Antonella Duso and Renato Oniga
Linguistic Thought in Rome before Varro

The aim of this paper[1] is to explore the beginning of the linguistic debate in Rome during the Republican Age. Retracing the evidence on the first Roman grammarians offered by Suetonius in *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*, we analyse the progressive development of the grammatical discipline from a role of *ancilla poesis* to an autonomous field of study. The poets Livius Andronicus and Ennius are remembered by Suetonius, *gramm*. 1, 1–2 as the first to have provided a contribution to the *studium grammaticae*. We discuss this contribution in detail and add similar hints from Naevius, Accius and Lucilius. We also highlight the development of a theory and practice of etymology in Aelius Stilo, up to the dispute between anomaly and analogy. Moreover, our reading leads to the revaluation of ancient grammarians neglected until now, such as Antonius Gnipho, Valerius Cato, and above all Staberius Eros, an analogist who prefigures some of the concepts that will find a full arrangement in Varro's *De lingua Latina*. Here we point out a first definition of the Latin concepts of inflection, derivation, as well as the intuition of the universality of grammar.

1 The origins: poets and grammarians

For a long time, the diffusion of Greek grammar in Rome led the scholars to the misconceived idea that the Romans lacked "originality": all of it could be reduced to a simple re-elaboration of Greek sources.[2] It was only in the last decades of 20th century that new perspectives arose, aimed at understanding the Roman peculiarities of the phenomenon.[3] However, the attention of scholars was diverted for a good reason to the imperial period, when Quintilian and his master Remmius Palaemon founded the *Ars Grammatica* that would then be fixed in the Late Antiquity period among the enormous number of treatises collected in Heinrich Keil's edition of *Grammatici Latini*.[4] What is still missing, and is to be investigated

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1 The present contribution is the result of the collective work of authors who share methodology and contents. The responsibility for paragraphs 1 and 3 is with Antonella Duso, whereas that of paragraph 2 is with Renato Oniga.
2 Exemplary for this approach is the book by Dahlmann (1932/1997).
3 Cf. Baratin/Desbordes (1981); Kaster (1988); Taylor (1987); Swiggers/Wouters (1996; 2002; 2011).
4 Keil (1855–1880).

in this article, is the cultural discussion carried out in Rome during the Republican period, in the crucial moment of the first reception of the grammatical discipline that laid the foundations for its following systematisation.

1.1 Livius Andronicus

The first important point that should be highlighted is that the origins of grammar in Rome coincided with the origins of Latin literature itself, in the second half of the 3rd century BC. Livius Andronicus is the first author who can be found in the handbooks of history of Latin literature, but he is also the first grammarian introduced by Suetonius' *De Grammaticis*. In Andronicus' translation of the *Odyssey*, the work of the translator-poet is on par with the philological and linguistic exegesis of the grammarian and is typical of the Alexandrian tradition.[5]

In order to show this, let us examine the translation of the first line of the *Odyssey*, which in Homer is ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, and in Andronicus becomes *virum mihi Camena, insece vorsutum* (fr. 1 Flores).[6] The transposition in Latin of this well-known Homeric incipit has been fittingly defined by Scevola Mariotti as a "piccolo capolavoro di abilità tecnica, un *tour de force* del traduttore grammatico e artista" (Mariotti 1986[2]: 27).

At a first sight, it seems to be a literal translation, maintaining intact even the word order of the Greek original text. In particular, it is worth noting the same strong break between the two components of the phrase formed by the noun and the adjective ἄνδρα...πολύτροπον / *virum...vorsutum*. The only exception in the word order is the movement of the goddess's name in the vocative case before the imperative verb. In fact, ἔννεπε Μοῦσα becomes *Camena insece*. The main reason for this is to place the goddess's name in the same privileged position from a metrical point of view, before the main pause of the verse, which in Greek is the caesura of the hexameter, and in Latin the diaeresis of the Saturnian. Since the Saturnian verse is shorter than the hexameter, the name has to be moved back, in order to be placed before the central diaeresis of the verse.

Nonetheless, it is the selection of single terms, which demonstrates very clearly a careful work of morphological and semantic analysis, namely a proper grammatical work, preliminary to the translation and carried out with a great technical competence.

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5 Cf. Mariotti (1986[2]) and Traina (1974[2]).

6 Flores (2011) *ad loc.* defends the archaic spelling *vorsutum*, proposed by Perutelli (2005), against the criticism of Kruschwitz (2008).

In the imperative addressed to the inspiring goddess, the verb chosen by Livius Andronicus is the archaic *insece*, which translates the Homeric ἔννεπε. This choice is motivated by the fact that the Homeric verb is an archaism in respect to the classical Greek, in which ἀείδω stands for "to sing". For this reason, the translator avoids the classical Latin verb for "to sing", namely *canere*, used for instance by Virgil in the incipit of the *Aeneid* (*arma virumque cano*), and instead chooses the verb *insequo* (class. Lat. *insequor*), inflected as an archaic imperative. This choice is driven by the desire to create a veritable calque of the Greek model, from a stylistic but also a prosodic point of view, since both words have the same measure of a dactyl, and also a morphological one, because both verbs have the same prefix ἐν-/*in*- and the same root ἐπ-/*sequ*-.

In a similar way, the translation of πολύτροπον to *vorsutum* presupposes a process of morphological and stylistic analysis. In fact, the translator understands that πολύτροπον is a nominal compound, whose head, that is the second member, is derived from the verb τρέπω "to turn". The literal translation of τρέπω into Latin is *verto*. However, the translator avoids the creation of an analogous nominal compound, which would be *multi-versus.[7] The reason is that Latin uses nominal compounds to a lesser extent than Greek.[8] As a matter of fact, a Latin derivative by means of a suffix often corresponds to a Greek compound, as in our case the adjective *vorsutus* is derived from the verb *verto*. Moreover, the initial syllable of this word gives the translator the possibility of creating a sound figure typical of archaic Latin poetry: in the frame of the verse there is a syllabic alliteration with variable middle vowel *vir-/vor-* (*vir*um...*vor*sutum).[9]

Finally, the Greek Μοῦσα is not translated using a loanword *Musa*, that at the time of Livius Andronicus had not yet entered in Latin (the first to introduce this Graecism was Ennius), but is expressed by a "cultural calque": the ancient Italic goddess *Camena*. The etymological transparency of her name refers back to the root of the noun *carmen*, which in archaic Latin indicated poetry.

