On the Problematic *f/h* Variation in Faliscan*)

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Abstract: PIE *bh/dh regularly give *f* word-initially in Oscan-Umbrian and Latin, and *gh gives *h,* suggesting these as Common Italic developments. However, in Faliscan, Latin's most immediate sister, etymological *bh, dh, and *gh unexpectedly show both *f* and *h* as reflexes (e.g. *hileo* 'son,' alongside expected *filea* 'daughter,' vs. Latin *filius* 'son;' *fe* 'here,' alongside expected *hec,* vs. Latin *hic*). The source of this *f/h* variation has not as yet been satisfactorily explained, although there have been numerous attempts at solutions (e.g. early dialect split [Meillet 1933, Giacomelli 1979]; Etruscan influence [Pfiffig 1969, Pisani 1978], phonetic confusion [Hiersche 1963]). We propose that a reexamination of the relevant data points to a sound change (*f → h*) and subsequent hypercorrection as the source of this Faliscan *f/h* variation. Since the oldest Faliscan inscriptions (7th–4th c.) show the expected Italic developments, Faliscan forms (post 4th c.) with *h* for earlier *f* (e.g. *hileo*) must have resulted from a sound change of *f → h*. Words with *f* for etymological *h* (e.g. *fe*) are then the result of hypercorrection. Dialects of Faliscan itself as well as Urban Latin dialects with a distinction between *h* and *f* word-initially provide a likely model for hypercorrection (note, for instance, that not all Faliscan words are affected by the sound change *f → h*). This proposal therefore clarifies the nature of the development of the aspirates in Latino-Faliscan and moreover suggests a parallel explanation for similar variation in the aspirate developments between Rural Latin and Urban Latin.

1. Introduction

In the Italic branch of Indo-European, the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) voiced aspirated stops develop regularly to fricatives in word-initial position. The labial *bh and the dental *dh aspirates appear as *f* in Oscan-Umbrian (O-U) and Latin[1] (*bher- 'bear, carry' > Latin *fero:,* Umbrian **fertu** 3 SG IMPV [Ve IIa 17], Volscian *ferom* INF [Ve 222], Marrucinian *feret* 3 PL SUBJ [Ve 218]; *dheyg'h- 'form, mold' > Latin *fingo:,* Oscan **feíhúss** 'walls' ACC PL [Ve 1b 5]; *dhH₁s-no- > Latin *fa:num* 'shrine;' *dheH₁s-neH₂- > Paelignian *fesn(am)* ACC SG 'shrine' [Ve 216], Oscan **fíísnú** NOM SG [Ve 1 24], Umbrian **fesnafe** ACC PL [Ve IIb 16]); the palatal *g'h and the velar *gh aspirates develop to *h* (*g'her- 'enclose' > Latin *hortus* 'garden,' Oscan **húrz** NOM SG [Ve 147b 23]; *ghe- (deictic element) > Latin *hic* 'this,' Umbrian **(era)hont** 'in the same way' FEM ABL SG [Ve Ib 23]). Examples of the labiovelar aspirate in word-initial position are lacking for Oscan-Umbrian, but we note that this sound also develops to *f* in Latin (PIE *gʷhen- 'strike, kill' > Latin *(de:)fendo:* 'ward off').

In contrast with what is generally believed to be the regular developments of the PIE aspirates in Latin and O-U, Latin's closest sibling and neighbor, Faliscan, shows the following "unexpected" developments: both *f* and *h* appear as reflexes of the PIE aspirates *bh/*dh and *gh (e.g. **filea** 'daughter' [GG 67] – **hileo** 'son' [GG 97] vs. Latin *fi:lius* < PIE *dhiH₁lyo-;[2] **fe** 'here' [GG 123 II] – **hec** [GG 121 II] vs. Latin *hi:c* < PIE *ghey-ke).

