# VARRO ON LEXICAL CREATION IN LATIN

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**Abstract**

The intention of this article is to present Varro's thinking on word formation in Latin and to highlight his important contribution to the study of Latin from a lexicological perspective. Varro's theory can only be partially reconstituted, by assembling the ideas contained in several passages dispersed throughout the treatise *De lingua Latina*, in its incomplete form as we have it today. Despite this, in the last few decades, a deeper and more thorough reading of the Varronian text by certain scholars has revealed his profound linguistic thinking, autonomous and original in many respects. In the field of lexical creation, a remarkable idea is that *declinatio* is a useful and necessary linguistic phenomenon in all languages, which is tantamount to formulating a linguistic universal.

**Key words:** *Varro, word formation, impositio, declinatio voluntaria, declinatio naturalis.*

**Résumé**

L'intention de cet article est de présenter la pensée de Varron sur la création des mots en latin et de mettre en exergue son importante contribution à l'étude du latin du point de vue lexicologique. La théorie de Varron ne peut être que partiellement reconstituée en assemblant les idées contenues dans plusieurs passages dispersés dans le traité *De lingua Latina*, dans sa forme incomplète que nous détenons aujourd'hui. Malgré cela, au cours des dernières décennies, la lecture plus approfondie et plus compréhensive du texte varronien par certains chercheurs a révélé sa pensée linguistique profonde, autonome et originale sous plusieurs aspects. Dans le domaine de la création lexicale, ce qui est remarquable c'est l'idée que *declinatio* est un phénomène linguistique utile et nécessaire dans toutes les langues, ce qui équivaut à une idée qui préfigure les universaux linguistiques.

**Mots-clés:** *Varron, création lexicale, impositio, declinatio voluntaria, declinatio naturalis.*

M. Terentius Varro structures his treatise *De lingua Latina* on two major directions around which the linguistic discussions of the antiquity began several hundred years before him in the Greek world, initially in the philosophical environment. The first one was initially formulated in Plato's dialogue *Cratylos* and relates to the origin of language, to the relationships between words and their meanings and in its synthetic expression is represented by the dichotomic relation nature *vs* convention, *phýsis* vs *thésis* or *nómos*. The other position refers to the relation between the principles governing the functioning of language, originating in Aristotle's statements that privileged the idea that language functions in a dominant way according to laws or rules, that is, governed by the principle of analogy. This was opposed by the supporters of the theory of the functioning of



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language according to the principle of anomaly, formulated and argued by the Stoics. This controversy is briefly formulated as analogy *vs* anomaly. These two philosophical-linguistic dichotomic ideas[1] were spread in the Roman cultural world, especially after the mid-2nd century BC, through the lectures in Rome by the Stoic philosopher Crates of Mallos and went on even after the first century AD, when Varro lived most of his life. He is the most important source of understanding the debate of ideas around the two linguistic controversies, for in the analysis and description of the Latin language he constantly refers to them. During the Hellenistic period, these conflicts of ideas continued and developed with new arguments, opposing the Alexandrian Grammarians to the Stoic school of Pergamum. Thus, the Alexandrian grammarians applied themselves to demonstrate that language is governed by rules - *ratio, logos, proportio, analogía* -, which can be brought to the fore by the study of language, with the status of a true science, *téchnē*. The most prestigious product of the Alexandrian Grammar School belongs to Dionysius Thrax and is entitled *Téchne grammatiké*. But the Stoics, who favoured the idea that language forms did not obey rules, believed that language could be studied only by practical knowledge, *empeiría*. In short, some argued that in language order and regularity prevail, and the others supported the opposite idea, since language is a natural human capacity and words are originally onomatopoeic, language is dominated by irregularity and anomaly, and this is the result of the fact that, over time, for various and random causes, the original forms, called by the Stoics *prõtai phōnaí*, "primitive sounds", had undergone changes, and there were quite numerous morphological and semantic irregularities in Greek to give the Stoics arguments in favour of their thesis. This latter theory is also advocated by Varro in the fifth book of his work *De lingua Latina*: *Quae ideo sunt obscuriora, quod neque omnis impositio verborum extat, quod vetustas quasdam delevit, nec quae extat sine mendo omnis imposita, nec quae recte est imposita, cuncta manet (multa enim verba litteris commutatis sunt interpolata), neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e vernaculis verbis, et multa verba aliud nunc ostendunt, aliud ante significabant, ut* hostis*: nam tum eo verbo dicebant* peregrinum *qui suis legibus uteretur, nunc dicunt eum quem tum dicebant* perduellem. (*LL* V, 3)[2] In this passage several reasons are listed to indicate how difficult it is to find the original forms and meanings of the words, this research constituting the object of etymology and semantics: the disappearance of some primary words over time; improper imposition of a word in relation to its referent, or on the contrary, changing the originally designated word with another word, as is the case of the word *hostis*, which at first meant "foreigner", but it ended up designating "enemy", a notion that in ancient

[1] The terms "dispute" or "controversy" should be understood as divergent but not irreducible theories, because they were in fact complementary. *Vide*R. H. Robins, *Scurtă istorie a lingvisticii*, Romanian translation by Dana Ligia and Mihaela Leaţ, Iaşi, Polirom, 2003, p. 79-80, p. 38-43.

[2] "These relations are often rather obscure for the following reasons: not every word that has been applied, still exists, because lapse of time has blotted out some; not every word that is in use, has been applied without inaccuracy of some kind, nor does every word which has been applied correctly remain as it originally was; for many words are disguised by change of the letters. There are some whose origin is not from native words of our own language. Many words indicate one thing now, but formerly meant something else, as is the case with *hostis* 'enemy': for in olden times by this word they meant a foreigner from a country independent of Roman laws, but now they give the name to him whom they then called *perduellis* 'enemy'." Varro, *On the Latin Language*, With an English Translation by Roland G. Kent, Vol. I, London, William Heinemann Ltd Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1938, p. 5.

N. B. In this article, all translations from Latin into English are from this edition.



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times was designated through *perduellis*, that is "the one with whom one is at war"; changes may also occur in the acoustic word form and obscure the original form; a special category is represented by words borrowed from other languages and their original form cannot be reconstituted. Varro is aware that, because of these difficulties, it is impossible to identify the primary forms of all the words or their roots as they resulted from the act of imposition, and therefore he begins his research from the point where the origin of a word is clearer: *In quo genere verborum aut casu erit illustrius unde videri possit origo, inde repetam. Ita fieri oportere apparet, quod recto casu quom dicimus* inpos*, obscurius est esse* a potentia *quam cum dicimus* inpotem*; et eo obscurius fit, si dicas* pos *quam* inpos*: videtur enim* pos *significare potius* pontem *quam* potentem. (*LL* V, 1, 4)[3]

Although the largest part of Varro's treatise is lost, its systematic, clear and methodical character allows us to understand its general plan and the main ideas he develops and argues in each book. Also, grouping the books in hexades as thematic units and summarizing at the beginning of each book the main ideas previously discussed in order to link them to what follows makes it possible to somehow outline Varro's linguistic thinking. In this way, the unitary and organic conception of the work is uncovered.

