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Latin *au-* 'away', an allomorph of *ab-*

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La interpretación del preverbio latino au- *(*auferō *y* aufugiō*) que acepta la mayoría de manuales modernos (<*h₂eu, 'fuera') debe ser descartada. Tanto los datos de la epigrafía latina como la distribución de alomorfos de* ab- *en la lengua clásica demuestran que* au- *debe considerarse el reflejo regular de* ab- *en frente de* f-.

Most of the handbooks derive Latin au- *(in* auferō *and* aufugiō*) from PIE *h₂eu 'away, off', but this must be rejected. Inscriptional evidence as well as the distribution of the allomorphs of* ab- *in Classical Latin show that* au- *must be regarded as the regular reflex of* ab- *in front of* f-.

> *Una praepositio est* af *quae nunc tantum in accepti tabulis manet ac ne his quidem omnium, in reliquo sermone mutata est; nam* amovit *dicimus et* abegit *et* abstulit, *ut iam nescias* a'ne *verum sit an* ab <an> abs. *Quid, quod etiam* abfugit *turpe visum est et* abfer *noluerunt,* aufugit *et* aufer *maluerunt? Quae praepositio praeter haec duo verba nullo alio in verbo reperietur.*

> "The same preposition is *af*, which now exists only in acknowledgements of receipt and not even in all of them; in other usage it has changed. For we say *amovit* and *abegit* and *abstulit*, so that you do not know whether *a* is true or *ab* or *abs*. And what is more, even *abfugit* seemed ugly and no one wanted *abfer*, that is why everybody prefers *aufugit* and *aufer*. Except for these two words, this preposition is not found in any other word."

Cicero, *Orator* 158 (text according to Kroll 1913)

The Latin preverb *au-* 'away' only occurs in *auferō* 'to carry away' and *aufugiō* 'to flee', both attested from Plautus onwards. None of the other Italic languages have a prefix which goes back to Italic **au-*. In many handbooks, *au-* is regarded as the regular reflex of PIE **h₂eu* 'away, off', and cognate with Greek αὖ 'again, on the other hand', Old Church Slavic *u-* 'away', Old Prussian *aumūsnan* 'ablution' and Old Irish *ó, úa* 'away, from'. Thus, e.g., in Sommer 1914: 263, Walde-Hoffmann 1938 I: 79, Pokorny 1959: 72, Ernout-Meillet 1959: 2, Sommer-Pfister 1977: 194, Leumann 1977: 61. It seems likely that this PIE word is indeed contained in Latin *aut* 'or', Oscan *aut,* **avt** 'but, or' < **au-te/i*.[1] Latin *autem* 'on the other hand' probably represents a more recent formation of *aut* plus **-em* (cf. *item, idem, quidem*). The speakers of Latin, however, could not deduce an element *au-* from *aut* or *autem*. We thus observe that *auferre* and *aufugiō* are completely isolated within Italic, and also, that there is no semantic difference within Latin with the very frequent preverb *ab(s)*. These data suffice to doubt the identity of *au-* with PIE **h₂eu*, and they feed the suspicion that *au-* derives from *ab-*.

In fact, the idea that *au-* is a phonetic variant of *ab-* is anything but new. It was proposed by Wölfflin (1892: 506) and, independently it seems, by Bréal (1894: 48). However, in his influential introduction, Brugmann (1911: 810) writes: "Im historischen Latein nur noch *au-fero, au-fugio*. Diese Formen zeigen, dass sich hier *ab-* auf Kosten von *au-* ausgebreitet hat. Jene Komposita behaupteten sich, weil *aff-* = **ab-f-* oder **abs-f-* zweideutig geworden war (vgl. *affero = ad-fero*)." In 1920, the Dutch classicist Muller discusses the problem from all angles, and —to my mind— convincingly shows that *au-* must indeed have developed from *ab-*, and is unlikely to be a descendant of PIE **h₂eu*. After his article, one would expect the issue to have been closed, and his conclusions adopted by the handbooks. Such was not the case, however. In 1923: 205f., Eduard Hermann briefly mentions *au-* in his book on *Silbenbildung*, claiming that Muller was wrong about the descent from *ab-*. Hermann only spends a few lines on the complex of forms which took Muller five pages, and it is clear from his discussion that he has misunderstood the Dutchman. Hermann lays the assumption that *auf-* derives from *abs-f-* at Muller's door, but this is exactly what Muller had *not* claimed. Muller (p. 113) assumes that **apsfero* would have yielded **asfero* (admittedly, a doubtful view), and that *abs-tulī* and *ablātum* suggest earlier **abfero*.[2] Hermann's short-hand dismissal of Muller's conclusions appears to

