Latin oboedio: between phonological explanation and diastatic variation

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Abstract

If we accept the origin of oboedio as a compound of ob and audio, the result is completely clear from the semantic point of view but unexpected from the phonological one. In fact, the diphthong oe is not justified as a result of reduction (it should be *obūdio, like inclūdo and preclūdo from claudio, and defrūdo from fraudo, etc.) or of other changes. The phonological hypothesis is mostly founded on reconstruction of the ancient stages of audio, probably from *auizdiō (> *obouizdiō > *oboizdiō > oboedio). Instead, a second explanation considers oboedio a hypercorrected form of an original that has not survived: *obūdio.

This paper aims to analyse these reconstructions and selects the only one that would seem to yield effective results. Using evidence from a sociolinguistic perspective, it explains that oboedio contains a form of hypercorrection, probably invented by middle-class speakers, involving the archaizing and ennobling power of the diphthong oe, which the overall conservatism of Latinity, and in particular of some institutions and uses, (law and religion) may have kept alive.

Keywords: Latin oboedio and audio, etymology, phonological reconstructions, diachronic sociolinguistics, typological and cognitive patterns.

1. The purpose and the ‘embarrassant’ problem of the diphthong oe

The Latin verb oboedio is evidently a compound of ob plus audio. However, it should not contain the diphthong oe because it should be *obūdio as a result of reduction, in the manner of claudio > inclūdo, preclūdo, exclūdo, oclūdo, etc., causa, causa > recūso, accūso, etc., and fraudo > *frūdo, lavo > -lūo, -lувium, pavio > depūvio (see Niedermann, 1906: 30-31; Palmer,
1954: 220; Godel, 1961: 57-58; Meiser, 1998: § 53.4)\(^3\), or it should have kept the original diphthong \(au\).

In fact, as we know, there are other compounds of \(audio\) like \(exaudio\), \(in(d)audio\) and \(subaudio\)\(^4\) where the reduction does not have any effect. It is reasonable to agree with Meier-Brügger (1980: 288) that «Der Diphthong \(au\) des Hintergliedes unterliegt keiner Vokalschwächung und weist auf späte Entstehung bzw. junge Rekompensation dieser Komposita. Älteren Datums kann einzig oboedīre sein». If a recomposition was possible for the other compounds of \(audio\), it may be argued that \(oboedio\) was an archaic verb, although it has existed since Plautus.

Two ways to solve this «embarrassant» (Vendryes, 1902: 284) issue have been proposed. The first one was a phonological explanation proposed by scholars like Schulze (1887: 251), Solmsen (1894: 150-151), Szemerényi (1960: 240-245) and Meier-Brügger (1980). Their results converged in influential handbooks and dictionaries such as WH, Sommer (1948), Leumann et al. (1977), Meiser (1998) and De Vaan (2008). The hypothesis is mostly founded on reconstruction of the ancient stages of \(audio\), probably from \(∗aṷizdīō\) (cf. Greek \(θέω\) and \(αἰσθάνομαι\) “perceive”) and the changes \(ob- ∗aṷizdīō > *obo điểm o > oboidiō > oboedio\) (except for Szemerényi, who considered a labial dissimilation from \(-au- > -ou-\) and then \(-oi-\) possible).

\(^3\) Probably \(au > eu > ou > ū\) (Niedermann, 1906: 40-41). According to E.M., s.v. \(laus\), the compounds \(adlaudo\), \(conlaudo\), \(dilaudo\), \(elaudo\), from \(laudo\), could have kept the radical \(a\) in order to avoid confusion with the \(lūdo\) group. Despite this, several verbs do not present any reduction from \(au\) to \(u\).

\(^4\) \(Subaudio\) appears for the first time in Seneca, but the majority of attestations are in the Vergilian comments by Servius, where it means “to imply (a word omitted)”, as if the meaning of the prefix sub- “secretly” (see \(subaudio\) in Apul. met. 5.19 ed. Zimmermann, 2012: sed tantum nocturnis subaudīs subaudīn uocibus and the verb \(subausculto\) “listen to secretly”) has shifted from the subject (“hear secretly”) to the object (“hear something hidden, that is not explicit”). In this case, attention should be drawn to the polysemic value of \(subaudio\), because it stands between the hearing sphere and the cognitive one (\(subaudio\) as “to imply (a word omitted)” is a synonym of \(intellego\)). See the frequent places where \(subaudio\) and \(intellego\) are close and interchangeable, e.g. Serv. Aen. 1.76.1 edd. Rand et al., 1946 Subaudīs "dixit", quod ex posterioribus intellegitur, ut supra notavimus. Furthermore, there is \(praesudio\) “hear in advance”, a late compound with a temporal-value prefix, in Digest (1.16.6 pr. 2 edd. Mommsen and Krüger, 1868-1870: praesaudītus custodīus) and in Cassiodorus (hist. 9.14 edd. Jacob and Hanslik, 1952: neque praecaudīvīmus omnīno). Finally, \(inaudio\) is a very rare verb (16 records in PHI\#5.3. See later). It is only attested in early, and probably strictly informal (all the four cases in Cicero are from Epistulae), Latin (cf. García-Hernández, 1977: 132). \(Inaudio\) also has the form \(indaudio\) (9 records in PHI\#5.3, 7 in Plautus). Cf. Lindsay (1894: 178) on the syncope due to the ancient protosyllabic stress: «The same shortening may have caused that confusion of the old preposition \(indo\) (\(en\)\) with the preposition in (en) \(ind(ō)gredior\) etc. becoming by syncope identical with \(ingredior\) which led to the disuse of \(indo\) and the adoption of \(in\) in its place. Thus \(indaudio\) (Pl.) was completely ousted by \(inaudio\) by the time of Terence, and in the classical period compounds with \(indo\) are rare, only being found as archaisms in poetry, e.g. \(induperator\) Juv.».
The other solution is based on a spelling and diastratic hypothesis (Havel, 1881: 410; Wackernagel, 1893: 55; Vendyres, 1902: 284; Burger, 1928: 40; Palmer, 1954: 270-271). As will be demonstrated, the phonological approach does not seem to have yielded effective results so far. The goal here is to analyse and discuss every reconstruction from every perspective that it is possible to adopt: those from lexicology in cognitive semantics, etymological good praxis and hypothetical sociolinguistic reconstruction. At the end, I will try to add new evidence to explain oboedio from a sociolinguistic point of view.

