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READING LATIN AS LATIN — SOME DIFFICULTIES AND SOME DEVICES¹

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Two years ago this month the writer of this paper published an article² under the caption “Shall We Teach our Pupils to Read Latin?” It will be noted that the title was cast in the form of a question — perhaps in the form of a deliberative question of volitive origin! At any rate the question was not meant to be purely rhetorical. Nor is the question merely academic; for the answer which a teacher of Latin makes to that question, even if it is only a tentative answer, will determine quite fundamentally his classroom procedure at every level of his teaching. And this will be true for the very simple reason that most of the knowledges, habits, and skills necessary to develop the ability to read Latin as Latin and in the Latin order are radically different from those knowledges, habits, and skills necessary to develop the contrasted ability, viz. the ability to decode (or to decipher or to “translate”) Latin as English and in the English order. It follows, therefore, that the types of pupil-activity which are set up in the classroom and in outside study for the purpose of developing one set of knowledges, habits, and skills will differ quite radically from those set up for the development of the other set of knowledges, habits, and skills.

Now it is undoubtedly true that no one at the present time can give a final answer to the question stated above. At any rate, there is not at present available on that question objective evidence which is at all comparable to that discussed at length in the

¹ Read at the twenty-sixth annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in New Orleans, April 3, 1930.

² Cf. the CLASSICAL JOURNAL XXIII (1928), 500-10.

general *Report* (Volume I) of the Classical Investigation in regard to the validity of certain ultimate educational objectives in the study of Latin and of those methods which are the "best by test" for the attainment of those objectives. As a writer in the CLASSICAL JOURNAL,³ points out, the recommendation in the *Report* to the effect that "the primary immediate objective in the study of Latin is the ability to read Latin as Latin" was based on opinion and not on the results of tests. It is true, however, that this recommendation was based on what seemed to be the *majority* opinion of teachers⁴ and was, furthermore, in accordance with previous official recommendations on the subject.⁵

Then, too, one may hazard a guess that the Committee which drew up the *Report* assumed that the primary immediate objective in the teaching of Latin was "ability to read Latin as Latin," because no other assumption was tenable. In the opinion of the writer of this paper, at any rate, it would have been quite impossible for that Committee, or for any other representative group of Latin teachers, to set up as the primary immediate objective in the teaching of Latin any of the following abilities or knowledges which, at least by implication, have been proposed by various critics of this feature of the *Report*:

1. Ability, actually or mentally, to transpose the words of a Latin sentence into English order and then to transverbalize the Latin words thus transposed into more or less equivalent English words or phrases so as to "make sense."
2. Ability to transverbalize the words of a Latin sentence into more or less equivalent English words or phrases and then to transpose and rearrange these English words and phrases thus transverbalized so as to "make sense."
3. Ability to repeat memoriter paradigms of Latin nouns, adjectives, and verbs, to quote rules of Latin grammar, and to

³ A. T. Walker, "The Report of the Classical Investigation — a Criticism," CLASSICAL JOURNAL, xxv (1929), 83-92.

⁴ Cf. the *Report*, pp. 193f.

⁵ Cf., e.g., the *Report of the Committee of Ten* (1893), or the announcement of the College Entrance Examination Board (1924) as quoted in the *Report of the Classical Investigation*, pp. 288-91.

give more or less near English equivalents of a selected list of Latin words.

4. "An accurate knowledge of the facts of Latin, plus whatever reading ability Heaven may have vouchsafed to the pupil's brain" (Walker, *op. cit.* 82-93).

And in the opinion of the present writer, a teacher who should adopt any one of these four abilities as a primary immediate objective and should organize classroom procedure consistent with his chosen objective would not only fail to give his pupils any practice in reading Latin (in any real sense of that term) but would be guilty of giving his pupils practice in methods which would positively inhibit the correct reading process.⁶

But that again is mere opinion. What we need, of course, if we are to try to find the final answer to the question, "Shall we (or should we) teach our pupils to read Latin as Latin and in the Latin order?" is an accumulation of objective evidence. We need, e.g., more such evidence as that presented by Buswell's laboratory study of eye-movements.⁷

Furthermore, even if we are convinced of the truth of Buswell's conclusions that "the direct method produces desirable reading habits; the translation method does not" and that "this seems to be equally true regardless of the type of language — as applicable to Latin as to French," we should still be guilty of begging the question; for what we really want to know is whether or not those knowledges, abilities, skills, habits, attitudes, and ideals commonly regarded as the most important ultimate objectives of the study of Latin are best attained by the average pupil through learning to "read" Latin directly (i.e. as Latin and in the Latin order) or indirectly by transposition and transverbalization (i.e. as English and in the English order).