[3] I shall take as starting-point of my discussion that derivative or case-form of the words in which the origin can be more clearly seen. It is evident that we ought to operate in this way, because when we say *inpos* 'lacking power' in the nominative, it is less clear that it is from *potentia* 'power' than when we say *inpotem* in the accusative; and it becomes the more obscure, if you say *pos* 'having power' rather than *inpos*; for *pos* seems to mean rather *ponce* 'bridge' than *potens* 'powerful'. (Kent 1938, p. 5-7)

[4] For example, when he concludes the first hexade, Varro sums up the ideas he has dealt with and lists the themes covered by the following books: *Quare institutis sex libris, quemadmodum rebus Latina nomina essent imposita ad usum nostrum: e quis tris scripsi Po. Septumio qui mihi fuit quaestor, tris tibi, quorum hic est tertius, priores de disciplina verborum originis, posteriores de verborum originibus. In illis, qui ante sunt, in primo volumine est quae dicantur, cur etymologiké neque ars sit neque ea utilis sit, in secundo quae sint, cur et ars ea sit et utilis sit, in tertio quae forma etymologiae. In secundis tribus quos ad te misi item generatim discretis, primum in quo sunt origines verborum locorum et earum rerum quae in locis esse solent, secundum quibus vocabulis tempora sint notata et eae res quae in temporibus fiunt, tertius hic, in quo a poetis item sumpta ut illa quae dixi in duobus libris soluta oratione. Quocirca quoniam omnis operis de Lingua Latina tris feci partis, primo quemadmodum vocabula imposita essent rebus, secundo quemadmodum ea in casus declinarentur, tertio quemadmodum coniungerentur, prima parte perpetrata, ut secundam ordiri possim, huic libro faciam finem.* (*LL* VII, 7, 109-110) ”But because I fear that there will be more who will blame me for writing too much of this sort than will accuse me of omitting certain items, I think that this roll must now rather be compressed than hammered out to greater length: no one is blamed who in the cornfield has left the stems for the gleaning. Therefore as I had arranged six books on how Latin names were set upon things for our use: of these I dedicated three to Publius Septumius who was my quaestor, and three to you, of which this is the third—the first three on the doctrine of the origin of words, the second three on the origins of words. Of those which precede, the first roll contains the arguments which are offered as to why Etymology is not a branch of learning and is not useful; the second contains the arguments why it is a branch of learning and is useful; the third states what the nature of etymology is. In the second three which I sent to you, the subjects are likewise divided off: first, that in which the origins of words for places are set forth, and for those things which are wont to be in places; second, with what words times are designated and those things which are done in times; third, the present book, in which words are taken from the poets in the same way as those which I have mentioned in the other two books were taken from prose writings. Therefore, since I have made three parts of the whole work On the Latin Language, first how names were set upon things, second how the words are declined in cases, third how they are combined into sentences—as the first part is now finished, I shall make an end to this book, that I may be able to commence the second part.” (Kent 1938, p. 365-366).



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Thus, the eighth book is the first one of the second hexade and it starts by mentioning the three divisions of the language study Varro undertakes: *impositio* (*quemadmodum vocabula rebus essent imposita*), *declinatio* (*quo pacto de his declinata in discrimina ierint*), and *coniunctio*, actually *compositio* (*ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant*): *Quom oratio natura tripertita esset, ut superioribus libris ostendi cuius prima pars, quemadmodum vocabula rebus essent imposita, secunda, quo pacto de his declinata in discrimina ierint, tertia, ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant, prima parte exposita de secunda incipiam hinc*. (*LL* VIII, 1, 1)[4]. In other words, in Varro's treatise, the compartments of the study of language are etymology, morphology and syntax, for they correspond to these three concepts he mentions.

The research in the field of *impositio* is undertaken by this Latin linguist as an etymological study, setting out to find the etymon, that is, the original word and its true meaning, the object of books II-VII, of which only books V-VII have been preserved. The next division in the study of the language, *declinatio*, is discussed in the second hexade, comprising books VIII-XIII, of which only the first three reached us. As it can be seen in the fragment quoted above in note 4, Varro integrates each theme of his study into the general plan of the work, always indicating at what point of his approach each step is situated in relation to the others.

Book VIII contains arguments against the principle of analogy *quae dicantur cur non sit analogia*, from the point of view of how the derived (*declinata*) words (*verba*) originated from the words initially applied to things (*vocabula rebus ... imposita*). *Impositio* and *declinatio* are therefore the main concepts used by Varro to explain the existence of words, and the relationship between these two processes is illustrated by comparing a spring and a river: *Duo igitur omnino verborum principia, impositio et declinatio, alterum ut fons, alterum ut rivus*. (*LL* VIII, 2, 5)[5]

These two concepts contain deeper and more nuanced linguistic insights than they appear at first glance, and some of their implications are considered "revolutionary" by recent scholars who tried to explore the linguistic thinking of Varro more thoroughly than others did before them[6].

The purpose of Varro's approach is to describe the Latin language, but more often than once he brings into debate various aspects of the Greek language, its grammar providing the model for the study of Latin, given the great similarity between the two languages. What was not evident to Varro, nor to any other ancient grammarian, was that this resemblance was due to their original kinship - something that could not have been predicted by ancient linguists, because it was only documented in more recent centuries – and it was strengthened by mutual loans due to the long contact between the two languages. A significant advantage of this permanent relating to the Greek language is that Varro's linguistic horizon was wider than that of the Greek grammarians, who were preoccupied exclusively with their own language. Comparing the functioning of the two

[4] "Speech is naturally divided into three parts, as I have shown in the previous books: its first part is how names were imposed upon things; its second, in what way the derivatives of these names have arrived at their differences; its third, how the words, when united with one another reasoningly, express an idea. Having set forth the first part, I shall from here begin upon the second." (Kent 1938, p. 371)

[5] "The origins of words are therefore two in number, and no more: imposition and inflection; the one is as it were the spring, the other the brook." (Kent 1938, p. 375)

[6] Cf. Daniel J. Taylor, *Declinatio. A Study of the Linguistic Theory of Marcus Terentius Varro*, Amsterdam, John Benjamin Publishing, 1974.



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languages, Varro was able to reach relevant and judicious observations that go beyond the strictly descriptive, grammatical level, rising to a level of linguistic generality, such as, the observation that *declinatio* - in the very comprehensive meaning given by Varro to this term -, is a necessary and useful phenomenon for all languages because it serves the principle of linguistic economy. This finding led some modern linguists to believe that Varro had the intuition of a linguistic universal[7], thereby surpassing not only all grammarians who preceded him, but all ancient and medieval grammarians up to those of the modern times.

