LATIN GRAMMAR, GREEK TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract. The phonetic approach in Martianus Capella's *Grammar* (*id est*, the 3rd book of *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*) is prevailing and the climax appears to be the depiction of the accent. The accentuation (3.268) is defined from a Greek standpoint, not only terminologically, but also beyond the plausible realities of the Latin language. Martianus Capella states that each syllable is either grave or acute or circumflex. The three different types of accent he considers are described both phonetically and graphically, in a manner that perfectly fits the Greek diacritics (a stroke ascending from left to right, a stoke descending from left to right and, correspondingly, a semicircle, *sigma*, placed above). They might hardly be accepted for Latin language, given the data we have and, nevertheless, the Indo-European comparative linguistics. Consequently, this theoretical description of the accent might be considered beyond the Latin language.

Keywords: Martianus Capella, grammar, Latin, accent, Greek.

1. SOURCES. TEXT

The encyclopaedic work of Martianus Capella[1] is probably indebted to the writings of his predecessors, just as any other encyclopaedic work. It recapitulated the fundamentals of the Roman academic curriculum and transmitted them to a later generation of scholars and students; the book is a key work in the history of education, rhetoric and science during this period and it was one of the highly popular books for nearly a thousand years.

Defining the distant sources of Capella's third book[2] encounters major difficulties and remains on the whole inconclusive, as our surviving Latin grammatical treatises are mainly of the fourth century AD or later. There are some points of correspondence between Capella's book on grammar and the work of Diomedes (late forth century AD) *Ars grammatica* or his treatise *De oratione et partibus orationis et uario genere metrorum libri III*, which includes a book on the eight parts of speech, one book on the elementary principles of grammar and style

[1] The quotations are from the Latin edition of Ilaria Ramelli (2001) and the English translation of William Harris Stahl (1977).

[2] The sources were investigated by Wilhelm Langbein (*De Martiano Capella grammatico*, Ienae: Typis G. Nevenhahni, 1914), following an earlier study by Johann Jürgensen ("De tertio Martiani Capellae libro", *Commentationes philologiae seminarii philologiae Lipsiensis*, 1874, pp. 57–96).

and the final one, on poetry, quantity and meters. The similarities might be explained by supposing that both borrowed from a common source – the source, if any, has perished. Capella differs from Diomedes in his definition of a syllable, in distinguishing the three parts of a syllable and the four genera of *iunctura*, nevertheless in details of the treatment of accent, including his assertion that a word can bear all three accents (*e.g.*, *Árgìlêtum*).

There are also some correspondences between Capella and Charisius, Marius Victorinus, and Servius, that cannot be shown to descend from one common source. In the treatment of conjugations and declensions, as much as it is (*i.e.*, mostly in phonetical perspective), Capella followed Charisius directly; where he differs, it is because he wished to offer his own opinion or perhaps because he followed a different source, such as Pliny the Elder. Capella's treatment of words ending in *u* is not found in any other extant grammarians. There are some similarities with Marius Victorinus and Servius in the treatment of syllables (including the final ones), pronouns, verbs, adverbs, participles, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections (mostly in what concerns *litterae, i.e.*, phonemes); nevertheless, it is impossible to establish from which he drew. Though he shares some points of resemblance with Probus and with the Anonymous of Berne, these are less significant compared to the consonance with other grammarians. It seems clear that he and Priscian used the same source for describing the letters – whether the source is Papirianus or an earlier writer, such as Probus or Pliny, is again in doubt[3].

Leaving aside the topic of Capella's sources, it is relevant to plunge into the complex tradition of the text, crowned by glosses and commentaries. The ancient sources of Martianus Capella are consequently transplanted to the fifth century; the next millennium took them over amidst the filter of commentaries written by Iohannes Scottus Eriugena, Remigius Autissiodorensis and Bernardus Silvestris. The third book of *De nuptiis* is scarcely mentioned in these commentaries[4].

The treatment of pronunciation was found useful and it was often quoted; a handbook made up of Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* II, Iulius Severianus, a paschal computus and excerpts from Martianus (300–9, 312–24) had a minor vogue. Book III as a whole was almost unused, the most plausible explanation being that Donatus' grammar was available and most likely considered superior.