But in order to carry on controlled experiments to find scientifically the answer to the question just stated, we shall need first of all by minor experiments to evaluate classroom methods suit-

⁶ For a good statement of this point of view, cf. Hugh P. O'Neill, *Reading Latin*: Loyola University Press (1929), 6.

⁷ Cf. G. T. Buswell, *A Laboratory Study of the Reading of Foreign Languages*: New York, Macmillan Company, (1927), 71-95.

able for attaining those subsidiary and ancillary abilities, knowledges, and skills which would seem to be necessary to the attainment of the ability to read Latin directly. The Committee charged with conducting the Classical Investigation failed to find significant data in this field, because at the time of the investigation no school system could be found which was able to provide facilities for setting up a controlled experiment or for securing test results that would yield convincing evidence on this point. In the Cleveland schools, e.g., where a modified "direct" method has long been in use in certain Latin classes, half-year promotions of pupils played such havoc with the groups being studied that the data secured were inconclusive.

But times have changed; and the relaxation of quantity requirements by the College Entrance Examination Board and other standardizing agencies and the publication of new teaching materials, including textbooks, now makes it possible for teachers or school systems to conduct experiments and to prove for themselves the educational values of one system of teaching as against the other.

As a first step in any such experiment it would seem desirable to state clearly in terms of knowledges, abilities, skills, habits, and attitudes those subsidiary immediate objectives which would seem to be necessary to the development of each of these general abilities. We teachers of Latin are, I fear, too much inclined to say that a pupil must "know" his vocabulary, forms, and syntax, without stopping to think just what we mean by such a statement, or to realize that the method by which the pupil is to acquire a knowledge of these elements should be consistent with the use he is to make of them.

I should like to present to you today the results of one effort so to state certain of these subsidiary immediate objectives, then to analyze some of the learning difficulties which seem to stand in the way of attaining these objectives, and finally to propose some classroom procedures which I believe teachers would find helpful in overcoming these difficulties. I begin by listing some important

immediate objectives which, it seems to me, are necessary to the attainment of ability to read Latin as Latin:

1. Ability to pronounce accurately and automatically at sight a capital stock of Latin words, phrases, and sentences.

2. Ability to pronounce accurately at sight unfamiliar Latin words as they appear in later reading.

3. A working knowledge of the Latin sounds represented by the letters of the Roman alphabet and a working knowledge of the rules for placing the accent of a Latin word.

4. Ability to read a Latin sentence or paragraph fluently and with proper word phrasing and voice inflection.

5. Ability automatically and without transverbalization to get the correct meaning from a fairly large capital stock of Latin words when these are seen in sentence context.

6. Skill in getting the correct meaning from unfamiliar Latin words when seen in sentence context.

7. Ability to recognize accurately and promptly commonly used grammatical forms and to select the appropriate grammatical function of a given form in its particular sentence context.

8. Habit of, and skill in, grouping together on the basis of form and function those Latin words which make up major or minor thought units.

9. A working knowledge of the general principles of Latin word order.

10. A language attitude toward Latin and a reading attitude toward the printed Latin page.

It will be noted that the first four of the ten immediate objectives listed above have to do with the *saying* of Latin. At first thought it might appear that too great emphasis is thus given to mere vocal utterance. However, it seems apparent to the writer, at least, that a teacher who is committed whole-heartedly to the experiment of trying to teach his pupils to read Latin as Latin must give an important place to these first four objectives, inasmuch as a necessary first step in *reading* a language consists in *saying what one sees* — in converting written or printed word symbols into spoken words. *Saying* Latin is not all there is to

reading Latin, but no normal person can learn to *read* a language without *saying* the words of that language, either audibly or to himself. And it is right at this point that we encounter our first serious learning difficulty. Many teachers hesitate to try to teach their pupils to read Latin as Latin, because they realize that it is difficult, if not impossible, for many boys and girls to acquire the ability to pronounce Latin with any degree of accuracy, to say nothing of learning to read it “fluently with proper phrasing and voice inflection” (to quote from Objective 4). Many other teachers who start out bravely on such a venture soon give up the struggle or allow the oral reading of Latin to degenerate into a purely perfunctory performance, which amounts to about the same thing as no reading at all.

Such teachers should remind themselves that speech is fundamentally a habit or skill, and not merely a knowledge; that it is therefore not enough to call a pupil’s attention once or often to the new and strange Latin sounds of certain long-familiar letters of the Roman-English alphabet; that a speech habit or skill (like any other habit or skill) can be acquired only through long-continued and properly motivated practice; that the new speech reactions must be built up alongside of the old; that this can be done most effectively in a natural setting where language is used to convey and to express thought; and that a great deal of oral reading should precede any attempts at silent reading.

