

The resistance of Latin equa 'mare' to replacement

Author(s): Warren A. Brewer

Source: *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, 1984, 97. Bd., 2. H. (1984), pp. 236-243

Published by: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (GmbH & Co. KG)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40848753>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (GmbH & Co. KG) is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*

JSTOR

## The resistance of Latin *equa* ‘mare’ to replacement

[§ 1] The title of this article derives from § 150 of Veikko Väänänen’s *Introduction au latin vulgaire*, wherein he discusses the lexical problem posed by the equine words. Figure 1 below illustrates how the Classical Latin masculine generic, *equus* ‘horse’, has been completely supplanted in the Romance languages by reflexes of Latin *caballus* ‘work-horse, nag’. “Par contre,” writes Väänänen, “*equa* ‘jument’, terme technique en quelque sorte, résiste.”

	‘mare’	‘horse’	‘stallion’	‘gelding’
Latin	<i>equa</i>	<i>equus</i>	<i>admissārius</i>	<i>canthērius</i>
Italian	<i>cavalla,</i> <i>giumenta</i>	<i>cavallo</i>	<i>stallone</i>	<i>castrone</i>
French	<i>jument</i>	<i>cheval</i>	<i>étalon</i>	<i>hongre</i>
Spanish	<i>yegua</i>	<i>caballo</i>	<i>gараñón</i>	<i>caballo</i> <i>capado</i>
Portuguese	<i>égua</i>	<i>cavalo</i>	<i>garanhão</i>	<i>cavalo</i> <i>castrado</i>
Roumanian	<i>iapă</i>	<i>cal</i>	<i>armăsar</i>	<i>jugan</i>

Figure 1: Some Latin and Romance equine terms

*Equa* has, indeed, survived in a number of daughter languages, especially well represented on the Iberian and Balkan peripheries of the Roman world, as well as in Logudorese *ebba*, Catalan *equa*, Provençal *ega*.<sup>1)</sup> Einar Löfstedt could not answer the question as to why *equa* should have outlived *equus*: “Warum schließlich *equa* im Vulgärlat. besser erhalten ist als *equus*, bleibt noch zu erklären.”<sup>2)</sup> This is at least an honest admission of ignorance as to a

<sup>1)</sup> Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke (1935), *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, no. 2883; Robert A. Hall, Jr. (1976), *Proto-Romance Phonology*, no. 914. Old French *ive* was replaced by the ‘beast of burden’ word (Lat. *iumentum*) “. . . in country districts where the work horses on the farm were in fact the mares” as Buck says in his *Dictionary of selected synonyms in the principal Indo-European languages* (1949), § 3,44,3 (= p. 170B). So. Italian *giumenta* seems to have resulted from the Norman French intrusion there; Rohlf’s (1971), *Romanische Sprachgeographie*, § 145 (= p. 199), and especially map no. 36 on p. 271.

<sup>2)</sup> *Syntactica* 2, 374n.

possible conserving factor. Most other answers to this question have involved an ad hoc labelling of *equa* as a technical word, as already pointed out in a passage from Väänänen's handbook cited above.<sup>3)</sup>

[§ 2] The way Gerhard Rohlfs has used the factor of technicality in lexical change must result in a paradox. On the one hand, in his *Romanische Sprachgeographie*, the designations for Romance female equines have been preserved due to the "specialness" of *equa*:<sup>4)</sup>

"Dadurch daß *equa* nicht die gesamte Gattung bezeichnete, sondern nur das Geschlecht ausdrückte, konnte dieses Wort als Spezialterminus länger erhalten bleiben."

On the other hand, some pages later, Rohlfs invokes technicality as a mutative factor operant on the Romance words for 'he-goat':<sup>5)</sup>

"Der lateinische Name der Ziege hat sich als ungemein resistent erwiesen. Der lateinische Name des Ziegenbocks (*caper*) ist nur in Sardinien erhalten geblieben. . . .

Gegenüber dem Wort ['Ziege'] der Gemeinsprache ist 'Ziegenbock' ein Spezialterminus, der in der Sprache der Bevölkerung wenig gebraucht wird."

Is it possible that technicality or specialization can both retard *and* accelerate lexical change? Probably not. Given the facts of the following section, the question of technicality should be proven irrelevant.

