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Faliscan

Is Faliscan an independent language or a dialect of Latin?

Traditional view: Faliscan is an independent language, but more closely related to Latin than Oscan or Umbrian; there are two branches of Italic, Latino-Faliscan and Osco-Umbrian; Latino-Faliscan consists of two languages, Latin and Faliscan, and Latin has a number of dialects such as Roman Latin, the Latin of Praeneste, etc. Whether Faliscan has dialects is an issue that is impossible to resolve because of the fragmentary attestation of the language.

Beeler (1956): Faliscan is an independent branch of Italic, not a sister language of a putative Latino-Faliscan; thus there are three branches, Latin, Faliscan, and Osco-Umbrian.

Palmer (1954): Faliscan, the Latin of Praeneste, and the Latin of Rome are all dialects of the same language.

Joseph and Wallace (1991): neither Beeler nor Palmer are right; Faliscan shares a number of innovations with Latin, but not Osco-Umbrian; on the other hand, Faliscan is not as close to Roman Latin as the language spoken at Praeneste. This means that Faliscan forms part of the Latino-Faliscan branch of Italic, but that it is a separate language, unlike the speech at Praeneste, which is a dialect of Latin.

It seems to me that Joseph and Wallace mix up two issues here: linguistic subgrouping and the issue of dialect vs. language.

Linguistic subgrouping presupposes a family-tree model of the relationships between different varieties of speech; the issue is which variety branched off when.

The issue of dialect vs. separate language is a complicated one. It is usually said that if two varieties are mutually intelligible, we are dealing with dialects, but otherwise with separate languages. However, it is not clear to what extent there has to be mutual intelligibility for such a classification (e.g., do you have to understand everything?); it is also unclear what one should make of cases where speakers of one variety can understand those of another variety, but the opposite does not hold; e.g. speakers of Portuguese can normally understand Spanish, but speakers of Spanish struggle with Portuguese.

It is clear that the earlier one variety branches off from other varieties, the more likely it is to be a separate language, and that the later a variety branches off, the more likely it is to be a dialect. However, even if variety x (e.g. Faliscan) branches off earlier than varieties y (e.g. Roman Latin) and z (e.g. Praenestine Latin) split, x need not be a separate language.

It may well be that within Latino-Faliscan Faliscan branched off from Proto-Latin before Proto-Latin split into Roman Latin and the Latin of Praeneste, in which case the latter two varieties will be closer to each other; but so long as Faliscan can be understood by a speaker of Latin and vice versa, we are still dealing with dialects.

Principles of subgrouping

If several varieties go back to the same proto-language and differ in one point, this point will be an innovation in one variety and an archaism in another. Retained archaisms are not very useful in language classification; e.g. the Osco-Umbrian languages have voiced fricative reflexes of the voiced aspirates word-internally, while Latin has changed these voiced fricatives into voiced stops. Now Faliscan also has voiced fricative reflexes word-internally. Does this mean that Faliscan is closer to Osco-Umbrian than to Latin? No. We can still assume a Latino-Faliscan proto-language separate from an Osco-Umbrian proto-language, and after Latino-Faliscan split into Latin and Faliscan, the former turned the fricatives into stops, while the latter did not.

What is more important than retained archaisms is shared innovations. The personal pronouns were originally distinct in accusative and ablative, cf. Skt. *mā(m)* 'me' acc., but *mad* 'from me' abl. This situation is preserved in Osco-Umbrian, but both Latin and Faliscan use the same form, the old ablative, for both functions; cf. Faliscan **med** 'me' acc. or 'from me' abl.

This is a significant innovation; it is unlikely that the two varieties made this innovation independently, so it seems to go back to the proto-language.

Which shared innovations are significant and which ones are not? In order to be significant, a shared innovation has to be so unusual that it is unlikely to be an innovation that took place in two varieties independently.

Many sound changes are not unusual enough to be relevant. Take rhotacism, the change of intervocalic -s- to -r-, presumably via -z-. Oscan and Umbrian are much closer to each other than each of them is to Latin. Oscan has preserved intervocalic -s- or has changed it to voiced -z-, cf. Oscan **fiísíais** 'feriis'; Umbrian has changed -s- to -r-, cf. **benurent** 'uenerint' vs. *benust* 'uenerit'; and Latin has also changed -s- to -r-, cf. *feriae*. The changes in Umbrian and Latin are independent of each other, as the oldest forms of Latin still have -s-, cf. Paul. Fest. 76: ferias antiqui fesias uocabant. In fact, rhotacism is a common phenomenon; in Germanic -s- changed to -z- in certain positions by Verner's law, and in all Germanic languages except for Gothic this -z- then changed into -r-.

Shared morphological innovations are usually more significant than sound changes.

Shared lexical innovations are again usually irrelevant as we could be dealing with loanwords.

