Recent Latin studies consider actionality, though sometimes called differently, e.g. state of affairs (cf. Pinkster, 2015), as an important category concerning aspect. Actionality refers to various kinds of situations, expressing several oppositions as stative/dynamic, atelic/telic or durative/momentaneous (see Haverling, 2010). Classical Latin had morphological means of expressing some of these oppositions. They were the “iterative” suffix -t-, generally bearing the atelic meaning as opposed to various verbal prefixes conveying the telic meaning as well as the “stative” suffix -ē- being in opposition to the dynamic “inchoative” suffix -sc-.

Though especially the suffixes -t-, -ē- and -sc- were very frequent and productive in the early periods, their meaning gradually became blurred in Late Latin, and although we do find some traces of them in Romance languages, they eventually lost their function.

The present paper will show, based on a quantitative corpus analysis, that there were some indicators of this ongoing process in Classical Latin, already, taking verbs with the suffix -t- as an example.

The suffix -t- is traditionally referred to as the “iterative” suffix used to derive “iterative” verbs from neutral or unmarked verbs. E.g. the verb iacere (to throw) with the suffix -t- renders iactāre (throw repeatedly or vigorously). Looking at French, we will find out that it is only the descendant of iactāre, i.e. jeter, that has survived, iacere leaving no trace.

Corpus data show that the process of disappearance of the unsuffixed verb iacere was already going on in the classical period. The data confirm that the verb iactāre actually expresses atelic situations, as e.g. matres familiae de muro vestem argentum que iactabant (CAES. Gall. 7,47) ‘The matrons were casting their clothes and silver over the wall.’

On the other hand, the verb iacere could express both atelic and telic situations though among the telic ones, some fossilized collocations appear to be more frequently present as ‘Iuppiter, tuis’ inquit ‘tussus avibus hic in Palatio prima urbi fundamenta ieci. (LIV. 1,12) ‘O Jupiter, it was thy omen that directed me when I laid here on the Palatine the first foundations of my City.’

In the classical period, the frequency of the two verbs is nearly equal, but what is interesting is a high frequency of verbs derived from iacere with various prefixes (dēicere, reicere, conicere, prōicere etc.), prevailingly referring to telic situations as e.g. Hunc ... comprehenderant atque in vincula conicerceant (CAES. Gall. 7,47) ‘They had seized him and thrown him into chains.’

Thus, since telic situations were expressed by the prefixed verbs and atelic situations by the “iterative” verb, the unsuffixed verb gradually became functionally superfluous, being restricted to collocations as fundamenta iacere ‘to lay foundations’, ancoras iacere ‘to cast anchors’ etc., eventually disappearing completely.

A similar development is manifested by the pair vertere / versāre, only versāre being preserved in French as verser or trahere / tractāre > traiter. Again, in Classical Latin, there were a great deal of prefixed verbs derived from the unsuffixed verbs some of which can even be found in French as convertere > convertir.

These data indicate that the disappearance of the atelic/telic opposition expressed morphologically by the suffix -t- was caused by the functional redundancy of the original
unsuffixed verbs of some Latin iterative verbs. Something similar also happened in the case of the two other verbal suffixes primarily expressing actionality, i.e. -ē- and -sc-.

**References:**


Electronic sources (corpus):

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