We realize, of course, that there are similar developments in dialectal Latin, i.e. unexpected *h*'s and *f*'s for expected *f* and *h* respectively (e.g., PIE *bher- > Latin *horda* 'pregnant cow' Varro *RR* 2.5.6; PIE *ghaydo- 'goat' > Latin *fedus* Paul. Fest. 84 M).[3]) But this evidence consists primarily of a handful of glosses cited by Roman grammarians and has little substantive inscriptional support; while we believe these forms represent a real phenomenon, in terms of trying to understand what is going on with *f/h* in Italic, it seemed best to focus on Faliscan because the inscriptional evidence available here, though not plentiful, is more likely to provide a clearer picture of the developments.[4]) Hence we here examine the Faliscan material, first reviewing previous accounts and then proposing what we believe to be a better solution.

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[1]) All Oscan-Umbrian citations come from Vetter 1953 = Ve. The source for Faliscan forms is Giacomelli 1963 = GG.

[2]) **fileo/filea** may derive from the root *bhewH-, from a suffixed form *bhwi:lyo-. For discussion of the etymology see Lejeune 1967: 78–86 and Hamp 1972: 219–20.

[3]) The forms in question can be found in Conway 1897: 359, 384–86 and Campanile 1961 3–6.

[4]) We note that only a small number of Faliscan inscriptions exists and that consequently this material must be approached with some caution.

2. Earlier Accounts

The "irregular" developments of the aspirates in Faliscan have been approached from several different angles:[5])

(1) It has been argued (G.Giacomelli 1963: 126, 1978: 515; Pfiffig 1969: 44; Pisani 1978: 45) that these developments are the result of contact with Etruscan speakers who had a sound change $f > h$.

(2) It has been suggested (Hiersche 1965) that the developments in Faliscan arose by phonetic confusion in a period with two opposing sound changes, $f > h$ and $h > f$.

(3) Finally, another account (Campanile 1961; R.Giacomelli 1978, 1979) has seen the f/h variation here as the result of an early dialect split in Latino-Faliscan.

We briefly review these proposals in order to point out what we believe to be some of their more serious deficiencies.

2.1 Etruscan Influence

Contact with Etruscans appears at first glance to offer a possible source for the f/h variation in Faliscan because the *Ager Faliscus* is bounded on the west by Etruscan territory and because there is evidence for a sound change of $f > h$ in Etruscan. But the Etruscan contact hypothesis contains several flaws.

First, if Etruscans were the source of the variation, we would expect the Etruscan inscriptions that are found in the *Ager Faliscus* to show evidence of a sound change $f > h$. However, there is no such evidence. Etruscan inscriptions in the *Ager Faliscus* do not attest this change. Moreover, Etruscan inscriptions in Etruscan territories adjacent to the *Ager Faliscus* do not have such a change. In fact the locus of the Etruscan sound change is the community of Clusium, which is centrally located in north Etruria, some 60 to 70 kilometers on the

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[5]) There is one additional account, namely J.Untermann's suggestion (1964: 178) that Faliscan underwent a merger of f and h that was generally represented orthographically by f, and infrequently by h. We note however that there is a certain vagueness in this proposal that makes it difficult to evaluate. For example, it is not made clear what the outcome of the merger was. Even so, though, Untermann's account would lead one to expect more cases of etymological [h] being spelled with ‹F›, since for him ‹F› is the usual representation for the outcome of the merger. As the forms in (2) indicate, there are instead 5 ‹H› for [f] words in (2 a), but only 2 ‹F› for [h] words in (2 b).

fly from Città Castellana, the major Faliscan urban area.[6]) Second, if Etruscan responsibility for the f/h variation in Faliscan is indicated by the Etruscan sound change $f > h$, then we would expect the sound change in Etruscan to be chronologically prior to the f/h variation in Faliscan. But, as far as we have been able to determine, the change of f to h in Etruscan is to be attributed to the latest layer of Etruscan inscriptions, c. III-I B.C., and thus is found after the earliest examples of the change in Faliscan, which can be assigned to the IV century B.C.