[3] Dick, in his edition of Martianus notes certain similarities between Book III and Bede's *De arte metrica*: this work, on the composition of Latin verse, designed to help teach grammar in the abbey school, was based on Donatus' *De pedibus* and Servius' *De finalibus*, and used examples from Christian poets as well as Vergil. Another textbook of Bede's, *De orthographia*, designed to help a medieval reader of Latin with unfamiliar abbreviations and words from classical Latin works, appears to have been mainly intended as a reference work.

[4] One manuscript of Martin of Laon's commentary simply does not gloss Book III. Iohannes Scottus Eriugena's commentary deals with Book III briefly, most attention being given to the allegorical introduction; the comments on the technical part of the book are confined almost entirely to explaining the uncommon words and proper names which occur amongst Martianus' examples. Remigius' treatment is even more striking: he makes no observation on the technical material of Book III; his notes deal exclusively with the allegorical sections.

The progressive, pyramidal structure of the linguistic levels in Donatus' *Ars maior* is to be detected in Capella's third book. Donatus' treatise includes six parts, one more than *Techne peri phones* of Diogenes of Babylon, but with a significant difference: Donatus does not include chapters on *dictio* (*lexis*) and *oratio* (*logos*), so that the entire work can be labelled, from a modern point of view, as phonetics: 1. *De uoce*; 2. *De littera*; 3. *De syllaba*; 4. *De pedibus*; 5. *De tonis*; 6. *De posituris*. This difference (including a chapter on accent and another one on punctuation) is hardly an innovation, as it seems to belong to the Rhodian School; nevertheless, in his *Techne* of Dionysios Thrax treats accents briefly and confines himself to enouncing the three types. Donatus' chapter on accent is composite, as it includes, besides the general rules of accentuation, some graphic signs, as *diastole* and *hyphen*; this implies Alexandrian tradition, combined with a practical and didactic perspective. The same approach is to be found in *De nuptiis*.

2. *LITTERAE, SYLLABAE, ACCENTUS*

Capella's third book of *De nuptiis* is strictly connected to the content of the whole work: Grammatica[5], the first character that speaks in front of the celestial guests, is the leading liberal art and her characteristics are depicted mostly in relation to the other *Artes*, in a subtle manner[6].

The apprenticeship starts with the elements (*i.e.*, the letters); it proceeds to syllables, words, phrases, clauses and sentences, in a manner more didactic than practical or effective. Martianus offers an elaborate study of letters, their connections and pronunciation; then he treats the syllables, their connections and pronunciation, with special attention to final syllables, which are important in an inflected language.

Unlike other grammatical treatises, Capella's *Grammatica* includes a precise description of the articulation of the "letters" (for example, the vowels[7]); the term

[5] Grammar is introduced as being native from Memphis, in Egypt; she is an old woman, as she was born in immemorial times. The chronological reference to the divine regnum of Osiris, the husband of the goddess Isis, confers grammar a mythical dimension, in tight connection to the central role of Mercury/Hermes in the diffusion of this art, by means of hermeneutics (whether the etymology of the term is authentic or popular). Grammar's purpose is revealed by the instruments that teachers and students of grammar used, displayed as medical remedies meant to cure the ignorance.

[6] The final speech belongs to Music ("Harmony"): her domain is that of *tonus* ("note", "key") and *sonus* ("sound").

[7] A *sub hiatus oris congruo solo spiritu memoramus*. ("We utter *A* with the mouth open, with a single suitable breath.") E *spiritus facit lingua paululum pressiore*. ("*E* is made by a breath with the tongue a little depressed.") I *spiritus prope dentibus pressis*. ("*I* is made by a breath with the teeth kept close together.") O *rotundi oris spiritu comparatur.* ("*O* is made by a breath with the mouth rounded.") V *ore constricto labrisque prominulis exhibetur.* ("*V* is made with the mouth almost closed and the lips forward a little.") Y *appressis labris spirituque procedit.* ("*Y* is a breath with the lips close together.")

encompasses more than sounds, as in succeeding paragraphs the author annuls the superfluous letters. Consequently, his depiction of the letters is ambiguous, given that the term can refer to either SIGN or SOUND and Martianus himself admits that some of the letters are redundant (*K vs* C[8], or the Greek *Y*); nevertheless, he describes the distinctive way in which they are articulated[9]: "*C* is made by the back teeth brought forward over the back of the tongue"; "*K* is made with the palate against the top of the throat"; "*Q*[10] is a contraction of the palate with the mouth rounded" (3.261).

