semantic change, such as *til*, Old English 'to(wards)' but modern English 'until', or *æfter*, Old English 'behind, during, after', modern English 'after'. Perhaps it would be wise to let the sources speak for themselves, normally informing scholars with what they do not say, rather than what they do. Thus Isidore of Seville, in the *De coniunctione* section of his most popular work (*Etymologies* 1.12) mentions only one conjunction, *et*, and one disjunction, *aut*, as would be expected using the historical linguistic theory posited above; *copulatiuae autem coniunctiones dictae eo, quod sensum uel personas coniungant, ut «ego et tu eamus ad forum». Ipsud*



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*'et' sensum coniunxit. Disiunctivae dictae, quia disiungunt res aut personas, ut «ego aut tu faciamus»* («copulative conjunctions are so called because they join together a sentence or people, such as "you and (*et*) I go to the forum". The 'et' unites the clause. Disjunctives are so called because they distinguish between things or people, such as "you or (*aut*) I do it"»). The absence of *uel* as an example in the reported speech hints at the predominance of *aut* in the spoken idiom, justified by the Romance reflexes, although its employment in the sentence anyway shows how it was ostensibly still in use in the written language.

## 3 The disappearance of *uel* and the Wright thesis

It would appear that there exists a historical pattern in the use of *uel*, explicable by reference to linguistic theory. Overall, it is proposed that *uel* disappeared from the spoken language sometime either during or shortly after the fifth-century. However, there are a couple of factors that need to be taken into account here. Firstly, the supposition means that *uel* disappeared from everyday speech, but it must have still been formally learnt because its presence continues in written texts throughout Medieval Latin. This might imply that retention of its usage varied and was possibly still in use amongst more educated speakers for longer than amongst uneducated speakers. Indeed, its disappearance is likely to have taken place at different speeds amongst speakers depending on social and geographical factors. This means that for some speakers there may have been a passive understanding of the word, although they may not have actively used it themselves.

The last point requires further investigation. The thesis of Roger Wright was alluded to above, and is important in this respect since it relies on an ability to what might be called «gloss» written Latin forms into spoken Romance ones. Essentially, Wright proposed that whilst people might have written in Latin, a text would have been read with a Romance pronunciation (an idea expounded especially in his 1982 and 2002 works). There was therefore no distinction between the two until a state of diglossia was forced by the orthographic reforms of Alcuin in Carolingian France and later in the thirteenth century in Spain. The theory has been widely lauded by Anglophone audiences and Romanists in particular. Unfortunately, its impact amongst Latinists has been less substantial, and even the latest English-language work on the history of the Latin language makes only a fleeting reference to Wright, without even mentioning his important theory (Clackson & Horrocks 2007, 300). Nevertheless, it represented a substantial improvement to that problematic and confining question so famously asked by F. Lot (1931) *A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler latin?* (compare M. Richter (1983) *A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler Latin en Gaule? A propos d'une question mal posée*). However, the Wright theory has been less warmly received elsewhere (see Quilis Merín 1999, 169-228) and whilst it is indeed perfectly sensible to gloss into Romance those Latin forms that continue into Romance, the

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question is far more difficult with those forms that were possibly no longer in use in the spoken language. Most obviously, this refers to forms such as Latin deponent verbs and the synthetic passive, both of which have disappeared from Romance; as one scholar stated, «deponent verbs destroy the Wright thesis». This is a question that has, in the author's opinion, been so far been imperfectly answered by defendants of the Wright thesis.

Of course, the disappearance of whole morphological forms such as deponent verbs or the Latin synthetic passive is on a very different level to the disappearance of individual word items. The inability to understand them might have wide-reaching implications in the understanding of a text overall; however, the inability to understand a single word such as *uel* probably would not. Given its context, a correct meaning of *uel* could likely be guessed anyway, even by those who very rarely came into contact with the word. From this perspective, it ties in nicely with the Wright theory of «writing Latin, speaking Romance» and would presumably be what he might call an archaic feature, forming a «subsection of the passive vocabulary of those who could read and write» (Wright 1982, 42). In other words, anyone who was reading a text with *uel* in it would have sufficient passive knowledge to interpret it as *aut*. However, although it is important to draw attention to the debate surrounding these issues, unfortunately they cannot be discussed further here (a good starting point is instead the 1991 articles by Green (1991) and Walsh (1991) to understand the two opposing views). Rather, the important point is that although *uel* at first sight appears as a rather minor grammatical particle, its importance lies in the fact that it is a feature of Latin, and not Romance. A central tenet to Roger Wright's theory is that Latin and Romance are the same and should not be differentiated; «Proto-Romance was the speech of all; it is unnecessary to postulate anything else» (Wright 1982, 44).[5]