In sum, then, geographical and chronological considerations militate against the hypothesis of Etruscan interference.

2.2 Phonetic Confusion

In an article published in 1965, Rolf Hiersche argued that the h/f variation in Faliscan was to be understood in terms of an "interchange" of f and h, entailing two sound changes of $f > h$ and $h > f$ operating simultaneously. Crucially for Hiersche, the Faliscan letters ‹F›[7]) and ‹H› do not have values customarily assigned to them for Italic, namely labiodental fricative [f] and glottal fricative [h]; instead, they represent for him bilabial and velar spirants respectively. The interchange of the two spirants would then be motivated by the fact that they are similar acoustically. In essence, misperception of acoustically similar sounds is given as the motivation for these changes that are the reverse of one another.

We do not find Hiersche's account of the Faliscan evidence very convincing for several reasons. First, all the relevant evidence suggests that ‹H› was actually phonetically [h] and not [x], based on its weakness all throughout Italic (e.g., it is lost invervocalically in Latin, it serves as a hiatus marker in Latin, Oscan and Umbrian, and it is lost initially in Latin). Moreover, the source of the letter ‹H› in Italic alphabets (Faliscan, Latin, Oscan, Umbrian) comes via Etruscan from the West Greek sign standing for pure aspiration.[8]) Thus, the burden of proof for ‹H› as [x] falls on Hiersche, and we see no compelling reason to adopt his interpretation.

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[6]) A note on this change can be found in Rix 1984: 221.

[7]) Our sign ‹F› is merely intended to indicate a reference to the Faliscan orthographic symbol for f, namely ‹↑›.

[8]) See Cristofani 1978 for a discussion of the introduction of the West Greek alphabet into Italy and diffusion throughout the peninsula.

Further, the evidence that Hiersche (1965: 117–118) adduces for an interchange of *f* and *h* all involves either loan phonology or context sensitive changes of one sort or another. But the context sensitivity of the Faliscan development with *f/h* is limited to position in the word (only word initially and never medially), and crucially does not seem to depend on the surrounding phonetic environment; in particular the Faliscan *f/h* interchange is found before both *e* and *o*. Whether a context-free change of [x] to [φ] – as Hiersche's account would require for Faliscan – is even possible is therefore open to question.

Finally, one can wonder if a language would really ever have two competing sound changes that involved the same segments but differed as to which was the input and which the output.

2.3 Early Dialect Split

In recent publications Enrico Campanile (1961) and Roberto Giacomelli (1978, 1979), adopting a scenario first proposed by Meillet (1933: 98), suggest that Latin dialects belonging to different (sociolinguistic and regional) levels of speech split into two groups according to the treatment of PIE aspirates. According to this view, the rural level of Latino-Faliscan, which for them includes Faliscan and those Latin dialects outside the city of Rome, and the urbane level, which is for all intents and purposes Classical Latin, diverge in their treatment of the aspirates in the following way. In the rural dialects, the labials and dentals, via an intermediate stage of (Proto-Italic) *f, developed to *h*, while in the urban dialect, Proto-Italic *f remained as *f*. The palatal and velar aspirates, on the other hand, develop to *f* in the rural dialects, via an intermediate stage with a (Proto-Italic) velar spirant *x, while in urban Latin, *x yielded *h*. Faliscan (and rural Latin dialectal) forms with etymologically incorrect *f* and *h* must then result from "dialect mixing" and borrowing, presumably via contact with the prestige varieties of urban Latin.

