When Learning Greek and Latin Became Hard, and What We Can Do About It

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Abstract: The way the classical languages are traditionally taught can constitute a barrier to the entry to the field for many students. This piece reviews the history of language pedagogy over the last two centuries (starting with the Prussian school reform), and makes the case for embracing more progressive approaches to teaching Greek and Latin, informed by contemporary linguistics and second language acquisition studies. It includes a discussion of existing barriers to change, suggestions on how to implement small incremental changes in the classroom, as well as a conversation with an expert who has shifted to teaching Latin communicatively.

I. Introduction

One of the few upsides of being on the academic job market is that you get to talk to a lot of people. Over the past few seasons, I have had many engaging conversations about the state of the field with colleagues at large public institutions, small liberal arts colleges, Ivy League schools, and everything in-between. And one topic that always comes up, and that always draws interest, is how to attract more students to the introductory Latin and Greek courses, and how to make sure that those students learn the languages while also enjoying themselves enough that they do not drop out after the first semester.

This is an exciting time in Classics, as many in the field are working to reimagine the discipline in a way that is more progressive and inclusive, both in terms of the topics that are deemed worthy of study and in the type of students and scholars that Classics programs want to attract and cultivate. There is important work being done, and many colleagues (and likely the readers of this journal) share my conviction that the field can only survive and thrive if it can become significantly more open and diverse (and less elitist) than it was in the past. And I am certainly not the only one who has the sense that the way Greek and Latin are taught can constitute a major barrier to entry into the field.

The situation will be familiar to many readers: few students begin university studies with any background in Greek or Latin, and even those who do are not necessarily ready to do advanced work in the languages. The undergraduate "Introduction to Latin/Greek" courses frequently develop a reputation for being arduous, and enrollment numbers drop (sometimes dramatically) from one term to the next. Capable and motivated teachers might find that their methods are not serving the students, and yet feel that they do not have the institutional latitude to alter them. Even the students who persist and complete Greek and Latin coursework during their undergraduate years often need additional time to hone their language skills before they can start their Ph.D.s, hence the development of various offerings such as post-baccalaureate programs to bridge the gap. And yet, language proficiency is often taken as one of the most important factors in graduate admissions—indeed, by some as a key measure of academic promise.

But what type of promise are we measuring, exactly? As a result of the particular history of our field (to which I shall return below), the way in which Greek and Latin are taught at American universities is often remarkably old-fashioned. As a product of an Italian private Catholic high school in the 1990s (where several of my teachers were elderly priests who had carried out their university studies entirely *in Latin*), I was shocked to discover during my Ph.D. training at an American institution that the methods used to teach Greek and Latin at universities in North America could prove more conservative than the ones to which I had been exposed during my teenage years.[1] These "old-fashioned" methods often rely on mind-numbing amounts of memorization and hair-splitting categorization. And, what's even more puzzling, they have almost no connection to the discipline of contemporary linguistics, and more specifically to the vast field of second language acquisition. This stood out to me in very sharp contrast with the progressive pedagogical methods I had come to admire in American undergraduate teaching. Looking into these Greek and Latin classrooms (even the ones run by energetic, caring, and inspiring instructors) is like looking at the light coming from distant stars.

I am a historical linguist: I have devoted a frankly excessive amount of my time to exploring the nooks and crannies of Ancient Greek and Latin grammar. Yet I am fairly confident that if I had been compelled to memorize and recite the "seven types of subjunctives" (on which see more below) as an undergraduate student, and to complete daily "drills" on the Ancient Greek verbs, I might have sought an entirely different career for myself. These types of activities are to linguistics what memorizing baseball scores is to mathematics, and are famously unreliable as indicators of language proficiency (more on this below). They also contribute to the impression that there is something uniquely hard and challenging about learning ancient languages—they turn Latin and Greek into unattainable objects, only accessible to a selected few. And while some might find solace in such a view (I was able to learn the Classical languages, therefore I am special), I would argue that it does far more harm than good.

Only a very small subset of the general student population thrives under these more traditional methods of teaching. These are students who possess a very specific kind of diligence and endurance (what the Germans call *Sitzfleisch*, literally "sitting flesh", meaning "endurance in a sedentary activity"); who are good at following complex abstract rules and paying great attention to detail; who are, I might add, impervious to boredom. These are all wonderful qualities to have, but they are not all necessary or even sufficient to make a great scholar.[2] And they are not the *only* qualities that we ought to select if our goal is to have a field that is vibrant, innovative, and diverse. Bracey (2017) argues that these traditional methods are directly responsible for the lack of racial and socio-economic diversity in the Latin classroom:

> This approach takes a language that was once spoken comfortably by people
> of all backgrounds, social classes, ages, etc. throughout the world and renders

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[1] Incidentally, my training in Greek and Latin wasn't particularly modern to begin with (following the definitions introduced in Section II, it would have fallen squarely within the Grammar and Translation camp). But at the introductory level there was much less emphasis on memorization, categorization, and grammar drills, and at the intermediate and advanced level there was more emphasis on reading extensively above all else, starting with very easy texts (see Section III below for some examples).

[2] These are qualities, incidentally, that would make for the ideal Prussian bureaucrat. But more on this relation below.

it into a complex linguistic jigsaw puzzle that requires an elite mathematical mind to decipher.

Bracey's comment requires an important qualification here (which is in line with Bracey's own thinking): it is not these methods impede diversity in the classroom because "diverse" students do not have "elite mathematical minds" (or rather, as I would put it, a special kind of diligence and endurance). Students of all backgrounds, after all, have learned the Classical languages using traditional methods in the past, and scholars of color (such as William S. Scarborough and Helen M. Chesnutt) have written this very kind of traditional grammar.

But as Bracey explains, these now-outdated methods make the languages artificially (and unnecessarily) arduous to all students, so that only a few "survive the grammar gauntlet, while the rest struggle and eventually drop out". In the contemporary high school classroom (and arguably at the college level too), this type of artificial selection means that "except for the occasional outliers, the overwhelming majority of these [successful] students are going to be the most advantaged … in the district" (ibidem).[3] As a result, fewer students are going to seek entry to the field to begin with, and the few who do are more likely to come from privileged backgrounds.[4]

Ironically, one might argue that even those students who "do well" under these methods don't end up learning the languages *that well* or *that quickly*.[5] For instance, Palmisciano (2004) laments how in most Italian high schools, excessive hours of grammar-focused instruction dominate the curriculum, at the expense of spending time with the original texts. With reference to the Italian *Ginnasio* (i.e., the first two years of the five-year *Liceo Classico*), Ricucci (2013) is a pilot study showing that more progressive methods outperform the traditional methods for Ancient Greek by a fairly large margin when it comes to student outcomes. Pozzi (2010) shows similar results for Latin.[6] Stringer (2019) reports data on positive outcomes for

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[3] The remainder of Bracey's piece articulates additional barriers to racial diversity in the high school Latin classroom, including outdated and insensitive treatment of topics like colonization and slavery in Latin textbooks (on some of these issues, see Erik [2017]), as well as the lack of Latin teachers of color. These are important issues that need to be addressed, though they exceed the scope of this paper.

[4] The socio-economic background might matter in another way: advantaged students might also come from backgrounds in which topics like Greek and Latin are perceived as particularly worthwhile and prestigious, and thus worth "suffering through". This attitude, anecdotally, is quite evident to this day in Italian high school choice: the *Liceo Classico* (where Greek and Latin take up 10+ hours of instruction per week) still carries more societal prestige in some circles than any other kind of secondary education, so that many wealthy parents not only encourage their children to take on these studies (sometimes against their children's own wishes), but are also willing to invest resources in extensive private Greek and Latin tutoring when their children struggle with the languages. This willingness to pay good money for remedial Greek and Latin instruction has little to do, typically, with a pure love of Cicero and Plato, and much more to do with issues of class.

[5] Many of us who feel that we have reached some amount of fluency in reading Greek or Latin have typically attained this capacity after doing extensive independent reading in the languages rather than after mastering the introductory grammar textbook. Crucially (and tragically), these traditional methods, which turn the languages into abstract, algebraic systems and do not reliably lead to language proficiency, often engender career-long insecurity about the languages even among those students who performed well under such conditions.

[6] With respect to the test administered, the Greek students following a progressive method (i.e., a communicative method using *Athenaze* as a textbook) surveyed by Ricucci (2013) on average answered 91% of the questions correctly, while students of the Grammar and Translation method answered correctly only 50% of the time. The Latin students surveyed by Pozzi (2010), who were administered a different type of test, showed comparable results, with students of progressive methods (who used Ørberg's *Familia Romana* textbook*)* scoring an average of 98% vs. students of traditional methods scoring an average of 53%.

progressive methods in North American high schools, encompassing student enrollment, retention, and performance.

The field, in a way, is like a mountaineering club that insists that everybody should climb mountains in flip-flops. There might be a long tradition of doing so (perhaps because better footwear was not available in the past), and some members of the club might feel that they have become quite good at it, and that, in fact, climbing in flip-flops is a good gauge of whether somebody is a talented mountaineer or not. But we cannot pretend that there aren't better and more sensible ways of climbing mountains available nowadays, and that insisting on outdated and ineffective footwear won't alienate a majority of the population.