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[1] The source of **-ti/e* is uncertain. Final **-ti* could have been taken from **ati* (> Lat. *at* 'but') or **eti* (> Lat. *et* 'and'); final **-te* may be connected with Skt. *utá* 'and' (less clear is Gr. αὖτε 'again', which may have PIE **-kʷe*). O. *auti*, U. **ute,** *ote* 'or' cannot be derived from **-ti*, but must have had a longer vowel in the auslaut, **-ī* or **-ei* (UNTERMANN 2000: 137).

[2] More recently, RUSSELL (1988: 168) has also noted that *au-* < **ab(s)-* "would make more sense" in view of the perfect *abstulī*.

have played a decisive role in the explicit rejection by Walde-Hoffmann 1938 of the assumption *ab-* > *au-*. The authority of the most comprensive Latin etymological dictionary was accepted without any discussion by Ernout-Meillet in their dictionary (1959), as well as by the subsequent handbooks (e.g. Leumann 1977: 157f., 561). A last echo of the opposite view was heard from Marstrander (1928: 245), who writes that "*aβ* hat sich offenbar in *au* entwickelt vor einem bilabialen *f*, dem es sich, um von *ad* getrennt zu bleiben, nicht assimilierte."

As Muller already argued in 1920, Brugmann's reasoning that *au-* was retained in order to avoid the coalescence with *aff-* < **ad-f-*, is built on quicksand. Firstly, the assimilation of **ad-f-* > *aff-* was a relatively recent Latin development, as is shown by Oscan *ad-* in *adfust* 'he will be present', Umbrian **ařfertur** 'high priest', probably < **ad-bʰer-tor-*, and Archaic Latin *apurfinem* 'apud finem' (CIL 5, 4ᵗʰ century BC, Lake Fucinus), *arfuise* 'adfuisse' (Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus, 186 BC). Thus, *au-* would have had to survive with a recognizable meaning well into Latin times. But there are no indications that *au-* ever existed in Faliscan, Sabellic, or Venetic. Of course, since the other Italic languages are preserved in only a fraction of the amount of evidence for Latin, it cannot be considered proven that **au-* did not exist there; but neither is it very likely. Even less so since the meaning of this *au-* would have been the same or nearly the same as that of *ab-*. Secondly, the recent date of the assimilation **ad-f-* > *aff-* also implies that the preverb *au-* changed from being a semantically recognizable preverb to a nearly extinct one in a very short period of time. This cannot be completely excluded, but I would regard it as very improbable. Thirdly, *au-* would have been dropped everywhere but remained in front of *f-*, in order to disambiguate **afferō* (< **ab(s)*) from *afferō* (< **ad*). This explanation is untenable: a form cannot be preserved in order to remedy a future merger. One could only assume that *au-* was introduced from elsewhere to the position in front of *f-*, because *aff-* had now become ambivalent. But in view of the absence of *au-* from the entire remaining Latin lexicon, this is extremely unlikely. Fourthly, both Brugmann and Marstrander assume that **ab(s)f-* would have phonetically yielded **aff-*, but this remains to be proven. Unlike *ob* and especially *sub*, which are seen to assimilate their *b* to many different following consonants (yielding, e.g., *oc-, of-, og-, om-, op-*), no such development is attested for *ab*.

