CHAPTER I

Introduction

In this chapter I set out some aims and findings of the work, define some terms, and state some of the questions that will be addressed later. The types of evidence that will be used are described. I will also comment on methodology, but that will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. Dialectal variation in other languages has been extensively investigated in recent years (and earlier as well), and I consider here the issues that have emerged in dialect studies and relate them to the Roman world. Most of these issues will come up later.

I AIMS, METHODS AND FINDINGS

The attentive reader of Latin texts written between 200 BC and AD 600, the period to be covered here, will probably have a sense that the language changes in time, but no sense that texts could be assigned a place of composition on linguistic evidence alone. There have even been those who have taken the texts at their face value and argued that the language was a unity which did not begin to develop regional variations until the medieval or proto-Romance period (see also below, XI.1).[1] But if so it is surely paradoxical that Latin should have spawned a diversity of Romance

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[1] For a general discussion of the 'thèse unitaire', see Väänänen (1983: 486–90); also the remarks of Gaeng (1984: 7 n. 11) and Banniard (1992: 24–32). The thesis is associated particularly with Muller (1929), who stressed the sameness of later Latin and argued for a sudden radical change in the eighth century. See e.g. Muller (1929: viii): 'in the fourth quarter of the eighth century, . . . , a rather sudden shifting of the linguistic forces takes place: the new speech is born. And now, whatever heterogeneous, outworn, unsuitable material has been left, is rapidly eliminated. The new being rejects it according to its instinctive standard'; also (1929: 7): 'Starting from the general opinion that there was a Koinê or Vulgar Latin spoken about the same everywhere so that inhabitants of the Roman empire understood each other, it is my purpose to endeavor to demonstrate that the cessation of the existence of that Koinê is not at all coincident with the fall of the Roman empire, or directly connected with it; that this Vulgar Latin common to Western Romania continued its existence up to and in the VIIIth century; that the rise of dialects is due to positive and not to negative causes, viz: the social conditions prevalent in the West after the VIIIth century.' Muller was well aware of some of the evidence for earlier variations by region (see his Introduction), but he played down its significance and insisted

languages and dialects and yet had no regional varieties itself. The paradox
has long puzzled scholars. The unitarian argument is at variance with all
that is known about the behaviour of geographically widespread languages
over time.[2] It seems inconceivable that the language spoken by the Latini
for many centuries before the appearance of the earliest literary texts in the
third century BC should not have acquired regional varieties. Quite apart
from the length of the period during which Latin was transmitted only
in spoken form, with no possibility of the standardisation that may come
with literacy and schools, and quite apart from the scattered character of
Latin-speaking communities, the Latins were in contact with speakers of
other languages, such as Greek, Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian, Marsian and
Faliscan, and these contacts had the potential to influence Latin in different
regions.

Several main arguments concerning the regional diversity of Latin will
be gradually advanced in the book.

First, whatever the impression given by most texts, there was indeed
regional variation in Latin, not only in the late Empire but even in the
Republic. Already in the last centuries BC in literary texts we find a con-
cept of regional variation well developed (see Chapter III), along with
a view that the Latin of Rome had prestige whereas the Latin of non-
Romans such as rustics might even be comical. There were literary genres
during this period (comedy and Atellan farce: see III.3, 6.1) using linguistic
means to portray certain stage characters as outsiders to Rome. Evidence
for usages distinctive of particular regions is available throughout recorded
Latin.

Second, such variation shows up in different parts of the language system,
most notably in the lexicon but also in phonology and to a limited extent

on a sudden violent change in about the eighth century. A useful discussion of the question is to be
found in B. Löfstedt (1961: 207–13), who stresses the failure of scholars to locate texts geographically
with linguistic evidence, and suggests that late Latin across the provinces was a sort of koine (210;
see also below, 6). For another discussion of the paradox of the unity of (written) Latin alongside the
diversity of the Romance languages, see B. Löfstedt ([1973] 2000: 101–5). In this second discussion
Löfstedt is not entirely pessimistic about the possibility of finding regional variations in written texts.
He writes ([1973] 2000: 105) of the need to refine methods of using written texts as evidence for
speech, and of the need for more synchronic study of late Latin texts. On early theories concerning
the relationship between Latin and Romance see also Meier (1996: 62). For a recent brief overview
of the problem of the regional diversification of Latin see Herman (1996: 49, 56–8).