What is the solution? Am I perhaps calling for a relaxation of the academic standards that our field has aspired to in the past? Should we "get rid of the languages" and not ask our students to learn the Latin *consecutio temporum* before they can read some Virgil? The languages are hard (*res difficiles*) and they require dedication, some might respond; only a few students possess the special talent and enthusiasm needed for these studies, and thus the selection is only natural. I disagree on both accounts. On the one hand, nothing would be more ungenerous on our part than not equipping the next generation of scholars with the best tools to carry out their work on the original texts. We wouldn't want to create, so to speak, a French major who gets off the plane in Paris and can't carry out the most basic interactions in the local language. As for "innate" talent and drive, I would argue that the disciplines that emphasize them the most are precisely those where the pedagogy is most lacking. In other words—is it that most students are just not cut out for the languages, or is it that we have picked a way of teaching the languages that is deeply unhelpful to most students (i.e., the metaphorical flip-flops)? This is not to say that "talent" and motivation do not matter, but I believe that a teacher's job is to make sure that they are not *the only factors* that determine learning outcomes. And of course, many topics are difficult, but we should make sure we are not artificially making them harder than they need to be out of sheer inertia—or even worse, out of the desire to inflict upon others the same suffering that was inflicted upon us (and thus perpetuate a sort of intergenerational trauma). Modern linguistics teaches us that all languages are, after all, languages (all equally complex, all equally interesting and worthy of study).[7] And human brains are excellent at learning languages, when given the right conditions.[8]

The solution, then, I would argue, which amounts to one of the most important challenges for the future of Classics as a field, is to find better, more effective, and more inclusive ways to share the Classical languages with a wider and more diverse student population (a population, moreover, which might be now less and less likely to thrive under nineteenth-century methods of teaching, though this is a topic for another paper). As a linguist, I feel that this is one of the areas where my training can be of help. As we shall see below, it was in part my scholarly predecessors in the 1800s who created this problem, and I would like to do my part to help solve it. This article aims to offer a first step in the direction, especially for those colleagues who have felt some frustration with the current state of

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[7] On the myth that "some languages are better than others", see Harlow (1998). On the myth that "some languages are more logical than others", see Lodge (1998).

[8] This is not to say that some languages might be easier for some learners to acquire, given their personal linguistic background (e.g., a speaker of Italian will have an easier time acquiring Spanish than Japanese; German will come easier to a speaker of Swedish than to a speaker of Tagalog), and that some individual learners might overall be faster at acquiring languages than others. On the myth that "some languages are harder than others", see Andersson (1998).

affairs but who have not yet uncovered an alternative path. Of course, many teachers and scholars have dedicated their whole careers to working on these issues;[9] the goal of this contribution is simply to provide a starting point amid a sea of resources and sometimes conflicting advice, especially for those who are just now beginning to wrestle with this problem.[10]

Because the issue of language pedagogy stands at the intersection of intellectual history, institutional policy, and personal practice, the remainder of this paper takes an eclectic approach to making the case for more progressive teaching methods. Part II will present a short history of the methods for teaching second languages in general and classical languages in particular. This contributes to the argument in two ways: first, there is much confusion as to what counts as a "traditional" vs. "progressive" method for teaching Latin and Greek, and this overview is meant to clarify the issues and relevant terminology. Second, I believe fewer colleagues will be inclined to defend traditional methods tooth and nail once they see them in their historical context (as opposed to "the one and only way for learning Greek and Latin"). Recognizing that most teachers do not have the capacity to radically alter their approach to the languages right away, Part III offers a number of suggestions on how to tweak the more traditional methods of teaching Greek and Latin in order to achieve better results in the classroom, without completely overhauling one's approach to language pedagogy. Several barriers are in place to adopting more progressive methods when teaching the Classical languages (which we will discuss below), and there are benefits to taking a more gradual approach. Still, a powerful case can be made for going even further, and I believe the most persuasive arguments in this sense often come from personal experience. For this reason, Part IV is a conversation with an expert and a friend who has spent over a decade grappling with these issues in the trenches of Italian higher education, and who has decided to implement a radically more progressive (i.e., communicative) approach to teaching Latin in her classroom. The conversation touches upon all the topics treated in the article and weaves them together in a single cloth. Finally, the Conclusions summarize the main points of the paper and reflect on some of the remaining barriers to reframing the way the Classical languages are taught.

II. A Very Short History of Second Language Teaching

People have learned Greek and Latin as second languages for a very long time,[11] but most histories of the modern field of second language teaching begin with the so-called "Grammar and Translation" method, as it came to be practiced in the first half of the nineteenth

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[9] It seems to be the case, both for North America and the United Kingdom, that universities are typically the bastions of the most traditional approaches to the Classical languages, while colleagues working at the high school level have a stronger record of exploring new and more progressive pedagogical approaches (there are, of course, important exceptions). Ramsby (2020) documents the rise of interest in "Active Latin" methods in secondary Latin teaching over recent years.

[10] The bibliography is (luckily) bounteous. For those looking for a place to start, Adema (2019) is a compact but rich introduction to Latin learning and instruction as a research field. Hunt (2023, 2022), and Lloyd and Hunt (2021) are book-length treatments that offer a wealth of applied advice and case studies on running a Latin classroom. Gruber-Miller (2006) similarly combines theoretical insights and practical examples. Carlon (2013) makes a forceful case for applying the finding of second language research to Latin pedagogy.

[11] See Dickey (2016: 4–6) for how the ancients did it, Miraglia (2020: 20-31) for how the Humanists did, and Archibald, Brockliss, and Gnoza (2015) for a broader historical perspective. Coffee (2012) covers some of the same ground I cover in this section, but with a greater focus on the origins and evolution of communicative approaches to Latin specifically.

century, and specifically in the version that was known as "the Prussian Method", since it was developed for instruction in Prussian *Gymnasia*.[12] Richards and Rodgers (2014: 6-7) describe the method as follows:

1. The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development;

2. Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening;

3. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used, and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorization. In a typical Grammar-Translation text, the grammar rules are presented and illustrated, a list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation equivalents, and translation exercises are prescribed;

4. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice;

5. Accuracy is emphasized;

6. Grammar is taught deductively;

7. The student's native language is the medium of instruction.

Now if this description sounds familiar, it's because this is precisely how many of us were taught the Classical languages (and, in some cases, some modern languages as well). "Grammar and Translation" is still, in many ways, the default way to teach the Classical languages today: one can find contemporary, up-to-date, and beautifully produced textbooks for introductory Greek and Latin which embody every single aspect of this method.[13]

What did linguistics have to do with the Prussian Method? The 1800s were the period when modern linguistics was first being established as a science in Europe and North America.[14] Many steps in this direction were made by scholars who endeavored to systematically describe the abstract structures of the old Indo-European languages and tried to reconstruct the historical processes that shaped them. These scholars produced beautiful, finely detailed descriptions of the phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit (among other languages). The idea that languages could be described as a series of abstract rules (i.e., "grammar") was solidified at this time. It was seen as modern and scientific to apply these findings to language pedagogy, following the assumptions that: a) languages could be learned by memorizing said abstract rules (i.e., that a method for

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[12] Sears (1844), titled "The Prussian Method of Teaching the Elements of the Latin Language", is the first effort to export this "trendy" method to the North American classroom. Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (Part 11, Ch. 2) provides a vivid depiction of a Latin class through which poor Hanno Buddenbrook (born, in the novel, in Lübeck in 1861) must suffer, which reflects the principles of the Prussian Method.

[13] This method, we should add, does not survive for Greek and Latin alone. Even though "it has no advocates" (Richard and Rogers 2014: 7), it is still used sometimes in second language instruction, either on the sheer force of tradition, or because (while it does not present many advantages for the learners) it does present several advantages for the instructor: it takes relatively low mastery in the target language to implement (since all of the teaching happens in the students' first language), it leaves the instructor firmly in control of class activities (as opposed to more contemporary methods that emphasize collaboration and the joint construction of knowledge), and it more closely meets the expectations of a strict classroom hierarchy, which might still be favored in some cultural settings.

[14] This was due, in no small part, to extensive contact with the much more insightful grammatical and linguistic traditions in India; see Kiparsky (2022) for an overview of the ancient grammarian Pāṇini's grammar of Sanskrit, especially §5 for its intellectual influence on linguistics since the 19th century.

language description could also be a method for language pedagogy), and b) that the fine detail discovered by historical linguists and philologists would also always benefit language students. The issue with this method, for all of its supposed modernity and scientific creed, is that students did not really seem to effectively learn the languages from it, as many official reports lament over the following decades (see, e.g., Miraglia 2020: 101-4). As an Italian committee report on higher education from 1909 summarizes (ibidem):

> The method adopted in Italian schools for teaching the classical languages is at the same time the hardest and the least effective.

In other words, this method built additional (and gratuitous) hardship into the teaching of Greek and Latin, and thus solidified the status of the classical languages as something arduous and only fit for the elites (the goal of the Prussian *Gymnasia*, after all, was to educate the children of the higher classes, as well as to reproduce existing class divisions). If we look at contemporary accounts of Classical training in German *Gymnasia*, we get the sense that additional and gratuitous hardship (rather than language proficiency) was actually the whole point of the method (Miller 1904: 98):

> It will be seen by a glance at this curriculum that Latin is its most important element, if we are to judge by the amount of time allotted to that subject in comparison with the others. And such is the case. Latin is made the ground on which the hardest battles of a boy's education are fought out. Here he receives his severest mental drill and training.

