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# Negative adjectival morphology in Latin.

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**Abstract:** In the present paper the evaluation of a new etymology for the word *uirgō* ‘virgin’ serves as occasion for an overview of the morphological prefixes by means of which Latin encodes negation on adjectives and nouns. Using the theoretical framework, whose origin ultimately goes back to Aristotle, three varieties of negation will be described: contrariety, contradiction, and privation. As will be shown, all these varieties, and privation in particular, require some theoretical refinement: in some cases, instead of contrariety, some more adequate conceptualizations are preferable such as neutralization or reverse. In this paper the seven prefixes used to encode negation on adjectives and nouns – *dē-*, *dis-*, *ex-*, *in-*, *nē-*, *sē-*, *uē-* – will be described also diachronically, and for each of them their original function will be tentatively identified.

**Keywords:** absence; caritive; contradiction; contrariety; negation; neutralization; presupposition of existence; privation; reverse; scope of negation

## 1 Preliminaries

In recent years, several scholars have dealt with the issue of negation in Latin and many contributions have been devoted to this topic within different theoretical frameworks.<sup>1</sup> However, the majority of careful investigations has focused mainly on negation as a syntactic phenomenon, whereas negation

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<sup>1</sup> The number of contributions on this topic is huge; for a general overview, see in particular Orlandini (2001) and Pinkster (2015: 672–735).

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To Gianguido Manzelli, who generously shares his immense knowledge of languages, in friendship.

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as a phenomenon expressed by means of morphological elements, even lexically,<sup>2</sup> still remains an under-investigated field of research, not only in Latin (see Joshi 2020). In the present paper I will focus on morphological negation marked on adjectives and nouns, whereas negation marked on verbs will be taken into account only for a detail at the end (see Section 5).

Obviously, there is no need to underline that negation is a highly complex phenomenon in which several mechanisms, i. e. cognitive, logical, psychological, are involved at different levels of analysis. Therefore, it is no surprise that such a topic has been discussed over time by philosophers, philosophers of mind, logicians, psycholinguists, ever since Greeks set the grounds of Western thought (see Horn 1989).<sup>3</sup>

This paper aims at providing an overview of the various prefixes Latin employs to express negation marked on nouns and adjectives. However, even in this contribution some observations focusing on theoretical aspects of negation will be in order.

Moreover, the way languages encode morphological negation possesses some peculiarities that have been treated only partially, especially from a diachronic point of view. For instance, taking into account the etymologies of the different particles and/or adverbs that expressed negation in Proto-Indo-European, there are two sources from which they directly or indirectly derive, i. e. *\*ne* and possibly *\*mē*. According to what has been reliably reconstructed, the latter exclusively occurred in negative commands, whereas the former was used to negate parts of speech such as nouns or adjectives; in later stages of some Indo-European languages like the Slavic ones, *\*ne* also developed the function of negating sentences. This also is the well-known case documented by Eng. *not* (<*ne wight* ‘not a thing’) or Latin *non* (<*ne oinom* ‘not one’), in which negation was reinforced.

The double source of negation just mentioned, i. e. one employed with nouns and adjectives, the other occurring in sentences, raises a fundamental issue, i. e. whether notions or thoughts intrinsically negative really exist (see Horn 1989: 514–517). This crucial point had been extensively treated by Frege (1956 [1919]), who, however, exclusively dealt with sentential judgments as the majority of logicians and philosophers did. Whether this conclusion is also valid for nouns or adjectives remains an open issue.

Recently it has also been proposed that the morphological and syntactic expression of negation can be treated unitarily. Therefore, the traditional

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<sup>2</sup> A short mention is in Pinkster’s chapter cited above (Pinkster 2015: 734–735).

<sup>3</sup> For a more general treatment of this complex phenomenon, the reader will find the relevant information in the recent, comprehensive handbook of negation (Déprez and Espinal 2020), which covers almost all the topics in which negation is involved. See also Bhat (2004).

distinction between a morphological negation and a syntactic one should be abandoned (De Clercq 2021). However, that such a distinction could not possibly be dismissed also remains an open issue thus far.

## 2 Negation and a new etymology for *uirgo* ‘virgin’

The occasion to re-open the rather thin dossier on the morphological negation of adjectives and nouns in Latin is represented by Roman Garnier’s relatively recent paper (Garnier 2014), in which the French scholar has put forward a new etymology for the Latin word *uirgō* ‘virgin’. This word remains unclear and usually scholars who attempted to provide its etymology had tried to establish a relation either with *uirga* ‘rod’ or with *uir* ‘man’.<sup>4</sup> In both cases, such proposals do not seem completely satisfying and the issue would still be at stake. According to Garnier’s proposal, *uirgō* “c’est un *bahuvrīhi* privatif sur base de substantif” (Garnier 2014: 65) and its etymology could be traced back to a PIE form *\*h<sub>1</sub>uí-h<sub>1</sub>rǵ<sup>h</sup>ō<sup>n</sup>*, whose original meaning was “non-montée”. This type would belong to the group of *bahuvrīhi* compounds that includes examples such as classical Sanskrit *vi-druma* ‘treeless’ or recent Avestan *\*vī.āp-* ‘without water, dry’, attested in the superlative *vī.āpōtāma-* ‘der wasserloseste’ (*Vidēvdāt*, 3. 15; translation by Bartholomae). The negative meaning of these compounds would be due to its first element, i. e. the separative prefix *ui-* that would also occur in words like *uidua* ‘widow’ and possibly *diuido* ‘I divide’.