The basic variant of the prefix is *ab-*, corresponding to Umbrian **ap-** in **apehtre** 'from outside'.[3] The voiced word-final stop in Latin points to Proto-

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[3] Maybe also to Paelignian and Oscan compounds in *af-*, viz. P. *afded*, O. **aflakus, aflukad, afstist**, but the meaning and interpretation of these forms is very uncertain, cf. UNTERMANN 2000: 56-60.

Italic **ap* (compare Archaic Latin *feced* < **fēket*),[4] which must derive from PIE **h₂epo* 'away'. The absence of final **-o* in Italic is problematic, but this problem does not concern us now.[5] The distribution of the allomorphs of the prefix is as follows:[6]

before vowel and *h-*	*ab-*
before voiced dentals (*d, i, l, n, r*)	*ab-*
before *s-*	*ab-*
before voiceless stops (*p, t, c, qu*)	*abs-*
before voiced labials (*b, m, v*)	*ā-*
before *f-*	*au-; ā-*
before *l-, v-, m-* in some inscriptions	*af* (as a preposition)

It is clear that *ab-* was the original variant in front of vowels, whereas *abs-* is always used in front of voiceless stops, apparently in order to avoid a voiceless variant *ap-*. The form *abs* is likely to be inherited, if we compare it with Gr. ἄψ 'back, again'; see Russell 1988 for more evidence and a theory on the origin of preverbs and adverbs with and without **-s*. In front of *p-* and *sp-*, dissimilation has led to *a(s)-*: *asportō, aspernor*. In front of *s-*, we simply cannot see whether we are dealing with **ab-* or with **abs-*.

The interpretation of *ab-* in front of voiced dentals and *ā-* in front of labials is less easy. Leumann 1940: 8 suggests an original distribution of *ab-* in front of vowels, *abs-* in front of consonants; he accordingly traces *ā-* to **abs-*. But there is no direct evidence for **s* in front of the voiced obstruents; its reconstruction is motivated by the parallellism with *ē-* < **eks-* 'out' as in *ēuertō, ēmergō*, cf. Sommer 1914: 263. If **abs-* originally also stood in front of voiced dentals, it is unclear why **abs-d-* did not yield *ād-*, or **abs-n-* > *ān-*. One might assume that **abs-* was only introduced before voiced labials, in order to avoid a collision of two labials; but nobody addresses this point.

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[4] SZEMERÉNYI (1973: 59) argues that "Italic as a whole shows the development of final voiceless stops to voiced stops", whereas RUSSELL (1988: 151) is much more hesitant. Reconstructing Proto-Italic **ap* is problematic because of the Oscan prepositions συπ 'under', **úp**, *op* 'at', which contrast with O. *-d* < **-t*. The alternative explanation for Latin *-b* is from voicing in front of voiced anlaut, cf. SOMMER 1914: 275 who gives as an example *abdūcō* < **ap(o)doukō*.

[5] Proto-Italic **h₂ep* might have been formed next to **h₂eps* on the example of **ek(s)*, cf. Sabellic **ek* (O. *eh*, U. *eh, ehe*, **e**, SPic. **e**) beside Latin *ex*, and Celtic **ek-* beside **eks-*; see RUSSELL 1988. Similar problems surround *sub* < PIE **[s]upo* and *ob* < PIE **h₁opi*. It has been argued that Venetic shows traces of unapocopated **opi* and **upo* in compounds (cf. LEJEUNE 1974: 120-122), but the evidence consists only of names, and is therefore inconclusive.

[6] The variants of the independent preposition are given by SOMMER 1914: 298 for Plautus: *ab* usually before vowel, *i-, r-; ā* before *v-, p-, b-, m-, f-, c-, qu-, g-*, usually also before *n-*, stronger vacillation before *t-, d-, l-, s-; abs* often before *tē, tuō*; but also *abs terrā, aps quā, abs Pseudolō*. See KOLLMANN (1976) for statistics on *ā, ab, abs* in other authors, and (1977) for a classification according to the initial consonant of the following word.