The imagery is unmistakable here: Latin was not being treated as a language, but as a type of military training for the mind.[15]

While the Prussian method has been exceptionally long-lived in Classical studies, resistance to its application to the instruction of modern languages had started to develop already by the 1860s. Experimental educators like Heness, Saveur, and Berlitz pioneered approaches that are now described as "the Natural Method", whereby teachers who were native speakers would begin speaking the target language to their students immediately and almost exclusively, focusing at first on oral communication (asking simple questions, using gestures, illustrations, and using contrast and association to convey meaning), and teaching the grammar only inductively and at a later time. Unlike the Prussian method, this approach was successful with young children, as well as with individuals who had undergone less formal education (Ruyfflaert 2020).

Many principles of the Natural Method would be incorporated in the Reform Movement of the 1880s, which Richards and Rodgers (2014: 9-11) summarize as follows:

1. The spoken language is primary and this should be reflected in an oral-based methodology;

2. The findings of phonetics should be applied to teaching and teacher training;

3. Learners should hear the language first, before seeing it in written form;

4. Words should be presented in sentences, and sentences should be practiced in meaningful contexts and not be taught as isolated, disconnected elements;

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[15] The immediately following paragraph in Miller's description is also worth reporting: "Incidentally, it may be remarked that Latin is considered in Germany distinctly a man's language. Except in the most up-to-date private schools, it is not taught to girls and women, who are supposed to either have no practical use for this study, or not to be equal to the mastering of its difficulties" (ibidem).

5. The rules of grammar should be taught only after the students have practiced the grammar points in context–that is, grammar should be taught inductively;

6. Translation should be avoided, although the native language could be used to explain new words or to check comprehension.

Many of the scholars associated with the Reform movement were linguists involved with the nascent field of phonetics and the International Phonetic Association. Unsurprisingly, these scholars argued that the spoken language should be the core of language teaching and emphasized the importance of teaching correct pronunciation, which would be aided by the employ of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Wilhelm Viëtor, whose 1882 paper is often regarded as the beginning of the movement (see Howatt 1982, 1984), was a teacher at a German *Realschule* (a type of secondary school lower in prestige than the *Gymnasium*, whose graduates would not qualify for subsequent university study). He wanted to develop a method that worked better for his less academically-inclined students, one that would require less independent work and memorization from them. A key concern for Viëtor was the issue of *Überbürdung* or 'overburdening' of the students with excessive and ineffective homework, which was of central importance to his reform efforts (see Howatt 1982: 264).

The principles of the Reform Movement were continued, in the 1900s, by the Direct Method; they are most clearly exemplified by the Berlitz Method (as it is continued to this day). By now they will be familiar (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 11-14):

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language;

2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught;

3. Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes;

4. Grammar was taught inductively;

5. New teaching points were introduced orally;

6. Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas;

7. Both speech and listening comprehension were taught;

8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

In England, W. H. Rouse was a proponent of the Direct Method as applied to the Classical languages, specifically. One can read a breathless account of the modernity and effectiveness of his teaching at the Perse School in Cambridge in Miraglia (2020: 13-16, with references), and a very dismissive account of the same facts in Wingate (2013).

What is fascinating to discover—and which exemplifies a general trend in Classical language pedagogy—is that, despite the various "reformist" declarations, the didactic materials produced by Rouse himself for Greek tell a more conservative story. The Grammar (if not Translation) elements are still alive and well, but are *supplemented* by more "progressive" activities, such as the adoption of a constructed, continuous text, and the reliance on spoken exercises in the classroom.[16] For instance, the beginner student using *A*

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[16] This is, of course, not to say that Rouse's methods might not have been effective. My intention is to highlight a constant feature of "progressive" pedagogy for the Classical languages, namely, that it often

First Greek Course (Rouse 1916) begins by learning the alphabet (Lesson I), then reads a grammatical description in English, which includes paradigms for the interrogative, relative, and indefinite pronouns, the first class of adjectives, the definite article, and the present conjugation in -ω. Afterwards, the student is given a hefty vocabulary list, is asked to carry out a few grammatical exercises, and only then is instructed to start reading (but not translating!) the continuous constructed text contained in the reader *A Greek Boy at Home* (Rouse 1909).[17] After that, the more "communicative" portion of the lesson begins, whereby the teacher asks comprehension questions (in Greek), asks the students to re-tell the story (in Greek), and finally to re-write it (in Greek). There is nothing inductive in how the grammar is presented to the students, only a different sequencing of topics that serves the purpose of starting to read a continuous text as soon as possible. The vocabulary is similarly presented as a list to be memorized *before* reading the text, rather than as material to be learned "unconsciously" through encountering it repeatedly in context.

Many "progressive" approaches to Greek and Latin teaching nowadays largely follow Rouse's model of combining explicit, deductive grammatical instruction with a constructed continuous text and vocabulary lists (with more or less emphasis on the spoken language component). This is essentially the Reading Method or Inductive Method, which is exemplified by textbooks like *The Cambridge English Course* for Latin or (partially) by *Athenaze* for Greek. If these textbooks are used without emphasizing the active usage of the target language (either on the part of the teacher or of the students), and class activity largely revolves around translating a continuous text and discussing grammatical topics in the students' language, the result is essentially a slightly modified version of Grammar and Translation that uses long constructed texts instead of short sentences (constructed or not). These methods can be more successful than sentence-based Grammar and Translation at building the lexicon (since the texts are repetitive), but they can be criticized for relying on non-genuine texts and potentially not preparing the students sufficiently for the hardships of translating real authors. Alternatively, one can use Rouse's method in a way that is more faithful to the author's original intentions, with an emphasis on speaking and writing Greek and Latin in the classroom. This is what many colleagues today would label the "Communicative Approach".[18]

A particular continuation of the Direct Method, developed in Denmark in the 1940s, is called the Natural Method and was specifically designed for independent study. It embodies the principles of the Direct Method more closely than Rouse's textbooks. It employs a continuous constructed text (for modern languages, this is accompanied by complete transcriptions in the IPA), in which the vocabulary and the grammar are introduced entirely inductively (see Figure 1).

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embraces new labels (be it the Direct Method, the Communicative Method, or, most recently, Content-Based Instruction) while in fact keeping large portions of the teaching methodology virtually unchanged.

[17] Another reader, titled *A Greek Reader* (1907) presents a selection of short texts by Greek authors, authentic but grammatically simplified and/or shortened, to supplement the materials in *A First Greek Course.*

[18] One should note that this is not to be confused with "Communicative Language Teaching", a method of second language teaching that has been popular since the 1980s (and is still used in many modern language textbooks), to which we shall return below. For a discussion of what is meant by "Communicative Approaches" to the ancient languages nowadays, see Lloyd and Hunt (2021: 1–3).

Fig. 1 Jensen 1942: English by the Nature Method
Image licensed under Public Domain Mark 1.0.
https://archive.org/details/english-by-the-nature-method/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater;
link accessed April 27, 2025.
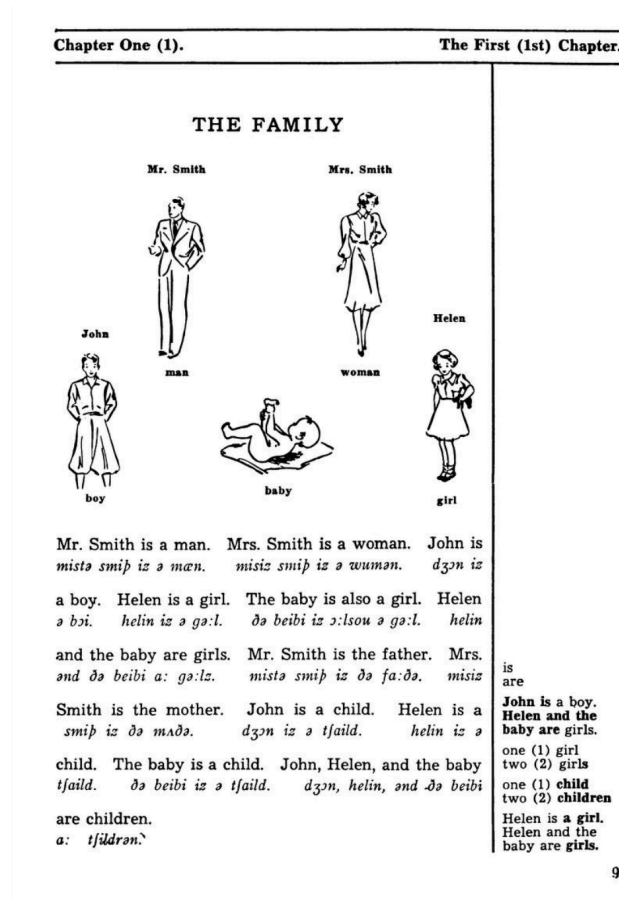
Jensen (1942) is the English. The Latin, written by Hans H. Ørberg (1957), is still employed today as the textbook *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (to which we shall return in Part IV below).