This etymology is undoubtedly brilliant and seducing but, at the same time, also raises some questions about the expression of the morphological negation in Latin that deserve to be analyzed more in depth.

The first crucial point that deserves discussion is that, in Garnier’s proposal, the original meaning of the word *uirgō* would be ‘non-covered’, and this implies that what is defined as “privative” can be expressed by means of the negative adverb *non*. In this respect lack or deprivation of something are conceived as a form of negation. However, there is a difference between a word like Lat. *uirgō* and Sanskrit *vi-druma* ‘treeless’: the latter is formally transparent, the former is not. A simple explanation would be that *uirgō* is very old: it already occurs in the Duenos inscription as *uirco*. The second difference is that the relation between the prefix *ui-* and the nominal base of *uirgō* is different from the relation between *vi-* and *-druma* of the Sanskrit and *āpōtāma-* of Avestan adjectives because in Latin the second part of the compound is a deverbal noun. Last, but not least, the original meaning of *ui-* expresses separation rather than lack.

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<sup>4</sup> The entry *uirgo* in Walde and Hofmann (1982: s.v.) still provides the reader with the most complete array of proposed etymologies for this word.

All these points considerably weaken Garnier's etymology. However, the idea that concepts such as privation or lack, or even separation can all be considered implicit types of negation is not new: its origin can be traced back at least to Aristotle, who gave fundamental contributions even to the issue of negation.

### 3 The theoretical framework: some reflections

#### 3.1 Three varieties of negation

As is well known, Aristotle was the first philosopher that systematized the issue of negation: his proposals on this topic are still acknowledged as the basis for discussion. "In the beginning of *Categories* Aristotle distinguishes four varieties of opposition, three of which inherently involve negation: contradiction, contrariety, privation, and correlation" (Horn 2020: 7).<sup>5</sup> It may be useful to remind the reader that two terms are contradictory when they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive: for instance, a number is either even or odd and there is no other possibility given (*tertium non datur*): i. e. parity and disparity cover all possible numbers.

Two terms are contrary when they are mutually exclusive but non-exhaustive because there is another possibility (*tertium datur*): for instance, an object cannot be big and small at the same time, but it can simultaneously be neither big nor small.

Usually, in the literature on this topic true negation is distinct from other logic modalities, which can, but do not necessarily have to, receive a negative interpretation since their content is not negative *stricto sensu*. Already Jespersen (1917) observed that the contradictory adjectives could develop a contrary meaning over time. The distinction that will be employed in the analysis presented in the following pages is based on the Aristotelian opposition that still remains crucial between contrary (ἐναντίος) and contradictory (ἀντιφατικός).

The third variety of opposition that is supposed to inherently involve negation is privation: as a type of negation, it is particularly challenging and it raises several peculiar problems. Its analysis requires a specific line of reasoning that does not take into account the logic relation between the negative entity and its positive counterpart, but rather the existence or non-existence of the entity in the scope of negation, as will be shown below. However, even in this case, privation is a multifaceted concept and in principle it could be seen as a hypernym of negation because any negative noun or adjective could probably be

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<sup>5</sup> Correlation is the variety of opposition in which negation is not involved and will not be dealt with here.

paraphrased as ‘without X’: *unhappy* ‘without happiness’, *unconscious* ‘without consciousness’, *incorrectness* ‘without correctness’, and so forth. However, this picture does not correspond to the complexity of language and such an automatic reformulation would end up concealing the actual mechanisms involved in encoding negation.

In addition, if one pays attention to the adjectival category, one will observe that there exist adjectives that are formally positive but semantically negative. A good example could be represented by the English adjective *empty*. Even in Latin there are representatives of both types, i. e. *uacuus* ‘empty’, formally positive, and *inanis* ‘empty’, whose etymology is far from being certain: its initial *in-* is likely to correspond to the negative prefix *in-* and consequently it would be a negative adjective even formally.

### 3.2 Negation as separation/absence

Negation expressed through adjectives and nouns had already been conceived by Aristotle as a form of absence, lack of the quality or content of the term involved. So the adjective *improbis*, for instance, qualifies one who lacks the quality of being morally sound, *imberbis* is a man that has no beard, and so on. However, even though these two negative adjectives seem to have the same status and express the same type of negation, they differ from one another crucially, as will be shown below, Section 5.

Although over time other philosophers and logicians, notably Kant (1992 [1763]), for instance, accepted Aristotle’s approach to the issue of negation, it must be stressed in any case that from a conceptual viewpoint notions like lack (of something), (de)privation, absence, even loss, do not perfectly overlap with that of negation. Apparently, there would be a conceptual difference between the true negation that manifests itself in the sentence at the syntactic level, and the morphological negation that has to be considered rather as a form of lack or absence. The result of this approach is that negation on nouns and adjectives is not a semantic primitive as one might take for granted. Looking at the etymology of the prefixes that convey the negative value in Latin, they can always be traced back to adverbs or particles, whose meaning or function refer to the semantic field of separation.<sup>6</sup> There are parallels in other languages like Finnish, for instance, where a phrase with privative meaning is marked by the abessive case.

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<sup>6</sup> It must be pointed out, however, that there are languages like Chinese (Chappell 1994: 129–130) or Acehnese (Durie et al. 1994: 177–178), in which negation is traditionally recognized as a semantic primitive marked in the lexicon.

The fact that such prefixes have to do with the notion of separation, both etymologically and semantically, and that only secondarily they develop the value of negation, needs some reflections.