Varro does not insist on loans as a source of vocabulary enrichment, although in V, 3 he says *neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e vernaculis verbis*[8] and emphasizes on many occasions the Greek, Sabine, Gallic, Egyptian, Phoenician, Persian or generally the non-Latin origin of some words and their syntactic and morphological relations with Latin. In the morpho-syntactic behaviour of these imported words, Varro finds an argument against the principle of analogy: *Secundo quod Crates, cur quae singulos habent casus, ut litterae Graecae, non dicantur* alpha alphati alphatos*, si idem mihi respondebitur quod Crateti, non esse vocabula nostra, sed penitus barbara, quaeram, cur idem nostra nomina et Persarum et ceterorum quos vocant barbaros cum casibus dicant. Quare si essent in analogia, aut ut Poenicum et Aegyptiorum vocabula singulis casibus dicerent, aut pluribus ut Gallorum ac ceterorum; nam dicunt* alauda alaudas *et sic alia. Sin quod scribunt dicent, quod Poenicum sint, singulis casibus ideo eas litteras Graecas nominari: sic Graeci nostra senis casibus non quinis dicere debebant; quod cum non faciunt, non est analogia.* (*LL* VIII, 36, 64-65)[9] The imported neologisms in Latin are mostly of Greek origin and occur in all areas of vocabulary. For example, he lists some Greek ichtyonyms integrated into the Latin inflexion: *Aquatilium vocabula animalium partim sunt vernacula, partim peregrina.[…] Foris* muraena*, quod* myraina *Graece,* cybium *et* thynnus*, cuius item partes Graecis vocabulis omnes, ut* melander *atque* uraeon. (*LL* 1938, V, 77[10].

*Impositio* is the fundamental semiotic act by which words are "imposed" or applied onto things in order to designate them, *impositio vocis ad significandum*[11]. The Greeks called this process *thésis toũ onómatos*, better known in its short form, *thésis*. The words resulting from this process are the primordial forms, rather few in number, but the growing complexity of people's lives made it necessary to increase the lexical

[7] Daniel J. Taylor, *op. cit*., p. 13, 30 et passim.

[8] "there are some whose origin is not from native words of our own language" (Kent 1938, p. 5)

[9] "Second, in reference to what Crates said as to why those which have only one case-form each are not used in the forms *alpha*, dat. *alphati*, gen. *alphatos*, because they are Greek letters — if the same answer is given to me as to Crates, that they are not our words at all, but utterly foreign words, then I shall ask why the same persons use a full set of case-forms not only for our own personal names, but also for those of the Persians and of the others whom they call barbarians. Wherefore, if these proper names were in a state of Regularity, either they would use them with a single case-form each, like the words of the Phoenicians and the Egyptians, or vith several, like those of the Gauls and of the rest: for they say nom. *alauda*< 'lark,' gen. *alaudas*, and similarly other words. But if, as they write, they say that the Greek letters received names with but one case-form each for the reason that they really belong to the Phoenicians, then in this way the Greeks ought to speak our words in six cases each, not in five: inasmuch as they do not do this, there is no Regularity. (Kent 1938, p. 423).

[10] "The names of water animals are some native, some foreign. From abroad come *muraena* 'moray,' because it is *myraina* in Greek, *cybium* 'young tunny' and *thunnus* 'tunny', all whose parts likewise go by Greek names, as *melander* 'black-oak-piece' and *uraeon* 'tail-piece'." (Kent 1938, p. 75)

[11] As Roger Bacon formulates much later.



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inventory of languages. Primary words, *primigenia*[12], have their own roots, *radices*, and do not originate from other words, but they have the ability to produce a large number of words, as a single plant produces a large number of seeds for new plants. The inventory of the "imposed" or applied words, *impositicia*, is very limited for the very simple reason that they must be easy to remember, but the number of those deriving from them is practically unlimited: *Impositicia nomina esse voluerunt quam paucissima, quo citius ediscere possent, declinata quam plurima, quo facilius omnes quibus ad usum opus esset dicerent*. (*LL* VIII, 2, 5)[13] It follows therefore that "declination" is a necessary process, as it is a very economic and rational way to identify, based on similarities, *similitudines*, and differences, *discrimina*, even those word forms that speakers had not previously encountered, but which are recognizable due to the possibility of integrating them into a predictable paradigm of the linguistic system.

In order to find out the origin of the words, to get closer to their primitive forms, in Greek *prōtótypa*, ie. to discover their etymology, Varro says that knowledge of history is needed, because only tradition brought us this knowledge: *Ad illud genus, quod prius, historia opus est: nisi discendo enim aliter id non pervenit ad nos*. (*LL* VIII, 2, 6)[14]. But to find out the forms of the derived or declined words, ie. *declinata*, in Greek *parágōga*, grammar, *ars,* is indispensable: *ad reliquum genus, quod posterius,* ars*: ad quam opus est paucis praeceptis quae sunt brevia. Qua enim ratione in uno vocabulo declinare didiceris, in infinito numero nominum uti possis: itaque novis nominibus allatis in consuetudinem sine dubitatione eorum declinatus statim omnis dicit populus; etiam novicii servi empti in magna familia cito omnium conservorum nomina recto casu accepto in reliquos obliquos declinant*. (*LL* VIII, 2, 6)[15]

*Declinatio* is the process by which the lexical inventory of a language increases through internal resources and consists in "declining" or "deviating" a word from the vertical, which represents its basic form. The process of declination is again explained by Varro by means of a biological model and is exemplified by a primordial form such as *homo*, considered vertical, *rectum*, and the form *hominis* which deviates from the vertical, is oblique, *obliquum*, in relation to it: *Ut propago omnis natura secunda, quod prius illud rectum, unde ea, sic declinata: itaque declinatur in verbis: rectum* homo*,*

[12] *Primigenia dicuntur verba ut* lego, scribo, sto, sedeo *et cetera, quae non sunt ab aliquo verbo, sed suas habent* radices*. Contra verba declinata sunt, quae ab aliquo oriuntur, ut* ab lego legis, legit, legam *et sic indidem hinc permulta*. (*LL* VI, 5, 37) "Primitive is the name applied to words like *lego* 'I gather', *scribo*' I write,' *sto* 'I stand', sedeo 'I sit,' and the rest which are not from some other word, but have their own roots. On the other hand derivative words are those which do develop from some other word, as from *lego* comes *legis* 'thou gatherest', *legit* 'he gathers', *legam* 'I shall gather', and in this fashion from this same word come a great number of words". (Kent 1938, p. 209).

[13] "Men have wished that imposed nouns should be as few as possible, that they might be able to learn them more quickly; but derivative nouns they have wished to be as numerous as possible, that all might the more easily say those nouns which they needed to use." (Kent 1938, p. 375)

[14] "In connexion with the first class, a historical narrative is necessary, for except by outright learning such words do not reach us." (Kent 1938, p. 375).