By the 1920s, the popularity of the Direct Method for foreign languages had somewhat declined, and it came to be combined with more traditional grammar activities in the students' language (as we have already seen with Rouse).[19] The Coleman Report (Coleman 1929), a multi-year study of the status of foreign language teaching at US institutions of higher education, argued that teaching conversation skills was impractical for most American students and that *reading knowledge* should be the goal of instruction instead. But this reactionary wave didn't last long: the course of World War II convinced the American government that actual *spoken competence* in the target languages should be the principal

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[19] Some contemporary scholarship, like Wingate (2013), presents the arguments advanced at the time against the Direct Method as unsurmountable criticism, and argues for a return to Grammar and Translation in the field of Classics. What is ironic is that no approach to teaching modern languages has ever argued for a return to the Prussian Method, and even the scholars who leveled criticism to the Direct Method did so in order to improve upon it, not to bury it. Such is the case for Harold Palmer, cited by Wingate, who was directly involved with the development of the "Oral Approach", which was influential in the UK for decades, and, as the name suggests, hardly marked a return to "Grammar and Translation".

goal of foreign language instruction, and all of the following methods of second language teaching returned their focus on the teaching the spoken language first and foremost (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 13).

As a result, all of the major methods and approaches to language teaching that were developed in the second half of the twentieth century (be it the Oral Approach, Situational Language Teaching, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, or Content-Based Instruction) can essentially be seen as continuations of the Reform Movement, in that they emphasize the primacy of the spoken language and the attainment of communicative competence over the mastery of abstract grammatical rules.

Without going into much detail (for which see Richards and Rodgers 2014), trends that became more and more established in second language teaching in the second half of the century include: extensive (if not exclusive) usage of the target language in the classroom; inductive and needs-based presentation of grammatical topics; an emphasis on communication; development of fluency over accuracy alone; acquisition of vocabulary from usage in context (as opposed to vocabulary lists); interactive and collaborative class activities (which simulate authentic interactions in the target language) along with a flatter classroom hierarchy (where the teacher is the facilitator but not the "boss").

This does not mean that the Grammar and Translation method has disappeared entirely: it is exceptionally hard to kill. Textbooks that embody the principles of more progressive methods can always be used in a way that makes them more traditional (and, in theory, vice versa). Anecdotally, the textbook used in my middle school English classes reflected all the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT),[20] but our instructor effectively used it as a reader for a Grammar and Translation-style course.[21] After three years, I had a solid "grammatical foundation", but it took a lot of independent work (and a lot of English media consumption) for me to become fluent. Our French teacher used a similarly CLT-style textbook, but followed the CLT methodology much more closely, and had us speaking and listening a lot more in the classroom; when we went on a school trip to France, we felt somewhat confident in our abilities to interact with the locals.[22]

What are we supposed to do with all of this knowledge, as teachers of Greek and Latin? The first step is to recognize the challenge ahead of us, and the tension between what many of us might have perceived as "the one and only way of teaching Greek and Latin" and the

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[20] Note that CLT itself is so vast and varied that no single version of it exists (see discussion in Richards and Rodgers 2014: 86-87). Howatt (1984: 279) speaks of a strong version of CLT, which "stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes", and a weak version of CLT, which "advances the claim that language is acquired through communication". CLT textbooks typically feature a number of short dialogues (to be listened to and acted out), topical readings, and interactive class activities, with each chapter organized around a specific communicative goal or topic of interest (e.g., asking for directions, talking about hobbies, interviewing for a job, etc.) while keeping the explicit grammatical instruction on a needs-only basis. The textbooks themselves often have a very recognizable graphic style, full of illustrations, photographs, and colorful typography, all meant to bring the "real word" into the classroom.

[21] To this end, she had to dictate the explicit grammatical rules to us, which we wrote down in a separate notebook, and were asked to memorize. I still remember the rules that she gave us for the irregular plurals in English—e.g., that the plural of *handkerchief* is *handkerchieves* (now I know that, as it is often the case with prescriptive grammatical rules, this does not always hold: the variant *handkerchiefs* exists too, and it might be preferred in some varieties).

[22] On the downside, I am still able, to this day, to draw diagrams representing the usage of the English tenses, but I could not begin to tell you the names of the French moods or tenses, or list which French nouns have irregular plural forms.

needs of the students in our classrooms. We should also acknowledge that radical change does not happen overnight, and that many institutional barriers are in place that make rethinking language pedagogy challenging. The good news is that there are many ways forward, and they are not mutually exclusive. I see two paths ahead of us: we can either stick to Grammar and Translation, but update it in ways that improve it substantially and alleviate its worst pitfalls. Alternatively, we can venture in the direction of more radically communicative language teaching, accepting that it might require a more profound overhaul of our teaching methods, our language curricula, and the type of training that we provide for language teachers. Section III explores the first route. Section IV provides evidence as to why we might want to attempt the second one, as well as some practical advice.

III. Improving the Traditional Method

Some of us might not yet feel quite ready to give up the traditional approach entirely. This might be for several reasons: it worked well enough for us (or so we think)—we might even have enjoyed it; it allows us to use textbooks and resources with which we are already familiar (i.e., the devil we know); and it matches the expectations of the type of knowledge our students are supposed to demonstrate later in their training. If our students will be graded on accuracy rather than fluency, and on their capacity to identify grammatical phenomena (whether real or invented by earlier scholars, such as the infamous "dative of military accompaniment"—see Smyth 1916: §1526),[23] we might as well "teach to the test".[24]

Furthermore, we might also be persuaded that the different goals that we have for the Classical languages (reading them fluently and understanding their linguistic structures, as opposed to speaking or even writing them) might justify a pedagogical approach that is more strongly reading-based. Why spend time speaking imperfect Latin in the classroom when we could be reading the ancient authors instead?[25] Institutional factors play a fundamental role too: if our teachers are trained in the Grammar and Translation method, we cannot ask them to switch methods without (time-consuming) additional training, and we cannot ask them to pursue that training on their own time and at their own expense. If our curricula and programs are designed following a traditional Grammar and Translation schedule, new methods could lead to disruption and logistical challenges. And if teachers trained to use communicative methods are few and far between, an institution wishing to try more progressive methods might still need to keep offering traditional classes next to new and progressive ones.

Regardless of where we stand on the issues above, and operating within the institutional limitations that we might face, we can still opt to experiment with a handful of newer pedagogical principles and graft them onto the more traditional methods, and thereby begin to reap some tangible benefits in our classrooms. A short list of strategies that I have found

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[23] This "maximalist" approach to grammatical description can be criticized on both the theoretical level (i.e., it does not reflect anything real in the competence of a native speaker) and on the pedagogical one (how does it truly help the student to be able to identify such minuscule shades of meaning as they translate their texts? Non-native speakers can understand and use the dative case correctly without passing each instance through such an artificial filter).

[24] Several of the suggestions below have to do with teaching grammatical concepts, which still constitute a component of many types of more communicative teaching methods.

[25] Section IV will explore some reasons why these activities might nonetheless be profitable.

helpful in my own teaching practice is given below,[26] as well as available online resources.[27] Keeline (2019) collects a number of suggestions for implementing a "mixed approach" (traditional *and* Active Latin) in beginning Latin classes, undergraduate reading classes, and graduate seminars.

Grammatical analysis and terminology

1. Support the development of a grammatical vocabulary

The Grammar and Translation method relies heavily on students being conversant with traditional grammatical terminology, yet most students nowadays do not receive traditional grammatical training in school. Terms for the parts of speech, such as "verb, adjective, preposition, adverb", as well as syntactic concepts, such as "verb phrase, prepositional phrase, subordinate clause" may inspire only bafflement in many university students.[28] If we fail to ensure that our students are properly equipped with the core concepts in this domain before handing them a traditional descriptive grammar of Greek or Latin, we are setting them up for failure. Here, there are many potential paths to success. At the university level, we might recommend that our students take a class on "Introduction to the Study of Language" (Linguistics 101 or the like) before or alongside their introductory language courses. This recommendation applies likewise to prospective Greek and Latin teachers. Textbooks such as Ringe (2018) are specifically designed to teach foundational grammatical concepts for second language learners. I am personally writing a book provisionally titled *Short Lessons in Greek Linguistics* which is meant to cover these topics for the benefit of students of Ancient Greek specifically. At the very least, instructors can brush up on their own knowledge of grammatical terminology and so make sure that they are capable of providing simple explanations and examples to their students in their first language first, and the target language second.[29]

As an example of how inadequate our definitions and discussions can be, consider the passive voice, a topic that English speakers often find challenging to grasp (in both Latin and English). For one, the term "passive voice" in English is often popularly understood as designating any rhetorical strategy where an agent is not mentioned, regardless of whether a genuine grammatical passive is involved or not (so that the sentences *there were casualties*, or *Remus died at the hands of Romulus* might both be labeled as "passive voice" even when they are both, grammatically speaking, active clauses). Some older textbooks (such as Allen and Greenough) leave the passive voice entirely undefined, and just state that "it works like in English". More recent ones often give very brief explanations, which, although correct, may

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[26] A general principle in the classroom should, of course, be that teachers should play to their strengths. I took inspiration for many of the strategies below from my experience in teaching linguistics, because that field is familiar to me; still, I believe these practices might be helpful to others, too.