Since these prefixes are related to the notion of separation, they frequently also possess, or develop, a pejorative value over time, or even indicate an approximation. Therefore, adopting the notion of approximatives from Wierzbicka (1986, where the notion is only “positive”), they possibly should be described more adequately under the label of “negative approximatives”. The only prefix with an intrinsically negative meaning is *in-*, which goes back to Proto-Indo-European \**h<sub>2</sub>*, whose development is recorded in almost all branches of Indo-European. However, even this prefix is supposed to be originally an element with a privative meaning (the Greek grammarians labelled it as ἀστερητικόν); see Section 5 below.

### 3.3 Negation as privation

The label of privation itself is not completely unambiguous: there are at least two possible ways of conceptualizing privation, as already proposed by Kant 1992 [1763: 782],<sup>7</sup> either as a type of *absence* (*Abwesenheit*) or of *lack* (*Mangel*). According to the interpretation that is required by the context in which privation is expressed, there are some crucial linguistic differences and consequences.

If privation is conceptualized as *Absence*, then all adjectives that express negation by means of prefixes, whose primary meaning is ‘away from, separated from’, should be interpreted as adjectives conveying a meaning of privation, at least from the etymological viewpoint. In any case, it refers to something *optional*, i. e. that does not have to be necessarily present. This could be the case for which the label *Privative* can be employed.

On the other hand, if privation is conceptualized as a form of *Lack*, it means that something *necessary* is unexpectedly absent. In this case, the label that perfectly fits is *Caritive*.<sup>8</sup> Both terms, i. e. *Privative* and *Caritive*, are quite commonly used in linguistic typology.

<sup>7</sup> The German terminology adopted here is taken from Kant (1992 [1763]: 782). It must be pointed out that the origin of Kant’s theoretical contribution to this issue was primarily concerned with mathematics and his terminology for negation is much richer.

<sup>8</sup> *Caritive* is a label current in Caucasian linguistics. *Caritive* “describes non-involvement (including, but not limited to, absence) of a participant (absentee) in a situation, with the non-involvement predication semantically modifying the situation or a participant of a different situation” (definition given at <https://caritive.org/about-caritive>; accessed 17 May 2021).

### 3.4 Aristotle's ideas on privation

Interestingly, Aristotle put forward two possible interpretations of the concept of privation, albeit implicitly, without distinction of whether it was a type of absence or a type of lack. This is well illustrated in the following passage, taken from the *Categories* (12a28–33):

Στέρησις δὲ καὶ ἕξις λέγεται μὲν περὶ ταυτὸν τι, οἷον ἡ ὄψις καὶ ἡ τυφλότης περὶ ὀφθαλμόν· καθόλου δὲ εἰπεῖν, ἐν ᾧ πέφυκεν ἡ ἕξις γίνεσθαι, περὶ τοῦτο λέγεται ἐκότερον αὐτῶν. ἐστερηθῆναι δὲ τότε λέγομεν ἕκαστον τῶν τῆς ἕξεως δεκτικῶν, ὅταν ἐν ᾧ πέφυκεν ὑπάρχειν καὶ ὅτε πέφυκεν ἔχειν μηδαμῶς ὑπάρχει· νωδὸν τε γὰρ λέγομεν οὐ τὸ μὴ ἔχον ὀδόντας, καὶ τυφλὸν οὐ τὸ μὴ ἔχον ὄψιν ἀλλὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχον ὅτε πέφυκεν ἔχειν· τινὰ γὰρ ἐκ γενετῆς οὔτε ὄψιν οὔτε ὀδόντας ἔχει, ἀλλ' οὐ λέγεται νωδὰ οὐδὲ τυφλὰ

“Privatives” and “Positives” have reference to the same subject. Thus, sight and blindness have reference to the eye. It is a universal rule that each of a pair of opposites of this type has reference to that to which the particular “positive” is natural. We say that that is capable of some particular faculty or possession has suffered privation when the faculty or possession in question is in no way present in that in which, and at the time at which, it should naturally be present. We do not call that toothless which has not teeth, or that blind which has not sight, but rather that which has not teeth or sight at the time when by nature it should. For there are some creatures which from birth are without sight, or without teeth, but these are not called toothless or blind’ (Tr. Edghill).<sup>9</sup>

In this quotation, Aristotle illustrates privation as a concept strictly tied with conditions set by nature. More precisely, he distinguishes between the condition of being without teeth in a period when teeth should be present by nature and the condition of being without them because teeth have not yet come through. The former case is that of old people, for instance, who have lost their teeth getting older, the latter is the case of newborns, who start cutting their first teeth when they are about five months old.

This distinction mirrors two situations crucially different: in the former case, the negation concerns or affects something that exists or used to exist, whereas in the latter what is negated does not exist or has not yet come into being. Quoting one of Aristotle's examples, the Greek adjective νωδός<sup>10</sup> ‘toothless’ always refers to somebody who has lost his teeth, not to a newborn, who is by natural condition

<sup>9</sup> What Edghill translates as ‘Privatives’ and ‘Positives’ should possibly be more adequately translated as ‘Privation’ and ‘Possession’.

<sup>10</sup> The fact that Aristotle describes νωδός as an affirmative adjective (καταφάσει: *Met.* 1068a7) suggests that the word was no more etymologically transparent (for its etymology, see Beekes 2010, s.v.). On the relation between *nē* and *nē̄*, not taken into account here, see the contribution by (Álvarez Huerta 2012).

without teeth. Aristotle connects these two cases with two different conditions imposed by nature.

