

Interim report

Project title: Living Latin

Project reference: 16-17/AF/Letchford

Initial phase of the project - summer 2017

I attended the four week summer school at the *Accademia Vivarium Novum* in Frascati, Italy. This was a fully-immersive Latin experience: tuition six days a week, 9am-9pm with excursions on three Sundays, also conducted entirely in Latin, to the Roman town of Ostia, Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, and the site of Tusculum, a Roman hill-top town 20 miles from Rome. All conversation, whether in a formal teaching, discussion or social situations (such as all meals) was conducted in the target language.

I attended all the events on offer:

- mornings: working through a spoken Latin textbook *Familia Romana* (see below) between 9am and 2pm.
- afternoons: reading and discussion of Renaissance authors such as Erasmus; and lecture on pedagogy.
- evenings: *ludi* - interactive games, quizzes, songs and similar activities.

Implementation: key points

Since the start of the current academic year, I have used the same textbook and delivered around 80% of each class in Latin (90% in term 1).

Features that I have not used previously include:

- acting out Latin texts
- extensive use of costumes and props
- students writing much more extensively in Latin
- pupils responding to questions (oral and written) in Latin
- singing songs in Latin

I also ran a voluntary class reading Erasmus, without recourse to translation.

Dissemination of results

I have also delivered a paper to the biggest conference in the UK on classics, arranged annually by the Classical Association, at the University of Leicester. The paper was entitled *Teaching Latin using the Target Language* and was given earlier this month on Saturday 7th April. The following day, I took part in a demonstration workshop, showing more advanced techniques of teaching in the target language. By this means I have made contact with others interested in introducing more spoken Latin. One of them, who has recently finished a doctorate on communicative methods of teaching Latin, commented that I was certainly at the cutting edge in the UK.

Historical background to Latin teaching in the target language

The teaching of Latin has a long and venerable history. Our methods of language teaching are now beginning to take on board research into cognitive development processes, more advanced linguistic theory and neuro-biological research. This whole field of Second Language Acquisition seeks to understand better the processes that affect learning - although research of real-life learners often results

in less clear-cut results than one might hope for. Modern languages have taken on board many practices in the hope of improving second language acquisition. Latin is somewhat behind the cutting edge, especially in the UK, partly driven by our obsession with public exams.

Many people's perception of Latin will be coloured by the approach of grammar schools up to the 1960s, where Latin maintained a strong hold because the leading universities made O level Latin a requirement for matriculation. Although this requirement has been absent for 50 years, there is still, in some quarters, the view that Latin is 'elitist'. For some, this is reinforced by the fact that Latin now only has a firm position in the curriculum of independent schools (although, in terms of numbers, more students learn Latin in state schools than in independent schools currently).

Living just outside Stratford upon Avon, I became curious as to what kind of education Shakespeare would have had when he attended the Grammar School. Looking into this led me to this project.

In Shakespeare's school, we see an emphasis on grammar, as exemplified by Lily's Grammar, which was used in various revisions for the next two hundred years. But this was only in the earliest stages of language-learning. Once this had been thoroughly committed to memory, reading began, and so did speaking. Translation (into English and back again into Latin) and declamation prepared those who got to the end of the course for study at Oxford or Cambridge at the age of around fourteen.

The statutes of some schools insisted that only Latin be spoken, even in the playground, after the initial stage and some appointed a responsible boy as 'lupus' to report on any transgressions to the schoolmaster. This sounds remarkably like immersion in the target language to me.

Today, we do not have the luxury of time that the Elizabethans had: one estimate puts it at 40 hours a week with no school holidays as we now understand them. So, although using spoken Latin might appear revolutionary, in other respects it is rediscovering the wisdom of older practices and adapting it to our rather different circumstances.

Implementation: identifying the cohort

One key factor is the nature of the cohort. Everyone in their first year (Classical Civilisation or Ancient History or variations) studies a classical language at an appropriate level - thus Latin is basically obligatory and must be passed.