[27] Additional online resources: https://www.chiarabozzone.com/post/when-learning-greek-and-latin-became-difficult-and-what-we-can-do-about-it; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

[28] In my experience of teaching "Introduction to the Study of Language" to hundreds of undergraduates, I observed, to my surprise, that the most challenging week for the students was not the week devoted to phonetics, when they had to learn the principles of articulatory phonology and to use the International Phonetic Alphabet. It was, instead, the module on syntax, during which they had to learn how to diagram a sentence like "The child saw a squirrel in the park with binoculars".

[29] A basic textbook in linguistics, such as Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2014), may prove useful in this regard.

prove insufficient for some students. See, for instance Libatique and Machado (2022: 10):[30]

> Voice expresses the relationship between the action of the verb and the subject. Like English, Latin has two voices: **active**, in which the subject is performing the action of the verb ("I love"), and **passive**, in which the subject is receiving the action of the verb ("I am loved").

What does it mean to *receive* the action of the verb? Is this enough for a student to grasp what the passive is doing and why would a speaker want to use it? An adequate grammatical explanation of voice requires that we understand the concepts of *verbal valency* (i.e., how many arguments a verb can bind; transitive verbs vs. intransitive verbs) and the difference between *semantic role* (e.g., agent vs. undergoer), *syntactic function* (e.g., subject vs. object) and *morphological marking* (e.g., nominative vs. accusative nominal endings; active vs. passive verbal endings). An understanding of why writers and speakers might use passive constructions requires introducing basic concepts of discourse and information structure.[31] If, as teachers, we ourselves lack clarity about these topics, explaining them to inquisitive or puzzled students may prove challenging. And this is without even taking the complexities of the Greek middle voice into consideration![32]

I don't want to give the reader the impression that one should earn a doctorate in linguistics in order to teach introductory Latin, but being conversant with the relevant grammatical terminology (as ideally refreshed through the equivalent of a college-level introductory linguistics course) is certainly desirable. Another plus of this type of linguistic awareness is that other modern languages (often spoken in the classroom) can be brought into play. For instance, a discussion of gender and number agreement in Greek or Latin adjectives can be illuminated by using Spanish language examples. This practice, moreover, helps remove Greek and Latin from the pedestal upon which traditional teaching methods can inadvertently place them.

2. Approach grammar inductively

A progressive principle that is now firmly established in second language acquisition literature is that one should teach grammar first through *induction*, and that one should encourage students to *observe and analyze* the structures of the language (as opposed to simply memorizing them). We are all familiar with the way that many grammars of Greek and Latin begin with an explanation like the following: English expresses syntactic roles

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[30] These authors have thought a lot about how best to teach the Latin passive specifically, and they make a number of persuasive suggestions in Libatique and Machado (2021).

[31] Often, passive constructions are used to ensure that referents that we care about (typically human or high in animacy, typically the topics of the discourse) are encoded as syntactic subjects, even when they are semantically undergoers. However, different languages may exhibit different preferences—a classic study in this direction is Du Bois (1987), who coined the term *Preferred Argument Structure*.

[32] When teaching at the university level, I have found that defining the Ancient Greek middle as a *valency-reducing derivation* (when providing the right examples) is helpful for many students, provided that the concept of valency has already been adequately explained. Transitive verbs bind two arguments (typically an agent and an undergoer, realized in Greek as a subject and an object); a valency-reducing derivation *reduces* the amount of arguments a verb can bind. When such a derivation is applied to a transitive verb, the result is a verb that only binds one argument. Note how the phrase "I wash the cat" has two arguments (me and the cat), while the phrase "the cat is being washed" only has one (the cat). Note also how the phrase "the cat washes itself" only has one argument (again the cat, who both carries out the action and undergoes it). The latter two examples cover a large portion of the usages of the middle in Greek.

through word order, while Greek and Latin use cases. A much more effective (and entertaining) exercise would be, instead of giving students any such explicit explanation (which, again, may be potentially terminologically obscure), to hand them the problem set shown in Table 1, and to ask them, based on the examples provided, to translate the following sentences into Latin:

1. Black cats love milk

2. Mario gives the cats to the cat

3. The cats give milk to Mario

4. Mario is a black cat

Table 1. Latin and English sentences

Latin	English
1. Marius cattum amat	1. Mario loves the cat
2. Marium cattus amat	2. The cat loves Mario
3. Marius cattōs amat	3. Mario loves the cats
4. Marium cattī amant	4. The cats love Mario
5. Marius cattō fuscō lactem dat	5. Mario gives milk to the black cat
6. Mariō cattus lactem dat	6. The cat gives milk to Mario
7. Mariī cattus fuscus est	7. Mario's cat is black
8. Mariī cattī fuscī sunt	8. Mario's cats are black

To complete this task (which can take up to thirty minutes), students must perform what we call *morphological analysis* (i.e., the bread and butter of many undergraduate linguistics classes). Without any previous knowledge of or information about the language, they have to figure out which words, and, crucially, which parts of the words contribute which meaning to the sentence. The lexical similarities between Latin and English (Mario = *Marius*, cat = *cattus*[33]) and the studied variation in the examples give students clear indications as to how the pieces fit together. As they move through the exercise (individually, or preferably in small groups), students have the opportunity to develop a concrete understanding of some basic facts of Latin cases and word order. This exercise is challenging enough to win the enthusiasm of students who enjoy puzzles, and (perhaps most importantly) it does not depend on any preexisting grammatical concepts or knowledge of grammatical terminology on the part of the students.[34]

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[33] *Cattus* (sometimes spelled *catus*) is a Late Latin word, similar in form to other words denoting cats in many Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages, to the point that its origin is hard to pin down. This won't perturb most beginning Latin students.

[34] Each time that I have used this very problem set in the class, students (typically first-year undergraduates at a large public university) have remarked on how "fun" this activity was and have been able to complete it without my intervention.

After the students have produced their translations, we can ask them to explicitly comment on what they have observed. How is Latin different from English in how it orders words? Why do Latin words have so many different word forms? The goal at this point is not to introduce the complete second declension or the first conjugation, but merely for the students to observe (i.e., discover) that the final parts of many Latin words "change" depending on which meanings are being expressed. We can then point out to them that this feature is similar to the behavior of some English words (*loves* vs. *love*; *Mario* vs. *Mario's*), only that Latin does it to a greater degree. A sequence like *cattō fuscō* corresponds to English "to the black cat" (somehow both the "the" and the "to" are not expressed through separate words in Latin; for now, we can point this out without explaining it), or that Latin can move around its words more freely than English does.

The (surprisingly many) facts gathered from this short activity can act as scaffolding[35] for the acquisition of specific grammatical knowledge that students will discover later in the class. Asking the students to collect all the different forms of the words *Mario* and *cat* creates a concrete basis for the concept of "paradigm" (which in other models is simply imposed upon the students). In later meetings, students can be tasked to assemble a paradigm themselves by "hunting" for the necessary information in an appropriately selected (or constructed) text. Imagine the excitement of finding a new case form "in the wild", never before encountered, and needing to figure out what it means. In my experience, knowledge won in this inductive fashion (and through trial and error) is a great deal more memorable for the students than the abstract and tidy systems presented by descriptive grammars. We are still far from a communicative approach (although the students will leave their first Latin class proud to have produced a few sentences in the language!). We are still using the language as an object of meta-linguistic reflection and analysis (i.e., we are talking about the language instead of simply speaking the language), and we are still using translation as a tool—but we are inviting the students to use their own problem-solving abilities and curiosity as opposed to memorizing raw facts.

A lighter version of this method of linguistic analysis (which is akin to what students would encounter if they did coursework in contemporary linguistics) is to present the students with simple examples *first*, and ask them to produce a grammatical observation before providing them with a grammatical rule. For instance, if the students are already familiar with the present indicative, the imperative can be introduced by presenting them with the following sentences:

1. *legis librum* 'you are reading the book'

2. *lege librum!* 'read the book!'

3. *legitis librum* 'you (pl.) are reading the book'

4. *legite librum!* '(you (pl.)), read the book!'

Then, the instructor asks the students to explain what meaning the new word forms of the verb *legō* seen in the examples express. The idea is to teach them to carefully observe the language itself, rather than the textbook. Once they have converged on the idea that these new word forms can be used to express a command, examples from another conjugation can be given (e.g., *amā*, *amāte*), and the students can be asked to predict what the forms for the remaining conjugations will be. For instance, students can be asked to turn simple sentences

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[35] Scaffolding, of course, is a fundamental concept in education, based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). For a general introduction, see Kurt (2021).

containing second and fourth conjugation present indicatives into commands.

3. Embrace what is helpful

When teaching an introductory class, it is usually not helpful to burden the students with detailed explanations of historical phonology or morphology (and the same is true for extended, abstract lectures on vocabulary and its usage). Nonetheless, I have found that a few well-placed historical linguistics notes can be enlightening, mostly because they can help students remember and understand facts of the language that would otherwise be entirely arbitrary, alleviating the need to memorize irregular paradigms.