In fact, the approach used in this research is a synthesis of lexicological data from historical linguistics, in particular of the contribution of etymology (dictionaries and specific studies) and of epigraphy, cognitive interpretations of semantic patterns (see the link between hearing perception and the semantic field of obedience), typological structures (see Greek ὑπακούω “listen to”, “obey” from ἁκούω “hear”, and German gehorchen “obey” from hören “hear”), and diachronic sociolinguistics, which is the explanatory key to solving the oboedio question.

The paper is organised as follows. First I outline the formal (§ 2.1) and semantic features (§ 2.2) of Latin oboedio in order to define the identity of this verb. Then, I review the phonological (§ 3) and sociolinguistic (§ 4) explanations, and from there I draw some conclusions (§ 5).

2. Oboedio – ID card

2.1. Formal features: oboedio, ob + audio

Over the years, the only scholar not to accept the origin from audio has been Pisani (1948: 17; 1968: 68-69). In his opinion, the diphthong oe is clear if we consider another initial root word, i.e. oboedio as *ob-boedio, where *boed- comes from *bheidb- and is comparable with Latin fido, fides, foedus, Greek πείθω “to obey”, Russian убеди́ть, “to persuade”, Slave běda, “necessity”, Albanian bë, “oath” (cf. besë “faith, promise, pact”). However, this solution presents many difficulties both at the formal and the semantic levels.

From a formal point of view, it is useful to note the late form obaudio as a proof of a link between oboedio and audio, at least in terms of speaker perception (see also Aug. serm. 111 ed. Carrozzi, 1983; multi auditis et pauci oboeditis; Isid. or. 10.196 ed. Lindsay, 1911: oboediens ab aure, eo quod audiat imperantem. See below). Obaudio is attested in Apuleius (met. 3.15 ed. Zimmerman, 2012), Tertullian (Marc. 2.2.7 ed. Moreschini, 1972) and in the
Vulgata (ed. 1979), and Festus wrote: oboedire obaudire (ed. Lindsay, 1913). Regarding Christian and late texts, it is possible to consider the direct influence of Greek ὑπακούω “obey” (from ἀκούω “hear”), as can be seen in a passage from Augustine, who quotes the Itala version and where the Hippo bishop deprecates the over-frequent use in Latin of Greek syntactic structures such as the genitive object of a perception verb (Graeca magis locutio est): et non obaudierunt vocis meae, which corresponds to οὖχ ὑπάκουσιν τῆς φωνῆς μου (locut. hept. 7.9. edd. Zycha and Tempsky, 1894; cf. Coleman, 1975: 142 and Löfstedt, 1959: 90). Although in that period the influence of Greek was deep and evident in Latin, and the form obaudio cannot be considered proof of the certain origin of oboedio from audio (we could also judge this form to be folk etymology), in my opinion, obaudio is an etymological and analogical form with respect to the other compounds of audio (exaudio, in(d)audio, subaudio, etc.).

2.2. Semantic features: oboedio as ‘auditory obedience’

The connection between audio and oboedio, which, as said, was transparent for late Latin speakers, can be found throughout literary Latinity:

(1) a. [Pa.] Nunc tu ausculta mi, Pleusicles. [Pl.] Tibi sum oboediens. (Pl. mil. 805-806 ed. Lindsay, 1904-1905)
   [Pa.] “Now, you listen to me, Pleusicles!” [Pl.] “I obey you!”

b. Ut ad uerba nobis oboediant. (Cic. Caec. 52 ed. Clark, 1905-1911)
   “To obey our words.”

   “Many people hear and few obey.”

d. Oboediens ab aure, eo quod audiat imperantem. (Isid. or. 10.196 ed. Lindsay, 1911)
   “Oboediens comes from ‘ear’ (aure), because you listen to who orders.”

If we expand our point of view to a perspective capable of joining typological and historical data with a concrete cognitive interpretation, we

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5 The correspondence between Latin oboedio and Greek ὑπακούω is essentially typological, not a literal translation, nor due to a common etymological origin. Such a typological resemblance can sufficiently reinforce a reciprocal link between two words coming from two different languages, in particular in a bilingual environment like Late Antiquity.