To sum up, although translating the Greek text almost literally, Livius Andronicus tries to create something deeply different and perfectly Roman both in form and in content, showing a great skill in linguistic analysis, particularly in

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7 According the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the English term *multiverse* was created by William James in 1895, and it became a technical term of physics to indicate the concept of parallel universes.

8 Oniga (1988: 20 n. 23).

9 Ceccarelli (1986: 3).

the field of morphology, which presupposes the knowledge of the linguistic theories elaborated by the Alexandrian grammarians for the edition of the Homeric texts.[10]

The examples could be easily multiplied, as in Liv. Andr. fr. 21 Flores (= 18 *FPL*; 9 Mariotti), which is the translation of *Od.* 8, 138 ff., where the reference to the sea, simply given by the noun θάλασσα in Homer, is translated into Latin as *inportunae undae*. In this way a typical Roman pathos is inserted in the text and, once again, the grammatical taste for the morphological research is apparent too. The adjective *inportunus* is indeed a derivative from a negative prefix *in-* and the noun *portus*, with the literal meaning of "that which rejects from the port". In this way, the translator introduces the theme of the 'port' and the laborious way back of the hero together with an evocative value, which from the epic passed on to Greek and Latin tragedy,[11] and also develops a naval theme particularly felt in the Rome of his times.[12] As a whole, Livius Andronicus was therefore, as his contemporary Alexandrian philologists, a poet, a grammarian, and an exegete at the same time.[13]

1.2 Naevius and Ennius

Following the historical survey reported by Suetonius in his *De grammaticis*, after Livius Andronicus we find Ennius, who is the third and most famous poet of the triad of archaic Latin poets. There is no reference, however, to the second, Naevius. It is reasonable to suppose that Suetonius might have considered both Livius and Ennius as grammarians because they taught in schools and came from strongly Hellenised regions, the former from *Rudiae*, the latter from *Tarentum*. However, in our opinion, the exclusion of Naevius from the list of grammarian-poets is not completely justified.

In fact, the fifth book of Varro's *De lingua Latina* (§ 43 and § 53) contains two fragments (28–29 *FPL* = 1–2, pp. 6–7 Fun.), which consist of etymologies of Roman toponyms, explicitly attributed to Naevius: *Aventinus* from *avis* and *Palatium*/*Balatium* from *balare*. Even though Varro does not cite the work from which these fragments were taken, they are commonly attributed to the *Bellum Poenicum*, and precisely to the so-called "archaeology", namely the mythological

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10 On Alexandrian scholarship, see Matthaios (1999), Pagani (2011) and Montana (2015: 99–143).
11 Oniga (1997a).
12 Leigh (2010).
13 Cf. Mariotti (1965 = 2000).

part of the poem, which the author dedicated to the explanation of Roman antiquities, thus exhibiting a taste for aetiology and etymology typical of Alexandrian poetry.[14] Also in Rome, as in Greece, the origin of philosophical and grammatical thought is preceded by a pre-history made of etymological suggestions in the texts of the earliest poets.[15]

Hence, also Naevius deserves to be mentioned for his grammatical interests, although his attachment to the ancient Italic tradition makes him appear less open to a discipline of Hellenistic origin. The interest for Italic etymologies, however, was not extraneous also to the austere Cato the Censor in his *Origines* (fr. 1–9 Fun.). Moreover, it is worth remembering that the image of Naevius as a poet who confined himself to the Italic conservatism, symbolised by the preservation of the old Saturnian verse as opposed to the novelty of the Greek hexameter, is essentially due to the self-portrait of Ennius in contrast with his predecessor.

Let's remember those famous lines 206–210 Sk. of Ennius' *Annales*, in which the author commends a more determined action of Hellenisation of Latin poetry, symbolised by the introduction of the Greek Muses instead of the Italian divinities *Fauni*, clearly referring to the previous poetics of Naevius:

> ... *scripsere alii rem* / *vorsibus quos olim Faunei vatesque canebant* / *[cum] neque Musarum scopulos* ... / *nec dicti studiosus [quisquam erat] ante hunc.* / *nos ausi reserare* ...[16]

As for Ennius, it is worth pointing out the use of the phrase *dicti studiosus,* by which he defines himself, since it is a linguistic calque modelled on the Greek φιλόλογος,[17] was also created in this case in order to avoid introducing a nominal compound in Latin, as we have already observed in Livius Andronicus. Suetonius (*gramm.* 10, 4) informs us that φιλόλογος was the nickname of Eratosthenes of Cyrene, a famous scholar at the Library of Alexandria, who was at the same time geographer, mathematician, philosopher, grammarian and poet. Thus, Ennius programmatically presented himself as a follower of the Alexandrian model of an erudite person who cultivates multiple interests in literature and science.[18]

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14 Mariotti (1955/2001³: 42).

15 On etymological word play in poetry, from Homer to the Latin literature, cf. the synthesis by Nicolini (2011: 18–31) and O'Hara (2017: 7–56). On etymological praxis in Homer that inspired Greek and Latin poetry, see also Risch (1947 = 1981).

16 "Others have written of the matter in verses which once upon a time the Fauns and Seers used to sing...[when] no one had surmounted the rough rocks of the Muses ...nor [was anyone] studious of the word before this man...I dared unbar...". (Translation based on E.H. Warmington 1936).