[§ 3] In his 1963 article entitled "Bemerkungen zum Problem *genus : sexus* im Lateinischen"<sup>6)</sup> Bengt Löfstedt also shows a belief that *equa* was adopted as a special term to designate the female, while its masculine generic counterpart became *caballus* (the ancient 'workhorse') instead of, for example *canthērius* 'gelding', *admissārius* 'stallion', or (*para*-)*verēdus* 'courier's horse', precisely because of the ever greater use of the horse as draught animal. The application of horse-power to the heavy plough resulted in an agricultural revolution in the early Middle Ages, made possible by the development of the horse-collar and nailed horseshoe; consequently the horse had not only military value, but also became economically

<sup>3)</sup> Cf. Ernout-Meillet (1959), *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, s.v. *equus*, "Nom ancien et générique . . . mais *equa*, terme spécifique, a survécu en partie . . .".

<sup>4)</sup> Op. cit. p. 85.

<sup>5)</sup> Op. cit. p. 163f.

<sup>6)</sup> *Symbolae Osloenses* 38, 56f.

important as well.<sup>7)</sup> Furthermore B. Löfstedt observes an overall morphological drift away from the Latin “motion” formations towards a common Romance predilection for heteronymy, such that not only is *equus* : *equa* replaced in Vulgar Latin by *caballus* : *equa*, but also *caper* : *capra* by *buccus* : *capra*, with this sort of trend particularly noticeable in French. Most importantly, he notes that the Latin terms for female domesticated animals tend to be better preserved overall than those for males.<sup>8)</sup>

After surveying the equine terminology from other languages, one gets the impression that the relative durability of the ‘mare’ terms is not an isolated Romance phenomenon, but has wider ramifications throughout West Indo-European generally; even more speculative would be to wonder if it is not “universal”, but this consideration must be kept in abeyance for the time being, due primarily to a lack of readily available studies of livestock terminologies outside the Indo-European field. The best available data for contrastive purposes involve the diverse languages of Celtic, Germanic and Slavic.

[§ 4] In figure 2 are displayed the Celtic forms for adult equines, showing the relative uniformity of the mare words, at least within Goidelic and Brythonic respectively, whereas for the generic and the breeding male, there is a tendency towards innovation and diversification.

The *Scotti* (“Irishmen” in Medieval Latin) began arriving in the northwest of Great Britain from the Second Century A.D., with a veritable invasion in the Fifth Century that overran the native Picts and Caledonians.<sup>9)</sup> Modern Irish and Scots Gaelic show diver-

<sup>7)</sup> Lynn White, Jr. (1962), *Medieval technology and social change*, p. 57. The Lithuanian generic *arkl̃ys* ‘horse’, with an obvious connection with *arklas* ‘plow’, is a fairly conclusive bit of evidence for the reflection of cultural reality in linguistic form.

<sup>8)</sup> Cf. Yakov Malkiel (1951), “The Hispanic suffix *-(i)ego . . .*”, *University of California Publications in Linguistics*, v. 4, no. 3, p. 147: “In general, names of young and of adult male animals (castrated and procreative) have been completely reshaped in Ibero-Romance, with the aid of indigenous, Latin, Germanic, and even Arabic lexical material . . .; typical designations of the female are almost invariably traditional (*cabra*, *oveja*, *vaca*, *yegua*), and the Latin word has also been preserved wherever male and female are referred to with equal frequency and the services they lend are not sharply differentiated, as is true of beasts of burden (*asno*, *asna . . .*; *mulo*, *mula*).”

<sup>9)</sup> Jan Filip (1977), *Celtic civilization and its heritage* (2nd ed.), p. 190; Nora Chadwick (1970), *The Celts*, p. 76.