[15] "[… ]for the other class, the second, a grammatical treatment is necessary, and for this there is need of a few brief maxims. For the scheme by which you have learned to inflect in the instance of one noun, you can employ in a countless number of nouns: therefore when new nouns have been brought into common use, the whole people at once utters their declined forms without any hesitation. Moreover, those who have freshly become slaves and on purchase become members of a large household, quickly inflect the names of all their fellow slaves in the oblique cases, provided only they have heard the nominative." (Kent 1938, p. 375)



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*obliquum* hominis*, quod declinatum a recto*[16]. Therefore *declinatio* is a natural phenomenon, which belongs to the nature, *physis*, of language.

*Declinatio* is a polysemantic grammar term in Varro's terminology, since it is equivalent to several current linguistic terms. Thus, it means "declension" of a noun, "conjugation" of a verb and "derivation" by prefixes and suffixes and "lexical composition"[17]. Although, like all other Latin grammarians, Varro is primarily interested in Latin and, to a large extent, in Greek as well, he is of the opinion, as we have already shown, that *declinatio* is a phenomenon that necessarily and usefully occurs in all languages: *Declinatio inducta in sermones non solum Latinos, sed omnium hominum utili et necessaria de causa: nisi enim ita esset factum, neque discere tantum numerum verborum possemus (infinitae enim sunt naturae in quas ea declinantur) neque quae didicissemus ex his, quae inter se rerum cognatio esset, appareret.* (*LL* VIII, 2, 3)[18], because it is productive and economical, and the words thus created can be easily understood based on the formal or semantic relations between them, or their kinship. For this last case, Varro refers to what is now called word family, that is to say to a lexical aspect, but he brings in examples of morphology: *legi* is "declined" from *lego*, the two forms are actually inflected forms of the same verb; but between *Priamus* and *Hecuba* the lack of formal kinship*, cognatio,* is obvious, as well as that of unity of meaning, *nullam unitatem adsignificaret*. Varro uses two words for kinship: *cognatio*, which means blood relationship, and *agnatio* specifically paternal kinship. Kinship between words occurs in the same way as the kinship and clan relations between people: *Ut in hominibus quaedam sunt agnationes ac gentilitates, sic in verbis: ut enim ab Aemilio homines orti Aemilii ac gentiles, sic ab Aemilii nomine declinatae voces in gentilitate nominali: ab eo enim, quod est impositum recto casu Aemilius, orta Aemilii, Aemilium, Aemilios, Aemiliorum et sic reliquae eiusdem quae sunt stirpis.* (*LL* VIII, 2, 3)[19]. Although Varro's observation that the kinship manifests itself at phonological and semantic level is lexically correct, since in the quoted text he uses an inflection paradigm to exemplify it, it appears that by the notion of kinship he understands, however, something different from what current linguistics means, namely that a lexical family is formed on the same root or theme.

Varro sometimes makes erroneous etymologies, but there are many more examples of etymologies and lexical families he correctly identifies, such as the one formed from the root *fa-*, which however, he does not isolate as such, but starts from the inflectional form *fatur*: Fatur *is qui primum homo significabilem ore mittit vocem. Ab eo,*

[16] "As every offshoot is secondary by nature, because that vertical trunk from which it comes is primary, and it is therefore declined: so there is declension in words: *homo* 'man' is the vertical, *hominis* 'man's 'is the oblique, because it is declined from the vertical." (Kent 1938, p. 371).

[17] Cf. also Kent 1938, p. 370, 381.

[18] Inflection has been introduced not only into Latin speech, but also into the speech of all men, because it is useful and necessary; for if this system had not developed, we could not learn such a great number of words as we should have—for the possible forms into which they are inflected are numerically unlimited—nor from those which we should have learned would it be clear what relationship existed between them so far as their meanings were concerned. (Kent 1938, p. 373)

[19] "As among men there are certain kinships, either through the males or through the clan, so there are among words. For as from an *Aemilius* were sprung the men named *Aemilius*, and the clan-members of the name, so from the name of *Aemilius* were inflected the words in the noun-clan: for from that name which was imposed in the nominative case as *Aemilius* were made *Aemilii, Aemilium, Aemilios, Aemiliorum*, and in this way also all the other words which are of this same line" (Kent 1938, p. 373-375)



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*ante quam ita faciant, pueri dicuntur* infantes*; cum id faciunt, iam* fari*; cum hoc vocabulum, tum a similitudine vocis pueri* fariolus *ac* fatuus *dictum. Ab hoc temporea quod tum pueris constituant Parcae* fando*, dictum* fatum *et* res fatales*. Ah hac eadem voce qui facile* fantur facundi *dicti, et qui futura praedivinando soleant* fari fatidici. (*LL* VI, 7, 52)[20]

Varro's grammatical description, like all ancient Greek-Latin grammars, is based on the morphology of the word - *verbum*[21] or *vocabulum*[22], sometimes *vox*-. This is indivisible, like the atoms of Democritus and Epicurus[23], and represents the minimal linguistic unit with which Varro operates at all the levels of the study of language on which his work is structured: *Verbum dico orationis vocalis partem, quae sit indivisa et minima*. (*LL* X, 4, 77)[24]

There are two classes of words: some productive, because by "declination" they can generate many lexical forms and therefore they belong to the class called *genus fecundum*, while others are not capable of generating other forms and are classified into the *genus sterile*: *Duo enim genera verborum, unum fecundum, quod declinando multas ex se parit disparilis formas, ut est* lego legis legam*, sic alia, alterum genus sterile, quod ex se parit nihil, ut est* et iam vix cras magis cur. (VIII, 3, 9)[25]. In other words, some are variable and others are invariable. The formal variability to which Varro refers includes both derivative and inflectional morphology.

The "declination" of nouns, *vocabula*, knows four types: *De nominatibus qui accedunt proxime ad infinitam naturam articulorum atque appellantur vocabula, ut* homo equus*, eorum declinationum genera sunt quattuor: unum nominandi, ut ab* equo equile*, alterum casuale, ut ab* equo equum*, tertium augendi, ut ab* albo albius*, quartum minuendi, ut a* cista cistula. (*LL* VIII, 29, 52) [26]

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[20] That man *fatur* 'speaks' who first emits from his mouth an utterance which may convey a meaning. From this, before they can do so, children are called *infantes* 'non-speakers, infants'; when they do this, they are said now *fari* 'to speak'; not only this word, but also, from likeness to the utterance of a child, *fariolus* 'soothsayer' and *fatuus* 'prophetic speaker' are said. From the fact that the Birth-Goddesses by *fando* 'speaking' then set the life-periods for the children, *fatum* 'fate' is named, and the things that are *fatales* 'fateful.' From this same word, those who *fantur* 'speak' easily are called *facundi* 'eloquent,' and those who are accustomed *fari* 'to speak' the future through presentiment, are called *fatidici* 'sayers of the fates'." (Kent 1938, p. 219)

[21] *Verbum* is a term often used for "word" in general, as well as for the grammatical term "verb".