### 3.5 Negation and presupposition

However, by slightly changing the perspective and equating the natural condition of being present with the presupposition of existence,<sup>11</sup> wider typological generalizations are possible. For instance, there is a parallel to the distinction of presupposition just illustrated that concerns verbs: even in this case presupposition turns out to be crucial whenever the negative meaning is involved, as illustrated in Section 3.6 below.

Aristotle had already noticed that the negative prefix of Ancient Greek α- used to imply privation. Etymologically and also functionally, the privative α- perfectly corresponds to the prefix *in-* of Latin:

(*Met.* 1022b33)

καὶ ὅσαχῶς δὲ αἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ α ἀποφάσεις λέγονται, τοσαυταχῶς καὶ αἱ στερήσεις λέγονται ‘Privation has as many senses as there are senses of negation derived from the negative affix (ἀ-)’ (Tr. Tredennick)

This passage belongs to a long section of *Metaphysics* (1022b3–1023a5), in which Aristotle claims that for all the types of privation there is a corresponding negative sense marked with the negative prefix ἀ-. Among the examples quoted there is one involving again a physical impairment such as blindness or defect such as being one-eyed. These examples are similar to the one involving the condition of being toothless mentioned in the *Categories* quoted above, in Section 3.4.

Aristotle’s passage deserves attention for several reasons, many of which are beyond the purpose of this paper and cannot be dealt with here. However, what is crucial here is the fact that a distinction is drawn between privation of something that is possessed at the right time according to the laws of nature such as teeth, and privation of something else, whose presence is not required by nature at any time.

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<sup>11</sup> “Presupposition of existence” is a label used in logic implying an existential quantifier. However, the notions both of “presupposition” (Soames 1989) and of “existence” (Cocchiarella 1989; Westerståhl 1989) are particularly complex. In this paper, I use this label not in a technical sense: it simply means that the object of the verb is presupposed. A referee suggested that in this case the relation could be that of a conventional implicature. I strongly doubt it. For the time being, I still use “presupposition of existence”.



### 3.6 Negation and existence

The distinction just mentioned recalls, and is parallel to, the logical difference between the so-called affected object and the effected object. Such parallelism, which has gone unnoticed thus far, consists of this: both in the case of the expression of the object and in the case of negation as privation, the label in question can be interpreted in two different, opposite ways. In the case of the object, it is *presupposed as existent* when it is affected, while it is presupposed as non-existent when it is effected.

Traditionally, there is a distinction between the *accusativus effectus* and the *accusativus affectus*. The former does not presuppose the existence of the entity, mainly an object, created or built by the verbal meaning, whereas the latter presupposes its existence. Two examples suffice to illustrate this point:

<i>Accusativus effectus</i>	to build a house (the house does not exist [yet]: its non-existence is presupposed)
<i>Accusativus affectus</i>	to demolish a house (the house exists: its existence is presupposed)

In this case, it must be also pointed out that in the corresponding negative sentences the conditions of existence or non-existence do not change if compared with positive sentences:

<i>Not to build a house:</i>	the house does not exist
<i>Not to demolish a house:</i>	the house exists

The same happens in the case of privation, because the thing that is lacking either implies the presupposition of existence or the presupposition of non-existence. Since there is no possible situation in between, this relation shares its distinctive property with that of contradiction. In both cases, what turns out to be crucial is the presupposition of existence of the entity negated or of the semantic role of patient expressed in accusative.

Since the conditions imposed by nature to which Aristotle refers in the passage of the *Categories* cited above and the presupposition of existence taken into account in the case of the object affected overlap, in the present contribution it is suggested to reformulate the conditions imposed by nature as conditions of existence. In other words, the two notions end up coinciding. Therefore, the proposal put forward here is to analyze the cases illustrated by Aristotle as examples in which negation operates on entities that are presupposed to be existent or non-existent. The feature of presupposition of existence thus becomes crucial.

### 3.7 Negation and morphological typology

There is a last point that deserves attention: the typological aspect of morphological negation. As already mentioned, negation encoded by morphology has not yet received the attention it deserves and a full description of the different strategies exploited to express nominal or adjectival negation is not yet available, the only contribution being Joshi (2020). However, no matter what framework is employed to describe the morphological negation on nouns and adjectives, some typological constraints must be taken into account when dealing with the occurrence of specific morphological mechanisms even though “no systematic typological studies have been made on derivational negation, and thus no generally valid cross-linguistic generalizations can be offered” (Miestamo 2017: 427). For instance, whether a language encodes negation morphologically to negate nouns and/or adjectives is a reasonable issue only in the case that the language in question structurally belongs to those in which nouns and adjectives are clearly distinguishable. If such distinction exists, the commonest strategy to negate adjectives or nouns among the world’s languages is probably by means of affixes.<sup>12</sup> A sketchy typology of the morphological strategies of negation in nouns and adjectives is far beyond the purposes of the present pages, but some observations can be useful for illustrating the line of reasoning adopted here.

According to the typological structure of the language involved, negation is encoded differently. For some language families such as Eskimo-Aleut or the languages of Native North America, the issue discussed here does not make any sense, because the parts of speech are not as distinct as they regularly are in the Indo-European languages. On the contrary, in a language belonging to the inflectional-fusive type, morphological negation can be encoded either as a prefix,<sup>13</sup> as in the case of the Indo-European languages that still witness this phenomenon, including Latin, or as a suffix, in languages typologically different such as Turkish. In this language the suffix *-siz*, literally ‘without’, corresponds to the privative, and transforms the nouns on which it is marked into negative adjectives: *zamansız* ‘inappropriate’ (lit. ‘without time’), *anlamsız* ‘meaningless’ (lit. ‘without meaning’). This mechanism also occurs in many other languages, for instance in Australian languages (Dixon 2002: 84–86; for a general view, see Miestamo [2017: 427], where even more complex cases are mentioned), or in some European languages such as English and German, characterized by the

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, in the online version of the *World Atlas of Language Structures* there is no entry for negation marked on nouns and adjectives.