A syllable is defined (3.264) as a combination of letters and is heard as a single sound (*syllaba igitur dicta est, quod iunctis litteris sonitum simul accipientibus informetur*). The syllables are described in details, from the standpoint of their vowel and consonant structure: *[in qua iuncturis] quid nectat littera utrisque, / quo admittat socium uel faciat latere, / quae quo transiliat conuersis legibus usu / et transformatum nomen habere uelit, / quas oris sonitus uel quas modulatio linguae / gignant et pulsu rupta labella suo* (3.262). There are three important aspects regarding the syllable: its connection, its accentuation and its length (*de iunctura, de fastigio aut de longitudinibus*).

The climax of the third book appears to be the study of accent: the allegorical character Grammatica is determined to fully present this topic, disregarding that Pallas demands from her a historical presentation[11].

The accentuation (3.264) is defined from a Greek standpoint, not only terminologically, but also outside the plausible realities of the Latin language. Martianus gives a minute description of the three divisions of syllables: each syllable is either grave or acute or circumflex. These terms refer to the pitch of the voice: the acute is a pitch rising above the normal, the grave is normal, and the circumflex is a dual pitch, which rises and falls back to normal within the space of one vowel (*et similia*); and just as no syllable exists without a vowel, so is none without an accent. The accent, Grammatica states, is the soul of a sound, the

[8] *Vide* 3.253: *K* is thought sometimes to be a "notation", sometimes a "letter", as the letter C can certainly perform all its functions except these: *kapita, kalendae, kalumniae*.

[9] For this paragraph, *vide* Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica*, VI 32, 17–34,23; Terentianus Maurus, *De litteris, de syllabis, de metris*, 111–248 (edited by Keil, *Grammatici latini*, VI, p. 315 sqq.).

[10] *Vide* 3.255: "Some people used not to consider *Q* to be a letter, and they would be right, if only it were not so evident in *aequus* and *equitatus*. It never occurs without two vowels in association, of which the first is always *u*; the other vowels may then follow, as in *quartus, questus, Quirites, quotus, equus*. It is made up of *c* and *u* and so is a double and composite sound, and and double-*q* does not occur. It is not preceded by any particular letter and it is never a final letter."

[11] *Vide* 3.263: "While Grammar was saying this, and Jupiter and the Delian were urging her forward, Pallas spoke up: «While Literature (*Litteratura*) here is hurrying on to discuss the connection of syllables, she has passed over the historical aspect (*partem historicam praetermisit*)». At this objection by the maiden goddess, Grammar in great agitation answered: «I know I must pass over a great deal, so as not to incur the distaste of the blessed by getting entangled in details. So I shall perform my purpose, hastening along the shortest ways, to avoid getting lost, hidden in thick undergrowth or a dense mass of briars»".

seedbed of music, because every melody comes from the accents and weights of sounds; and so it has been called "accent" from *adcantus* ("tuning"): *et est accentus, ut quidam putauerunt, anima uocis et seminarium musices, quod omnis modulatio ex fastigiis uocum grauitateque componitur, ideoque accentus quasi adcantus dictus est* (3.268). Every utterance in Latin, whether simple or compound, has one sound that is either acute or circumflex; none can ever have two acute or circumflex sounds, but two grave sounds are common.

There are some observations regarding what we usually call *samdhi*-phenomena or syntactic phonetics, as Capella notices that the true pronunciation[12] of individual sounds is frequently altered or even lost according to their context in speech. Some of these observations are focused on the accent, e.g., "words change their accents when *-que*, *-ue*, and *-ne* are suffixed; when *-que* is a copulative conjunction (*complexiua coniunctio*), and *-ue* an expletive one (*expletiua*), as in *Latiumque augescere uultis* and *stimuloue meum cor* in the *Pelopidae* of Accius".