[2] As Herman ([1985a] 1990: 67) puts it, faced with a lack of evidence in texts for the regional
diversification of the language one can draw one of two conclusions. Either Latin was a unity during
the Roman period, or the texts give a false impression. Only the second conclusion is tenable, as I
hope this book will make clear. There is a wide-ranging review of the state of the question by Poccetti
(2004), who brings out the diversity of the language and touches on many of the themes of this
chapter (and other parts of the book).

in morphology. Finding localised syntactic variation has proved far more problematic (see below, 2 and XI.5.3).

Third, the best evidence for variation is found not in the inscriptions that have traditionally been investigated for this purpose, but in literary *testimonia*, non-epigraphic documentary corpora and even some literary texts. I will return shortly to the types of evidence that will be used in the book.

Fourth, the diversification of the language cannot be attributed to a single factor but had multiple causes. These will emerge chapter by chapter and will be summarised at the end of several chapters. In the concluding chapter I will offer an overview of the causation of regional variety (XI.4) and will comment on the relationship between Latin and the Romance languages.

Since Latin developed into the Romance languages,[3] these will inevitably often come up. Sometimes it is possible to find a continuity between an early regionalism and the geographical distribution of its reflexes in Romance (see XI.3.5), but more often than not localised usages in the Latin period are simply not relevant to the Romance languages. In the expanses of the Roman Empire regionalisms came and went under diverse influences, or spread in time from their place of origin, such that a usage confined to an area in, say, the early Empire need not have been so a millennium later. I will not restrict myself merely to anticipations in Latin of Romance features. A primary aim of the book will be to present the evidence for variety region by region. The focus will be on regions in which Latin took root and had native speakers, most notably Italy, Spain, Africa, Gaul and Britain. The eastern provinces are of less significance in a study of this type (see below, 13). In much of the eastern Roman Empire Greek was the main language used by the Romans, and the scanty remains of Latin (for the most part inscriptions on stone, and also some papyri and ostraca) were left either by incomers from the west, or by learners of Latin as a second language, as distinct from Latin-speaking populations native to the region. The western provinces by contrast produced an abundance of literary texts as well as non-literary writing.

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[3] The Romance languages have been called a linguistic consequence of the Roman Empire (Elcock 1960: 17). They are the languages that developed directly out of Latin in the former provinces of the Roman Empire. For an overview see e.g. Harris (1988). The main branches are Ibero-Romance (Spanish [i.e. Castilian], Portuguese, Catalan), Gallo-Romance (French, Occitan, Franco-Provençal), Italo-Romance (standard Italian and the Italian dialects), Sardinian, Rheto-Romance (Romance forms spoken in the eastern part of Switzerland and north-eastern Italy) and Balkan Romance (mainly Rumanian, or Daco-Rumanian, since it derives from the Latin of the province of Dacia). The location of the main Romance dialects that will come up in this book can be seen in maps 4–6.

Accounts of the diversification of Latin have often taken the form of models not necessarily based on much evidence from Latin itself.[4] This book probably collects more evidence than has ever been assembled by those discussing the regional variety of the language. The presentation of the Latin evidence has been my primary aim, and only after that have I explicitly addressed general issues, though I would contend that even a single item of evidence may have wider implications that are obvious at once. I have stressed that point constantly as the evidence is set out. It is not enough merely to 'collect' evidence. Evidence is easily misrepresented or misused, and I have tried to assess the reliability and relevance of every single item discussed.

I will be dealing in this book with five categories of evidence. First, there are inscriptions of the early period, Latin, Italic (where appropriate) or of mixed character. The inscriptions of *CIL* I^2 have sometimes been used to suggest dialect differences between the Latin of Rome and that of various areas outside Rome, such as Latium and Campania. I find methodological shortcomings in some of the discussions of this kind. I will review many of the claims that have been made and attempt to determine what substance they may have (Chapter II). Since Oscan has often been asserted to have played a part in the differentiation of the Romance languages (see VI.4), I will consider the question whether there is evidence for an Oscanised form of Latin that might have left its mark at a much later date.

Second, subliterary Latin written on materials other than stone, such as curse tablets, usually on lead, and writing tablets on wood, papyri and ostraca, have been turning up in recent decades in such places as Britain, Egypt, Africa and Gaul. These documents tend to be the work of poorly educated writers, and are full of phonetic spellings and other non-standard features rooted in ordinary speech. They do, it will be suggested, provide some information about regional varieties of Latin. The most important corpora are the ostraca of Bu Njem and the Albertini tablets, both from Africa, curse tablets from Britain, and the graffiti of La Graufesenque in Gaul. I will deal with the first two corpora at VIII.6 and VIII.7, the first three corpora together in Chapter X, and the texts from La Graufesenque at V.2.