Wright (1982, 1-4) was not the first to draw attention to the impracticalities of what V. Väänänen (1982) had called the «thèse différencielle» (Wright called this the «two-norm theory»), by which he meant a diversification of spoken and written Latin from the very beginnings of the codification of a literary Latin in the third century BC. This would imply that such a distinction had existed in Latin-speaking Iberia from the very beginnings of Roman conquest. Such an approach has been one of the main contesting theories of the relationship between Latin and Romance, the other being what Väänänen had again called the «thèse unitaire», implying that a form of speech identifiable as Romance had only become predominant after the political decentralisation of the Roman west; this idea has been re-championed by M. Banniard (1992). The important difference between Wright and other theories, however, is that Wright does not postulate any difference: Latin and Romance were one and the same, since Latin was simply read as Romance. Such an approach offers great advantages, namely that in viewing Latin and Romance as the same, the traditional divide between Latinists and Romanists is able, to a certain extent, to be bridged. That such a

[5]However, he was later to regret the use of the term 'proto-Romance'; «The only real regret I have is that in that book I occasionally called the language of those times 'Proto-Romance'. I would not do that now» (Wright 2002, 198).



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divide exists is evident in most of the works on the history of Latin and individual Romance vernaculars, neither of which often provide anything more substantial than a nod to the other. This is in many ways a nonsensical situation and one that encourages arbitrary linguistic divisions based on political events and chronologies with little reflection of what must have been the spoken reality. Essentially, Wright sought to invalidate the question of «when did Latin become Romance» because, he proposed, the distinction had never existed.

On the other hand, there are various problems with such an approach. Importantly, Romance has characteristics that place it at such odds with Latin (such as the lack of deponent verbs and the synthetic passive) that it is difficult to believe that some kind of consciousness of a disparity between spoken and written forms had not existed for many generations prior to the reforms of Alcuin. In addition, there exist many what might be called «internal» aspects of Latin and Romance that do not find reflection in each other and that must be treated as such (Posner 1996, 104-138). Deponent verbs, for example, are not found in the history of any Romance language and are absolutely confined to the history of a language recognisable only as Latin. The same could be said of many of the synthetic elements of Latin not found in the much more analytic Romance. The history of the disjunctive is an excellent example of this. The history of *aut* is invariably the same as the history of, for example, Spanish *o*. From this perspective, the idea of Latin and Ibero-Romance as one language works perfectly sensibly. However, the story of *uel* finds no place in the history of Romance and it is confined to Latin. From this perspective, to treat Latin and Romance as one and the same necessarily leads to the neglect of an important aspect of language history: namely, that Latin had disjunctive particles that were lost in Romance and that their history deserves to be told. In essence, Latin is not Romance, and although Romance may be a later representation of the former, they each have important characteristics that distinguish them from each other. The two often have a shared history, but Latin also has its own history, independent of Romance, and to unite the two often serves to ignore it. The history of the Latin disjunctive is a case in point.

# 4 Conclusions

This paper has sought to explore an important element of the history of Castilian: its disjunctive particle. It started with the premise that whilst on the one hand Ibero-Romance has one principal disjunctive descended from *aut*, Latin itself had up to six particles that could express a disjunctive function. The historical process was therefore one of lexical reduction. This observation leads to three important questions: firstly, to what extent might all six disjunctive particles have been in use in spoken Latin; secondly, when did they disappear from the spoken language; thirdly, why did they disappear from the spoken language. In answer to these, it has been argued that spoken Latin did indeed make use of *uel* as a predominantly inclusive disjunctive and that it had begun to disappear after the fourth-century AD. This process had been completed by the seventh-century,

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by which point its loss in the spoken language is reflected by its polysemy, arguably too impractical for spoken use.