And in any case, Latin shows no such scruples for *ob* and *sub*, which easily combine with a following labial into *obb-* (only in *obbrūtēscō*), *off-*, *omm-* (only in *omittō*; otherwise *obm-*), *opp-*, *subb-*, *suff-*, *summ-*, *supp-*.

It seems at least equally likely that *ab-* in front of voiced dentals reflects *s*-less **ab-*, and that the same prefix yielded *ā-* in front of voiced labials. In fact, I think that the inscriptional evidence for the preposition *af* in front of labials, which can hardly reflect *abs, confirms that we may posit **ab-* in front of all voiced consonants. In addition, *af* shows that the development of *b* may have been different after *a* than after *o* and *u*.

The form *af* occurs on a few inscriptions from Rome as well as from outside town; in all cases, it concerns a preposition rather than a prefix. The attestations have been discussed by Vine 1993: 175-189, who concludes that the original locus of *af* was in front of *l-* and *v-* followed by a back rounded vowel: *af.louco* (CIL 2444, Nemus Dianae, 3rd/2nd century BC), *afluc[o* (CIL 2869, Ager Capenatis, ca. 200 BC), *af.Lyco* (CIL 728, Rome), *af Lucretia* (CIL VI 17780, Rome, 2nd-3rd c. AD), *af.vobeis* (CIL 586, Epistula ad Tiburtes, ca. 159 BC). Vine (p. 188) infers that the bilabial stop was assimilated to the following labial(ized) continuant, and *af* was probably pronounced as [aβ]. In his view, this is a "non-urban" treatment of *ab*. It may have been the case that *af* remained in use as a technical term, explaining why we also find it in some inscriptions in front of other consonants, e.g. in *af.Capua* (CIL 638, 132 BC, Tabula Popilliana, in Lucania), *af.solo*, *af speculu*. *af.vinieis*, *af villa*. Praenestian *af.muro* (CIL 1471) may also contain an original instance of *af*, since the noun also has a voiced labial plus back vowel. Finally, also the form *afvolant* 'āvolant' in Paulus Diaconus, *Epitoma Festi* p. 26, would be consistent with the inscriptional evidence for *af* in front of *v-*.

Vine's account confirms the explanations mentioned above by Wölfflin, Bréal and Muller. Bréal assumed a chain of developments *ab > af > av > au* (whence *auferō, aufugiō*) *> ā* (whence *āmittō, āvertō* etc.). Commenting on the evidence from inscriptions (the same which Vine used, except for CIL 2444 which was published in 1931), he notes that the change of *ab* to *af* appears to be especially frequent in front of *v-*, that this must have been the road to *āvellō* and *āvertō*, and that the Romans probably pronounced *av-vertō*. If we follow Vine in interpreting written *af* as /aβ/, we can simplify Bréal's schema by one degree: *ab > aβ > au > ā*. Maybe, we can even do with three degrees: *ab > aβ > au* in front of *f-*, and *ab > aβ > ā* in front of *b-*, *m-*, *v-*.

The opposition between, on the one hand, *auferō* and *aufugiō*, and, on the other, *āfuī* (Pl.+), *āfore* (Catul.+) 'to be absent' and *āfluō* 'to flow (away)' (Cic.+), can hardly be explained from a different phonetic treatment of the sequence **ab-f-*: the presence in Plautus of both variants, and the same vowel *u* following on *f* in *aufugiō* and *ā-fuī* leaves no room for such a game. Here I adopt the solution first proposed by Wölfflin, viz. of a different chronology: whereas *au-* is the original phonetic outcome, *ā-* can be

analogical after words in *b-*, *m-*, *v-*. The question of why this analogy did not reach *auferō* and *aufugiō* must remain unanswered.

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