Third, *testimonia* abound in literature offering information about regional varieties. Literary authors sometimes comment on this or that usage as current in a particular town or region. There is a long tradition, not least in Romance philology, of noting such evidence, but a comprehensive

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[4] Even the admirable recent discussion by Stefenelli (1996) contains little evidence.

collection of data is lacking. That will be provided in Chapters III (on the republican *testimonia*) and IV (on the imperial). This material brings out changing views of regional diversity (see XI.2). There is often a rhetoric to ancient observations, and such evidence cannot be used uncritically. In a recent book on regional variation in contemporary British English based on the BBC's nationwide *Voices* survey it is remarked (Elmes 2005: 97–8) that people in the regions today like to claim words as their own region-alisms when in reality such terms may be scattered much more widely, even across the whole country.[5] This is an observation that should be kept in mind as one assesses ancient *testimonia*. Communications were poor in the ancient world, and there is no necessary reason why someone asserting the regional character of a usage should have had any knowledge of linguistic practices much beyond his own *patria*. Nevertheless various writers moved about a lot and seem to have been reliable observers of ordinary speech. The accuracy of some ancient comments can be confirmed from other evidence (cf. III.1). Even an inaccurate remark may have a certain interest, as reveal-ing for example a concept that the language varied geographically in certain ways.

Fourth, there are later literary texts. Can such works ever be placed geographically on internal linguistic evidence alone? A secondary aim of the book will be to address this question. After the chapters referred to above about explicit *testimonia* I will turn to implicit evidence (Chapters V–IX), by which I mean evidence embedded without comment in a text that might give a pointer to its provenance. There has been widespread pessimism about the possibility of extracting such evidence from literary texts, which by their very nature are written in versions of a literary standard (for this term see below, 4), and standard varieties of a language by definition obscure local dialects. Some often cited pages of E. Löfstedt's *Late Latin* (1959: 42–50) are an eloquent expression of this pessimism (see below, V.1).[6] I will consider the question what features a usage must have if it is to play a part in locating a text geographically (see V.7.2), and will present some case studies of texts along with discussions of methodology. It will be argued that even as early as the fourth century there are texts (or parts of texts) which can be given a place of composition from an examination of their language.

Finally, there are the vast numbers of inscriptions of the Roman Empire, published mainly in the volumes of *CIL*. A chapter (X) will be devoted to the

[5] Elmes repeats the point from time to time (2005: 113, 115).
[6] See also B. Löfstedt (1961: 208).

problems of using the spellings and misspellings found in inscriptions from different parts of the Empire as possible indications of the diversification of the language. There is no reason in principle why a study of misspellings should not reveal signs of dialectalisation. A misspelling may be phonetic, and betray a feature of a local dialect. Consider, for example, the following trade card of Peter Lynch, cabinet-maker, of Cork, dated 1890:

PETER LYNCH Bridewell Lane Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer (sine of the Mahogny Bedsted) Humbly takes lave to petition the patronage of the auristocricy and public in particlar (who dont want to waist their mones) in regard of the 1st quality of his work in the abuv line. P. Lynche defies compution for cheapness and dacent tratement over and abuv any other workshop in Cork.[7]

Here the spellings underlined represent a recognisable feature of the southern Irish vowel system. It is not, however, in the nature of Latin inscriptions that they throw up misspellings confined to particular regions. The same banal misspellings turn up in varying degrees right across the Empire. Many such misspellings are indeed phonetically determined, but the problem is that they are widespread and do not serve to differentiate one region from another. Herman (in various papers), Gaeng (1968), Barbarino (1978) and others have sought to refine the unpromising data by establishing that certain errors, though found all over the Empire, are of unequal frequency in various places. Detailed statistical tables have been compiled showing the incidence of particular misspellings in different parts of the Empire. If misspelling X is common in one place but rare in another the assumption is made that the underlying linguistic change was more advanced in the first place than in the second. I am not the first to find this assumption unsatisfactory. Schmitt (1974b: 42), for example, commenting on Herman's (and Gaeng's) approach to the evidence of misspellings in inscriptions, remarks:

Il est évident que la fréquence des phénomènes est due avant tout au niveau économique de chaque région . . . et que ces phénomènes ne reflètent le caractère d'un parler que d'une façon très limitée.