17 Mariotti (1951/1991²: 67ff.); Tomasco (2002: 189).

18 Nuchelmans (1950); Kuch (1965).

Among the innovations introduced by Ennius with regard to the Greek and Latin epic tradition, there are the digressions on philosophical and grammatical topics[19] The examples of particular importance for our topic are those in which the author, instead of recurring to the simple translation, explains to his readers – in the same manner as would be done in a modern translator's note – which are the exact semantic correspondences between the Greek and Latin words (e.g. *ann.* 140 Sk.: ἀήρ/*ventus*; 211 Sk.: σοφία/*sapientia*). In another work, the *Epicharmus*, there is a trace of Ennius' interest in the properly etymological field. In fact, many etymologies of the names of divinities were elaborated in this work, including those that Varro mentions in the fifth book of the *De lingua Latina*. For example, the origin of the proper name *Proserpina* is explained as deriving from *serpens* (Varr. *ling.* V 68 = Enn. *var.* 59 V.[2]):

> *hinc Epicharmus Enni Proserpinam quoque appellat, quod solet esse sub terris. Dicta Proserpina quod haec ut serpens modo in dexteram modo in sinisteram partem late movetur.*[20]

Similarly, in Varro, *ling.* V 64, the etymology of *Caeres* is also derived from Ennius (*var.* 48 ff. V.[2]). It can be deduced that Varro, in this passage of *De lingua Latina*, used a section of *Epicharmus*, dedicated to etymological explanations of the names of Roman divinities.[21] We can therefore conclude that the model of etymological inquiry so widespread in Varro is already present in Naevius and mostly in Ennius, who probably knew the method used by the Stoic grammarians.

In brief, the contribution of Livius Andronicus, Naevius and Ennius to the origins of grammatical thought in Rome is undeniable, even though in the following centuries it was rather depreciated, as in the text of Suetonius himself (*gramm.* 1, 1–2) which we have already referred to and which is quoted in its entirety here:

> *Grammatica Romae ne in usu quidem olim, nedum in honore ullo erat, rudi scilicet ac bellicosa etiam tum civitate necdum magnopere liberalibus disciplinis vacante. initium quoque eius mediocre extitit, siquidem antiquissimi doctorum, qui idem et poetae et semigraeci erant –*

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19 As pointed out by Mariotti (1951/1991[2]: 70ff.).

20 "From the fact that she is wont to be under the lands as well as over them, Ennius' *Epicharmus* calls her *Proserpina*. Proserpina received her name because she, like a *serpens* 'creeper', moves widely now to the right, now to the left" (translation based on E.H. Warmington 1936).

21 Bettini (1979: 36).

> *Livium et Ennium dico, quos utraque lingua domi forisque docuisse adnotatum est – nihil am-*
> *plius quam Graecos interpretabantur aut si quid ipsi Latine composuissent praelegebant.*[22]

Clearly, the framework provided by Suetonius[23] is affected by a classicist precon-
ception and a trivialisation of the *leitmotif* of archaic Rome as a culture entirely de-
voted to war.[24] The city that is defined here as *rudis ac bellicosa* was however able
to receive and appreciate literary texts of the refined Hellenistic culture, as those of
Livius Andronicus and Ennius, hastily dismissed by Suetonius as *semigraeci*.

1.3 Accius and Lucilius

The series of grammarian-poets also continues after Ennius, although Suetonius
does not mention it. In fact, we know of a curious controversy in the typically
grammatical field of orthography between the two most important Latin poets of
the second half of the 2nd century BC: Accius and Lucilius.

As is well known, the Latin alphabet includes only five vowels (and no dis-
tinction sign between long and short vowel), and so differs from the Greek alpha-
bet that distinguishes the vowels *o* and *e* with different alphabetic signs for the
long and short pronunciations. There was another use displayed by the epichoric
Oscan alphabet, whose influence is also attested in Latin inscriptions of Italic
origin, which wrote the long vowels with a double sign. The Latin grammatical
tradition has preserved the information that Accius (whose fragments also attest

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22 "The study of grammar was once not even known at Rome, much less respected, since the
community, being then uncultured and devoted to warfare, did not yet have much free time for
liberal learning. The first stages of this study, too, were undistinguished, inasmuch as the earli-
est teachers, who were at the same time poets and half Greek – I mean Livius and Ennius, who
are on record as having taught both languages privately and publicly – merely clarified the
meaning of Greek authors or gave exemplary readings from their own Latin compositions"
(translation by R.A. Kaster 1995).

23 Whose documentary value is beyond dispute; cf. Viljamaa (1991: 3843): "The introductory
sketch is not a mere preface to the lives of the most notable professors; primarily it is a descrip-
tion of the organic evolution of the grammatical art from its primitive roots and from its first
impetus given by the Greeks, through the gradual increase in its public esteem and expansion of
the activities of its practitioners, until the fashion had become established in Rome and also
spread out to the provinces".

24 *Poenico bello secundo Musa pinnato gradu/ intulit se bellicosam in Romuli gentem feram*, Porc.
Lic. fr. 1, p. 80 Fun. ("At the time of the Second Punic War, the warlike Muse with winged step
introduced herself to Romulus' savage race").

his interest in etymology: fr. 17, 22 e 23 Fun.), wanted to impose this use as standard (fr. 24 Fun.):

> *Accius geminatis vocalibus scribi natura longas syllabas voluit.*[25]

Such an attempt faced strong opposition from Lucilius, who in his *Saturae* accounted for various stylistic and grammatical issues.[26] Referring to the Greek use, according to which most vowels starting with *a* are written in the same manner whether long or short, Lucilius argues for the absolute uselessness of the *geminatio vocalium* in Latin (fr. 8 Fun. = 352–355 Marx):

> *a primum longa, ‹ac› brevis syllaba; nos tamen unum/ hoc faciemus et uno eodemque ut dicimus pacto/ scribemus 'pacem, placide, Ianum, aridum, acetum',/ Ἄρες Ἄρες Graeci ut faciunt.*[27]

As Bernardi Perini (1983 = 2001: 40–43) rightly observed, it is not possible to speak of a veritable 'orthographical reform', since neither Accius nor Lucilius had any authority to impose their opinions in an official manner, but probably this debate could be a hint of a more extended grammatical controversy between the Alexandrian analogy and the Stoic-Pergamenian anomaly. That is, Accius followed the linguistic analogy, which aims at introducing regularity and rationality in the grammatical system starting from the orthography, whereas Lucilius followed the anomaly, i.e. the irregularity, based on the *consuetudo*.[28]