There are, of course, some inherent problems with the methodology that are unavoidable but nevertheless need to be taken into account. Constraints mean that only *uel* has been treated here to the neglect of the other particles. This is to say nothing of the other Latin conjunctions that deserve their history to be similarly explored, and a similar undertaking could presumably be carried not only for the other disjunctive particles but also for the copulatives *atque*, *ac*, *et*, *-que*. Nevertheless, this will require many years of work and large amounts of textual analysis. The semantics of Latin particles is no-longer the «pleasant [...] hobby» (DeWitt 1938, 451) it was once thought and the usefulness of their study has recently been highlighted (for example, Kroon (1995) and Butterfield (2008)). Instead, *uel* has been used here as an example to demonstrate the type of evidence that is available and how it may be used. The results have been constrained geographically, for similar reasons; no doubt other regions might produce different results, especially in areas where *aut* was not to gain eventual prominence.

This leads to a final criticism, namely that written texts are always problematic for the representation of spoken speech; the position of *uel* as a written particle but not a spoken one cannot be taken at face value from the evidence in textual analyses without further thought. The use of metre, for example, would have been influential in an author's choice of words. Thus, the use of *aut* could be used to elicit elision of a final vowel or syllable in the preceding word, whilst *siue* could be used to provide two syllables etc. This factor would become less important in post-classical Latin following the transition from metrical scansion to the rhythmical *cursus*. The disjunctive could also be employed on a much more stylistic level. An example is that of the Tacitean Loaded Alternative, whereby Tacitus used the disjunctive to express two or more possibilities, yet at the same time left his reader with no doubt as to his preference for the options. This is normally done through the subsequent descriptive expansion of his preferred clause, or else the insertion of a phrase or comment attached to a clause to highlight it to the reader. Around forty-five percent of the disjunctives within Tacitus' works are weighted in such a manner (Sullivan 1975, 326; see also Whitehead 1979).

Even those authors that were born in Iberia need not necessarily reflect the spoken language of the region. Notwithstanding the fact that literary Latin was extremely codified, most of our classical authors at least were active in Rome, not the provinces, and were writing for an educated audience. Indeed, it is from the Italian Pliny the Elder that some of the most specific Hispanisms have been recorded from his time as governor in the province (see Adams 2007, 370-431). Added to this is the fact that in the case of Egeria, for example, there exists some debate as to whether she was even from the Iberian Peninsula (Weber 1989), as well as the large amount of evidence in the classical period compared to, for example, the early Medieval period. Unfortunately there is little that one can do to combat this except acknowledge its impracticalities. Generally, the texts studied are diverse enough so as to counteract any literary prejudice,



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and especially those from the post-classical period are normally understood to be more representative of traits in the spoken language. Even if specific regionalisms are not traceable, it is hoped that by using such case-studies, traits can be ascertained of the spoken language more generally.

The final discussion has fallen with the theory of R. Wright. In many aspects, the Wright theory is entirely sensible and this paper has sought neither to condemn nor to replace it. However, instead it has sought to show that the problem of Latin and Romance and their relationship to each other is not a closed box and that the views of Wright need adjustment. This is especially relevant for the Anglophone world, where there is a danger that non-specialists have come to accept the theory as fact. A recent work on early medieval Europe (Smith 2005, 24), for example, notes of language use:

> regional divergences in the spoken *lingua romana* gradually became even stronger in Antiquity, and pronunciation changed too, but not so much as to cause incomprehension between speakers from different regions. That started to happen only around 1200.

Presumably, the author is making reference to Wright's dates of the Lateran Council of 1215 and the Council of Valladolid in 1228, to which he places the beginning of the Latin and Romance distinction. However, the fact that Wright is not even referenced in the section hints that Smith has accepted Wright's theory and presumed it to be fact.

However, the most important point of contention has been with the assertion that Latin and Romance are one and the same language, and should be treated as such. In many aspects this is a sensible and useful approach, but not in all. Whilst Romance shares many features with Latin and much can be learnt from one about the other, there are other aspects that cannot. Moreover, focussing on the inter-relationship between the two can adversely actually be harmful, because it can lead to neglect of features that do not appear in Romance. Thus, many works on the history of Romance languages merely state that the Romance disjunctive is descended from Latin *aut*; be that as it may, it neglects a complex history of disjunctive particles that is internal to the Latin language. A study of the disjunctive therefore shows that Latin and Romance still require their separate histories to be written, as presently occurs. However, these histories are not mutually exclusive. Whilst in some aspects they are independent of each other, in others they share much in common, and this is a gap that still requires to be bridged. R. Wright is not correct to claim that Latin and Romance are one and the same. However, he is correct to close the gap of their study together. Nevertheless, the study of the Latin disjunctive demonstrates just how similar and different they can be, and it is both from the point of view of their differences, and not just their similarities, that scholars must write their histories.

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