[22] *Vocabulum* is also a term with two values: it means "word" in general and is synonymous with *verbum*, as in this case, or is a grammatical term meaning "noun".

[23] In this linguistic discussion, Varro uses the analogy between the postulate of the atomistic theory, which states that the world is built of an infinite number of indivisible particles without being able to explain of what origin they are, and the postulate of the etymologist that although there are several words whose origin cannot be known, there is still a large amount of words that he can explain: *Democritus, Epicurus, item alii qui infinita principia dixerunt, quae unde sint non dicunt, sed cuiusmodi sint, tamen faciunt magnum: quae ex his constant in mundo, ostendunt. Quare si etymologus principia verborum postulet mille, de quibus ratio ab se non poscatur, et reliqua ostendat, quod non postulat, tamen immanem verborum expediat numerum.* (*LL* VI, 5, 39)

[24] "By word I mean that part of spoken speech which is the smallest indivisible unit." (Kent 1938, p. 591)

[25] "For there are two classes of words, one fruitful, which by inflection produces from itself many different forms, as for example *lego* 'I gather,' *legi* 'I have gathered', *legam* 'I shall gather', and similarly other words; and a second class which is barren, which produces nothing from itself, as for example *et* 'and', *iam* 'now', *vix* 'hardly', cras 'tomorrow', *magis* 'more', *cur* 'why'." (Kent 1938, p. 377-379)

[26] From the appellations which come nearest to the indefinite nature of articles and are called common nouns, such as *homo* 'man' and *equus* 'horse', there are four kinds of derivation: one of name-giving, as *equile* 'horse-stable' from *equus* 'horse'; the second that of the cases, as the accusative *equum* from *equus*; the third that of augmentation, as *albius* 'whiter' from *album* 'white'; the fourth that of diminution, as *cistula* 'little box' from *cista* 'box'." (Kent 1938, p. 411-413)



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The first one is *genus nominandi*, in modern lexicology called nominal derivation with suffixes. The example given by Varro is the creation of the *equile* from *equus* with a nominal suffix. The second type is called *genus casuale*, which in fact means declension, related to the inflectional morphology and not to the derivative morphology. If Varro had in mind a certain hierarchy of the types of "declination", it is interesting to note that he does not consider this to be the first type of declination, because in his view the term "declination" was not yet specialized for inflectional morphology, although he defines this type by the category of the grammatical case. The third type, *genus augendi,* also refers to derivation with suffixes. By this Varro understands the comparison degrees of adjectives, in particular the comparison with the intensive suffix *-ius*, because he takes as example *album – albius* "white – whiter". The last type is represented by *genus minuendi*, a way of lexical creation by suffixes, namely the creation of lexemes with diminutive meaning by the suffix *-ulus, a, um*, which he exemplifies by *cista – cistula*.

In conclusion, of the four types of "declination" proposed by Varro, only one corresponds to the proper notion of declension, as it came to be specialized in later grammars. Varro does not mention in this context the formation of words by derivation with prefixes, but in Book VI he refers to this process when pointing out that it is an important process of increasing the number of words by internal means: *A quibus iisdem principiis antepositis praeverbiis paucis immanis verborum accedit numerus, quod praeverbiis inmutatis additis atque commutatis aliud atque aliud fit: ut enim* processit *et* recessit, *sic* accessit *et* abscessit*; item* incessit *et* excessit*,* sic successit *et* decessit*,* (discessi*t*) *et* concessit*. Quod si haec decem sola praeverbia essent, quoniam ab uno verbo declinationum quingenta discrimina fierent, his decemplicatis coniuncto praeverbio ex uno quinque milia numero efficerentur, ex mille ad quinquagies centum milia discrimina fieri possunt.* (*LL* VI, 5, 38)[27] The prefixing process is well represented in Latin and very old, its traces being identified back to the Indo-European phase. By prefixing it is possible to create nominal as well as adverbial and verbal lexemes, but since it is more commonly a way to create verbs, prefixes are often called pre-verbs. Varro retains only this aspect and speaks of pre-verbs by taking as example ten derivatives prefixed with as many pre-verbs of the perfect tense form of the simple verb *cedo*, which he does not mention as such. He notes that a very large number of verbs (*verba*) is thus created, but it is difficult to understand whether he refers here strictly to prefixed verbs or more generally to prefixed words, because the examples he gives are exclusively verbs.

As for the nouns, variability of form arises from several intrinsic causes, such as grammatical gender, or extrinsic, either to differentiate the natural gender or number, or to express the size or part of a whole: *Nomina declinantur aut in earum rerum discrimina, quarum nomina sunt, ut ab* Terentius Terentia*, aut in eas res extrinsecus, quarum ea nomina non sunt, ut ab* equo equiso*. In sua discrimina declinantur aut propter*

[27] "There are besides an enormous number of words derived from these same original elements by the addition of a few prefixes, because by the addition of prefixes with or without change a word is repeatedly transformed; for as there is *processit* 'he marched forward'and *recessit* 'drew back,' so there is *accessit* 'approached' and *abscessit* 'went off,' likewise *incessit* 'advanced' and *excessit* 'withdrew,' so also *successit* 'went up' and *decessit* 'went away,' *discessi*t 'departed' and *concessit* 'gave way.' But if there were only these ten prefixes, from the thousand primitives five million different forms can be made inasmuch as from one word there are five hundred derivational forms and when these are multiplied by ten through union with a prefix five thousand different forms are produced out of one primitive." (Kent 1938, p. 209)



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*ipsius rei naturam de qua dicitur aut propter illius usum qui dicit. Propter ipsius rei discrimina, aut ab toto aut a parte. Quae a toto, declinata sunt aut propter multitudinem aut propter exiguitatem. Propter exiguitatem, ut ab* homine homunculus*, ab* capite capitulum*; propter multitudinem, ut ab* homine homines*; ab eo (abeo) quod alii dicunt* cervices *et id Hortensius in poematis* cervix[28].

Thus, Varro brings together as "declined" the inflected forms of the same noun according to the grammatical categories of number, *homo – homines*, *cervix – cervices*, and case, which is correct from the point of view of inflectional morphology, but also words created by suffix derivation with a semantic function such as diminutives, *homo – homunculus*, *caput – capitulum*, and suffix words for trade names, *equiso* from *equus*, including words created by composition such as *argentifodinae*, from *argentum* and *foditur*.