<sup>13</sup> “Negation by prefixation is observed to be much more abundant than negation by suffixation” (Joshi 2020: 80).

suffixes *-less/-los* and *-free/-frei*. These suffixes, either in English or German, intrinsically presuppose the existence of the entity they negate, tend to be preferably associated with a concrete object rather than with abstract qualities. It is worth noting that the suffix *-less* as in *toothless* seems to be preferably interpreted as a privative, the suffix *-free* as, for instance, in *alcohol-free*, preferably as a caritive. Obviously, this point, for which also the notion of alienability or inalienability could play a role, requires further investigation.

## 4 Latin prefixes conveying negative meaning

### 4.1 General remarks

It is difficult to determine the precise number of prefixes in Latin that could convey a negative value on nouns and adjectives or change positive terms into their negative counterparts.<sup>14</sup> There are seven prefixes, i. e. bound morphemes, here listed alphabetically, that perform this, even though to a different degree: *dē-*, *dis-*, *ex-*, *in-*, *nē-*, *sē-*, *uē-*. Each of them was also productive to a different degree and documented for different spans of time: the prefix *in-*, for instance, became the only negative prefix *par excellence*, whereas the prefix *nē-* disappeared.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the prefixes *nē-* and *sē-* show a low degree of productivity and the number of negative adjectives they form is quite small indeed. Obviously, it would be very nice if we could ascribe a different semantic nuance to each prefix. Unfortunately, at least for the time being, this is a difficult task that remains beyond the purpose of the present contribution. Surely further investigations are needed.

It must also be pointed out that in Greek there are many negative adjectives that formally correspond to those of Latin, mainly but not exclusively, those that start with *in-*, so that it is not always easy to ascertain whether the Latin adjective is an independent creation or a calque. Even this point needs an accurate scrutiny of all adjectives recorded, which is not possible here.

In the Section 4, an overview of the Latin prefixes with negative value will be sketched, finally concentrating on the prefix *in-*.

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<sup>14</sup> The theoretical question whether these adjectives are derivational or compounds will not be discussed here: they have been described as either compounds (Leumann 1972: 398) or derived (Trips 2014: 388); I adhere to this viewpoint.

<sup>15</sup> The numerous adjectives of Rumanian beginning with *ne-* must be accounted for differently: “Im Rumänischen wird aus dem Slavischen *ne-* entlehnt” (Lüdtkke 1996: 247).

What follows is a concise specimen showing how the prefixes mentioned above change the meaning of the adjectives with which they combine, from positive to negative.

## 4.2 Prefix *dē-*

*dē-*: “Komposita mit *dē-* ‘weg-’, *ex-* ‘heraus-’, *vē-* ‘weg-’ bezeichnen, ähnlich wie die mit *in-* priv., als gewissermassen negative Besitzkomposita den Verlust oder das Fehlen eines Besitzes” (Leumann 1972: 398). The derivational base seems to be exclusively nominal. The semantics of this adjective refers to the diminishing intensity of the quality involved. In other words, by means of the prefix *dē-* it is not the nominal content that is completely negated, but rather its fullness, so that a word like *dēcolor* does not mean ‘without color’ but ‘discolored’.

*Dēcolor*: ‘deprived of its natural color’; Cicero (*Tusc.* 2, 8, 6)<sup>16</sup> translated the phrase *χλωρόν αἷμα* occurring in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* (v. 1058) as *decolorem sanguinem*.

*Dēcrepitus*: ‘very old’ lit. ‘noiseless’ (Plaut. *As.* 863)

*Dēdecorus*: ‘disgraceful, shameless’ (Plaut. *Bacch* 1191)

*Dēgener*: ‘degenerate’ (Virgil, *Aeneid* 2, 549): “apparently a Virgilian coinage first found here” (Horsfall 2008: 414). In Servius’ commentary the adjective is explained as “non respondentem moribus patris”.

Some adjectives exhibit a different formation, in which the prefix is added to the stem:

*Dēformis (forma)*: ‘unshapely’ (Cic. *Inv.* 1, 135).

*Dēsomnis (somnus)*: ‘deprived of sleep’ (Petr. 47, 5): it is a *hapax legomenon*, possibly built after *insomnis* or *exsomnis*, both occurring in Virgil (*Aen.* 9, 167 and *Aen.* 6, 556, respectively) or, less probably, *dēformis*.

In the case of *dēbilis* ‘weak’ the stem belongs to a word that did not exist (any longer?) in Latin, etymologically connected with Skr. *balām* ‘strength’. *dēbilis* ‘weak’: literally ‘who has not his/her full strength’, as in Cato’s example (*agr.* 157, 10):

*Et hoc si quando usus uenerit qui debilis erit, haec res sanum facere potest*  
 ‘And further whenever such occasion arises, ... a person who is debilitated ...  
 will be cured’ (Tr. Hooper, Ash)

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<sup>16</sup> For each entry the probable first occurrence is given.