6 The genitive vocis meae was eliminated in the Vulgata text.
can find the bonds that tie the two semantic areas in question: hearing and obedience. In Sweetser (1990: 41-43), the listener perspective is indicated by two semantic features: [attention] and [receptivity]. An internal reception often yields understanding, i.e. from a perception dimension to a cognitive one through a well-known metaphorical and metonymic shift. In many perception verbs in various (in time, space and phylogeny) languages, receptivity is in contact with obedience, as we can see from Table 1 by Viberg, by way of example, referring to English (1983: 157-158):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Cognition</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hear</td>
<td>“know”, “understand”</td>
<td>“meet”, “obey”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Extended meanings of verbs of hearing perception.

How can we explain these passages? What Viberg calls ‘social meaning’ (in a hearing perception verb such as meet or obey) is a communicative dimension where verbal relationships between human speakers occur. The characteristic feature of receptivity in hearing perception is an active will to pay attention. This will can also be conceived as a disposition to obedience because when we give an order or a prescription with words and speech the listener's attention grows. In this sense, as Ibarretxe-Antuñano notices (1999: 65), phylogenetically different languages present similar extended meanings. Some examples of hearing verbs that mean “obey” are:

(2) a. Italian: Ti ho detto che devi ascoltare tua madre.
   b. English: I told you to listen to your mother.
   c. Spanish: Te he dicho que escuches a tu madre.
   d. Basque: Seme batak ez eukan entzunik.
   “One of the sons was not obedient.”

In all these cases, the hearing perception verb expresses what Viberg names ‘activity’, i.e. the intentional will to perceive (see Viberg, 1983; 2001). In Danish lystre “to obey” has lost its original meaning linked to hearing: cf. English listen, German lauchen, Swedish lyssna. In Sanskrit śrūṣṭi- “obedience” comes from śru- “hear” (see also Clackson, 2007: 52).

In terms of word formation, we have already observed that Greek ὑπακουῶ, “to listen to, to obey”, comes from ἁκοῦω “to hear”, and German gehorchen “to obey”, and Geborsam “obedience” comes from horen “to listen to”.

This semantic pattern also occurs in Latin, as Nonius reminds us: *auscultare est obsequi* (370.9 L) “listen means obey”. Auditory obedience in Latin is expressed by specific structures that involve hearing perception verbs:

(3) *ausculto* + dative “to heed”, “to obey”; e.g.:
   a. *Cui iussus siet, auscultet.* (Cato agr. 5.3.2 ed. Mazzarino, 1982)
      “He must pay heed to anyone to whom he has been bidden to listen.”
      (trans. Hooper)
   b. *[Pa.]* Nunc tu ausculta mi, Pleusicles. *[Pl.]* Tibi sum obediens.
      (Pl. mil. 805-806 ed. Lindsay, 1904-1905)
      (see above)

(4) *dicto audiens sum*, “to obey” (until 1st century A.D.); e.g.:
   a. *Dominoque dicto audiens sit.* (Cato agr. 142.1.5 ed. Mazzarino, 1982)
      “And obey the master.”
   b. *Ego sum Iovi dicto audiens, eius iussu nunc huc me adfero.*
      (Pl. Amph. 989 ed. Lindsay, 1904-1905)
      “I obey Jupiter, I’m here now on his orders.”

The semantic field of Latin obedience has been researched by García-Hernández (2001). From a structuralist point of view the semantic field is organized as follows:

(5) archilexeme: *pareo*
lexemes: *pareo, obtempero, obsequor, oboedio, obsecundo.*
classeme: dative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archilexeme</th>
<th>Communication dimension</th>
<th>Obedience modalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>pareo</em></td>
<td>- non-immediate: <em>(dicto) oboedio</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- immediate: <em>tibi ausculto, te audio</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- durative: <em>dicto audiens sum</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- moderation: <em>obtempero</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- pleasure: <em>obsequor</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- favour: <em>obsucundo</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. *The semantic field of Latin obedience in García-Hernández (2001: 752).*

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7 See Anscombe and Pierrot (1985) for the probable performative value of such phrases.
8 Such a periphrastic construction comes to be used quite seldom. In PHI Latin corpus (see next footnote), we find 52 occurrences of *dicto audiens sum* (Cato 1, Pl. 6, B. Afr. 2, Caes. 4, Cic. 12, Nep. 4, Varro 2, Liv. 9, Quint. 2, Apul. 1, Hyg. 1, Porph. 1, Iust. 5, Symm. 3), and only 6 of *dicto obediens sum* (Pl. 2, Acc. 1, Liv. 1, Gell. 1, Vulg. 1), with a more meaningful distribution in early and classical Latin. From the functional point of view, as already Marouzeau (1910: 3–4) noticed, the periphrasis shows a nominal value, comparable to *cupiens sum* + genitive (see Piras, 1989-1990: 73 ff., for a detailed discussion on the criteria to distinguish between nominal and verbal value in classical and late periphrastic constructions. See the relevant references on this topic in Amenta, 2003 and Bentain, 2010).
Besides the internal classification (non-immediate, immediate, dura-
tive) which concerns aspectuality and the Aktionsart categorization, what is
important to note is the consistency of the communication dimension and
the crucial role played by the hearing perception lexemes audio and ausculto.