A well-known example concerns rhotacism in Latin (i.e., the historical sound change whereby [s] became [r] when between two vowels). A good place to introduce this development is when studying present active infinitives. Once students have become familiar with forms like *amāre* and *legere*, they might be puzzled by the seemingly exceptional form *esse*. This makes for an appropriate moment to mention that *esse* (morphologically segmented as *es-se*) in fact contains the original form of the infinitive morpheme, namely, -*se*. In *amāre* and *legere* (etc.), the original [s] became [r] between two vowels. The very morpheme -*se* is also found, unchanged, in the perfect active infinitives, such as *amavīs-se*. Knowing this simple rule allows students to recognize a single, unified morpheme -*se* among several disparate surface forms. Similarly, the basic rule of rhotacism is helpful when dealing with third-declension nouns of the type *honos, honōris*. In these nouns, the nominative retains the original [s] because it isn't followed by a vowel, while the rest of the paradigm shows the new [r] between vowels (the nominative later changed analogically to *honor*).[36] This explanation takes just a few minutes, and it can help students to remember and connect some facts of the language that they otherwise might not have noticed.

For Ancient Greek, a few topics of historical phonology that I have found similarly helpful in my language teaching include the differences between primary and secondary long mid vowels in Attic (e.g., <ω> vs. <ου> and <η> vs. <ει> respectively), the developments of [s] and [j] in combination with other sounds (which account for a large portion of the complexities in the historical phonology), and, on the side of historical morphology, the different types of present-stem formations (i.e., thematic vs. athematic presents, reduplicated presents. -*je/o*- presents, nasal infix and suffix presents, etc.).[37] These are all cases where a little bit of analytical knowledge can greatly alleviate the amount of otherwise arbitrary information that a student would need to memorize.[38]

Not all teachers will choose to provide these details to their students, and not all

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[36] And, as is the case for most possible sound changes, Latin is hardly alone in having experienced rhotacism of [s] (via [z] > [r]). Have you ever wondered why English *was* alternates with *were*? There too, an [s] between vowels was changed to [r]; see Ringe and Taylor (2014: 82–4). (This change, of course, happened for Germanic languages at a very different place and time than it did for Latin). For Latin, we can precisely pinpoint the time when this change occurred: Lucius Papisius Crassus (consul in 336 BCE) was the first of his *gens* to adopt the spelling Papirius for his *nomen gentilicium*, indicating that the pronunciation of /s/ had changed to [r] (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares*, 9.21). For a systematic and thoroughly engaging collection of the evidence for how Latin was pronounced, see Allen (1978).

[37] Explanations concerning all of these points can be found at the following sections of *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek*: Primary and secondary long mid vowels in Attic, §1.23. Developments of [s] in combination with other sounds, §1.91, 1.92. Developments of [j] in combination with other sounds, §1.77, 1.78. Present stem formations, §12.22–12.44.

[38] Major and Stayskal (2011) apply similar principles to teaching the Greek verbs.

students might benefit from them, but I have seen them work very effectively (even with high-school-aged students) when used strategically and sparingly. The goal here, of course, is not to teach the entire linguistic history of Latin or Greek to the students (needless to say, there are graduate-level courses and advanced handbooks dedicated to that), but to select a handful of facts that could be concretely helpful and are easy to grasp, and would reduce the amount of gratuitous memorization.

4. Break free from unhelpful categorizations

The teaching of syntax (more properly, morphosyntax) for the Classical languages is traditionally saddled with an abundance of minute classifications, which students are supposed to actively reproduce each time that they encounter a given category and every time that they translate it. When discussing the function of the Latin subjunctive, for instance, Allen and Greenough (1903: 278ff.) list four categories with several sub-functions (i.e., Hortatory, Optative, Deliberative, Potential). Flocchini, Guidotti, and Moscio (2001: 352–358) list *seven* categories (Hortatory and Negative Imperative; Concessive; Desiderative or Optative; Dubitative or Deliberative; Potential or of Modesty, Of Supposition or Hypothetical; Of Irreality).[39] Wheelock (who uses his own terminology, like Jussive Subjunctive), explicitly states "in order to master the subjunctive (...) you must: 1) learn a definition for each clause type, 2) know how to recognize each, and 3) know the proper translation for the subjunctive verb in each type" (Wheelock 2010: 195).

But is this formal (and clearly handbook-specific) categorization really the best point of entry for learning the Latin subjunctive? And is it truly necessary for students to go through these steps (*definition, recognition, translation*, as Wheelock suggests) in order to learn how to deal with this mood? Wheelock's steps are attractive because, as teachers, they give us something to do (provide definitions and examples, require that students reproduce said definitions and recognize examples thereof) and something to test for (Which subjunctive is this? What is the conventional way we agreed upon for translating this type of subjunctive?). But they are, pedagogically speaking, "teaching everything about the thing rather than the thing itself".[40] Students are learning a meta-language rather than acquiring a language. And as we all know, the steps often break down in practice: we have all encountered students who can reproduce the definitions, but can't then comprehend and translate subjunctive forms appropriately in context. These approaches can also result in translations that are extremely stilted or unnatural ("translationese"), simply because the students are trying to follow strict, artificial rules.

For beginner students, a better strategy would be to simply invite them to *notice* that different endings are being used and ask them to observe the contexts in which they are used (using short examples with English translations, as with the imperatives above, can be helpful at this stage). If we want to provide a very broad generalization, we could suggest that the indicative expresses *reality* (i.e., something that definitely happened or that is happening), and that the subjunctive expresses *what is outside of reality* (wishes, requests, possibilities, doubts, etc.). Ideally, the students should form their own sense of what the

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[39] Note that my point here is not that these descriptions are without interest or value (I personally quite like Flocchini, Guidotti, and Moscio's analysis and find it superior to Allen and Greenough's), but there is no reason to believe that these generalizations are the most appropriate place to start when teaching the subjunctive to first-year students of Latin.

[40] Cf. Rouse and Appleton (1925: 2).

subjunctive means by encountering multiple usages in the texts (again, we can invite them to *notice* the subjunctive and ask them to reflect on whether the verb expresses something within reality or not). Meanings are learned much more effectively by encountering them in context (where the context itself works as a guide) than by reading abstract definitions and disconnected examples.[41] Extensive categorizations like the ones provided by Flocchini et al. (2001) might be useful *later on* in the learning process, to solidify the intuitions and observations that students have already begun to construct for themselves, but do not replace contextual learning.

Selection and gradation of materials

1. Embrace the power of repetition

Repetition is key in language learning: this is true for vocabulary, but also for grammatical topics. In naturalistic language acquisition, learners are repeatedly exposed to the same structures before they master them (this is key to learning to understand and use these structures "unconsciously", i.e., quickly and without effort). In second language acquisition, too, we should aim to provide repetitive and redundant data as much as possible. To this end, it is important to select texts (real or constructed) that are extended and repetitive: a continuous reader is thus much more helpful than a series of disconnected sentences. Additionally, staying with a single author for an extended period of time guarantees that the lexicon, as well as the grammar, remain constant, thus increasing the opportunities for mastery.

2. Spend time with easy, non-canonical authors

If you use constructed texts at the beginning, you ideally want to move as quickly as possible toward real, extended texts composed by real, ancient authors. There are aspects of Latin and Greek that even the best contemporary translators cannot faithfully reproduce (in part because there is still much that we do not fully understand when it comes to Greek and Latin word order and discourse specifically), and there is a richness to the native usage of a language to which students need to adjust (the sooner the better). That said, the texts we choose need to be accessible and repetitive. This means that we might have to look somewhat at the margins of the usual literary canon, and not be too anxious for our students to read the very famous (but often complex) authors that usually dominate the study of Greek and Latin literature.

For Latin, Libatique and Machado (2021) report success using the *Fabulae* of Hyginus. Eutropius' *Breviarium ab urbe condita* (an extended summary of the history of Rome) is

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[41] In first language acquisition, lexical meaning is precisely acquired contextually rather than by definition: we don't typically tell a child what a bird is, but we point out several exemplars of birds and say 'Look! A bird!'. This type of learning results in the "fuzzy", gradient categories that characterize human language usage, whereby some types of bird are more prototypically "birds" than others (i.e., a blackbird rather than an ostrich), all the while maintaining a general sense that all birds belong to the same category (cf. Rosch's *Prototype Theory*, first developed in the 1970s). While we know that adult students of second languages can benefit from explicit instruction, their need for exposure to large amounts of input is still paramount. When it comes to teaching Latin, our goal should not be to have our students memorize all the names and features of all birds (i.e., all "subjunctives"), but simply to have them be able to recognize a subjunctive when they see it ("a bird"), and to have a sense of the meanings it can express in context, whether it happens to be a blackbird or an ostrich, so to say.

another option that combines very accessible language and a wealth of culturally relevant information. For Greek, the extended mythographic treatments in the *Library* of (Pseudo-) Apollodorus and Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, IV) have the similar virtues of being both highly repetitive, naturalistic, and providing important cultural knowledge. Going forward, students might be encouraged to do their own extended readings (a further step in Greek might be Herodotus; in Latin, Cornelius Nepos) with the help of facing translations (this might not be standard in North America but is common practice in Italy). The procedure here should be for the students to try to read and understand the original first and only refer to the facing translation when a lexical item or a construction proves unclear.[42]

3. Tailor your teaching to your target text

While vocabulary building is fundamental to attaining language fluency,[43] there are reasons to opt out of the practice of having students *memorize* vocabulary from a list (for one thing, remembering an item from a list is cognitively a very different task from understanding a word in its context). But regardless of how we decide to work on vocabulary (some alternative options are discussed below), we should take advantage of modern corpus linguistics and use frequency data and collocational data [44] to determine which items would be most helpful for our students to acquire (either in general or specifically for the texts that we have selected for them). *The Vocabulary Tool* on *Perseus* can be used to obtain a list of the most frequent words within a text, or within a larger corpus.[45]

We also know now that words are learned best in context and in company. Rather than focusing on isolated words, it can be particularly useful to look at lexical bundles, and collocations (or even larger constructions) that are particularly frequent in a given text. These can be found using concordance software (or by asking a digital humanities colleague in your department). *Perseus under Philologic*, for instance, has the capacity to generate collocational data (even in the form of a word cloud); Figure 2 shows the word cloud for the word ναῦς 'ship' in Homer, for example.[46]

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[42] When using this method, I usually recommend students cover the translation with a postcard and try to read independently as far as they can. When they encounter a lexical item or construction that they cannot quite understand, they can underline it in the original and check for the translation on the facing page, underlining that as well. This leaves a record on the page of items they might want to look at more carefully, or that they might need to review if they are preparing for a sight-reading exam.