### 4.3 Prefix *dis-*

*dis-*: This is the definition offered by Ernout and Meillet: “Marque la séparation, l'écartement, la direction en sens opposés ... et par suite le contraire, la *négation* ...” (Ernout and Meillet 1985: 176; my emphasis).

The derivational base can be either adjectival or nominal. Even this prefix is usually associated with negation and, when derived with an adjectival base, is usually supposed to signal contrariety, not contradiction. However, the function exerted by this prefix raises some questions about this interpretation. Let's take the example of the pair *facilis* ~ *difficilis*: *dis-* does not really negate the content of the positive adjective, but rather rejects the viewpoint according to which something is easy to do and accepts the opposite viewpoint. The relationship between the two adjectives is reverse and is reminiscent of the pairs of relative antonyms (on this, see Lyons 1977: 280–282; Saeed 2016: 64). This seems to be explicitly stated in a famous verse of Terence:

(Ter. *Heaut.* 4, 6, 1)

*nulla est tam facilis res, quin difficilis siet, quom invitus facias*

‘There is nothing so easy but that it becomes difficult when you do it with reluctance.’ (Tr. Riley)

This perspective also applies to the other adjectives:

*Dispar*: ‘dissimilar, unlike, different’ (~ *par*). This adjective is attested from the age of Cicero in several authors, including Cicero himself and Lucretius.

*Dissimilis*: ‘dissimilar, different’ (~ *similis*). This adjective is also attested from the age of Cicero in various authors. It is worth noting that Plato (*Parm.* 129a1–3) used the similar pair ὁμοιος ~ ἀνόμοιος to illustrate the relation of contrariety (ἐναντίον). However, it must be observed that *dis-* and ἀν- do not match perfectly.

*Dissocialis*: ‘antisocial’ (~ *socialis*). The fact that this adjective occurs in a late author like Rutilius Namatianus (1, 384) is good evidence that the productivity of *dis-* as a negative prefix lasted for a long time.

As mentioned above, there is a small group of adjectives derived from a nominal base and with a positive counterpart, usually with the prefix *con-*:

*Discolor*: ‘of another color’ (Varr. *rust.* 3, 17, 4) (~ *concolor* ‘of the same color’).

*Discors*: ‘discordant’ (Lucr. 5, 894) (~ *concors* ‘concordant, harmonious’).

*Dissors*: ‘of a different fate’ (Ov. *am.* 2, 12, 11) (~ *consors* ‘shared, in common’).

The relation between the adjectives with *dis-* and their counterparts with *con-* cannot be the same as in *happy* ~ *unhappy*, but is closer to contradiction rather than to contrariety.

#### 4.4 Prefix *ex-*

*Ex-* as negative prefix forms adjectives from a nominal base. Formally, in a few cases these adjectives exhibit a phonological readjustment as in *ēlinguis*. In a few cases they also exhibit the stem of both the adjectival inflectional classes as in *ēlinguis/ēlinguus*, even though the form belonging to the second class of adjectives is in general the older. The prefix *ex-* indicates the loss of something inherent and inalienable like some body parts, and explicitly expresses the caritive.

*exanimis*: ‘lifeless’ (Virg., *Aen.* 5, 517) / *exanimus* ‘lifeless, dead’ (Lucr. 6, 1256).

*exanimalis*: ‘lifeless’ (Plaut. *Bacch.* 848).

*ēdentulus*: ‘toothless’ (Plaut. *Most.* 275).

*ēlinguis* (Pacuv. 176) / *elinguus*: interestingly the grammarian Charisius (*gramm.* p. 399, 26) informs us how the word was interpreted: “elinguis habet linguam, sed usu eius caret; elinguatus amisit”.

*expers* (already in Plautus’ comedies; in Turpil. *com.* 157 it still occurs as *expars*): ‘having no part in, free from’.

*exsensus* (Laev. *frag.* 8) / *exsensis*: ‘senseless’, is an extremely rare adjective, as can be seen in the entry of TLL.

It must be observed that adjectives like *ēdentulus* or *exanimalis* are typical examples of the well-known linguistic creativity of Plautus and must be analyzed and evaluated cautiously, because they might not reflect the really spoken language but might simply be a new, funny coinage of the comedian.

#### 4.5 Prefix *ně-*

*ně-*: this prefix is the full grade negation, whose zero-grade is represented by  $\ast n_0$ , which gave *en-* > *in-* in Latin. This prefix occurs with both nouns and adjectives, the majority of which belongs to the oldest layer of the language:

*necessus*: ‘indispensable’ (from Plautus onwards);

*nefastus*: ‘impious, irreligious’ (*XII Tables* in Cic. *Leg.*, 2, 8).

#### 4.6 Prefix *sē-*

*sē-* (*sēd-*, *sō-*): Ernout and Meillet describe this prefix, with several allomorphs, as a “particule marquant la séparation, l’éloignement, la privation” (Ernout and Meillet 1985: 609). Cf. *sēd*, *sē fraude* ‘without fraud’ (*XII Tables*). According to de Vaan

(2021: s.v.) “[t]he abl.sg. (\**swēd*? >) \**sēd* originally meant ‘per se, for itself’, whence ‘however, but’ as cj. and ‘without, away’ as prep.” It encodes the absence of an element and corresponds to the preposition *sine* ‘without’. The scantiness of instances makes it very likely that this prefix never was particularly productive. Whereas *sēcūrus* and *sēdulō* are the result of the lexification of a phrase, so that they do not have any positive counterpart, in the case of *sōcors* it is difficult to establish whether it derives from a phrase \**sē corde* or not:

*sēcūrus*: ‘careless’ (<\**sē cūrā* ‘without care’; from Cicero’s age onwards);

*sēdulō*: ‘diligently’ (<\**sē(d) dolō* ‘without fraud, deceit’). This adverb, from which the adjective *sedulus* ‘diligent’ was derived, is attested from Plautus onwards;

*sōcors*: ‘slack, inert’ (from Plautus onward).