2 The precursors of Varro

In the exposition of Suetonius, after the earlier history linked to the figures of Livius Andronicus and Ennius, we read that the birth of a grammatical discipline in a technical sense would have to be collocated after Ennius's death, when Crates of Mallus

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25 "Accius wanted to write with double vowels the syllables long by nature". This is a free paraphrase reconstructed by Funaioli from different sources. On this topic cf. Bolisani (1939); Pepe (1946); Bernardi Perini (1983 = 2001).
26 Funaioli, pp. 33–50 collected about fifty fragments: for a recent synthesis of this subject, cf. Lehmann (2004).
27 "*A* is a long syllable, but also short. We will spell both with one letter, and as we say now will write in one and the same way *pācem, plăcide, Iānum, āridum, ăcetum*, just as the Greeks do with, Ἄρες Ἄρες" (translation based on Warmington 1936).
28 The anomalist position of Lucilius is confirmed by fr. 1153 s. Marx *decusis / sive decusibus*, where the author speaks in favour of the oscillation in the use, without presuming any analogistic normalisation.

from the Stoic school in Pergamon arrived in Rome for diplomatic reasons and was forced to stay longer than planned because of an accident (*gramm.* 2, 1):

> *Primus igitur, quantum opinamur, studium grammaticae in urbem intulit Crates Mallotes, A-ristarchi aequalis: qui missus ad senatum ab Attalo rege inter secundum ac tertium Punicum bellum sub ipsam Enni mortem, cum regione Palati prolapsus in cloacae foramen crus fregis-set, per omne legationis simul et valetudinis tempus plurimas acroasis subinde fecit as-sidueque disseruit ac nostris exemplo fuit ad imitandum.*[29]

Even though Suetonius's story does not lack inconsistencies, first of all in the name of the king of Pergamon, which cannot be Attalus but Eumenes II, on the whole the facts are considered to be historically correct.[30] Crates is presented by Varro at the beginning of the ninth book of the *De lingua Latina* as a disciple of the Stoic Chrysippus and as an opponent of the contemporary Alexandrian grammarian Aristarchus, with regard to the controversy between analogy and anomaly.[31]

Of course, the origin of grammatical knowledge in Rome cannot be reduced to a single Greek grammarian i.e. according to the typical taste of Suetonius for an anecdotal narration centred on key figures. Behind Crates we need to consider the existence of an important transmission pathway of Greek thought in Rome by means of which, from the middle of the 2nd century, and in particular from such centres as Pergamon and Rhodes, the scholarship of Greek grammarians started to spread.

2.1 Aelius Stilo

The text of Suetonius (*gramm.* 3, 1) then provides the first names of Latin authors who, at the end of the 2nd century BC, were exclusively devoted to grammar:

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29 "In my view, therefore, the first person to introduce the study of grammar to the city was Crates of Mallos, a contemporary of Aristarchus. Sent to the senate by King Attalus between the Second and Third Punic War, at just about the time of Ennius' death, Crates fell down and broke his leg in a sewer-hole in the neighborhood of the Palatine. He spent the whole time of his ambassadorship and of his recuperation constantly giving a host of lectures and holding frequent discussions, thereby providing an example for our countrymen to imitate" (translation based on Kaster 1995).

30 Cf. Blänsdorf (1988) and Broggiato (2001: 131–132).

31 Cf. Duso (2017: 52–55; 139–144). For a complete discussion of the theoretical background and the origin of this ancient controversy, see Matthaios (2018) and Matthaios in this volume; see also Montana (2015, 143–153).

> *Instruxerunt auxeruntque ab omni parte grammaticam L. Aelius Lanuvinus generque Aeli Ser. Clodius, uterque eques Romanus multique ac varii et in doctrina et in re publica usus.*[32]

The first name refers to the scholar who is known as Aelius Stilo, native of *Lanuvium*, master of Cicero and Varro.[33] From Gellius 3, 3, 12 it is possible for us to gather some information about his linguistic and philological studies on Plautus, then resumed and developed by Varro.[34] In a proper linguistic field, some fragments testify to an interest for archaism, investigated both in the *carmen Saliare*[35] and in the XII Tables,[36] as well as in the ancient Italic languages.[37]

Another passage from Gellius (16, 8, 2) reports the title of a work by Aelius Stilo denominated *Commentarius de proloquiis* in which, as Gellius himself informs us, the Latin term *proloquium* was used to translate the Greek ἀξίωμα, a technical term of the Stoic dialectics which indicated a simple sentence, complete in all its parts. Gellius (16, 8, 6) adds that this term was later used by Varro in the XXIV book of the *De lingua Latina*.[38] Therefore, Varro was indebted to Stilo even with regard to the syntactic terminology.

However, the grammatical field in which the dependence of Varro from Aelius Stilo is more widely recognised is etymology. Dahlmann, recalling a Reitzenstein hypothesis, suggested that in the books V–VII of *De lingua Latina*, Varro

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32 "Order and enrichment were brought to every aspect of grammar by Lucius Aelius Lanuvinus and his son-in-law Servius Clodius, both of them Roman knights with extensive and varied experience in scholarship and in public life" (transl. Kaster 1995).

33 Cf. Kaster (1995: 68–70).

34 Fr. 4 Fun.: *feruntur autem sub Plauti nomine comoediae circiter centum atque triginta; sed homo eruditissimus L. Aelio quinque et viginti eius esse solas existimavit.* Questa (1984) attributes to Aelius Stilo the first truly critical edition of the plain text, which dates back to the colometry preserved by the manuscript tradition.