	'mare'	'horse'	'stallion'	'gelding'
Old Irish	<i>láir</i>	<i>ech, march</i>	<i>(ech-)cullach</i>	<i>gerrán</i>
Irish Gaelic	<i>láir</i>	<i>capall</i>	<i>stail (f.!)</i>	<i>gearrán</i>
	<i>làir</i>	<i>each</i>	<i>greigh-each</i>	<i>gearran</i>
Welsh	<i>caseg</i>	<i>ceffyl, march, cel</i>	<i>ystalwyn, march</i>	<i>adjfarch</i>
Breton	<i>kazeg</i>	<i>marc'h</i>	<i>roñse, march</i>	<i>(marc'h) spaz</i>

Figure 2: Some Celtic equine terms

gence in the generic and breeding male categories, whereas the presumably Goidelic *\*lāreks* is still maintained in both languages.<sup>10</sup>) Likewise a supposedly Brythonic *\*kassikā* lives on in Welsh and Breton, despite the displacement of the ancestral speakers of the latter language from Cornwall to Armorica from the Fifth to Seventh Centuries, while the non-'mare' categories show fairly thoroughgoing foreign intrusions, or native formations of relatively late, semantically transparent periphrases.<sup>11</sup>) As was the case in Romance generally, the Roman 'work-horse' (*caballus*) has, in Celtic, half-won a competition with proto-Indo-European *\*ekwos*, with *capall* in Modern Irish, replacing Old Irish *ech*, and with *ceffyl* in Welsh still contending with Celtic *\*markā*.<sup>12</sup>)

[§ 5] The overall impression given in figure 3 is that the proto-Germanic 'mare' category is relatively stable, vis-à-vis the other adult equine designations. Germanic also seems to provide a striking parallel to the Romance developments of *equus/equa*: Proto-Germanic 'mare' (*\*marhī*, *\*marhjōn-*) has outlived its paraschematic masculine generic counterpart (*\*marhaz*), which seems to have passed from the scene in the Middle Ages, last heard from in Old English *meaṛh*, Old Icelandic *marr*, Old Frisian *mar*, for example,<sup>13</sup>)

<sup>10</sup>) Joseph M. Loth (1933), "Les noms du cheval chez les Celtes . . .", *Mémoires de l'Institut National de France, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, v. 43, p. 129n.

<sup>11</sup>) Filip, p. 191; Chadwick, p. 81; Loth, p. 130; Buck, §3,44,4 (= p. 170B) and § 3,41,5 (= p. 168B).

<sup>12</sup>) Loth, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup>) Eugene Gottlieb (1931), *A systematic tabulation of Indo-European animal names with special reference to their etymology and semasiology*, p. 34; Julius Pokorny (1959), *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 700; Jan De Vries (1962), *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 380A; Hugo Palander [Viktor Hugo Suolahti] (1899), *Die althochdeutschen Tiernamen*, p. 91f.

when the Germanic neuter \**hrussan* seems to have displaced the masculine ‘war-horse’ terms \**ehwaz* and \**marhaz*, presumably as the horse became more of a common livestock animal than a sportsman’s pet,<sup>14</sup>) since the generic of the domesticated animals in Germanic tends to be neuter; cf. NHG. *das Rind, Schaf, Schwein, Huhn*. In High German as well, the Germanic ‘mare’ word outlived its masculine base, when OHG. *mariha* : *marah* yielded to MHG. *merhe* :

Old Norse	<i>merr,</i> <i>hryssa</i>	<i>hross</i>	<i>hestr,</i> <i>stóðhross</i>	<i>geldhestr</i>
Icelandic	<i>meri,</i> <i>hryssa</i>	<i>hross,</i> <i>hestur</i>	<i>stóðhestur,</i> <i>graðhestur</i>	<i>vanadur</i> <i>hestur</i>
Swedish	<i>sto</i>	<i>häst</i>	<i>hingst</i>	<i>valack</i>
Danish	<i>hoppe</i>	<i>hest</i>	<i>hingst</i>	<i>vallak</i>
Old English	<i>miere</i>	<i>hors, eoh,</i> <i>meorh</i>	<i>stéda</i>	<i>hengest</i>
Middle Eng.	<i>mere</i>	<i>hors</i>	<i>stalon</i>	<i>geldyng</i>
Modern Eng.	<i>mare</i>	<i>horse</i>	<i>stallion</i>	<i>gelding</i>
OHG	<i>mariha</i>	<i>hros, marah</i>	<i>reinneo, scelo</i>	<i>hengist</i>
MHG	<i>merhe</i>	<i>ros, pfert</i>	<i>reine, schele</i>	<i>hengest</i>
NHG	<i>Stute</i>	<i>Pferd</i>	<i>Hengst</i>	<i>Wallach</i>
Dutch	<i>merrie</i>	<i>paard</i>	<i>hengst</i>	<i>ruin</i>