[43] For a theoretical treatment of the role of lexicon in second language acquisition, see Tokowicz (2014).

[44] See Major (2008) for an application of this principle to Beginning Greek. For the use of corpora in language education in general, see Breyer (2011).

[45] *The Vocabulary Tool* on *Perseus*: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/help/vocab#tfidf; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

[46] *Perseus under Philologic*: https://perseus.uchicago.edu; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

Fig. 2. Word cloud for the word ναῦς 'ship' in Homer.
Generated by Perseus under Philogic.

Concretely, if I were working with my students on Homeric vocabulary, I would have them practice not just the word 'ship' by itself, but also the collocations 'fast ship', 'hollow ship', and 'black ship' (i.e., some of the most prominent lexical words in the cloud). Now, when they encounter 'ship', they have a better chance of recognizing some of the other words that surround it. A similar author- or text-specific approach can be used to determine the ideal gradation of grammatical topics (thus not necessarily proceeding in the traditional order, but rather tailoring the presentation to the demands of the chosen text or author).[47]

Classroom activities

Even within a more traditional classroom, much can be gained by introducing a handful of individual or group activities that reflect a more communicative or active approach, or that leverage multiple kinds of media. Below are just a few examples (more examples of communicative activities and assignments are discussed in Part IV).

1. Priming vocabulary and using visual media

Before working on a translation or reading task, it might be beneficial to prime the students' lexical knowledge by asking them to "brainstorm" the terminology they are likely to encounter in the text based on its general topic (e.g., "We are about to read about a shipwreck; what are some terms that we are likely going to need?" "What is another word for *sea* that we know?"). Images could be used here as well: in the current example, it might be helpful to show them an image of a ship and discuss the terminology they already know (or don't yet know) directly on the image (e.g., "What is the term for *mast*?"). Images can also be useful when introducing grammatical topics: a lecture on the Latin perfect can start with a small comic portraying two characters talking to each other and using perfect indicative forms (with known vocabulary). Games of Memory (where students match tiles with an image of an object and tiles with the name of the object, which can be done by either printing

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[47] Libatique and Machado (2021) talk about altering the traditional gradation of grammatical topics based on the target text (in their case, the *Fabulae* of Hyginus) and the known challenges for English learners of Latin. While this is a good strategy, I find their rushed dismissal of communicative methods as surpassed, and their claim to be applying Content-Based Instruction (while in reality proposing a slight variant of the Grammar and Translation method) to be unpersuasive.

out physical tiles or by using a software) are another way of integrating a visual element into the study of the lexicon.[48]

2. Small dialogues and mini-interactions in the target language

Even if most of the classroom instruction takes place in English, it is beneficial to give students some opportunities to use Latin and Greek communicatively. Some recurring interactions could take place in the target language (while the examples in this paragraph are Latin, Saffire and Fries [1999] provide a number of scripts that can be used in the Greek classroom). Greetings and basic questions and replies (e.g., "Salve/Vale" "Suntne omnia plāna?" "Suntne interrogāta?" "Non audīvī/Non intellexī" "Possumne ad lātrīnas īre?") could be a good place to start. More advanced students could be asked to take part in small role-playing exercises. When introducing interrogative pronouns, for instance, one could set up the students in pairs, and have them ask each other basic questions while looking at a picture (e.g., "Quis est Carlus?" "Carlus pater est"). For students who are not used to speaking the target language in the classroom, giving them the opportunity to first write down a small dialogue or scene (bonus points for silliness) as a group activity (or even as a homework assignment), and only later acting it out in front of the class, can be a good way of easing them into active language usage. Asking them to summarize a reading in one or two sentences (borrowing words and even entire phrases from the original) is also an effective strategy, whether done orally or in writing.

IV. Embracing Communicative Language Teaching

The adjustments suggested in Part III might make for a good starting point for some teachers and some students, but they do not amount to a complete overhaul of traditional language pedagogy. What follows is a conversation with a long-time friend and fellow graduate in Classical Philology at the Catholic University of Milan, Daniela Negro, who has been teaching Latin and Greek at the high school level in Italy for over a decade. DN made the switch to communicative language teaching for her Latin classes a few years ago and is now a strong advocate of these methods (especially, as she explains below, because she finds them to be considerably more *inclusive* than the traditional ones). Her answers address many of the doubts and practical issues that face those teachers who want to follow a more progressive path.[49]

CB: How would you define your current method of teaching Latin, and what does a typical lesson look like in your classroom?

DN: At the moment, I'd say I teach Latin with a (mostly) communicative method. I work at an Italian high school (*Liceo*), where Latin is a mandatory subject. My students are usually aged

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[48] Many Learning Management Systems employed by universities, for instance, allow instructors to create interactive H5P exercises (https://h5p.org/; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025), which include Memory Games as well as many other types of activities that might be helpful for language teaching (e.g., Dialogue Cards, Crossword puzzles, Word search games, etc.).

[49] The following conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity. References and notes have been added. Other testimonials for communicative approaches to Latin (which in the English-speaking world are now often referred to as "Active Latin"), can be found in Coffee (2012) and Shirley (2019).

fourteen to sixteen. I use the textbook and workbook *Familia Romana.*[50] A typical class meeting starts with a quick review of our previous lesson (I usually ask my students to read their homework out loud, and we discuss what they did). Afterwards, we usually work on some new material: this can be reading a text, watching a video, or analyzing some sentences. Starting from that material, I discuss a new grammatical topic and/or some important vocabulary. At other times, I have students work individually or in small groups on reinforcement activities. Most importantly, as much of the class as possible takes place in Latin.

CB: How long have you been teaching with a communicative method?

DN: I have been teaching with the communicative method since about 2021. Before then, I could have been the poster child for the Grammar and Translation Method: I learned Greek and Latin in that way in a very conservative *Liceo Classico*, and most of the classes that I took during my undergraduate and graduate studies followed those same principles. After a Ph.D. in Classical Philology and a year of teacher training, I started teaching Greek and Latin in 2013, and I taught them (unsurprisingly) in the only way that I knew how. In 2019, I started taking an interest in communicative methods and, after some training, I first implemented these strategies in the classroom in 2021.

CB: How has your classroom experience changed since then?

DN: I have observed an enormous improvement. The change of method has helped me tear down a wall between me, my students, and Latin. Now they don't come into the classroom expecting an experience that is both boring and stressful. I would even dare to say that they have fun in my Latin class—at least most of the time.

CB: Would you say your students are achieving the same results as before, or better?

DN: On average, they are achieving better results. They develop a better grasp of the basic grammar, and they are much faster when it comes to reading and understanding the texts. Grade-wise, I see fewer failing grades than I did a few years ago.

CB: How does this method perform with students with diverse educational needs and backgrounds?

DN: I have found that communicative methods are considerably better when dealing with students with different linguistic backgrounds. While in the past many of my students who were non-native speakers of the language of instruction struggled in my Latin courses because they felt the need to translate the Latin into their own language first, and then into

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[50] DN: I find *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (Ørberg 2011) to be effective as a coursebook: my students usually have the reader at hand (*Familia Romana*—or, for more advanced classes, *Roma Aeterna*) as well as the corresponding workbook (*Exercitia Latina*). The course provides other materials as well: a second workbook, a student's manual (*Latine Disco*), dialogues (*Colloquia Personarum*), short stories, a glossary, as well as grammatical explanations and charts in various modern languages. (In English the grammar and glossary portions are available jointly as *Lingua Latina: A Companion to Familia Romana*).

the Italian we used in the classroom, I have found that teaching communicatively removes such a barrier, resulting in much better learning outcomes.

Similarly, I have found that teaching communicatively leads to much better outcomes for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia (who might, for instance, understand grammatical concepts in isolation, but struggle to apply them during translation work): this is true both in terms of their academic performance and in terms of their enjoyment of the class.