The degree of spelling correctness or, conversely, the degree of error in a corpus of inscriptions may reflect the educational level of those who composed the inscriptions that happen to survive. If an error occurs 30 per cent of the time in a corpus from one region but only 10 per cent of the time in a corpus from another, we cannot safely conclude that thirty speakers out of every hundred in the first place had adopted a new pronunciation,

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[7] For this text see The Knight of Glin, 'Dublin directories and trade labels', *Furniture History* 21 (1985), 260.

but only ten out of every hundred in the second. Even bad spellers do not spell phonetically all the time. The variation in the frequency of the error would be consistent with a conclusion that in both places a phonetic change was widespread, but that those responsible for the second corpus were of higher cultural level than those responsible for the first, and better able to avoid phonetic spellings. There would not necessarily be any difference in the speech of the two regions. In Chapter X I will not review a wide range of spellings but will consider the methodology of extracting regional variations from inscriptions. Some signs of regional variation will emerge from the data. However, it remains true that, of the evidence that might be called on in investigating the regional diversity of Latin, inscriptions, with their uniformity right across the Empire, are the weakest.[8] Indeed, if inscriptions are all that we have to go on for a region (and one thinks, for example, of the Balkans), the search for localised features is futile. There is no point, for example, in attempting to find anticipations of Rumanian in the Latin record. Moreover in this section I have merely touched on the difficulties of inscriptional evidence; more will be said in Chapter X.

It was implied above that regional variations in Latin do not necessarily correspond to those found in the Romance languages. It is probably true to say that in the study of the regional diversification of Latin the running has been made by those looking backwards from the Romance languages, as distinct from those who have scoured the remains of Latin itself for regional variations in the period from, say, the third century BC to the sixth century AD. I will often draw on Romance philology (and not least on the etymological dictionaries of Meyer-Lübke, von Wartburg and Corominas, and on the unfinished *LEI*), but will be focusing mainly on the Latin evidence itself, and writing from the perspective of a Latinist. Not that Latinists have neglected the question whether Latin had regional forms. Some distinguished scholars have written on the subject. E. Löfstedt, for example, devoted a judicious chapter (III) to 'local variation in Latin' in *Late Latin* (1959). Väänänen (1987) included a chapter on 'la controverse des variations régionales' (X) in his book on the *Peregrinatio Aetheriae*, and also surveyed (1983) the main theories that have been put forward to explain the regional diversification of Latin and the Romance languages. Many of the papers in the collected works of Herman (1990) deal with the Latin of the provinces, particularly through inscriptions. There was a keen interest in the subject at the end of the nineteenth century, some of it inspired by an obsession of the time with alleged peculiarities of African Latin (*Africitas*).

[8] See already Kroll (1897: 573) on the inadequacy of inscriptions.

All three of the scholars just named were concerned with the later period, but it has often been argued (with good reason) that even in the early Republic Latin was not a unity. The linguistic diversity of early Italy, the consequent contact between speakers of Latin and of other languages (not all of them Indo-European), and the fluidity of spelling at a time when grammarians hardly existed to impose a standardised orthography, are all factors that have encouraged the search for regional variation in early Latin, and particularly for variations between the Latin of the city of Rome and that of rural areas.

What is attempted in this book is a systematic account of the whole field, from the earliest period to late antiquity, dealing with the Latin evidence itself rather than the theories that have been advanced from a Romance perspective, and with the methodological problems raised by the interpretation of that evidence. I will not go beyond about AD 600 into the medieval period. The regional diversification of medieval Latin is a subject in its own right, with its own special problems, which I leave to others.

2 SOME DEFINITIONS: 'DIALECT' AND 'ACCENT'

Any book with a title like that of the present one is bound to create the expectation that it is about 'Latin dialects', just as a book about the regional diversity of Greek would be expected to be about Greek dialects. I largely avoid the word 'dialect' in the book, except in the collocation discussed in the next section. I must say something at the start about conventional views of the term, and also about my reluctance to use it. This reluctance will be further explained in the final chapter (XI.5.2). Overlapping with 'dialect' is 'accent', and that is a term which I freely use. I first distinguish between 'dialect' and 'accent'.

'Dialect' has been given many senses.[9] Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill (2005: 1) employ the term to refer to 'a language variety which is used in a geographically limited part of a language area in which it is "roofed" by a structurally related standard variety; a dialect typically displays structural peculiarities in several language components'. They go on to refer to 'accent' as embracing 'phonetic features'. This definition of dialect might be applied, for example, to English, but there is no reason why there should always be a 'roofing' standard variety (see further Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill 2005: 30–1). Davies ([1987] 2002: 156) points out that when the ancient Greek

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[9] On this point see Berrato (2005: 82). For some interesting remarks on the problems of definition see Davies ([1987] 2002: 154 with n. 3, 155).

dialects flourished, 'there does not seem to have been a standard language of which those dialects could be dialects. Attic, Boeotian, etc. had equal status.'[10] The koine was a later development. Berrato (2005: 82–3) notes that the Italian dialects, which he calls 'primary', 'all came into being at the same time through the transformation of Latin'. It was only later that one of them, the Florentine dialect, became the national language.