Let me illustrate what I mean by the above statements. The printed letter combination *s-u-m*, for example, to which the pupil has for years given the speech response “sūm,” will yield a habitual oral response “sōōm” only after the pupil has repeatedly uttered the word — preferably in a sensible Latin sentence and in a conscious and conscientious effort to do as the Romans did. Likewise, the letter combination *s-a-l-v-e* must become *salvē* as a Roman greeting, while remaining “sālve” as an English medication. Similarly *m-a-l-e* will remain English “male” unless completely surrounded by an evil Roman atmosphere.

I recently asked a large group of experienced Latin teachers to suggest classroom activities which they believed would really give

beginning Latin pupils effective practice in *saying* Latin. I pass on to you some of the activities which were suggested and which it seems to me apply especially to Objective 1 in the list given above:

1. The pupils as a group or as individuals pronounce after the teacher each new Latin word in the lesson vocabulary or reading assignment.
2. The pupils as a group or as individuals read after the teacher each sentence in the reading assignment.
3. The pupils are careful to pronounce separately all double consonants and to give approximately double time to all long vowels.
4. The pupils in early stages of the work copy Latin words and sentences, indicating the quantity of all long vowels.
5. The pupils write Latin words or sentences from dictation and then read them aloud.
6. The pupils indicate vowel quantities in all written Latin, at least during the first year.
7. The pupils read and act out Latin dialogues and plays.
8. The pupils reply in Latin to questions which the teacher asks in Latin about objects in the room.
9. The pupils memorize Latin mottoes, proverbs, poems, and songs.

Note, by the way, that all of the above mentioned activities are stated in terms of what the pupil does, for obviously a pupil learns only through his own activities. It is what the pupil does, not what the teacher does or says, that makes changes in the pupil — that modifies his nervous system and speeds up his synapses.

A similar list of activities was prepared to help the pupils to attain Objective 2, which merely represents a further development of the ability described as Objective 1. Here are some of them:

1. The pupils develop a working knowledge of the Latin sounds represented by the letters of the Roman alphabet by abstracting these sounds from Latin words already properly pronounced by imitation.

2. The pupils habitually prolong the long vowels and give full time to each separately pronounced consonant and so practically force themselves to place the primary word accent on a "long" penult.

3. The pupils develop under the teacher's guidance a working knowledge of the rules for syllabification and for placing the accent of a Latin word through an application of the principles involved, as illustrated in Latin words already properly accented by imitation.

4. The pupils help themselves to prolong the long vowels in their oral work by habitually marking them in their written work, at least during the first year.

5. The pupils formulate under the teacher's guidance the most important rules concerning the quantity of vowels in Latin (e.g. a vowel is short before another vowel).

6. The pupils are led to realize that the meaning or tense of a word is often indicated by the quantity and accent, as in such pairs of words as *occidō* and *occīdō*, *advenit* and *advēnit*.

7. The pupils write Latin words or sentences from dictation and are held responsible for marking all long vowels as an essential part of the spelling.

Objective 3 is obviously valuable only as it contributes to Objective 2, and its attainment has been sufficiently provided for in the list of activities just given. Also Objective 4 is only a more complex ability to which those abilities stated as Objectives 1, 2, and 3 (and also 8) contribute.

In Objectives 5 and 6 we encounter the second great learning difficulty. Many teachers are discouraged by the difficulties involved in getting their pupils to attach meaning to Latin words or to get meaning from Latin words without the persistent intervention of near-equivalents in the vernacular. Such teachers need to realize more fully the value of the oral-objective approach to the study of Latin and the necessity of developing in their pupils from the first the habit of, and skill in, "sensible guessing" at the meaning of a new word as it appears in oral or written sentence context. Such discouraged teachers should realize also that the

types of formal drill all too commonly employed in teaching Latin vocabulary only strengthen the natural tendency of English-speaking pupils to read Latin as English. The directions sometimes given to the pupil to "learn" the lesson vocabulary in advance of hearing or seeing the new Latin words in sensible sentence context can of course mean only one thing, viz. that the pupil is to "learn" to associate each new Latin word in the vocabulary with a more or less near-equivalent in English. And the result of this "learning" is that, whenever thereafter the pupil sees the Latin word in his reading, he is almost sure to give the practised indirect response in English instead of a direct response in Latin. And an habitual and automatic direct response, I repeat, is necessary if one is ever to learn to read Latin as Latin. Some classroom activities which have been found helpful in attaining Objective 5 are the following:

1. The pupils in the first few class periods learn the meaning of a small stock of Latin words by oral-objective presentation and are given much practice in hearing, saying, seeing, and writing these words in sentence context.
2. The pupils in their early work read much well-graded Latin which introduces only a few new words at a time and in illuminating sentence context.
3. The pupils are encouraged to associate as many Latin words as possible with known Latin or English words with which they are connected by derivation.
4. The pupils give orally or write Latin answers to Latin questions so framed as to require the pupil to use the words on which special drill is desired.
5. The pupils do completion exercises which require the insertion of the Latin words on which they are being drilled.
6. The pupils commit to memory little Latin stories or parts in Latin dialogues which contain the words on which they are being drilled.
7. The pupils write English-Latin exercises which require the use of the words on which they are being drilled.
8. The pupils are encouraged whenever possible to establish a

direct association of the Latin word with the appropriate object, act, or quality rather than to depend for meaning chiefly upon an English near-equivalent.

9. In reviews and drills the pupils are encouraged to show by objective methods that they know the meaning of a Latin word or phrase so as to use it in an appropriate Latin sentence rather than to give its English near-equivalent.

In more advanced reading the problem of training the pupils to get meaning directly from new Latin words is still more difficult. The building up of good vocabulary habits in the earlier stages of Latin reading and the selection of reading material so graded in vocabulary difficulty that the pupil has a real chance to "guess sensibly" the meanings of new words are prime necessities here. If these two requirements are met, the following classroom activities will be found very helpful in attaining Objective 6:

1. The pupils are given practice in class in comprehending at sight and are encouraged to try to discover the meaning of each unfamiliar word from its context or from its similarity to a known Latin or English word.

2. The pupils silently read and reread in class a short passage of new Latin, each pupil checking with a pencil any word the meaning of which he cannot solve for himself; a pupil then asks for help on a given word, and the teacher calls on some pupil who has solved the meaning to explain how he did it.

3. The pupil is encouraged in his outside study to use these same methods for discovering the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

4. The pupils are given much practice in discovering identical elements in pairs of related words through the use of English-Latin, Latin-English, and Latin-Latin word studies.

5. The pupil is given much practice in analyzing Latin words formed with prefixes which suffer assimilation in compounds (e.g. *ad-* and *in-*) and in analyzing Latin words containing the more important formative suffixes (e.g. *vict-or*, *vict-or-ia*).

6. The pupil by a system of graphic devices breaks up sentences or clauses into smaller thought groups and thus limits the immediate context for any unfamiliar word.⁸

⁸ For helpful practical suggestions on this point see Mignonette Spilman's

7. The pupil is encouraged to read a new Latin sentence aloud to secure auditory as well as visual association between an unfamiliar word in the sentence and some known related Latin or English word.

Objectives 7, 8, and 9 involve the greatest of all difficulties in learning to read Latin as Latin and in the Latin order — difficulties inherent in the very genius of Latin as a highly inflected language. In English, as we all know, word order is all important in determining the function of a word in a sentence, while inflectional endings are all but nonexistent. In Latin the inflectional endings are all-important in determining the function and relationship of words, while word order plays a quite subordinate rôle. It is not surprising therefore that many teachers who would be willing to pay the cost in time and energy sufficient to give their pupils adequate practice in saying Latin and who are convinced that word-meanings should and can be acquired functionally, nevertheless believe that it is all but impossible to teach their pupils to read Latin in the Latin order, and hence they allow or even encourage their pupils actually or mentally to transpose each Latin sentence into the familiar English order before attempting to comprehend its meaning. The advice which these teachers sometimes give, “first find the subject, etc.” represents, of course, complete surrender to the analytic method. If we teachers cannot discover and use, even in the early stages,⁹ effective teaching devices to overcome this the greatest reading difficulty, we cannot expect to train our pupils to read even “easy” Latin in the Latin order, to say nothing of training them so to read classical Latin of the periodic-sentence type.

Obviously Objectives 7, 8, and 9 are closely related to one another, and furthermore the ability stated as Objective 4 is only the outward and audible expression of the inward habit and skill article on “Learning to Read Latin in the Latin Order,” *CLASSICAL JOURNAL* xxiv (1929), 323-37, and also the graphic devices suggested under Activity 7 on pp. 138, below.