After discussing the causes and purpose of the lexical phenomenon of "declination", Varro sets out to examine how it manifests itself. He concludes that there are two types of "declination", *genus voluntarium* and *genus naturale*: *Declinationum genera sunt duo, voluntarium et naturale; voluntarium est, quo ut cuiusque tulit voluntas declinavit. Sic tres cum emerunt Ephesi singulos servos, nonnunquam alius declinat nomen ab eo qui vendit* Artemidorus*, atque* Artemam *appellat, alius a regione quod ibi emit, ab* Ionia Iona*, alius quod* Ephesi Ephesium*, sic alius ab alia aliqua re, ut visum est*. (*LL* VIII, 8, 21)[29]. This means that voluntary declination depends on someone's will, is arbitrary, spontaneous, and therefore cannot be anticipated. Its motivation could be rather of a psychological nature. Varro explains in Book X what he means by these two notions he introduces: *Voluntatem apello, cum unus quivis a nomine aliae rei imponit nomen, ut* Romulus Romae*; naturam dico, cum universi acceptum nomen ab eo qui imposuit non requirimus quemadmodum is velit declinari, sed ipsi declinamus, ut* huius Romae*,* hanc Romam*,* hac Roma. (*LL* X, 2, 15) It follows that the voluntary declination is the use or practice of language, and in this situation the etymology of a word can in turn only be arbitrary, because it is difficult to establish it on account of an unclear kinship, *cognatio*, (in the example given by Varro, in fact, *Romulus*'s name comes from *Rome*).

In the case of voluntary declination, Varro finds it largely demonstrated that it is governed by anomaly: *Quare proinde ac simile conferre non oportet ac dicere, ut sit ab* Roma Romanus*, sic ex* Capua *dici oportere* Capuanus*, quod in consuetudine vehementer*

[28] "Nouns are varied in form either to show differences in those things of which they are the names, as the woman's name *Terentia* from the man's name *Terentius*, or to denote those things outside, of which they are not the names, as *equiso* 'stable-boy' from *equus* 'horse'. To show differences in themselves they are varied in form either on account of the nature of the thing itself about which mention is made, or on account of the use to which the speaker puts the word. On account of differences in the thing itself, the variation is made either with reference to the whole thing, or with reference to a part of it. Those forms which concern the whole are derived either on account of plurality or on account of smallness. On account of smallness, *homunculus* 'manikin' is formed from *homo* 'man', and *capitulum* 'little head' from *caput* 'head'. On account of plurality, *homines* 'men' is made from *homo* 'man'; I pass by the fact that others use *cervices* 'back of the neck' in the plural, and Hortensius in his poems uses it in the singular *cervix*." (Kent 1938, p. 381-383)

[29] "There are two kinds of derivation, voluntary and natural. Voluntary derivation is that which is the product of the individual person's volition, directing itself apart from control by others. So, when three men have bought a slave apiece at Ephesus, sometimes one derives his slave's name from that of the seller *Artemidorus* and calls him *Artemas*; another names his slave *Ion*, from *Ionia* the district, because he has bought him there; the third calls his slave *Ephesius*, because he has bought him at *Ephesus*. In this way each derives the name from a different source, as he preferred." (Kent 1938, p. 389).



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*natat, quod declinantes imperite rebus nomina imponunt, a quibus cum accepit consuetudo, turbulenta necesse est dicere. Itaque neque Aristarchei neque alii in analogiis defendendam eius susceperunt causam, sed, ut dixi, hoc genere declinatio in communi consuetudine verborum aegrotat, quod oritur e populo multiplici et imperito: itaque in hoc genere in loquendo magis anomalia quam analogia.* (*LL* X, 2, 16)[30]

As for natural declination, Varro gives it this name because he thinks it necessarily results from the morphological rules of the language, which offer the advantage of predictability, due to their anchoring in paradigmatic classes. In the case of natural declination, the principle of analogy works because the analogy is also of two types, natural and voluntary. Varro integrates his linguistic approach into the wider knowledge of his time, and often brings arguments belonging to natural philosophy or to ordinary life: *Qui autem duo genera esse dicunt analogiae, unum naturale, quod ut ex satis nascuntur* lentibus lentes *sic ex* lupino lupinum*, alterum voluntarium, ut in fabrica, cum vident scaenam ut in dexteriore parte sint ostia, sic esse in sinisteriore simili ratione factam, de his duobus generibus naturalem esse analogian, ut sit in motibus caeli, voluntariam non esse, quod ut quoique fabro lubitum sit possit facere partis scaenae: sic in hominum partibus esse analogias, quod eas natura faciat, in verbis non esse, quod ea homines ad suam quisque voluntatem fingat, itaque de eisdem rebus alia verba habere Graecos, alia Syros, alia Latinos: ego declinatus verborum et voluntarios et naturalis esse puto, voluntarios quibus homines vocabula imposerint rebus quaedam, ut ab* Romulo Roma*, ab* Tibure Tiburtes*, naturales ut ab impositis vocabulis quae inclinantur in tempora aut in casus, ut ab* Romulo Romuli Romulum *et ab* dico dicebam dixeram[31].

The main cause of the disappearance or corruption of words in form and meaning is the passage of time: *Vetustas pauca non depravat, multa tollit*. (LL V, 1, 5)[32] Therefore, Varro inventories the ways in which form changes take place and concludes that there are as many as two sets of four causes, because each set can occur on two

[30] "For this reason we ought not to compare *Romanus* 'Roman' and *Capuanus* 'Capuan' as alike, and to say that *Capuanus* ought to be said from *Capua* just as *Romanus* is from *Roma*; for in such there is in actual usage an extreme fluctuation, since those who derive the words set the names on the things with utter lack of skill, and when usage has accepted the words from them, it must of necessity speak confused names variously derived. Therefore neither the followers of Aristarchus nor any others have undertaken to defend the cause of voluntary derivation as among the Regularities; but, as I have said, this kind of derivation of words in common usage is an ill thing, because it springs from the people, which is without uniformity and without skill. Therefore, in speaking, there is in this kind of derivation rather Anomaly than Regularity." (Kent 1938, p. 545-547)

[31] "Those moreover who say that there are two kinds of Regularity, one natural, namely that lentils grow from planted lentils, and so does lupine from lupine, and the other voluntary, as in the workshop, when they see the stage as having an entrance on the right and think that it has for a like reason been made with an entrance on the left; and say further, that of these two kinds the natural Regularity really exists, as in the motions of the heavenly bodies, but the voluntary Regularity is not real, because each craftsman can make the parts of the stage as he pleases: that thus in the parts of men there are Regularities, because nature makes them, but there is none in words, because men shape them each as he wills, and therefore as names for the same things the Greeks have one set of words, the Syrians another, the Latins still another — I firmly think that there are both voluntary and natural derivations of words, voluntary for the things on which men have imposed certain names, as *Rome* from *Romulu*s and the *Tiburtes* 'men of Tibur' from *Tibu*r, and natural as those which are inflected for tenses or for cases from the imposed names, as genitive *Romuli* and accusative *Romulum* from *Romulus*, and from *dico* 'I say' the imperfect *dicebam* and the pluperfect *dixeram*." (Kent 1938, p. 463-465)

[32] "There are few things which lapse of time does not distort, there are many which it removes." (Kent 1938, p. 7)