If we calculate the distribution of obedience verbs in a Latin language
corpus such as PHI#5.3, we find that the communication dimension repre-
sented by oboedio, ausculto + dative and dicto audiens sum amounts to about
7% of the whole verb-obedience area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexemes</th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
<th>FQ. % in obedience field</th>
<th>FQ. % in total PHI Latin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pareo</td>
<td>3080</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>0.0422%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obsequor</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0.0055%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oboedio</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0.0028%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obtempero</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.0022%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ausculto + dat. dicto audiens sum</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0.0014%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3947</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.0540%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. The semantic field of Latin obedience verbs:
distribution in PHI#5.3 Latin corpus.

2.3. Formal and semantic features. Conclusions

oboedio turns out to be closely related to the auditory dimension both
formally and semantically: formally, for its indisputable derivation from au-
dio “to hear”, “to listen to”; semantically, because of the relationship between
hearing attention and receptivity to auditory obedience, as happens in many
languages.

The verbal-communication dimension also recurs in a particular sphere
of the Latin language, the legal and sacred one. If there is a special obedi-
ence in Latin strictly connected to hearing perception (oboedio, dicto audiens

9 PHI#5.3, or PHI Latin, is a Latin language corpus compiled by Packard Humanities Institute
of Los Altos, California. Created for CD-ROM but available online at http://latin.packhum.org/ since
September 2011, this corpus was collected between 1987 and 1991. It contains almost all the Latin
literary texts up to 200 A.D. plus some late authors like Servius, Porfrius, Zeno, Justinian and the
Vulgata. The whole corpus boasts 7.3 million words and contains an excellent choice of the best critical
ditions.
sum, auscultio + dative), namely a communicative act but linked to an order and duty situation, then it is possible to recall a verb like interdico “to forbid, prohibit, interdict”. Interdico is also etymologically linked to the verbal-communication dimension. It comes from dico “to say” (cf. the same formation of antara-murye “I interdict”, in the Gathas’ language of the Avesta) and, in addition to the question of the polysemy of communication verbs (verba dicendi, hearing verba sentiendi, etc.), evokes another important element, the performative value of words.

In general, oboedio is a low-frequency verb in Latin texts (fq. 0.0028% in Corpus PHI#5.3). Half of all its occurrences are in the Vulgata (about 70) due to the evident influence of the frequent Greek biblical verb ὑπακούω “to obey”. This may be the most important source for its recovery in the Romance languages during the Middle Ages10.

In particular, the Septuaginta influence causes an increase in perfectum forms in Latin oboedio, because before Jerome’s version oboedio was mostly infectum, but Greek ἀκούω did not present this constraint.

3. Phonological perspective

All the phonological explanations begin with the difficult etymology of audio. Two starting points are possible. The first is:

a. From ayzdijō, so that audio < *ayis + *d̪-ie/o- “to render manifest to hearing”; see Schulze (1888: 251); Solmsen (1894: 150-151); Meier-Brügger (1980).

*ayis- cf. Gk. ἀκούω and αἰσθάνομαι “to perceive” (ἀστεῖσ-, cf. Skt. āvih < ‘h eu-is- “clearly”), *au-s-i- derivative suffix in -s- and dual -i- > auris “ear”

*d̪- “to render” (facio, τίθημι) or *d- “to give” (do, δίδωμι) or resultativity. Cf. Gk. suffix -Θ-, Lat. condo, abdo, perdo?, reddo? etc.

As Meier-Brügger (1980: 288) notes, «Die Bedeutungsverengung von

10 According to this hypothesis, Italian literary texts, already in the 13th century (Uguccione da Lodi, Andrea da Grosseto, Giacomo da Lentini and Albertano. Cf. data in TLIO) recover the Latin verb in the following forms: obedire, obbedire, ubidire, abbidire and obbidire. The first cases show a more conservative form, i.e. closer to the Latin model, while those with -i- in the second syllable have probably been subjected to a metaphonetic process.
‘wahrnehmen’ zu ‘hören’ wäre speziell lat.», as happens in German *hell “bright”, but *hallen “to resound”.

The second starting point is:

b. From ausdiō, so that audio < *aus + *d/i-e/o- “to give/put ear”; see Bréal (1878: 408–412); Szemerényi (1960); Pisani (1968: 68-69).

*aus- root “ear” > auris “ear”
*di- “to render” (*facio, τίθημι) or *d- “to give” (*do, δίωμι) or resultativity. Cf. Gk. suffix -θ-, Lat. condio, abdo, perdo?, reddo? etc.

From a third conjugation verb, *ausdo, -ēre dropping the sibilant before the dental consonant (cf. *idem < *is-dem) would become audio with the addition of the -i- suffix (< -ye/yō), a typical formation process for a 4th conjugation verb (see Palmer, 1954: 267-268; Ernout, 1953: § 227 B), as vincio comes from vinco, condio from condo, and dormio from dormo. It is possible that in this process audio could have been conditioned by a special influence of sentio. From a typological and comparative point of view, see Persian goş dad “to give ear, listen to”.