35 Fr. 1–3 Fun.: *manuos in carminibus saliaribus Aelius Stilo significare ait bonos, ut inferi di manes pro boni dicantur a supliciter eos venerantibus propter metum mortis, ut immanes quoque pro valde ‹non bonis› dicatur; Aelius in explanatione carminum saliarum eodem nomine (molucro) appellari ait, quod sub mola supponatur; pescia in saliari carmine Aelius Stilo dici ait capitia ex pellibus agninis facta, quod Graeci pelles vocent pesce neutro genere pluraliter.*

36 Cicero, *top.* 10 = fr. 6 Fun; *de leg.* 2, 59 = fr. 13 Fun. and Festus, p. 290ᵇ, 24 = fr. 36 Fun.; p. 352ᵃ, 5 = fr. 41 Fun.

37 *Dalivum – ait esse – Aelius stultum. Oscorum quoque lingua significat insanum* (fr. 8 Fun. = Paul. Fest. p. 68, 1) "Aelius believes that dalivum means 'foolish'; in Oscan it means 'crazy'"; *Aelius Dium Fidium dicebat Diovis filium, ut Graeci Διόσκορον Castorem, et putabat hunc esse Sancum ab Sabina lingua et Herculem a Greca* (fr. 9 Fun. = Varro, *ling.* 5, 66) "Aelius said that *dius Fidius* was son of *Diovis* (*Juppiter*), as the Greeks named *Dióskoron* Castor; he also said that the same hero was named in Sabinian *Sancus* and in Greek *Hercules*".

38 Varr. *ling.* fr. 29 G.-S. *proloquium est sententia in qua nihil desideratur.*

would have largely made use of a Stoic *Etymologicon*, translated into Latin by Aelius Stilo.[39] In any case, Varro himself acknowledges his dependence on Aelius Stilo, often quoting his master for the etymologies: out of 51 certain fragments of Stilo's collected by Funaioli, 9 are quoted by Varro.[40] It is worth remembering the famous etymology *caelum* "sky" from *celare* "to hide", since its antonym is 'to reveal' (fr. 7 Fun.), which makes use of a well-known method of Stilo, called the *antiphrasis*, by means of which words are explained by their antonyms.[41]

2.2 Antonius Gnipho

The real turning point for the development of grammar as a teaching discipline took place in Rome during the 1st century BC, when, according to Suetonius (3, 4), more than twenty schools were active:

> *Posthac magis ac magis et gratia et cura artis increvit, ut ne clarissimi quidem viri abstinuerint quominus et ipsi aliquid de ea scriberent utque temporibus quibusdam super viginti celebres scholae fuisse in urbe tradantur.*[42]

Unfortunately, the names registered by Suetonius in the following chapters of the *De grammaticis* (4–24) do not tell us much, since the interest of the author is more directed to the rumours about their private life, whereas the cited grammatical works are fewer, and no fragments properly dealing with grammatical questions have been preserved. However, by carefully examining the text, we find at least three figures who can help us to better understand the context in which the activity of Varro took place.

The first is Antonius Gnipho, to whom Suetonius devotes chapter 7 of the *De grammaticis*, telling us that he came from Gallia (7, 1 *in Gallia natus*) and was teacher, among others, of Caesar and Cicero (7, 2 *docuit primum in Divi Iuli domo ... in his M. Ciceronem*). Suetonius narrates that *scripsit multa* (7, 3), even though he further clarifies that, according to his pupil Ateius Philologus, the only works that can be attributed with certainty to him are the two books of the *De Latino sermone*,

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39 Dahlmann, (1932/1997: 55) see also ch. 1 in the Italian translation.
40 Fr. 7, 9, 10, 12, 27, 39, 42, 46, 50 Fun.
41 Other examples: fr. 1 Fun. *Manes*; 15 *miles*; 26 *ordinarius*; 59 *lucus, ludus, Ditis*; 71 *simultas*. On this topic see Oniga (1997b); Taylor (2016).
42 "From that point on, both the esteem in which the skill was held and the attention devoted to it became ever greater. As a result, not even the most distinguished men disdained to write something on the object themselves, and at certain times, it is said, there were more than twenty well-attended schools in the city" (translation based on R.A. Kaster 1995).

whereas the remaining production would be due to the revision by his disciples (*ibid.*). Already this title is, however, significant because of its close analogy with two works by Varro: the lost *De Sermone Latino* and the partially preserved *De lingua Latina*. It may be thought that the titles of Varro's linguistic work are expressions of an allusive tribute, and at the same time of an emulative spirit, since the only two books by Gnipho contrast with the number of Varro's works in five and twenty-five books respectively.

Moreover, from the sparse fragments available, we can already see in Gnipho the application of principles of morphological analogy (Kaster 1995: 117). In fr. 4 Fun., in particular, the author proposed normalising the irregular forms of the third declension with an alternation *u/o*, of the type *ebur/eboris*, *robur/roboris* and *marmur/marmoris*, in order to extend the vowel *-u* to all the paradigm, also to the plural, supporting the use of forms like *ebura*, *robura* and *marmura*.[43]

This confirms that at the core of the controversy between analogy and anomaly, as already in the Greek grammatical tradition, also in the Latin grammarians preceding Varro there were issues concerning the regularity/irregularity of morphology.

2.3 Valerius Cato

The paragraph that Suetonius devotes to Valerius Cato tells us that he was a respected teacher of grammar and poetics, had important pupils, and *scripsit praeter grammaticos libellos etiam poemata* (*gramm.* 11, 2). Unfortunately, these hasty words do not say anything about the proper grammatical production of this author, which previously Suetonius himself had defined *poetam simul grammaticumque notissimum* (*gramm.* 4, 2). In the rest of the paragraph, Suetonius discusses only the poems, reporting the titles *Lydia* and *Diana*, which confirm the coexistence of love and mythological poems, as in Catullus.

Valerius Cato was indeed the last grammarian-poet following the Alexandrian model, and had an important role in the circle of Neoteric poets. Suetonius' chapter closes with the quotation of some verses dedicated to Valerius Cato from other poets of the Neoteric circle: Furius Bibaculus, Ticida and Cinna.

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43 Quint. *inst.* 1, 6, 23 *sicut Antonius Gnipho, qui robur quidem et ebur atque etiam marmur fatetur esse, verum fieri vult ex his ebura robura, marmura.* ("thus Antonius Gnipho while admitting *robur*, *ebur* and even *marmur* to be correct, would have their plurals to be *ebura*, *robura* and *marmura*").