Morphological differences between Faliscan, Latin, and Osco-Umbrian

Both Faliscan and Latin differ from Osco-Umbrian

a) Nominative / vocative plural of 1st declension: Faliscan **sociai**, Latin *sociae* vs. Oscan **aasas** 'altars': Faliscan and Latin have an innovated pronominal ending, Osco-Umbrian has the inherited ending.

b) Genitive singular of 2nd declension: Faliscan **kaisiosio**, Latin *Popliosio Valesiosio* vs. Oscan **sakarakleís**: Faliscan and Latin have kept the inherited *-osio*, which then gets replaced by *-ī* (also inherited?); Osco-Umbrian has taken the i-stem ending.

c) Genitive singular of 3rd declension: Faliscan **apolonos**, Latin *nominus* vs. Oscan **medíkeís**: Faliscan and Latin have generalized the ending of the consonant stems **-os* (ablaut variant **-es*), while Osco-Umbrian has generalized the i-stem ending (from **-eis*).

d) Dative singular of 4th declension: Faliscan **mercui**, Latin *senatui* vs. Umbrian *trifo*: Faliscan and Latin have added the *-ī* of the 3rd declension to the older *-ū*, which sometimes still occurs in Latin and was preserved in Osco-Umbrian. Does Faliscan also have a variant *-ū*?

e) Accusative singular of personal pronouns: Faliscan **med**, Latin *med* vs. Umbrian *tiom*, Oscan *siom*: Faliscan and Latin have taken on the ablative (!) ending; the Osco-Umbrian ending is also an innovation

f) 1st person singular of the perfect: Faliscan **pe:parai**, Latin *-ei* vs. Oscan **manaf-um** 'mandaui': Faliscan and Latin have the old perfect ending, with **-i* added, while Oscan has the aorist ending. (Faliscan **tulom** is too doubtful to be considered here.)

g) Simple future: Faliscan **carefo**, Latin *carebo* vs. Umbrian **ferest** 'he will carry': the labial future of Faliscan and Latin is clearly an innovation.

h) uncertain: ablative singular of 5th declension: Faliscan **foied**, Latin *died*: both have *-d* from the second declension, while Osco-Umbrian is unlikely to have innovated here because in the other declensions it has not taken on *-d* either. (The only ablative of the 5th declension attested in Osco-Umbrian is Umbrian **ri** 're'.)

Faliscan differs from Latin

a) 3rd person plural ending of the perfect: Faliscan **f(if)iqod** vs. Latin *finxēre* / *finxerunt*: Faliscan continues the aorist ending, while *-ēre* is an old perfect ending and *-erunt* from **-is-ont* is innovated.

b) Genitive singular of 1st declension: Faliscan **titias** vs. Latin *filiae*: this difference is not an old one, as early Latin still has the genitive in *-as*, cf. *escas* or *pater familias*; *-as* is inherited (Umbrian **tutas**), *-a-i* is a borrowing from the 2nd declension.

c) Dative singular of 2nd declension: Faliscan **titoi** vs. Latin *Tito*: again this is not an old difference, as early Latin still has *Numasioi*; *-oi* is inherited (Oscan **húrtúí**), *-o* is a sandhi-variant.

Conclusions for subgrouping

Beeler's hypothesis that Faliscan is an independent branch of Italic, like Osco-Umbrian, is untenable. Faliscan and Latin share a number of unusual morphological innovations not found in Osco-Umbrian. Faliscan and Latin thus form a subgroup within Italic, just like Oscan and Umbrian.

Faliscan is not as close to Roman Latin as the Latin of Praeneste; cf. Ve 508 from Praeneste, where the perfect is *[d]edero* 'they gave', which is close to the Latin ending.

But is Faliscan a separate language? This depends on mutual intelligibility, and that is not just a question of morphology.

Mutual intelligibility

As the morphological evidence shows, Latin and Faliscan in their archaic stages were more similar than later on; after the destruction of Falerii Veteres the Faliscan language was gradually replaced by Latin. Presumably mutual intelligibility was greater in the earliest and latest stages of Faliscan than in between.

As far as the remains of Faliscan allow us to see, the morphological differences between Faliscan and Latin are small enough to speak of dialects, but perhaps this picture would change if we had more data.

In order for mutual intelligibility to exist, there has to be a large number of shared lexical items. Personal names are naturally irrelevant here, and among them we can actually see quite a strong Etruscan influence. If we disregard personal names, the Faliscan lexicon, insofar as we can recover it, is by and large shared with Latin (**cela** = *cella*, **cra** = *cras*, **filea** = *filia* etc).

Phonologically Faliscan and Latin are also very similar. The most striking differences concern the voiced aspirates and old diphthongs. Faliscan has voiced fricatives as reflexes of the voiced aspirates word-internally, while Latin has turned them into stops. And Faliscan monophthongized most of its diphthongs earlier than Latin. This undoubtedly had an effect on mutual intelligibility, but how great that effect was is unclear.

Given that the data are so meagre, my conclusion cannot be a firm one. However, it seems to me that Faliscan and Latin were by and large mutually intelligible, at least in their early stages, and for that reason it makes sense to speak of dialects rather than separate languages.