Starting from *aṷizdiō (solution 1) implies explaining oboedio in these steps:

*ob-aṷizdiō > *obuṷizdiō > *oboizdiō > oboedio

where «the reduced *-a- in the second syllable was rounded and the following *w was lost before *a- could develop into /u/. The resulting diphthong /oi/ was protected by the following *z from monophthongization to ū or ē» (De Vaan, 2008 s.v. audio. Cf. Leumann et al., 1977 for the same sequence).

The most significant problem in this hypothesis is the elision of the semivowel ŭ. According to phonological handbooks and studies, it is possible to illustrate all the cases where a semivowel ŭ is elided in Latin (for a concise review, see Meiser, 1998: §67):

ŷ > 0/_[o, ū, u] probably 3rd century B.C.; e.g.: suodales > sodales, Gnaivod > Gnaeo, *sṳe-ventus > seorsus, *sʊsor/suors > soror, *olaĩum > oleum11, etc.

11 For oleum, Safarewicz (1969: § 49; 1974: 172, 182) considered a simpler shortening, according to the rule vocalis ante vocalem corripitur, from ei in é (*oleiuom > ēleum > oleum. Cf. also déus from déiuos), instead of a semivowel loss.
Francisco Giura

$y > 0/V_1 _V_1$ probably 4th century B.C; e.g.:

*pro-$\varpi$rsor* > prorsus, *la$\varpi$trina > latrina, *obl$\varpi$itus > oblitus,

*u$\varpi$it$\varpi$ > vita,

*di$\varpi$it$\varpi$tis > ditis

but au$\varpi$rus, seu$\varpi$rus, diu$\varpi$nus, lau$\varpi$tio, obliu$\varpi$scor, diu$\varpi$tiae, and ou$\varpi$um, nou$\varpi$us, sequor by analogy (gen. oui, noui, 2nd sg. sequitur).

Moreover, there are two changes which are attributed to different periods (see Vendryes, 1902: 284; Rix, 1966: 157): a change during the prehistoric period: -o-$\varpi$i-, -o-$\varpi$e-, -o-$\varpi$o- > -o-$\varpi$u- > -$\varpi$u- (e.g. *re$\varpi$rsor$\varpi$ > rursus, *no$\varpi$en-dinai ("nee-") > nūundunae and nōndinae, *spou-$\varpi$-ma > spūma, prōvidens > prūdens, iouestod > iustō – not a syncope change but an assimilation; and one during the historic period: -o-$\varpi$i-, -o-$\varpi$e- > -o-$\varpi$o- > -oo- > -$\varpi$-, e.g. *mou-$\varpi$-t-o > motus, co-$\varpi$entio > contio.

Only the second change ($y > 0/V_1 _V_1$) produces a real loss of $y$, but only under a strict condition, i.e. between two identical vowels. Numerous exceptions like au$\varpi$rus, seu$\varpi$rus, diu$\varpi$nus, etc. should be highlighted (cf. also Monteil, 1973: 68-70)\(^{12}\). The other cases are probably events of assimilation (moreover, for some words the reconstruction is very uncertain). Therefore, oboedio presents a different situation\(^{13}\).

This explanation has been rejected by some scholars who do not accept oboedio from *ob + a$\varpi$izdi$\varpi$iō (solution 1). As Fay (1920: 124) wrote, «Of course the elaborately fanciful primate awisdio has been invented to turn a special phonetic trick for oboedio» and, furthermore, to justify a relationship with Greek ἀξω and ζήσωμαι: “to perceive” (from ἀξω-σ- < *h₂eu-is- "clearly"). This is Pisoni’s (1968: 69) consideration, which leads us to the sec-

\(^{12}\) Again, throughout the Latin period the semivowel tends to disappear (through elision or assimilation) in intervocalic position, especially before back vowels. In addition to the examples mentioned, the Appendix Probi shows some such changes in use: acus non aus, flavus non flaus, rivos non rius, pavor non paor (App.Pr. 29, 62, 174 and 176 ed. Asperi and Passalacqua, 2014). On the other hand, no semivowel disappearances happen after i, as would be needed for oboedio, and more generally neither in the first hypothesis for audio. In fact, novus does not evolve into *nous as a regulating force in the paradigm (see novi, novā, etc.). Cf. Väänänen (1982, [1963]: § 90).

\(^{13}\) Two specific examples are usually mentioned relative to oboedio: amoenus “lovely” from *a$\varpi$mena- (< *ama-gen-o- (see Meiser, 1998: 71) and proelium “battle” from *prou$\varpi$elio-m (< *pro-$\varpi$el$\varpi$io- (see Blümel, 1972; Klingenschmitt, 1980). These words represent the only real comparison capable of explaining the diphthong in oboedio. It is a pity that their reconstructions are so uncertain that all the best etymological Latin dictionaries are doubtful about them (see WH, EM and De Vään ns.s.). Klingenschmitt (1980) insists on mentioning personal names like Clœlius from (?) *kloyelios, but cf. Volscian Cloit and Latin Clīylius, Coelius from (?) *ko$\varpi$elios, Boelian from (?) *bo$\varpi$elios. It is more logical to presuppose *oi and not *oue in these roots. In fact, the relationship with Proto-Indo-European *kλ(ε)u- is not clear.
ond phonological solution: «Scomparso così l’obbligo di ficcare a forza un i in audio per ricavare oboedio, ritornerà in onore la vecchia ed evidente etimologia di audio: composto di *aus-* “orecchio” (latino auris) con una formazione di *dhē-* “porre”. così come noi diciamo “porgere orecchio”. Morfologicamente sembrerebbe trattarsi del denominativo da un *aus-dh-io- “colui che porgere orecchio” o di un femminile astratto *aus-dh-ā “il porgere orecchio”».