Particularly interesting, in the last verse of Furius Bibaculus quoted by Suetonius (*gramm.* 11, 4 = Bibac. *carm.* fr. 2, 7 *FPL* = Val. Cato *test.* 2 Fun.), is that the poet, extolling the virtues of his master Valerius Cato, and pitying his misfortunes, addresses him with the words *en cor Zenodoti, en iecur Cratetis* "you heart of Zenodotus, you liver of Crates". Combining together the figures of Zenodotus and Crates could make us think of a coexistence, and even a conciliation, in the educative programme of Valerius Cato, of the two different trends in the grammatical schools of Alexandria and Pergamon, whose exponents were indeed Zenodotus and Crates.

A similar position can be found in the famous words of Varro: *non solum ad Aristophanis lucernam, sed etiam ad Cleanthis lucubravi* "I did not only work by the lamplight of Aristophanes, but also of Cleanthes" (*ling.* V 9). Although the names of the grammarians are different (Aristophanes of Byzantium for the Alexandrian school and Cleanthes for the Stoic one, instead of Zenodotus and Crates), there is the same will to conciliate the positions of grammarians who belong to the two opposite schools of thought. Therefore, also in the tendency to conciliate different methods, such as analogy and anomaly, Varro might have had predecessors, such as Valerius Cato.[44]

2.4 Staberius Eros

Finally, it is worth remembering that Suetonius dedicates a very brief chapter (*gramm.* 13) to Staberius Eros, who is perhaps, as we will try to demonstrate, the most important character to understand the context in which the contribution of Varro took place. Unfortunately, the biographical note of Suetonius says absolutely nothing about his grammatical activity, only recording that Staberius Eros arrived in Rome as a slave (presumably in 83 BC), and after obtaining his freedom opened a grammatical school, where he had as pupils some prominent personalities such as Brutus and Cassius.

The fame of Staberius survived, however, until the first centuries AD, so that Pliny the Elder (*nat.* 35, 199) awards him the title of *conditor grammaticae* "promoter of grammar", while Fronto (p. 15, 4–16, 1 vdH[2]) recalls that his books were some of the most valued among those of archaic grammarians.

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44 Differently, Pisani (1976: 199) underlines the presumed originality of Varro: "è appunto in questa retta visione della applicazione contemporanea dei due metodi che secondo me Varrone ha fatto un passo decisivo, indipendente, a quanto io sappia, da formulazioni teoriche dei suoi predecessori".

What is more interesting to us is the fact that Staberius dealt with analogy, in his work entitled *De proportione* (an antecedent of the *De analogia* of Caesar).[45] Evidently, the linguistic observations on the ἀναλογία or *proportio* that we know from the fragments of Caesar and the work of Varro were in that period matter of discussion among grammarians such as Staberius principally for teaching purposes.

The only and extremely brief fragment of Staberius, probably taken from this work, is quoted by Priscian as follows:

> fr. 1 Fun. = *GLK* II 385, 1–3: *non esse positiones regulae, a quibus interdum analogia calumniatur*, συκοφαντεῖται.

This expression is certainly obscure and fragmentary, and the *communis opinio* is that, essentially, it is not possible to obtain anything from it on the grammatical doctrine of Staberius.[46]

However, we will try to develop a deeper analysis. We will see that the text, though difficult to interpret, is able to express a rather clear meaning that may be of a great interest in order to understand the context in which Varro's work originated. Let us try to understand the content of this fragment.

The less controversial part is the final one. Priscian, who preserved this fragment, intended to quote some examples of irregularities in the verbal voice. In this case, therefore, the verb *calumnior*, that normally is a transitive deponent verb, may be used, exceptionally, in the passive voice. So, *analogia calumniatur* would need to be translated as "the analogy is slandered". This is confirmed by the Greek translation provided by Priscian, namely συκοφαντεῖται that is indeed a passive form of the verb συκοφαντέω "to accuse".

This first point is interesting for the history of linguistics, because it provides a proof, independently from Varro, of the concrete existence of a controversy between defenders and opponents of the analogy in Rome during the 1st century BC. But maybe it is possible to take the interpretation of this fragment a step further.

In the first part of the sentence there is a clause with the verb *esse* in the infinitive form, and it is possible that this infinitive clause was introduced by an explicit or implicit *verbum dicendi*, of which we have obviously no knowledge but whose meaning could reasonably be something similar to "it is said that". We expect the subject of an infinitive clause to be in the accusative case, and indeed

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[45] On this work, cf. Garcea (2012).

[46] "Of Staberius's scholarly work we know next to nothing. Priscian (*GLK* II 385. 1–3) quotes an obscure, fragmentary sentence" (Kaster 1995: 167).

we find *positiones*, a plural accusative. The meaning of the word *positio*, frequent in Priscian,[47] is very clear: it is an equivalent of Greek *thesis*, to indicate the linguistic process by means of which the names are imposed on things, which Varro calls the *impositio nominum*.[48]

This is therefore a second interesting point, because it confirms that, as in Varro, the problem of the *impositio nominum* had already been a subject of discussion by Staberius in relation to the problem of analogy and anomaly.

Lastly, there remains the meaning of *esse regulae*, which certainly is the most difficult part of the fragment. From the grammatical point of view, *regulae* can be a genitive of convenience or a dative of aim or effect,[49] according to syntactical constructions rather common in predicative function with the verb *esse*.[50] A note in the commentary of Servius to Donatus (*GLK* IV 416, 13–15) could be cited as an example:

> *Item Vergilius ait "Tyria Carthagine qui nunc / exspectat"* (Verg. *Aen.* 4, 224 s.) *[inquit Carthagine], non Carthagini, quod erat regulae.*

Therefore, in the grammatical vocabulary the expression *est regulae* "it is according to the rule" was certainly in use, and it is possible to suppose that this use was already present in our fragment, which is quoted, by the way, by a grammarian.