But this scenario does not stand up when the Faliscan evidence is arranged into chronological layers (see below §3 and (1)).[9] The

earliest Faliscan inscriptions, which date to the 7th century B.C. and hence well before the period of Latin influence on Faliscan (not well before contact though), show that the developments offered by Campanile and Giacomelli are simply mistaken. The earliest evidence for the development of PIE aspirates in Faliscan, which comes from the *Ceres*-inscription (GG 1) and dates to the middle of the 7th century, reflects the typical Italic developments for aspirates (*bhars > **far** 'spelt, grain' NOM SG [GG 1, c. 650); *dheyg'h- > **f[if]iqod** 'fashioned' 3 PL PERF [GG 1, c. 650]; *g'hu-ti- > **huti[c]ilom** 'small vessel' NOM SG [GG 1, c. 650]).[10] For this reason, we cannot attribute the "irregular" developments in Faliscan to an early dialect split along the lines suggested by Campanile and Giacomelli, at least not without entirely disregarding the Archaic Faliscan evidence and the chronology of the *f/h* variation altogether.

3. Our Solution

We begin our explanation of the developments in Faliscan with a note on the chronology of Faliscan inscriptions. The epigraphical evidence in Faliscan is generally divided into three periods: an Archaic Faliscan (AF) period covering the 7th/6th centuries B.C., a so-called Medio-Faliscan (MF) period dating from the 5th century down to the destruction of *Falerii veteres* by Rome in 241 B.C., and finally a Neo-Faliscan (NF) period covering all inscriptions composed after the population of *Falerii veteres* was relocated to the less formidable site of *Falerii novi*, west of the old city.[11]

The Faliscan evidence relevant to our discussion is presented in (1) and (2). In (1) are listed the forms which we take to show the regular developments of the aspirates, in AF, MF, and NF. It is significant that AF has only these regular developments. Taking this chronological fact then as the basis for establishing the original treatment of these sounds in Faliscan, we can say that Faliscan is in line with the other Italic languages in terms of the treatment of the PIE aspirates.

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[9] Another possible objection to this analysis is the assumption that Faliscan is merely a colloquial/informal/rustic variety of Latin. This is an issue that needs careful attention, beyond what we can do in this paper, but we note that there are some fundamental differences in the verb systems of Faliscan and Latin – both

rural and urban – that may yield significant innovations distinguishing the two languages.

[10] If this is the right etymology for **huti[c]ilom**, then Faliscan does not show the sound change *g'h > f/ _____ u that is found in Latin *fundo:*, but rather seems to have taken PIE *g'h to *h* in all contexts.

[11] See G. Giacomelli 1978: 510–511.

(1) Evidence from Faliscan, regular developments:

a. Archaic Faliscan period:

*bh > f: *bhars > far 'spelt, grain' NOM SG [c. 650 (GG 1)];

*dh > f: *dheyg'h- > f[if]iqod 'fashioned' 3 PL PERF [c. 650 (GG 1)], fifiked 3 SG PERF [c. 550 (GG 11)], fita NOM SG [c. 650 (GG 1)] (if from PPP *fikto- < *dhig'h-to-);

*g'h > h: *g'hu-ti- > huti[c]ilom 'small vessel' NOM SG [c. 650 (GG 1)].

b. Medio-Faliscan period:

*dh > f: *dhiH₁lyo- > filea 'daughter' [c. 300 (GG 67)];

*dh > f: Gentilicium firmio [IV/III (GG 71 V)] (if from PIE *dher-);

*gh > h: *ghey-ke > hec 'here' [(GG 85), IV/III (GG 86 V), IV? (GG 97), (GG 99)].

c. Neo-Faliscan period (post 241 B.C):

*dh > f: *dhiH₁lyo- > file[ai] [(GG 144 III)], abbreviations f [(GG 61)], fi [(GG 121 III), (GG 123 II)];

*dh > f: Gentilicium firᵕᵕmia [(GG 143 I)] (if from PIE *dher-);

*gh > h: *ghey-ke > he [(GG 121 I), (GG 121 V)], hec [(GG 121 II)].