The second phonological hypothesis was mostly supported by Szemerényi (1960) (see also Bréal, 1875) and consists in a labial dissimilation from ou to oi due to the labial feature in ob-:

\[^{ob-}au(s)\text{dio} > ^{ob-}ou(s)\text{dio} > ^{oboi(s)}\text{dio} > oboedio\]

The only comparable example is the conjectured sequence for liber “free”: *leudheros > *louberos > loberos > liber. Against this opinion we should acknowledge that, first of all, according to liber, it should be *obidio. Second, the labial dissimilation seems to be limited to pre-labial position and possibly after l (cf. Palmer, 1954: 268). Third, there are a consistent number of counter-examples, such as Pūnicus, commūnis, pūnio, münio, etc., where labial dissimilation is absent (cf. Godel, 1961: 58 n. 12). Finally, there is the fact that b and u form a sequence fully marked by the feature [+grave]. Natural languages generally show consistency in co-articulation of the feature [+labial].

In conclusion, it should be considered that exploration of reconstructions of oboedio from a phonological perspective produces more problems than answers.

4. A sociolinguistic perspective

Towards the end of the 19th century, studies in historical and comparative linguistics took a different direction to solve the problem of Latin oboedio. We are talking about scholars like Havet (1881: 410), Wackernagel (1895: 55), Vendryes (1902: 284), Burger (1928) and Palmer (1954: 220). What they focused on was that a Latin ā, in addition to in many cases being the result of reduction of au in a second syllable, can also originate from the diphthong ao. This happened from Indo-European oj to Old Latin oj / oe and

\[^{14}^{Moreover, only from the 1^\text{st} \text{century B.C. does it happen that b and u tend to merge in a unique medial sound b \ (bilabial constrictive. Cf. contemporary Spanish and Catalan intervocalic b). See spellings like Nēz̄ovox for Nerva, bāliat for valeat at Pompei, plēbes non plevis \ (App.Pr. 9 edd. Aspetri and Passalacqua, 2014). See Väänänen (1982, [1963]: § 88-89).\]
from there to Classical Latin ũ. The last step (the reduction of oe to ũ) has variously been dated between the end of the 3rd century B.C and the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.\textsuperscript{15}.

As is known, the whole of Latinity experienced a general archaizing tendency in spelling, literature and pronunciation (see Clackson and Horrocks, 2011: 90 ff.). A ũ might be expressed in two other forms, marked by archaizing conservatism: oe and oi (cf. Marouzeau, 1911: 270-273; Leumann \textit{et al.}, 1977: § 73; Adams, 2007: 44-45)\textsuperscript{16}. Some words present all three realizations, some others just two, but they all generally settle into just one form, as shown in Table 4.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{OI} & \textbf{OE} & \textbf{ū} & \textbf{LOCI} \\
\hline
\textit{ploirume} & \textit{ploera} & \textit{plūra} & \textit{ploirume} occurs in The Scipioni tomb (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 9); \textit{ploera} in Cic. \textit{leg}. 3.6.10 ed. Powell (2006). \\
\hline
\hline
\textit{coiravit} & \textit{coerari} & \textit{cūravit} & \textit{coiravit} occurs in Alatri inscription, Gracchi period (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 1166); \textit{coerari} in Cic. \textit{Leg}. 3.10.8 ed. Powell (2006). \\
\hline
\textit{oino} & \textit{oenus} & \textit{ūnus} & \textit{oino} occurs in The Scipioni tomb (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 9); \textit{oenus} in Pl. \textit{Truc}. 102 ed. Lindsay (1904-1905). \\
\hline
\textit{loidos} & \textit{lūdus} & \textit{loidos} & \textit{loidos} occurs in CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 364. \\
\hline
\textit{comoinem} & \textit{commūnis} & \textit{comoinem} & \textit{comoinem} occurs in Sen. \textit{C. de Bacch.} (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 581; E 126). \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Graphic variation in terms with oi, oe and ũ.}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Safarewicz (1969: § 50) at the end of the 3rd century B.C.; Lindsay (1894: 240-241), at the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.; Sommer (1902: 88), 2nd century B.C.; Benedetti and Marotta (2014: 27 ff.), 2nd century B.C.; Anderson (1909), from 204 to 154 B.C. Probably the earliest epigraphic evidence for the change is found in \textit{uitier} (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 53); (Meiser, 1998: § 47) before the end of the 3rd century B.C. In \textit{Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus} (CIL I\textsuperscript{2} 581, 186 B.C.) both the spellings \textit{oi} and \textit{ou} are archaisms standing for an actual pronunciation ũ (e.g. \textit{plous}).