Once there is a standard variety (or 'national language') the way is open for the formation of regional varieties of that standard, largely through contact between the primary dialects and the standard (see further below, 4, 7). Regional forms of the standard language might be called 'secondary' dialects.[11] Such regional variants, according to Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill (2005: 25), 'can result from deliberate, but only partly successful, attempts by dialect speakers at learning the standard variety'. The BBC *Voices* survey referred to above has repeatedly observed dialect speakers modifying their speech in the direction of the standard.[12] But probably more common, at least in present-day Europe, 'is the situation in which the standard picks out (regional) dialect features, often of a phonetic nature' (Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill 2005: 25). A case in point in Britain is the rise of 'Estuary English', 'which contains much London regional phonology combined with standard morphology and syntax' (Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill 2005: 26) (see below, 7).

Chambers and Trudgill (1980: 5) distinguish between 'accent' and 'dialect' as follows:

'Accent' refers to the way in which a speaker pronounces, and therefore refers to a variety which is phonetically and/or phonologically different from other varieties. 'Dialect', on the other hand, refers to varieties which are grammatically (and perhaps lexically) as well as phonologically different from other varieties.

This definition of dialect is a slightly more specific version of that given by Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill (see above). Both accounts agree that accent refers to the phonetic or phonological features of a dialect, and that dialect embraces a variety of features, but Hinskens, Auer and Kerswill have preferred to leave unspecified what those features might include. Wells (1982: 1), dealing exclusively with English, is along much the same lines:

[10] Davies does however go on to suggest that the matter was not quite so straightforward. She argues convincingly that, 'even though there was no standard language in Greece before the koine, an abstract notion of Greek as a common language which subsumed the dialects was present among Greek speakers at a relatively early stage, i.e. from the fifth century B.C. onwards' (156; see also 168).

[11] Berrato (2005: 82–3) refers to primary, secondary and tertiary dialects, without making himself entirely clear.

[12] See Elmes (2005: 8–9, 37, 41, 66), and below, 7.

By the term 'accent' . . . I mean a pattern of pronunciation used by a speaker for whom English is the native language or, more generally, by the community or social grouping to which he or she belongs. More specifically, I refer to the use of particular vowel or consonant sounds and particular rhythmic, intonational, and other prosodic features; to the syntagmatic (structural) and paradigmatic (systemic) interrelationships between these, and to the more abstract (phonological) representations which can be seen as underlying the actual (phonetic) articulations, together with the rules which relate the one to the other.

Wells (1982: 3) states that he will avoid the term 'dialect' because it causes confusion, and use the term 'variety' instead. I share his reservations about 'dialect' (see the end of this section, and XI.5.2), but it has to be said that the distinction which he makes between 'variety' and 'accent' is very similar to that made in the sources quoted above between 'dialect' and 'accent':

A difference between varieties . . . may involve any or all of syntax, morphology, lexicon, and pronunciation . . . A difference of **accent** . . . is a difference between varieties of General English which involves only pronunciation.

If we are to identify regional variations in Latin, it would not do to insist that 'grammatical' variations (see the definition of Chambers and Trudgill) are a necessary marker of different varieties. There are diachronic variations in Latin syntax, and social variations determined mainly by the educational level of the writer, but localised syntactic variations are hardly to be found in the record (see XI.5.3), and for a good reason. In so far as regional varieties of Latin have shown up in writing, they represent for the most part momentary regionalisations of the standard language, with the same standard syntax, or the same social/educational deviations from that standard, found across all the areas in which Latin was written (see below, 4). In written texts it is lexical variation from place to place that is most obvious, whereas the significance of the lexicon is downgraded in the definition of dialect quoted above from Chambers and Trudgill.[13]

Some of the metalinguistic evidence (by which I mean comments in ancient writers about aspects of language) used in this book has to do with accent, a term which I will take to refer to just one aspect of a dialect, namely its phonetics and phonology. Dialects, we have just seen, are typically said to have other features as well, morphological, syntactic and lexical, and I will aim to go beyond accent as far as the evidence allows. Latin commentators were interested in the lexical peculiarities of regional speech as well as accent, but they do not offer a comprehensive view of all the features of the speech of any one place (on the meaning of 'place' see below, 9).

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[13] On the limitations of lexical evidence see also Trudgill (2004: 10).