Figure 3: Some Germanic equine terms

*pfert*, with, however, a surprising NHG. *Stute* : *Pferd*, leaving a pejorized *Mähre* ‘nag’. In Kluge-Mitzka there is an interesting observation on this development, with a rather peculiar etiological conclusion (s. v. *Mähre*):<sup>15</sup>)

“Im Deutschen hielt sich (wie bei *Frau, Magd, Schwieger*) das Fem. länger als das zugrunde liegende Mask. Die Bed[eutung] sank, weil Stuten rascher altern als Hengste.”

<sup>14</sup>) Cf. NHG. *das Pferd* < MLat. *paraverēdus*.

<sup>15</sup>) *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 20. Auflage, p. 454B.

The synchronic corollary to the historical tendency under discussion is that at any given point in time, there tend to be more designations for male animals than for females; this is clear from a dialect geographical study, as, e.g., Oskar Bandle (1967), *Studien zur westnordischen Sprachgeographie; Haustieterminologie im Norwegischen, Isländischen und Färöischen*, “A. Textband” pp. 199–264 [“Pferd”]; Lothar Wolf (1968), *Sprachgeographische Untersuchungen zu den Bezeichnungen für Haustiere im Massif Central*, pp. 19f. [“l’espèce chevaline”], indicates an exceptional development occasioned no doubt by the peculiar circumstances indicated in note 1 above.

[§ 6] The Slavic data in figure 4 show the good retention rate of Common Slavic \**kobyła* 'mare' and the masculine generic \**konĭ* 'horse'; the two male columns indicate a not unexpectedly greater degree of variation.

	'mare'	'horse'	'stallion'	'gelding'
OCS	<i>kobyła</i>	<i>konĭ</i>		
Serbo-Croatian	<i>kòbila</i>	<i>kònj</i>	<i>ždr(ij)ebac,</i> <i>pàstuh, ajgir</i>	<i>uštroyen konj</i>
Czech	<i>kobyła,</i> <i>klisna</i>	<i>kůň</i>	<i>hrěbec</i>	<i>kleštětec</i>
Polish	<i>kobyła,</i> <i>klacz</i>	<i>koń</i>	<i>ogier, drygant,</i> <i>stadnik</i>	<i>wałach,</i> <i>trzebieniec</i>
Russian	<i>kobyła</i>	<i>lóšadi</i>	<i>žerebéc</i>	<i>mérin</i>
Ukrainian	<i>kobyla</i>	<i>kinĭ</i>	<i>žerebecĭ</i>	
Bulgarian	<i>kobyla</i>	<i>kon</i>	<i>žrebéc, pastúch</i>	<i>skopen kon</i>

Figure 4: Some Slavic equine terms

Russian *lóšadi* merits special notice on several counts. For one thing, it is unique in being a generic equine expression that is feminine, in contrast to the Common Slavic masculine \**konĭ*. Perhaps this reflects an assimilation to the gender of generics such as *ovcá* 'sheep', *kozá* 'goat', *svinijá* 'pig', *kúrica* 'chicken'; note that even Common Slavic \**pisŭ* 'dog', a masculine, has been replaced in Standard Russian by the feminine *sobáka*. For another thing, in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries *lóšadi* meant 'draught horse', but in the first half of the Sixteenth it began to compete with *konĭ* for generic function, although still capable of indicating a horse of low esteem; by the Seventeenth Century, however, *lóšadi* and *konĭ* had become fully synonymous.<sup>16)</sup> No doubt this semantic drift parallels the changing economic status of the horse. *Lóšadi* is given a Turkotatar provenience by the handbooks<sup>17)</sup> (cf. Chuvash *laša* 'horse, gelding'), to which must have been attached a feminine collective suffix (as in obsolete Russian *čeljadi* f. 'servants')<sup>18)</sup> but which

<sup>16)</sup> Ernst Dickenmann (1977), *Das Pferd im russischen Nomina appellativa und Nomina propria*, p. 82.