\textsuperscript{16} Marouzeau (1911: 270) writes: «Cette conservation des diphtongues a pu être favorisée par diverses causes: dans l’écriture, par une manie persistante d’archaïsme, encouragée peut-être par l’exemple du grec, et, dans la prononciation, par la diffusion du parler de Rome». 

\textsuperscript{15}
This tendency occurs both in epigraphic and literary texts. The archaic facies of CIL I² 9 *hunc oino ploirume cosentiont R[omane] / duonoro optumo fuise uiro* is quoted in Cicero in Classical Latin as follows: *hunc unum plurime consentient gentes populi primarium fuisse uirum* (de sen. 17.61 ed. Powell, 2006), but when the subject of the text (e.g. a legal one) needs a higher and more solemn tone, the same author uses a conservative style. Cf. phrases in Cic. (*Leg.* ed. Powell, 2006): *loedis publicis* (2.22), *ploera* (3.6), *coerari oesus sit* (3.10). See also Lucretius 1.29, 1.32 and 5.1308 (ed. Müller, 1975) *moenera* (from *moi*) for *munera*, and Cato *or.* 167.6 (ed. Malcovati, 1953) *impoene for impūne* (see Palmer, 1954: 121-122).

In addition to this, archaic forms with *oe* or *oi*-marks are frequent in the ironic tone, especially in Plautus (see *moenitum*, *Bacch.* 926 ed. Lindsay, 1904-1905), and language with a teasing or a heroic and lofty spirit (see also Cist. 540, Pers. 554, 559; *Pseud.* 384, 585a ed. Lindsay, 1904-1905).

This is a pan-Latin tendency to archaism that is particularly found in epigraphic and legal texts. Moreover, as Adams (2007: 45) writes, «the various examples cited here from republican legal documents are to be treated as archaising forms suited to the language of law, with no relevance to regional variation». This is why I talk of a pan-Latin – i.e. in time and space – tendency.

According to these considerations, as has previously been affirmed, it is possible to establish two different levels of the Latin language: a conservative one and a usual one. Words that come from a root in *oi* may present a double form: the first is characterized by the archaic mark *oe*, and the second one by *u*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OE</th>
<th>Ú</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moenia, moerus, moiros</td>
<td>murus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poena Gk. ποινάκ</td>
<td>pánio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poenus Gk. Φοίνικες</td>
<td>Pānīcus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foedus</td>
<td>*fūdus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(conjectured by Wackernagel, 1895: 55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oboedio ?</td>
<td>*obūdio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. The double series *oe* / *u* (both from *oi*).

---

17 For archaism as an ingredient of Latin poetry generally, see Palmer (1954: 98).
18 Again, during the Augustan period we can read the archaizing spelling *faciundum coiraverunt* (CIL I² 1252).
19 Against this hypothesis, Meiser (1998: § 63.4) writes: «Hinter wortanlautendem *p-*,-*f-* bleibt *oi* als *oe* erhalten außer vor *i* der Folgesilbe, vgl. *poena* (*<* griech. ποινή) vs. *pānio*, *Poenus* vs. *pānīcus, foedus (zu *fides)*». See the same opinion in Parodi (1893: 437) and Safarewicz (1969: § 50.3).
I have also inserted oboedio on the basis of Burger (1928: 40): «oboe-di-re n’est pas, au début, un mot du vocabulaire courant; il semble qu’on ait affaire à un forme technique de la langue du droit; quand il est entré, assez tardivement, dans la langue commune et a tendu à remplacer parère, l’orthographe a pu influencer la prononciation». Similar views can be found in Havet (1881: 410), Wackernagel (1895: 55), Vendryes (1902: 284), and Palmer (1954: 220), who considered oboedio a hypercorrection (or notation renversée, or umgekehrte Schreibung) of a popular and usual form *obūdio. Since ū was the result both of archaic Latin oi (e.g. ploira, plūra, etc.) and of au >ū reduction (e.g. clau-do, oclūdo; see above), the conjectured hypercorrection in oboedio means that this verb should be assigned to a specific level of Latin, which we have defined as conservative language (in particular, law and religion).

The question now is: is oboedio «une forme technique de la langue du droit» (Burger, 1928: 40)? The answer is uncertain. Legal texts (e.g. Institutiones by Gaius, Codex Theodosianus, Codex Iustitniani, Digestus) show a limited number of cases of oboedio, but not as significant a number as to be able to draw any conclusion. In the Corpus civilis, verbs like obsequor and observo are much more frequent than oboedio. As Szemerényi (1960: 241) wrote, «we have no right to assume that it was only in the language of the law that oboedio was pronounced since the evidence shows, if proof were needed, that the verb was used in the most diverse phrases and contexts». In fact, oboedio occurs in Plautus, Accius, Afranius, Cicero, Nepos, Livy, Sallust, Curtius, Pliny, Seneca, Valerius Maximus, Apuleius, Gellius, Suetonius, Tacitus, Servius, Vulgata and Justinian, but it is absent from classical poetry (data from PHI#5.3. See also Eichenseer, 1964).