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levels, namely: loss, addition, transposition and change of sounds and lengthening, shortening, addition or loss of syllables: *Quorum verborum novorum ac veterum discordia omnis in consuetudine communi, quot modis commutatio sit facta qui animadverterit, facilius scrutari origines patietur verborum: reperiet enim esse commutata, ut in superioribus libris ostendi, maxime propter bis quaternas causas. Litterarum enim fit* demptione *aut* additione *et propter earum* traiectionem *aut* commutationem*, item syllabarum* productione *(aut* correptione*, denique* adiectione *aut* detrectione. (*LL* V, 2, 6)[33]

The denomination of things or *impositio verborum* is not a process that stops at some point, because linguistic reality must adapt to the non-linguistic reality in which new objects always appear to which new words must be "imposed". However, the lexical inventory of a language does not numerically increase with as many new words as new objects appear, because it would be contrary to the principle of the linguistic means economy[34]. There are linguistic tools that use existing lexical resources to name unknown objects. By means of the metaphor and metonymy old words are semantically loaded with new content. Figurative language, semantic transfer, or transfer of the lexical form are procedures that demonstrate linguistic creativity without encumbering the lexical inventory. A passage on Latin fish nomenclature summarizes Varro's findings in this respect, the key terms being *translata*, *similis* şi *ad similitudinem*. The words of Greek origin designating marine animals had known the same metaphorization process before being borrowed: *Vocabula piscium pleraque translata a terrestribus ex aliqua parte similibus rebus, ut* anguilla, lingulaca*,* sudis*; alia a coloribus, ut haec:* asellus*,* umbra*,* turdus*; alia a vi quadam, ut haec:* lupus, canicula*,* torpedo. *Item in conchyliis aliqua ex Graecis, ut* peloris*,* ostrea*,* echinus. *Vernacula ad similitudinem, ut* surenae*,* pectunculi*,* ungues. *(LL* V, 12, 77)[35] This passage exemplifies the mechanism underlying the imposition of some of the words that designate fish, such as *anguilla* 'eel,' *lingulaca* 'sole,' *sudis* 'pike', by semantic transfer due to the similarity between terrestrial living creatures and marine living creatures, that is through metaphor or metonymy. According to Aristotle's definition, "Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion."[36] A source of important borrowings not in terms of quantity,

[33] "Now he who has observed in how many ways the changing has taken place in those words, new and old, in which there is any and every manner of variation in popular usage, will find the examination of the origin of the words an easier task; for he will fiind that words have been changed, as I have shown in the preceding books, essentially on account of two sets of four causes. For the alterations come about by the loss or the addition of single letters and on account of the transposition or the change of them, and likewise by the lengthening or the shortening of syllables, and their addition or loss:" (Kent 1938, p. 7)

[34] André Martinet, *Éléments de linguistique générale*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1980, p. 176-177.

[35] "The names of water animals are some native, some foreign. From abroad come *muraena* 'moray,' because it is *myraina* in Greek, *cybium* 'young tunny' and *thunnus* 'tunny', all whose parts likewise go by Greek names, as melander 'black-oak-piece' and *uraeon* 'tail-piece'. Very many names of fishes are transferred from land objects which are like them in some respect, as *anguilla* 'eel,' *lingulaca* 'sole,' *sudis* 'pike'. Others come from their colours, like these: *asellus* 'cod,' *umbra* 'grayling', *turdus* 'sea-carp.' Others come from some physical power, like these: *lupus* 'wolf-fish', *canicula* 'dogfish', *torpedo* 'electric ray'. Likewise among the shellfish there are some from Greek, as *peloris* 'musse,' ostrea 'oyster', *echinus* 'sea-urchin'; and also native words that point out a likeness, as *surenae*, 'pectunculi' scallops', *ungues* 'razor-clams'." (Kent 1938, p. 75)

[36] Cf. *Poetica* 1457b, 6-7, in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, Edited with critical notes and a translation by S. H. Butcher, London, MacMillan and Co, 1922, p. 77-79.



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but in terms of frequency and significance in religious life is the Sabin dialect to which Latin is closely related and has a long common history. Varro quotes such loans in the religious sphere, especially names of deities integrated into Latin flexion and assimilated by culture, leading him to say that some of them have roots in both languages, like the trees on the border with their roots growing over both fields: Feronia, Minerva, Novensides *a Sabinis*. *Paulo aliter ab eisdem dicimus haec:* Palem, Vestam, Salutem, Fortunam, Fontem, Fidem. *Et arae Sabinum linguam olent, quae Tati regis voto sunt Romae dedicatae: nam, ut annales dicunt, vovit* Opi, Florae, Vediovi, Saturno*que,* Soli, Lunae, Volcano *et* Summano*, itemque* Larundae, Termino, Quirino, Vortumno, Laribus, Dianae Lucinae*que; e quis nonnulla nomina in utraque lingua habent radices, ut arbores quae in confinio natae in utroque agro serpunt: potest enim* Saturnus *hic de alia causa esse dictus atque in Sabinis, et sic* Diana*, de quibus supra dictum est*. (*LL* V, 10, 74)[37]

As already said, Varro often adopts a comparative perspective in the description of Latin in relation to other languages, mainly to the Greek and sometimes to the Sabine dialect, his work being an important source of knowledge of some features of this dialect as well as of some aspects of the Sabine religion and culture. His interest and knowledge are, of course, related to the fact that he was of Sabine origin. But in the given context, this shows that Varro thinks like a linguist with a broad horizon and is interested in the phenomenon of language in general, and when discussing a problem, besides Latin, he also considers the languages or dialects he is familiar with. Here are, for example, a few passages where he quotes Sabine words: *Hos quidam qui magis incondite faciebant vocabant* lixulas *et* similixulas *vocabulo Sabino: quae frequentia Sabinis*. (*LL* V, 22, 107) *Hircus*, qu[38]od Sabini *fircus* (*LL* V, 19, 97) Porcus*, quod Sabini dicunt* aprunum porcum *proinde* porcus*, nisi si a Graecis, quod Athenis in libris sacrorum scripta est* pórkē *et* pórkos[39]. Mars *ab eo quod* maribus *in bello praeest, aut quod Sabinis acceptus ibi est* Mamers. Aelius […] putabat hunc esse *Sancum* ab Sabina lingua et Herculem a Graeca. (*LL* V, 10, 66)[40]

In conclusion, although complex, Varro's analysis of the morphological field is, given the stage of linguistic thinking of his time, the lack of precision and specialization of the terms used, as well as the lack of adequate methods, inherently confused in some respects. One of these aspects is the terminology, more precisely, the use of the same term, *declinatio*, when referring to the morphological variation. For this reason, it seems that Varro does not distinguish between derivative morphology and inflectional morphology. However, we cannot fail to admit that he states in VIII, 8, 21 or X, 2, 15