## 4.7 Prefix *uē*-

*uē*-. This prefix is difficult to etymologize and several proposals have been put forward. In Ernout and Meillet, *uē*- is described as a “particule privative ou péjorative ... Ce préverbe figure au premier terme des composés à valeur *négative*” (Ernout and Meillet 1985: 716; my emphasis).

According to the piece of information provided by Paulus Festus’ text cited here, the prefix *uē*-, which was no longer productive during the classical age, conveyed a specific meaning, i. e. privation as lack of achievement:

(Fest. 512, 6)

*uegrande significare alii aiunt male grande ... alii paruom, minutum, ut cum dicimus: uegrande frumentum ...*

In this example, *uegrande frumentum* refers to the corn, whose ears did not fully grow. The value encoded by *uē*- can be paraphrased as ‘almost getting to the point of being fully X’; it is synonymous with *dē*-, with which it is in a relation of reverse (see Section 4.2 above). The majority of examples show that their bases were adjectival.

*uēcors*: ‘frenzied’. According to Fest. 373, 12; *est turbati et mali cordis*. From Pacuvius (trag. 216) onwards.

*uēgrandis*: ‘not very large’ (Plaut. *Cist.* 378).

*uēsanus*: ‘not of sound mind’ (Plaut. *Trin.* 826).

In Latin, another prefix, homophonous with *uē*- has been hypothesized, with the function of superlative as in *uēpallidus* ‘very pale’, a *hapax legomenon* occurring in

Horace, *sat.* 1, 2, 129, but its reading is far from being certain and already the grammarian Porphyrio preferred to read *vae pallida*. However, according to the hypothesis accepted in the etymological dictionary of Latin by de Vaan (2021: s.v.), “Reinterpretation of *vē-* as meaning ‘abnormal’ could then explain the formation of *vē-grandis*, *vēscus* and *vē-pallidus* (Hor.).”

## 5 The prefix *in-*

### 5.1 General remarks

Among the prefixes that convey a negative value in Latin, *in-* plays a special role:<sup>17</sup> it is the only one that can express all the varieties of negation under scrutiny, i. e. contrariety, contradiction and privation. This remark is parallel to what Aristotle says about the privative  $\alpha\text{-}$  (see Section 3.5).

It is easy to observe that, whenever contradiction or contrariety is involved, what is central is the relation of exclusivity and exhaustivity between the two terms in question, whereas privation is involved in the existence or non-existence of the abstract or concrete entity ascribed to the negative term, i. e. adjective or noun. In Section 3.2 above, the pair *improbis* and *imberbis* has been mentioned as an example of negative adjectives with the prefix *in-*. However, the two adjectives, albeit formally identical, are crucially different because of their semantics. A reformulation as ‘without probity’ and ‘without beard’, although basically correct, would not catch any crucial difference; still, a crucial difference between them exists. In the pair *probus* ~ *improbis* there is a relation of contrariety. However, I would prefer to describe it as a case of neutralization, as will be clear below. As a matter of fact, in cases such as this one the relation between the two adjectives could possibly be described more adequately as a relation of neutralization of the quality involved, the terms contrary/contrariety rather suggesting an opposition.

In the case represented by the pair *barbatus* ~ *imberbis*, the relation between the two adjectives is different in several respects:

1. The pair does not conform to the pattern  $X \sim in\text{-}X$  as represented for instance by pairs like *probus* ~ *in-probus* (= *improbis*, after the phonological readjustment) or *felix* ‘happy’ (originally ‘fertile’) ~ *infelix* ‘unhappy’.
2. The positive member of the pair is frequently represented by a past participle, whose meaning is ‘provided with X, endowed with X’.

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<sup>17</sup> The paper by Bader (1960) about *in-* is still useful.



3. The corollary of point 2 is that an adjective that was originally a past participle does not necessarily have a negative counterpart in an adjectival pair: for instance, *beatus* ‘blessed, happy’ does not have any corresponding counterpart *\*imbeatus* ‘unblessed’.<sup>18</sup>
4. The variety of negation is privation and the entity involved does not refer to an abstract quality but to a concrete element like the beard in the pair *barbatus* ~ *imberbis*.
5. The decisive feature is the necessary existence or non-existence of the entity involved: *barbatus* means ‘endowed with beard’, and the beard is taken as a physical element that necessarily accompanies the growth and development of the male body. The adjective *imberbis* (or its variant *imberbus*) presupposes the natural absence of the beard. It corresponds to Eng. *beardless*, It. *imberbe*, and can never be translated as *shaved* or It. *sbarbato* because this adjective, an original past participle, presupposes the existence of a beard to shave. Thus *imberbus* would rather mean something like ‘one, who is without beard because it still has to grow’ and not ‘one, who has shaved his beard’, by implying that the condition of ‘necessity to be’ is absent from ‘beardless’.

## 5.2 The prefix *in-* with adjectives

As shown, the negative adjectives with the prefix *in-* can be formally subdivided into three groups, the last of which can be further subdivided into two subgroups:

Group A: contains adjectives derived from adjectival bases; the prefix leaves formally unchanged the adjectives to which it applies or shows phonological readjustments. The pair could be represented as  $X \sim in + X$  like the type *felix* ~ *infelix*. This is the case in which the relation between the two members may be more accurately described as a form of neutralization of the quality involved instead of a real negation.