Our departmental philosophy is that all students should be exposed to a classical language so they can appreciate the limitation of working in translation and have basic tools to deconstruct a short passage if it is necessary for a point they are developing in an essay. This philosophy means that we have a wide range of experience of and confidence in language learning, including some who have had little exposure to formal second language learning. One aim is to give a firm base for students to continue while at the same time to have a course that helps motivate and encourage those who have less confidence and ability.

Another key factor is the rate of progression in the time available. At Warwick we have three classes a week and 23 teaching weeks. We have aligned the level at the end of the second year with A level. This allows us to be more flexible in what to achieve over the first two years

Implementation: what has been different?

1. The course has exposed the students to a great deal of written Latin and vocabulary. Chapters get longer as the book continues, but average out at approximately 1000 words of Latin per chapter of narrative (before grammatical explanations and exercises). The structure of the language becomes more sophisticated but in a way that leads them to deal with longer sentences with confidence.

2. The majority of each chapter is in dialogue form. This gives the opportunity for students to read Latin out loud, and for me to hear to what extent they are understanding as they read. Depending on the time available, I sometimes read, to bring out the meaning as best I can through intonation, dramatic pauses or reactions. Much better is getting them to act out the text, reacting as they encounter it (being prompted as necessary). To bring a sense of fun into the classes, I have a series of simple costumes (i.e. pieces of fabric that with a hole for the head as a tunic, long piece of white fabric for a *toga*, a coloured piece for a *stola*) and a number of appropriate props and wigs. In this way, they can more meaningfully respond to movements described or narrated in the text (in the manner of TPR - Total Physical Response, an approach taken by some modern-language teachers).

3. In the earlier chapters I gave most of the explanations in Latin, with individuals answering questions in Latin as well. This applied to both vocabulary and grammatical explanations. There was virtually no translation into English of the text, although resort was had to checking English translation for an occasional tricky individual word, especially where it might have more than one idiomatic translation.

Once a passage has been read, points of grammar are identified, mainly focusing on the main theme of each chapter. Guidance is given on how to approach it/recognise the feature, and the opportunity taken to put it in its context. As time has gone on and sentences have become more sophisticated, explanations tend to be more in English than Latin, although subsequent reminders will tend to use a lot of Latin. Classroom commands are almost always in Latin, with a checking to make sure they have picked up - particularly page numbers.

4. Consolidation of vocabulary is important. Much of this is done independently by the students between classes in two ways: by going through the passage several times, paying great attention to understanding precisely what it means (without necessarily translating). To help this, I have recorded myself reading all the passages and made them available on the module webpages. I encourage the students to go through this a couple of times to help their pronunciation and fluency in reading the Latin words confidently. The second way in which students consolidate is by doing a good number of varied exercises - e.g. gap-fill, recognition, formation, writing a Latin sentence as an answer to a Latin question - which focus on the words introduced in that section. To build on this, we do some vocabulary work in each class - synonyms, antonyms, definitions which they can do in small groups (competitively) or on their own, sometimes giving the words in the context they first met them, other times asking them to give the synonym/antonym. So far, there has been little in the way of traditional 'vocabulary tests'.

5. One factor to consider in this approach is the willingness of students to enter the spirit and engage with a more active way of learning a language. Krashen's hypothesis of the Affective filter has been criticised, but it identifies a phenomenon that many teachers will recognise: that students' receptivity to learning can be affected adversely by anxiety, doubts, stress and positively by good motivation and self-confidence that they can and will do well. This is a particular problem at university level, and especially with first years where some have a heightened sense of self-awareness and of being judged by their peers. For some, this performative aspect can be very helpful as it gives them the opportunity to be in a different character. Others are diffident and will not put themselves forward but enjoy the

experience and the engagement once encouraged to do so. A few find it very difficult, but they would find a more traditional approach challenging as well.

Reaction so far

So far, anecdotal feedback has been good, as has the module feedback the department collected in Week 1 of Term 2. Attendance has also looks to have been better than previous years, and those who find any language difficult seem to be enjoying the experience.



The author (front left) in full action, 11th July 2017

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