Book Review

James N. Adams. 2013. *Social Variation and the Latin Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521886147 (hardback), 956 pp. £114.99

Reviewed by **Katherine McDonald,** Gonville and Caius College, Trinity Street, University of Cambridge, CB2 1TA, UK, E-mail: km440@cam.ac.uk

DOI 10.1515/jhsl-2015-0020

This book takes a deceptively simple question as its starting point: did the changes to Latin which ultimately resulted in the Romance languages come only from below? The answer, masterfully demonstrated over the course of 900 pages, is no: while past scholarship has been tempted to see almost any Latin feature that has Romance outcomes as "Vulgar", many of these changes can be shown to have come from above, or to have been present in the speech of all social classes. Some of Adams's results can sometimes come as a surprise, directly contradicting the prescriptions of modern school-book grammars. As a consequence, this book is likely to become an essential point of reference in Latin and early Romance sociolinguistics.

Scholars of Latin and Greek historical sociolinguistics will likely already be familiar with Adams's previous two works on sociolinguistics, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (2003) and *The Regional Diversification of Latin 200BC – AD600* (2007). This book forms the third of the set, and makes links to the previous two works while covering very little of the same ground. The book is divided into eight parts of unequal length, and further divided into short chapters, each of which discusses and exemplifies one topic. After a concise introduction to his methods and overall argument, the first three largest parts are dedicated to phonology and orthography (Part 2), case and prepositions (Part 3) and nominal, pronominal and adverbial morphology and syntax (Part 3). These are followed by three shorter parts dealing with verbal morphology and syntax (Part 5), subordination (Part 6) and the lexicon and word order (Part 7), and a brief conclusion. Adams does not suggest that this book is meant to be exhaustive, though the level of detail is impressive, covering epigraphic, literary and metalinguistic evidence. Rather than covering every possible subject, the book aims to cover the main developments which have been discussed in previous literature. For this reason, phonology and morphology are given more space; the section on the lexicon is particularly brief, focusing on two case studies on anatomical terms and suppletion in the verb "to go" in place of a discussion of the entire lexicon.

This book is grounded firmly in Labovian sociolinguistics, and Adams repeatedly shows the usefulness of taking the theoretical framework of modern

sociolinguistics as his starting point. This is therefore not a book about "Vulgar Latin": Adams explains that the use of this term, which implies that all sub-literary Latin is both homogeneous and completely separate from the Latin of the elite, does not accord with modern sociolinguistic understanding of class-based variation. We now know that certain phonological and grammatical variables may be used by all speakers in a speech community, but the frequency of these variables will differ from class to class. Class also interacts with stylistic variation, so that each speaker has a continuum of speech styles, from most to least formal. Adams cites good metalinguistic evidence that Roman writers and orators were aware of this continuum, and made active use of it. Writers such as Augustine and Jerome advocated usages scorned by grammarians (nominative *ossum* and masculine *cubitus* respectively) for addressing Christian congregations; centuries earlier, the emperor Augustus apparently had similar views on the need for clarity rather than conformity to the so-called rules.

Only written sources are available for the sociolinguistic study of Latin, and Adams reminds us that highly educated speakers will in general have been fairly successful at expunging stigmatised variants from their writing. However, many non-standard spellings reflect pronunciations that were widespread across all social classes, and Adams specifically warns that we should not automatically assume non-standard spellings to be reflections of stigmatised phonological variants. He also stresses that we need corroborating evidence, such as the statements of grammarians, if we are to attribute a particular pronunciation to a particular social class. This simple idea results in a significant rereading of much of the evidence from, for example, the Pompeii graffiti, which have sometimes incorrectly been seen as a direct reflection of non-elite speech. On the other hand, Adams also suggests that the "submergence" of some variants in the high literature of Classical Latin, leading to apparent continuities between Plautine Latin and Romance, may have been exaggerated by recent scholarship, although he accepts that this idea holds true in some cases if not as a general pattern.

While using a sociolinguistic methodology for parts of his analysis, Adams shows effectively that even if he had not used this theoretical framework, the linguistic and metalinguistic evidence of ancient sources does not support the idea that there were fixed "elite" and "vulgar" varieties of Latin. In fact, his analyses of Classical Latin literary sources often yield the most surprises. He demonstrates that highly educated ancient authors differed considerably in their usage: for example, Livy always uses *ab* with the names of towns and cities to indicate motion, which modern grammar books would have us believe is incorrect. We should also be aware that not all usages which appear to us to be in the same category were treated as equivalent: to continue with the same example,

Adams shows that *in* + accusative and *ad* + accusative used with the names of towns might have been seen as substandard, but that *ab* + ablative was not. Adams also reads texts carefully to find the motivation behind apparently non-standard forms, showing for example that Plautus uses prepositions when unfamiliar towns outside Italy are named for the first time. We therefore start to see that variants are often used for clarity, or come with a particular nuance, rather than simply throwing all these forms into a box marked "non-standard".

Adams's use of the evidence of ancient grammarians is particularly astute. Adams recognises here that the grammarians – whose pronouncements are often taken as describing the difference between "Classical" and "Vulgar" – are usually addressing their "say-X-not-Y" remarks to their highly educated readership. Rather than describing the state of the language, grammarians are much more commonly drawing on examples of variation within the speech of the educated elite, and encouraging one variant over another. Sometimes the grammarians' opinions had a clear effect on elite writing and resulted in writers erasing some common spoken variants from our sources: this idea is immediately familiar from modern English, where forms such as "split infinitives" and singular *they* have long been present in the casual speech of all social classes, even if a minority try to remove them from the most formal written styles. Adams also shows that in many cases the variants the grammarians are trying to preserve are demonstrably no longer part of current usage. This comes out most clearly in their comments on vowel length, which even the grammarians could not identify correctly.

Having demonstrated that Classical Latin was full of variation, and did not always follow the grammarians' rules, Adams shows that some lasting changes to Latin came from above rather than from below. Some of the features that Adams identifies as change from above feel counterintuitive, since they are so often identified as Late Latin vulgarisms. For example, the suppletive forms of *ire* seem like unlikely candidates for change from above, given the usual narrative of their development from Latin into Romance. However, Adams demonstrates that the suppletive forms had their origins in elite writing: the monosyllabic forms of *ire* such as *it* were avoided even by Cicero, and came to be replaced with forms from the poetic word *uado*.

Throughout the book, Adams once again shows his nuanced understanding of Latin sources of all periods, including literary works, technical writing, Christian texts and epigraphic material from around 200 BC onwards. He also makes frequent reference to the Romance outcomes, with an emphasis on Italian and French examples, but using examples from across the Romance languages where needed. In the phonology part of the book, he also makes use of material from the other Italic languages of Italy, including Oscan, Umbrian and Faliscan.

Though the body of evidence for this book is huge and the discussion is often detailed, Adams's style is clear and easy to follow, though some of his more subtle arguments dealing with shades of meaning sometimes require several readings. Those without a background in Latin and the Romance languages may struggle at some points, since not all examples and quoted passages are translated, though in general, the longer passages or those which exemplify a subtle distinction in meaning are rendered into English.

For those interested in ancient sociolinguistics, this book will be a goldmine as a reference book and a game changer as a piece of scholarship for years to come. It is also accessible to undergraduates: students of Latin will find the introductory chapters particularly helpful as a toolkit for approaching sources and other secondary literature. Like Adams's previous two works, *Social Variation and the Latin Language* is set to become a seminal text for the study of Latin linguistics.

References

Adams, James N. 2003. *Bilingualism and the Latin language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Adams, James N. 2007. *The regional diversification of Latin 200BC – AD600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.