- A.     *infelix*<sup>19</sup>  
          *immātūrus*  
          *impiger*  
          *iniquus*

<sup>18</sup> A form such as *\*imbeatus* would raise some peculiar problems; see below.

<sup>19</sup> For the adjectives beginning with *in-* there will not be given the supposedly first attestation of the entry because they are supposed to be the unmarked form of negation.

Group B contains adjectives that do not have a positive corresponding form, but only a nominal base from which they are derived: the pair could be represented as the type:  $X_N \sim in + \text{stem of } X_N + \text{ending like } bellum \sim in\text{-}bell\text{-}is$ .

B.	<i>inermis (inermus)</i>	< <i>arma</i>
	<i>imbellis</i>	< <i>bellum</i>
	<i>imberbus, imberbis</i>	< <i>barba</i>
	<i>informis</i>	< <i>forma</i>
	<i>inanimis</i>	< <i>animus</i>

It is worth observing that Priscianus (*gramm.* II 9, 25) informs us about the way the adjective *informis* could be interpreted in the 6th century: “dicitur mulier, non quae caret forma, sed quae male est formata”. The original meaning of *informis* ‘that has no form’ was no longer in use and the adjective only meant ‘unshapely, deformed, hideous’.

### 5.3 The prefix *in-* with verbs

Group C needs some remarks. Its peculiar feature is that all these adjectives derive from the verbal base both of the *infectum* and the *perfectum*. The analysis of this group of adjectives was thoroughly accomplished by Arias Abellán (1996) in a paper devoted to the comedies of Plautus. She recognized two cases, here indicated as C1 and C2:

C1: *In-* + *-nt-*: “caso en el que el prefijo cumple la función de “negar” el contenido verbal de la base a la que se antepone” (Arias Abellán 1996: 430): *insciens, incontinens, impudens, innocens*.

In this case the adjectives mean ‘one who does not know’, ‘one who does not contain’, and so on. Obviously, all adjectives develop meanings that are far from the original ones. For instance, *innocens*, originally ‘one who does not do harms, injuries’, developed the more common meaning ‘innocent, naïf’.

C2: *In-* + *-to-*: “el prefijo niega igualmente el contenido verbal de las bases en *-to-* a las que se antepone” (Arias Abellán 1996: 430–431): *insepultus, incenatus, inultus, inuictus*.

The subgroup C2 can be subdivided into two other subgroups: there is a difference concerning the negative adjectives derived from the past participle, and it has gone unnoticed so far, at least to the best of my knowledge. According to the semantics of the verb, the scope of negation is different. Usually, scope is a notion employed

in the analysis of the syntactic negation, but it also turns out to be necessary with this group of adjectives.

C2A. When the verb expresses an activity and therefore does not possess any resultative meaning, the scope of the prefix *in-* is over the entire activity. See for instance this example:

(Plaut., *Aul.* 368)

*superi incenati sunt et cenati inferi*

In this example, *incenati* means not only that they did not even start eating their dinner, but also that they did not receive any dinner. In the case of *incenatus*, since there is no other situation possible, the relation between *cenatus* and *incenatus* is of contradiction.

C2B. However, when the verb expresses a resultative meaning, the scope is exclusively over the result, not over the activity expressed by the verb. For instance, *incoctus* does not properly mean ‘raw’, but ‘not completely, perfectly cooked, undercooked’, as is clearly shown in the following instance:

(Plaut. *Pers.* 93)

*collyrae facite ut madeant et colyphia, ne mihi incocta detis (syn. crudae).*

In cases as the one illustrated by the verb *coquere*, it turns out to be difficult to decide whether the relation between the two forms of the pair is contrariety or contradiction. However, since the meaning is gradable, and therefore scalar, it has to be interpreted as a case of contrariety. In this case “the idea that the relevant distinction to work with in the domain of negation is the distinction between low and wide scopal negative markers rather than between morphological and syntactic negation” (De Clercq 2021: 12) turns out to function perfectly.

For the time being, the conclusions that can be drawn are that:

- a. whenever the scope of negation is on the stem, as in C2A: *IN* + STEM + *to-*,<sup>20</sup> the relation between the two members of the pair is of contradiction;
- b. whenever it is on the notion of accomplishment or telicity, as in C2B: *IN* + stem + *TO-*, expressed by the verbal form usually coded by the past participle, the relation is of contrariety.

## 6 Provisional conclusions

Revisiting the etymology of Lat. *uirgō* has been the occasion to revise the issue of how Latin expresses negation not by means of verb, but by means of adjectives and

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<sup>20</sup> The capital letters indicate the scope of negation.

nouns, and the way it codifies it. This contribution is meant just as a starting point for more detailed investigations.

For each of the prefixes used to encode negation on adjectives and nouns, I have tried to envisage their possibly original value. One of the consequences of the present research is that, if contrariety and contradiction are quite easy to identify, privation as a variety of negation is much more complex and should be split up in different, subtler conceptualizations. Notions like presupposition of existence, for instance, never taken into account before, seem to represent a promising way to explain why a certain prefix is used instead of another to encode negation and why some forms have the meaning and value they possess.

Finally, if our reflections and proposals are correct, Garnier's etymology of Lat. *uirgō*, no matter how brilliant and seducing, turns out to be too weak to be accepted.

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