<sup>17)</sup> Max Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* 3,64 (1958); Oleg N. Trubačev (1960), *Proisxoždenie nazvanij domašnix životnyx v slavjanskix jazykax*, p. 54f.

<sup>18)</sup> *Étimologičeskij slovarĭ slavjanskix jazykov*, 4, 40–42 (1977), s. v. \**čeljadi*; Vasmer 3, 314 (1958).

Collocations of "horses" and "men" are, of course, common enough in Indo-European: Latin *equis viris* 'with all one's might'; Avestan *aspa-vira*;

subsequently became a singulative, much as German *Stute* ‘mare’ descends from a Middle High German *stuct* that referred to a herd of mares pasturing half-wild in the woods.<sup>19)</sup>

In contrast to the relative uniformity of the Slavic female and generic terms, the stallion words show greater instability. What is reconstructed as *\*žerbīci* would have meant in the proto-language not ‘stallion’, but ‘colt’, derived from *\*žrēbē* n. ‘foal’.<sup>20)</sup>

[§ 7] The lexical category of ‘mare’ tends to have a fairly good rate of retention within any given language group of West Indo-European. The expressions for ‘male’, on the other hand, whether referring to ‘stallion’ or ‘gelding’, tend in the opposite direction towards a markedly constant flux. And overall, the generic ‘horse’ category might be said to drift at an intermediate rate of change somewhat between female conservatism and the other extremity of male variability.

Apropos of the Latinists’ statements cited above in §§ 1 and 2, it might be rightly asked whether *equa* really does “resist” replacement. Perhaps it would be more correct to speak of a relative conservatism of this notional category in contrast to the other corresponding categories, especially of breeding male and castrate, which in many instances show extraordinary volatility. Why *equa*, or any other ancient word for that matter, does not change need not be explained. It simply doesn’t change very fast. Rather than speak of some sort of inherent inertia in the word or category ‘mare’, we should do better by noting that there are weaker extralinguistic vectors of change operant on the much broader lexical category of

---

Armenian *ayru-ji* ‘cavalry’ [lit., “man” + “horse”]. Buck (§ 3,41,2 = p. 168A) claims that Modern Greek *ἄλογο* ‘horse’ has developed this meaning in military parlance, in which *ἄνθρωποι* and *ἄλογα* (“men” and “dumb animals”) were commonly associated, the horse being the warrior’s beast par excellence.

<sup>19)</sup> Kluge-Mitzka, p. 762A, s. v.

<sup>20)</sup> *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, s. v. *žrēbīci* m. ‘foal’. A uniformity of ‘stallion’ terms cross-linguistically should certainly arouse suspicions as to the antiquity of the situation. A. R. Hausenberg (1972), *Nazvania životnyx v Komi jazyke*, p. 113, vividly illustrates this by pointing out that from purely linguistic considerations one would have to reconstruct a Common Permic *\*už* ‘stallion’, despite the fact that the archeological record gives no evidence for domesticated horse during the Fenno-Permic period. It wasn’t until the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries A. D. that the Komi territory was settled by southern immigrants bringing with them stockbreeding and agriculture.

FEMALE DOMESTICATED ANIMAL than there are on the other categories. Technicality as a mechanism of change is here irrelevant. Relative to *equus*, *equa* may well have been a rare word in Latin texts, used primarily in technical treatises; but infrequency of usage is not normally a condition associated with lexical retention—on the contrary, it is usually considered a factor in obsolescence. The description of a categorical non-change (or slow change) can of itself suggest a sort of explanation which might state that slow change, as for instance in the 'mare' words, comes about because there is practically no reason for change to occur. This seems so obvious to me as to be trivial. Conversely, a category such as 'stallion', that undergoes constant replacement, must have its reasons for so doing, and again the invocation of a vague criterion such as technicality is not only irrelevant here, but an inconsistency. Later on I plan to try explicating the modes of lexical formation and replacement and the effect of various cultural factors in such change in hopes of finding an explanation for this variable rate of change in livestock terminology and its implications for the lack of male terms in the standard reconstruction of proto-Indo-European words for domesticated animals.

Dept. of Classics  
405 Hilgard Avenue  
Los Angeles, Calif. 90024

Warren A. Brewer