[37] *"Feronia, Minerva*, the *Novensides* are from the Sabines. With slight changes, we say the following, also from the same people: *Pales, Vesta, Salus, Fortune, Fons, Fides* 'Faith'. There is scent of the speech of the Sabines about the altars also, which by the vow of King Tatius were dedicated at Rome: for, as the Annals tell, he vowed altars to *Ops, Flora, Vediovis* and *Saturn, Sun, Moon, Vulcan* and *Summanus*, and likewise to *Larunda, Terminus, Quirinus, Vertumnus*, the *Lares, Diana* and *Lucina*: some of these names have roots in both languages, like trees which have sprung up on the boundary-line and creep about in both fields: for *Saturn* might be used as the god's name from one source here, and from another among the Sabines, and so also *Diana*." (Kent 1938, p. 71-73)

[38] "Certain persons who used to make these rather carelessly called them *lixulae* 'softies' and *similixulae* 'wheat-softies', by the Sabine name, such was their general use among the Sabines." (Kent 1938, p. 103)

[39] *"Hircus* 'buck', which the Sabines call *fircus*.[ … ] *Porcu*s 'pig,' because the Sabines say *aprunus porcus* 'boar pig'; therefore *porcus* 'pig', unless it comes from the Greeks, because at Athens in the Books of the Sacrifices *pórkē* 'femalepig' is written, and *pórkos* 'male pig'." (Kent 1938, p. 93)

[40] Aelius [ … ] thought that he was *Sancus* in the Sabine tongue, and Hercules in Greek. p. 65.



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that *declinatio* knows two types, *declinatio voluntaria*, by which he actually understands the derivational morphology made evident in the examples he gives, and *declinatio naturalis*, by which he understands inflectional morphology, as we can deduce from his examples illustrating this type. For the voluntary declination, the principle of the anomaly is predominant, while in the case of the natural declination, it is the analogy principle, obvious in the fact that the words are ordered in paradigmatic, predictable, and therefore easy to recognize categories by any speaker, even those forms he has never previously come across. When distinguishing between what belongs to proper grammar from what belongs to lexicology, one can say that Varro makes an almost complete inventory of modalities of lexical creation in Latin. This becomes apparent in the surviving pages of his treatise, where he puts forward situations for the term *declinatio* meaning derivation when he refers to the formation of new words by suffixation and prefixation. Varro and the ancient grammarians did not use the notion of morpheme, as to them, the minimal linguistic unit was the word. However, even without arriving at such an operational concept, Varro speaks, for example, about roots, *radices*, (VI, 5, 37) in the case of primary words*, primigenia* or *impositicia*, which even if few in number, but being included in the *genus fecundum* are capable of generating a large array of words and due to their kinship, *cognatio*, are brought together into families based on their common roots. An example in this case is the lexical family he builds from the verb *fatur*, VI, 7, 52, regarded by him as the basis of derivation, but without carrying to an end the idea of root and without defining it, though the way he puts together this word family shows his intuition was right. On the other hand, Varro does not anticipate the theoretical notion of suffix, although he mentions three types of derivation with suffixes: *genus nominandi*, nominal derivation with suffixes, *genus augendi*, for the degrees of comparison with suffixes and *genus minuendi*, the formation of diminutive words with suffixes. In all the examples he gives to illustrate these concepts, Varro does not segment the constitutive morphemes, but looks at the word resulted from "declination" in his entirety. He does however draw attention to the prefixing process, well represented in Latin and he exemplifies by ten such morphemes that form new lexemes starting from the verbal root *ced*-, VI, 5, 38. Although the prefixes are much easier to identify than the suffixes and it is obvious that Varro understands the derivation mechanism by means of prefixes, he does not however isolate them as morphemes to emphasize the mechanism of generating new words through this procedure. Moreover, he restricts it to verb formation, and therefore calls them preverbs, although this phenomenon also appears in the case of nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. Nevertheless, he finds it very productive and economical, because a small number of preverbs create a very large number of verbs. Varro also refers many times to borrowing from other languages as another source of enrichment of the Latin lexical inventory.

Varro's conception about word formation can only be partially reconstructed, by assembling the ideas contained in various passages dispersed in the six existing books of his treatise *De lingua Latina*. In the last decades, a more careful and comprehensive reading of the Varronian text by some linguists has brought to the fore his profound, autonomous, and original linguistic thinking in many respects. Varro had a good grasp of Greek grammar, as well as of Greek philosophers who had formulated linguistic theories, from whom he adopted and applied to Latin many concepts, ideas, and methods, but at the same time preserving his autonomy of thought and, for as much as we can account, he elaborated in many respects an original discourse about the Latin language.



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This treatise is not a work of grammar[41] in the sense that this term had in antiquity. It was intensely read and abundantly quoted by grammarians[42], philologists, scholars, or amateurs of antiquities, but it was probably not used as a school textbook. It was far beyond teaching interest. Thus, a possible explanation for the partial preservation of this work could be that manuscripts were not massively reproduced for didactic purposes. *De lingua Latina* is not Varro's only linguistic work, but the only one to have several of its books preserved. He began writing language studies as early as 85 BC, when the linguistic domain was very poorly represented in the Roman culture. In the forty years preceding the publication of this treatise, he wrote no less than eight titles, totalling about sixty books. It may not seem much, but added to the sixty titles in the most diverse areas containing over six hundred and fifty books, it offers us an idea about Varro's great intellectual capacity and energy, and thus makes us realize what a great loss the almost entire disappearance of his encyclopedic work means. In this huge body of work, his linguistic concerns were constantly present and focused on very diverse thematic areas. Varro is the author with the broadest and most original linguistic thinking before Priscian, that is more than five hundred years. He was highly respected in his time and enjoyed a great authority in the following centuries. In the modern period the numerous citations and references inserted in the works of other authors made it possible to achieve compilations of fragments from Varro's works on language that were lost, but of course this cannot restore the entire work.

Daniel J. Taylor speaks of a Varronian revolution in linguistics[43]. Unfortunately, although Varro's thinking was revolutionary in some respects, the revolution did not take place, because the immediate posterity did not select and develop the ideas for which he is so appreciated today, either because they were not understood for they went beyond their time, or because they were not given the consideration they deserved. As for the lexical creation, we can distinguish his idea that *declinatio* represents a useful and necessary linguistic phenomenon for all languages, which is, as Daniel J. Taylor remarks, a linguistic universal.

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[41] About which, according to the quotation of Diomede, Varro says that has four functions: *Grammaticae officia, ut adserit Varro, constant in partibus quattuor, lectione enarratione emendatione iudicio*. Diom., *GL*1426, p. 21–22.

[42] J. Collart notes that Varro is the most cited author by later Latin grammars, "L'œuvre grammaticale de Varron", p. 3.

[43] Daniel J. Taylor, "The Varronian Revolution in Linguistics", in *De Lingua Latina* X. *A New Critical Text and English Translation with Prolegomena and Commentary*, John Benjamins B. V., 1996, p. 10-18.



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