⁹ As O’Neill cleverly remarks: “Experience proves that the pupil who has been taught to prow around a sentence looking for the subject and verb is with difficulty cured of his nomadic habits later on” (*op. cit.* 11).

stated as Objective 8. Any classroom activity, therefore, which is helpful in attaining Objectives 7, 8, or 9 would also be useful in the attainment of the others in this group. For convenience, however, the activities are listed under that particular objective to which they would seem to contribute most directly. Some classroom activities especially useful for the attainment of Objective 7 are:

1. The pupils are taught to associate form and function through first meeting new grammatical forms and syntactical uses in sensible Latin sentences, either oral or written.

2. Pupils do oral and written completion exercises which require a knowledge of the form demanded by the context.

3. The pupils gradually build up paradigms and formulate rules from the forms and uses which they have met in their Latin reading.

4. The pupils copy the reading assignment and indicate by certain graphic devices the function of certain especially significant words or word groups in the sentence (e.g. they underscore all direct objects and place a wave line under all nouns or pronouns in the dative case).

5. The pupils copy assigned English sentences and indicate by similar graphic devices the function of certain especially significant words or word groups and then turn these sentences into Latin.

6. The teacher writes a certain Latin noun, adjective, or verb form on the board, and a pupil gives orally or writes around it a sensible Latin sentence in which this form is correctly used.

7. The pupils are encouraged to read through a complex or compound Latin sentence, breaking it up by means of certain graphic devices into major and minor thought groups, and then to determine the form and function of each word in relation to the other words in its own group.

8. The pupils give orally or write Latin answers to Latin questions which require the use of forms on which special drill is being given.

9. The pupils are trained through sight reading to anticipate

the form and use which are likely to follow a given “signal” word (e.g. *impero*, which is likely to be followed by a subjunctive clause introduced by an *ut* or *ne*).

Here again the cultivation of good reading habits is often made unnecessarily difficult by wrong practices in the early stages of Latin study. The learning by rote of forms apart from their functions or the habitual association of Latin forms with their near-equivalents in English sets up and strengthens stimulus-response bonds which quite effectually interfere with any later efforts to read Latin as Latin and in the Latin order.

Some classroom activities especially directed to the attainment of Objective 8 are:

1. The pupils copy the reading assignment and indicate by certain graphic devices the major and minor word groups (e.g. end-on clauses, parenthetical clauses, ablative absolute phrases, participial phrases, etc.) as a first step in comprehending the passages.

2. The pupils copy assigned English sentences and indicate by similar graphic devices the major and minor thought groups, and then turn these sentences into Latin.

3. The pupils read a passage aloud and indicate by pauses and by voice inflection the various types of thought units.

4. The teacher writes a Latin passage on the board, beginning each major or minor thought unit on a new line, and has the pupils interpret each thought group as it appears.

5. The pupils are trained through sight reading to anticipate the kind of major or minor thought unit likely to follow a given “signal” word (e.g. *timeo*, which is likely to be followed by a subjunctive clause introduced by *ne*).

6. The pupils give Latin answers to Latin questions so phrased as to call for a given type of phrase or clause (e.g. *Quid Caesar jussit? Quid Caesar imperavit? Quid Caesar timuit?*).

For the attainment of Objective 9 the following activities are suggested:

1. The pupils give orally or write Latin answers to Latin questions following as closely as possible the word order used in

the questions (e.g. *Quo puer ambulat? Ad oppidum puer ambulat*).

2. The pupils are led to recognize the possibilities of a rhetorical word order in English through the use of pronoun case forms (e.g. "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you").

3. The pupils are encouraged to observe the order of words usually employed by the Latin author being read and to note the rhetorical effects produced by any radical variation in that order.

4. The pupils practise comprehension at sight by using a notched card to force themselves to comprehend, whenever possible, each word or word group as it comes.

5. The teacher writes a new Latin passage on the board, pausing after each word, and the pupils try to anticipate what will come next.

6. The pupils formulate under the teacher's guidance a few important general rules for "normal" Latin word order.

7. The pupils follow "normal" Latin word order in all their own writing of Latin, unless special rhetorical effects are indicated.

Objective 10 is placed last in the list of objectives given on p. 131, not because the writer considers it last or least in importance, but because attitudes are to a very great extent attained incidentally and indirectly and because most of the classroom activities recommended above as helpful for the attainment of the Objectives 1 to 9 contribute also to the attainment of Objective 10. No separate list of classroom activities, therefore, need be set up for its attainment.

The writer wishes in closing to express his own conviction, which he hopes in time can be verified by objective evidence, that any teacher of Latin who provides for his pupils the genuine sort of language experience urged in this paper will feel well repaid in the interest and enthusiasm of his pupils and, furthermore, that he will, if we know anything at all about the laws of learning, very greatly increase his pupils' chances of success in attaining both the immediate and the ultimate objectives which that teacher may have set up as valid in the teaching of Latin.