Moreover, with regard to the spelling oe in Latin there is another issue which we can call Greek-loan interference. If we browse the incomparable repertory that is Der Vokalismus des Vulgärlatein by Schuchardt, we discover that in many cases of Greek loanwords the diphthong oe appears in place of an original Greek upsilon (1867: II, 278 ff.). Well-known examples, already from the time of Plautus, are: lagoena from the Greek λάγγανας “flask, bottle” (Pl., Varr., Hor., Pers., Petr., Plin., Apul., etc.). Other forms are: laguncula (cf. Burger, 1928: 40), lagona (from Cato), late forms lagyna, lagaena (from which lαγγίνα); Antamoenides (Pl. Poen. 1322) from the Greek first
name “Ἀνταμονίδης, Antamonides; goerus (Non., Auson. ?), gyrus (Catul.), from the Greek γύρος “circle”.

A much discussed question is that of how Greek y was pronounced and spelt in the Plautus period: u, oe or ü? If we consider examples like Pl. Ps. 703 turanne from τύραννος (Pl. Ps. 1197, 1200) sucophanta from συκοφάντης, the wordplay in Pl. (Bacch. 129 ed. Lindsay 1904-1905), Non omnis aetas, Lyde, ludo convenit, and 362 Crucisalum me ex Chrysalo, 687 in cruciatum Chrysalum, 1183 Chrysalus […] excruciem, we can affirm that the spelling of Greek y was probably varied (mainly with u and y) but it was pronounced [u]. This seems to confirm the authenticity of the forms lagoena and Antamoe-nides with regard to a u hypercorrected by the diphthong oe. Otherwise, we should return to the evergreen idea of an intermediate phase between oi, oe, ü and u, where the spellings of Greek loanwords fit.

Can the diphthong oe in oboedio be considered similar to such Greek loanwords? And then, was oboedio an artificial spelling or the effective pronunciation? Before we try to answer these questions I would like to add a significant element. Varro, in Lat. 5.50 (ed. Collart, 1954) quotes from Sacra Argeorum a place in Esquilino that is called Lucus Poetelius, probably linked to the gens Poetelia that appear in Livy, like a family of high rank during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. (see, for example, the Lex Poetelia de ambitu dated 358 B.C.). The Esquilino area was a particular zone in the city of Rome. It was traditionally connected to the underworld, death and water. On the hill was the Mephitis Temple, an archaic sanctuary dedicated to Mephtitis, goddess of waters and of sulphurous waters, wells, underground cavities and the afterlife. On one side of the hill there was an area called Puticuli (see Varro Lat. 5.24 ff.), which was a cemetery – simple natural holes and wells in the ground – where poor people and slaves were buried. On the basis of these few elements we can perceive a folk-etymological interference between puteus “well” and puteo “to stink” (cf. putidus, putresco). In fact, Varro in the same passage (Lat. 5.26) describes the smell from the rotting corpses in the puticuli. The name of the city of Puteoli in Campania, although probably derived from puteus “well, water zone”, has always been connected to sulphurous smells from the Solfatara volcano, and so from puteo “to stink”. In Lucus Poetelius and in the gentilitial name Poetelia, we can suspect an attempt to ennoble the family name by hiding the allusion to the stink through the use of an archaizing element, i.e. the diphthong oe, which occurs in words like Poenis, poena, moenia – words probably connected to legal and sacred original meanings (a conservative and high area of the Latin language) – or in archaizing forms like moerus or coeravit (see above).
In conclusion, we can affirm that, once we acknowledge the failure of the phonological approach, the only possible solution is that oboedio contains a form of hypercorrection with the archaizing and ennobling power of the diphthong oe. It does not seem that oboedio was a verb limited to a specific area (law and religion) of the language, but the conservatism of the whole of Latinity, and in particular of some institutions and uses, can have kept the form with oe alive. Even if we do not have precise comparisons, a small number of Greek loanwords where oe renders γ can help us to better understand the unexpected form oboedio. Moreover, the particular case of Lucus Poetelius on Esquilino can represent an interesting comparison, especially regarding the socio-semantic causes of the presence of the diphthong oe. Finally, there is no reason to assume that oboedio was not pronounced with a real diphthong, unless we accept that poena or moenia also sounded like *pūna and *mūnia.

5. Conclusions

To solve what is only apparently the simple issue of oboedio, a sort of exploration in different areas of linguistics has been necessary. Comparative data, credited with a great tradition in historical linguistics (from Schulze, 1887 to Meier-Brügger, 1980), have been combined with more recent typological patterns (Viberg, 1983; 2001) enriched by a cognitive-linguistic categorization framework (Sweetser, 1990; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999). To sum up, oboedio is definitely a compound of ob and audio. The phonological explanations have not yielded effective results. The solution proposed here is a form of hypercorrection with the archaizing and ennobling power of the diphthong oe. After the valuable and essential contribution of diachronic and comparative linguistics, typological linguistics and cognitive categorization, it is, then, sociolinguistics that casts light on a possible solution.

Who was the inventor of such a hypercorrect form? Probably, oboedio was invented by middle-class speakers who made an incorrect imitation of the archaizing styles of the professional community connected to the legal-sacred sphere.

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TLIO = *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini* (a cura di OVI, Opera del Vocabolario Italiano del CNR): [http://www.ovi.cnr.it](http://www.ovi.cnr.it).


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