The three different types of accents are described not only phonetically, but also graphically (3.273): "The acute accent is signified by a stroke ascending from the left to right thus ´ (*acutus accentus notatur uirgula a sinistra parte in dexteram ascendente*); the grave descends from left to the right thus ` (*grauis autem a sinistra parte ad dexteram descendens*); the symbol of the circumflex is a semicircle placed above the letters themselves ˆ (*inflexi signum est sigma super ipsas litteras deuexum*). We sometimes call accents *fastigia* ("gables"), because they are placed on top of letters; sometimes *cacumina* ("summits"), *toni* ("tones"), or *soni* ("sounds"); and the Greeks call them *prosodiae* ("pitches"). It is worth knowing that all three accents can occur in a single word, such as *Árgìlêtum*."

The phenomena related to the lengthening of the syllables (3.275) are detailed in a less convincing manner, as both the *natura* and the *positio* are expressly considered in relation to vowels, not syllables. This is probably due to the same Greek standpoint that dominates Martianus' description of the accents. The passage is rendered even more difficult by the corrupted transmission of the text, which shows that the copists themselves had a hard time understanding what it meant.

Both phonetically and graphically, the presence of the circumflex, acute and grave accents is disputable in the case of Latin language. Heavily influenced by the terminology and the phonetic realities of the Greek language, these different types of accent can hardly be accepted as emerged from the practice of speaking Latin. The research in the field of comparative linguistics does not offer any testimony in favour of the acute *vs* circumflex distinction in Latin[13]. Besides all the nuances

[12] *Vide* 3.272: "those sounds are lost which are carried onto a succeeding sound, as, in the case of prepositions, in the phrase *ante urbem*; here *ante* loses its acute accent on the first syllable; similarly with *post muros*".

[13] *Vide* Jay Jasanoff, "Acute vs Circumflex: Some Notes on PIE and Post-PIE prosodic Phonology", in Adam Hyllested et al. (eds.), *Per Aspera ad Asteriscos. Studia Indogermanica in honorem Jens Elmgård Rasmussen*, Innsbruck, 2004, p. 247–256. From a comparative (Indo-European) perspective, there are only four divisions of the Indo-European family that

Martianus depicts, it seems realistic to understand the words "acute" and "circumflex" as describing, respectively, an ascending tone and the ascending and descending tone allowed by a long vowel, while the "grave" accent should probably be interpreted as designating a lack of tone, given that it is described as "normal" and can occur more times in a single word.

Whatever the other grammatical treatises used to include is left aside in *De nuptiis*. The commentary of Remigius Autissiodorensis emphasizes here the virtues of *serium fastidium* (114.17) *quod superflua et minus utilia refugit, nam sapientia uera breuitate gaudet, refugit uagam garrulitatem*. When Grammatica seems ready to introduce another subject, Pallas intervenes, because of the boredom that had come upon Jove and the celestial senate (*propter superi senatus Iouisque fastidium*), and, after discouraging the old lady to talk about the eight parts of speech, she warns her: "If you were to take up a discussion of rhythm and meter, as you would venture to do with young pupils[14], Music would surely tear you apart for usurping her office (*profecto Musices impetus, cuius praeuertis officium, discerperis*). The teaching you have given us will be well-proportioned and complete if you keep to your own particular subjects [...] (*formam igitur praedictae praeceptionis absolueris, si praecipuis memoratis iam te ab inchoamentorum uulgarium uilitatibus uindicaris*)".

Leaving apart the bulk of morphology and syntax, the allegorical character of Grammatica approaches only the phonetics: the mere *litterae*, the sounds, and their next level (*syllabae*), including the accent as a defining element. Describing the Latin accent with the instruments of the Greek grammarians reveals a grammatical emulation that surpasses the linguistic realities, as we understand them: it might be worth considering whether Martianus Capella's text mirrors a formal rigidity or there is some more to be investigated.

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distinguish between ordinary long vowels and "special" long vowels: Indo-Iranian, Balto-Slavic, Germanic and Greek; nowhere is this an inherited feature (§10). "The clear etymological distribution of acute and circumflex in Greek was subsequently complicated by analogical and other changes that led to the extension of circumflex at the expense of acute accentuation"(§5). Latin has no such distinction and never had it in its linguistic history.

[14] Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae*, 1.4.4, urges the teacher of literature to discuss meter and rhythm.

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