If this hypothesis is correct, we may be able to recognise an even closer parallel in a passage from Varro's *De lingua Latina* (IX 86), whose text, in the *codex unicus* F, is precisely this:

> *Regulae est numerus novenarius.*

Thus, we could maintain the text as it is and literally translate it as "according to the rule is the number nine". In this way, the correction of Scioppius (1605), *regula est*, would no longer be necessary, as it appears more like a trivialisation with respect to the technical use of *regulae est*.

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47 Groupe *Ars Grammatica* (2010: 85 n. 41).
48 On this question, in the core of the interest of the ancient linguistics since its origins, cf. recently Luhtala (2011).
49 Traina/Bertotti (1985: 105; 172).
50 E.g.: Cic. *de or*. 2, 30 *ars earum rerum est, quae sciuntur*; Sen. *epist*. 11, 7 *sui iuris sunt*; Caes. *Gall*. 5, 1, 4: *ea quae sunt usui ad armandas naves*; Liv. 4, 12, 5: *ludibrioque erant minae tribuni*.

Coming back to the text of Staberius, we have all the elements to propose an interpretation of the whole fragment which is able to express a full sense. The translation can be as follows:

> It is said that the imposition of names on things is not regular, by those who sometimes accuse the analogy.

If this interpretation is plausible, we have made an important discovery. The line of reasoning expressed in this fragment by Staberius appears remarkably similar to the one that was developed by Varro in the *De lingua Latina* in order to deal with the problem of analogy. The key term is what Staberius calls *positio*, and Varro calls *impositio nominum*. According to Staberius, the process of giving names to things is not subject to analogical regularity. Varro is exactly of the same mind. Moreover, Staberius argues that this phenomenon has been erroneously used as an argument to oppose the existence of the analogy *per se*, if we are to grasp in the expression *calumniatur* a pejorative nuance, as an attempt by Staberius to distance himself from this accusation against the analogy. In a nutshell, Staberius prefigures the whole conceptual system based on the opposition between anomaly in the imposition of names and analogy in their inflection, on which the VIII–X books of *De lingua Latina* are based.

3 The synthesis of Varro

Let us now recall what indeed the theoretical framework of the books is that Varro dedicates to this topic (that is the books VIII–X of the *De lingua Latina*). It is based on the use of the two opposite concepts of *declinatio voluntaria* and *declinatio naturalis*, which can be translated, respectively, by 'word formation' and 'inflection':

> *Declinationum genera sunt duo, voluntarium et naturale; voluntarium est, quo‹d› 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 Ion‹i›a Iona[m], alius quod Ephesi, Ephesium, sic alius ab alia aliqua re, ut visum est. Contra naturalem declinationem dico, quae non a singulorum oritur voluntate, sed a*

com‹m›uni consensu. Itaque omnes impositis nominibus eorum item declinant casus atque eodem modo dicunt huius Artemidori et huius Ionis et huius Ephesi[s], sic in casibus aliis.[51]

Varr. *ling*. VIII 21–22

In Varro, *declinatio* does not just mean 'declension' but indicates any morphological process.[52] Thus, *declinatio* for Varro includes not only the inflection of the noun but also the inflection of the verb (i.e. the 'conjugation'), and generally every type of word formation, by means of prefixes and suffixes (what we call 'derivation'), or the merger of two words (namely the 'compounding').

Thus, according to Varro, the *declinatio voluntaria* is used to give names to things (*impositio nominum*), and as such it is the realm of the anomaly since it depends on the will of whoever decided to call a thing with a given name, mostly using the morphological mechanisms of derivation or compounding. Here is the definition with other examples:

Ego declinatus verborum et voluntarios et naturalis esse puto, voluntarios quibus homines vocabula imposierint rebus quaedam, ut ab Romulo Roma, ab Tibure Tiburtes, naturales ut ab impositis vocabulis quae inclinantur in tempora aut in casus, ut ab ‹Romulus› Romulo Romuli Romulum et ab dico dicebam dixeram.[53]

Varr. *ling*. IX 34

Romulus called the city he founded *Roma*, starting from his own name, but he might also have called it differently. In Latin, then, the inhabitants of *Tibur* are called *Tiburtes*, but exactly as happens in Italian with demonyms, that are often

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51 "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. On the other hand, I call that derivation natural, which is based not on the volition of individuals acting singly, but on general agreement. So, when the names have been fixed, they derive the case-forms of them in like fashion, and in one and the same way they all say in the genitive case *Artemidori, Ionis, Ephesi*; and so on in the other cases" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938; here and in the following quotations, text from Goetz-Schoell 1910).

52 Taylor (1974).

53 "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 *Romulus* and the *Tiburtes* 'men of Tibur' from *Tibur*, 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*" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

irregular, they could have been called differently. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the declension of these nouns need be irregular.

In another passage Varro observes even more clearly that in Latin 'hunter' is *auceps*, while 'fisherman' is not **pisciceps*, but *piscātor*:

> *Si ab avibus capiendis auceps dicatur, debuisse aiunt a piscibus capiendis ut aucupem sic pisci‹cu›pem dici.*[54]

<div align="right">Varr. ling. VIII 61</div>

Therefore, the word *auceps* is formed through a process of compounding from *avis* 'bird' and *capere* 'capture', whereas the word *piscator* is formed through a process of derivation with a suffix from *piscis* 'fish'. But a different choice in the linguistic system, as happens, for example, in English, could have given to the fisherman the name **pisciceps* and to the hunter **aviātor*:

> au-ceps **pisci-ceps*
> **avia-tor* pisca-tor

With this reasoning, Varro understands what we now call, after Saussure, the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. Nowadays we could observe, for example, that the compounds *postman* and *road sweeper* in English correspond to the Italian derivatives *postino* and *spazzino*. At the same time, Varro understands that the potential for lexical creation by derivation and compounding mostly remains unexpressed in the linguistic systems: words such as **pisciceps* or **aviātor* are possible words, since they are well-formed, but they are inexistent in classical Latin. However, from the Latin **aviātor* the English *aviator* and the Italian *aviatore* will be derived when in the 20th century the linguistic systems of modern languages need to create a new word to indicate a new profession, that of the pilot of a plane.