This leaves two groups of forms showing "unexpected developments," both of which are restricted to MF and NF: *h* for expected *f*, given in (2a), and *f* for expected *h*, given in (2b):

(2) Evidence from Faliscan, unexpected developments:

a. *h* for expected *f* (MF and NF):

hileo 'son' [MF IV?, (GG 97)];

hirmia (Gentilicium) [MF, (GG 66 V)] (cf. MF firmio);

hirmio (Gentilicium) [NF, (GG 61)] (cf. MF firmio);

holcosio (Gentilicium) [NF, (GG 123 III)], if same name as (earlier?) folcozeo [NF, (GG 123 II)];

haba 'bean' < *bhabo- [cited as Faliscan by Terentius Scaurus VII 13, 9 GLK].

b. *f* for expected *h* (MF and NF):

foied 'today' [MF, (GG 5)] (< *gho:d d(i)e:d);

fe 'here' [NF, 2 x (123 III), (144 I)] (< *ghey-ke).

For the forms in (2a), we propose that the most efficient solution is simply to posit a sound change by which an earlier *f* became *h* in MF (and thus with effects showing up in NF as well). We believe that the assumption of such a sound change is an uncontroversial move since this change is found in other languages and so must be seen as a "natural" sound change. It is necessary to point out that this change in all likelihood did not affect all Faliscan dialects or else was lexically diffuse and did not affect all possible "candidates" in Faliscan that could have undergone the change, since there are Medio- and Neo-Faliscan forms that show the etymologically appropriate reflexes.

The remaining Medio- and Neo-Faliscan forms in (2b) show *f* in place of *h*: foied (GG 5) and fe (GG 144 I).[12] Since we have argued (in our discussion of Hiersche's proposal, above §2.2) that a sound change *h* > *f* is not feasible in this case, we hypothesize that the only real explanation for these forms is *hypercorrection*, i.e. that in a period of Faliscan in which some *f*'s were becoming *h*, some speakers falsely "restored" *f* in forms that had an etymologically correct *h*.

In our account, it must be assumed that Faliscan dialects that lost initial *f* were in contact with speakers who maintained an *f/h* distinction. Such speakers could have provided a model by which some Faliscan speakers might have introduced *f* into contexts in which *h* was expected on etymological grounds. Two such groups of speakers suggest themselves:

(i) If the change of *f* to *h* in Faliscan did not affect all Faliscan dialects (or alternatively all forms within Faliscan), then we can suppose that the forms with unetymological *f* are attempts on the part of speakers of *f*-less Faliscan varieties to reintroduce a distinction that existed in other, presumably more prestigious, varieties of the language.

(ii) Another possible source that could have played an important role as a hypercorrective model is urban Latin.[13] In the fourth century Rome began to extend its influence across the Tiber into territories in southern Etruria. So it is natural to seek to place at least part of the hypercorrective pressure on Faliscan dialects to Latin speakers that maintained an *f/h* distinction in initial position.

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[12] We here take foied at face value, even though we are aware that there are some problems with the inscription in which one of its occurrences is found. Note that even if foied is disregarded, there is still the form fe that must be accounted for.

[13] Untermann (1964: 178) notes that Neo-Faliscan abbreviations of the word fileo on Faliscan funerary inscriptions point in all likelihood to Latin influence.

By way of conclusion, we note that the similar *f/h* variation attributed to dialectal Latin by Roman grammarians and referred to above is probably to be attributed to a similar set of changes to that posited here for Faliscan. The same hypercorrective pressures are likely to have been operative between rural Latin dialects and the prestigious urban variety, though this entire issue clearly deserves a more extensive treatment.[14] The Faliscan situation thus seems to point the way to a resolution of this longstanding problem in other areas of ancient Italy.[15]

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[14] In Wallace & Joseph (forthcoming) we explore the consequences of a hypercorrective explanation for the Latin *h/f* variation.

[15] We point out that unexpected *f/h* alternations are not just additionally a problem for Latin. Rix (1984: 221), in his discussion of *f > h* in Etruscan, notes that sporadic forms occur with *f* in place of expected *h* (e. g., **ferclite** vs. **herclite**, from Greek Ἡρακλείδης). Interestingly, he suggests that these forms are probably to be explained by hypercorrection.

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