Coming back to the analysis of Varro's conceptual system, the *declinatio voluntaria* is opposed to the *declinatio naturalis*. The latter indicates the inflection of words (declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs), and thus it is the field of analogy:

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54 "And if from *avis capere* 'to catch birds' the *auceps* 'fowler' is named, they say, from *piscis capere* 'to catch fish' there ought to be a *pisciceps* 'fisherman' named like the *auceps*" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

Utrumque sit nobis sequendum, quod ‹in› declinatione voluntaria sit anomalia, in naturali magis analogia.[55]

Varr. *ling.* VIII 23

Impositio est in nostro dominatu, nos in natura‹e›: quemadmodum enim quisque volt, imponit nomen, at declinat, quemadmodum volt natura.[56]

Varr. *ling.* X 53

Words must necessarily inflect according to rules fixed by the nature of the linguistic system and escape the free will of the speaker. Once the name is "voluntarily" imposed on things, there is no more room for the arbitrariness. It is no longer possible to escape the "natural" necessity to inflect *Roma* following the first declension, since the word has an −*a* stem. Although in principle it would have been possible to create a different word for the city, once the word is created and imposed on the thing its inflection is no longer modifiable by the speaker, so it is not possible to create for this word a genitive just as one likes. Any other ending different from that determined by the grammatical paradigm would simply be wrong. Thus, the solution proposed by Varro is as a whole simple and elegant, based on the conceptual distinction between derivation and inflection, two procedures characterised by a different degree of regularity and freedom.

Just as interesting is that the same morphological theory underlies the procedures of etymology. According to Varro, starting from a thousand *verba primigenia* 'primary words', and applying to them a limited number of rules of *declinatio*, it is possible to derive all the *immanis numerus* 'the innumerable mass' of the Latin lexicon:

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.
(…)

Varr. *ling.* VI 37

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55 "We ought to follow both, because in voluntary derivation there is anomaly, and in the natural derivation there is even more strikingly regularity" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

56 "The imposition is in our power, but we are under the control of the nature of the words: for each one imposes the name as he wishes, but he inflects it as its nature requires" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

> *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.*[57]
>
> <div align="right">Varr. ling. VI 39</div>

This theory gets really close to what is nowadays the position of generative morphology, which presupposes a basic lexicon formed of simple words and provides a structural description of complex words by applying rules for word formation and inflection.[58]

Varro also recognises the reason for which not only the Latin language but also the human language in general have rules in order to make the language itself learnable:

> *Declinatio inducta in sermones non solum Latinos, sed omnium hominum utili et necessaria*
> *de causa: nisi enim ita esset factum, neque di‹s›cere tantum numerum verborum possemus*
> *(infinitae enim sunt naturae in quas ea declinantur) neque quae didicissemus, ex his, quae*
> *inter se rerum cognatio esset, appareret.*[59]
>
> <div align="right">Varr. ling. VIII 3</div>

In this fascinating passage, we find some insights that will be developed in an explicit manner only in modern times: the universality of grammar (*in sermones non solum Latinos, sed omnium hominum*), its capability to make infinite use of finite means (*infinitae enim sunt naturae in quas ea declinantur*), and the necessity of it for language learning (*neque discere tantum numerum verborum possemus*).

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57 "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* come *legis legit legam* and in this fashion from this same word come a great number of words [...] Therefore if the etymologist should postulate one thousand original elements of words, about which an interpretation is not to be asked of him, and show the nature of the rest, about which he does not make the postulation, the number of words which he would explain would still be enormous" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

58 Cf. Oniga (1988: 52).

59 "Inflection has been introduced not only into Latin speech, but 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" (translation by R.G. Kent 1938).

4 Conclusion

It is well known that Varro represents the synthesis of a long tradition of linguistic thought elaborated in Rome during the Republican period, as was effectively summarised by Mario De Nonno: "il confluire di un vivace interesse esegetico ed antiquario per le testimonianze più antiche della letteratura e della legislazione nazionale (l'epica in saturni, Plauto, Catone, le XII Tavole) con lo spiccato gusto etimologico testimoniatoci, prima ancora che dalla sistematica trattazione dei libri V–VII del *De lingua Latina* di Varrone, da tanti versi di Nevio, Ennio, Accio".[60] To this, the tradition of a proper grammatical discipline must be added as well, which had been elaborated in the 1st century BC by grammarians such as Antonius Gnipho, Valerius Cato and Staberius Eros.[61]

Unfortunately, we note that in the following centuries the work of Varro left few traces. The author is not even inserted by Suetonius in the list of Latin grammarians, probably because his work was felt just too philosophical compared to the technical grammars addressed to schools. For this reason, Varro's work did not have any influence on the establishment of the Latin *Ars Grammatica* which flourished from the 3rd to the 6th century and was essentially based on the treatment of the parts of speech and the introduction to Rhetoric.

For the history of Latin linguistics, the marginalisation of the Varronian tradition certainly represented an impoverishment. As was rightly observed by Giorgio Graffi (2010) in his valuable synthesis on classical antiquity premised to the history of linguistics from the 19th century to today, the "high" tradition of language studies, namely the philosophical one, had a fundamental role in stimulating the "low" tradition, namely the grammatical one, intended for schools.[62] When, as in Late Antiquity, this relation became more evanescent, transforming Latin grammar into a substantially dogmatic and compilatory discipline, there was no more room for Varronian questions, which were thus doomed to remain intuitions without developments in the history of grammar. Some of these ideas, such as the morphological theory and the contrast between rationalism and empiricism will become relevant again in modern times but in an independent way with regard to how they were set up in ancient times.

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60 De Nonno (1990: 607).

61 The research on archaic Latin grammarians is nowadays at the heart of a project promoted by A. Garcea, entitled *Grammatici disiecti* (Sources fragmentaires pour l'histoire de la grammaire latine), aiming to update the collection of Funaioli through material available on a website (https://gradis.hypotheses.org/).

62 Graffi (2010: 35).

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