How can we explain such a radical difference in outcomes, if I am the same teacher, and not a particularly strict one at that? These experiences made me realize that the communicative method isn't simply more effective—it is more inclusive as well. One of its cornerstones is to present the learner with a variety of inputs: written language, spoken language, images, and even real-world objects.[51] This is beneficial to students who might struggle when it comes to certain reading and writing tasks. While communicative methods do not eliminate the study of grammar,[52] they do put an increased emphasis on understanding the text as a whole before worrying about single words—and, sometimes, on understanding single words by looking at the general context. This approach will generally be more effective for students who have reading difficulties, and who might easily misunderstand a word because they misread a letter or reversed two syllables.

Moreover, when employing the Grammar and Translation method, we unwittingly combine two separate language learning goals: we ask students to translate the text in order to show us that they have understood the meaning, but we also take this translation as the one and only proof that students "know" the grammar. With a direct approach, it is easier to only test one skill at a time. We can either test for understanding (and we can pick from a host of options, depending on what's appropriate in the moment: a paraphrasis in their own language, answering some open and/or multiple choice questions; even a translation), or we can assign an exercise focused on a grammatical skill.

Overall, when we opt for a communicative approach, we give each student more chances to succeed in at least some of their assignments. This way, we can gain a more accurate picture of each student's strengths and weaknesses. And, most importantly, we can boost student morale by giving them the chance to feel effective, and thus believing that they can succeed. This, of course, is a much better foundation for learning.

CB: What persuaded you to seek a different approach?

DN: In 2019 I felt like I was at a crossroads. I had been teaching Latin for about ten years, and each year I could see that my methods were proving less and less effective. At that time, I

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[51] DN: To introduce masculine, feminine, and neuter inflection, for instance, I usually take three objects to class: a bag (*saccus*, masculine), a bottle (*lagēna*, feminine), and a cup (*poculum*, neuter). I then proceed to talk about them to demonstrate different cases and constructions (e.g., "ecce saccus" "ecce lagēna" "ecce poculum'" "lagēna in saccō est" "lagēna et poculum in saccō sunt" "quid est in lagēnā?" "aqua in lagēnā est", then pouring water into a cup "nunc aqua in poculō est").

[52] DN: It has been my experience, even with the type of communicative method that I use, that students who lack basic grammatical notions (e.g., students who don't know a noun from a verb, or who don't know what a prepositional phrase is in their own language) will still be the ones who struggle the most with Latin. While it is perfectly possible for children especially to learn languages through simple exposure, research shows that some explicit grammatical instruction is beneficial for adult learners; see Carlon (2013) for an application of this principle to Latin teaching specifically.

was teaching a quite promising group of students; yet most of them struggled with Latin, and I could not find a way to help them. I tried everything that the Grammar and Translation method had to offer: teaching them to find the verb and to identify grammatical structures, assigning lots and lots of translation work, and giving them long lists of words to learn by heart. Nothing changed—and this wasn't the first time an entire class of mine was struggling. I was furious with myself: my students were doing their job, so why was I unable to teach them, and why couldn't I help them fall in love with a subject that I cared about so deeply? Something had to change. I told myself: "either I change the way I do my job, or I get another job". That was when I first started looking into communicative methods.

CB: What type of training did you pursue, and how long did it take?

DN: When I started taking an interest in communicative methods, I followed some webinars held by the *Centro di Studi Classici Greco Latino Vivo*—one of the few organizations in Italy that is committed to a completely modern approach to Classical language pedagogy.[53] I immediately realized that I had my work cut out for me: I had to learn Latin all over again, so that I could become a confident and somewhat fluent speaker, with an active (rather than passive) knowledge of vocabulary. Additionally, I needed to learn concretely how to teach Latin with a communicative approach. Using a small grant provided by the Italian state for continuing teacher training, I followed a one-year course with *Greco Latino Vivo*: once a week, I sat in on an entry-level Latin class, and two days later I would meet with the instructor in order to discuss the pedagogical methods I had witnessed. After a year, I had acquired the skills needed to teach communicatively, but I must say that this kind of approach requires constant, ongoing training: I find it useful, for instance, to consume as much Latin-language media as possible (these can be texts, podcasts, videos, or even online classes) in order to maintain a good level of fluency and vocabulary.

CB: How did you approach having to speak the languages with the students?

DN: I was terrified at first, as I'm assuming most people would be. During my training, the first time that I was asked a question, I confidently opened my mouth, as I had perfectly understood the question itself... and I stood there, silent, unable to put my answer into words. Much has changed since then, but some of that fear comes back every time a student raises their hand to ask a question.

On the students' side, they at first tend to be puzzled. Here in Italy, they often come from a different method, or have heard stories from older siblings and friends who studied Latin in a different way. But after a few attempts, they usually do enjoy actively using the language. I discovered that the secret, as in most of teaching, is to cultivate a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. It is important that the students feel safe making mistakes, and that they know they won't be reproached for them (this is what my teachers called "lowering the emotional filter").

When I first started my training, I admit I felt quite skeptical about speaking Latin in the classroom. But now I have experienced first-hand just how powerful speaking can be for language acquisition: the repeated usage of vocabulary and grammatical structures is

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[53] https://www.grecolatinovivo.it; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

extremely effective for retention. And it makes for a much more dynamic classroom experience.

CB: Were you not concerned that you (and the students) would make mistakes that would become entrenched?

DN: I wasn't just concerned that it would happen, I *knew* that it would happen—and it did. My favorite mistake is forgetting that *dum* only takes a present indicative: when I speak or write quickly, I often end up using other tenses. My students have their favorite mistakes too. What I can do as a teacher is to try to anticipate the mistakes before they happen, and try to defuse them afterwards. So, for instance, when I first introduce *dum* to my students, I warn them that I will probably use it wrong from time to time, so they need to be extra careful—and they are obviously allowed to correct me if they think I made a mistake. This way, they can use my occasional lapses as a way to think about the correct usage of *dum*. I also normalize making mistakes by openly admitting to them (again, the emotional filter). And once I get to know my students, I can try to warn them ahead of time when they are about to use a word or a grammatical structure that they usually struggle with.

Laughter can be a powerful tool as well. Of course, one should wield it carefully—no one likes to be the object of ridicule. But within an open and supportive class environment, where students feel safe and respected, joking about a mistake (and, crucially, not about the person who made it) can be a very effective strategy. Miraglia (2020: 116–117) writes about a situation of this kind, in which a student, talking about the content of a nest (*nīdus*), used the word *ovēs* ('sheep') instead of *ova* ('eggs'). At this point, the teacher asked "Num bālant ovēs in nidō?" ('Do the sheep bleat in the nest?'). The students corrected themselves while joining in everyone's laughter, and no one forgot the difference between *ovēs* 'sheep' and *ova* 'eggs' anymore.

CB: How did these methods affect the pace of teaching? Were you able to cover the same topics you did in the traditional approach?

DN: When I first started to teach communicatively, I thought I would be able to cover all the topics at a much faster pace. After all, I would not have to waste time on technicalities and exceptions until they were necessary. I must admit, I quickly discovered that I was mistaken. The pace of the class itself didn't slow down, but the time I saved on explicit grammar instruction was now entirely devoted to making students talk, and to growing their vocabulary.

On a more general note, I realized that ever since I started teaching communicatively, I have had an easier time monitoring whether my students are following or not, and whether I need to stay on a topic longer in order to ensure that everybody "gets it". Because the students have a more active role in the classroom, they can't just nod along and hide. And they are getting a lot more Latin data, in a more concentrated form.

With the Grammar and Translation method, I would explain a grammatical rule in Italian and give a few examples. Then we would move on to translating a few easy sentences, or to reading a text where the structure recurred maybe once in twelve lines. Overall, that's not a lot of Latin exposure. Now we start from the examples (in Latin), and after the explanation (mostly in Latin) we spend a lot of time on multiple focused exercises (in Latin), and on

vocabulary training (in Latin), and each student has to speak multiple times (you get the gist).

What I said so far is true for teaching high school (where I need to grade the students often, and where their level of motivation varies). When I teach private classes, and I work with adults who are highly motivated and do not need constant testing, things can move much faster. In this situation, a 72-hour course can take students from zero to almost the end of *Familia Romana.* This means having covered all of the morphology except for the tenses of the subjunctive and all of the syntax apart from the usages of the subjunctive (in the CEFR Model—the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages—this is roughly a B1 level).

CB: How concretely do you grade your students and on which types of activities/tasks?

DN: As per the standards of Italian high schools, each student needs to complete at least six written examinations and four oral examinations per year. I personally try to test my students as frequently as I can (within reason): this allows me to quickly figure out if something is not working, and it lowers the stakes for each individual test (if something goes wrong on one particular test, it's not the end of the world). A typical written examination starts from a text, usually chosen from the teacher's materials of *Familia Romana*, or sometimes written by me. I ask the students to answer some questions to demonstrate that they understood the text; these can be either open-ended questions, true/false questions, or multiple choice. Next comes a section focusing on the main grammatical points covered in the text. Questions in this section may include modifying sentences from the text (e.g., *Marcus amandus est Liviae > Livia dēbet Marcum amāre*, or vice versa), or exercises in which students must inflect a word or a phrase. At the end, I usually have a section where students have to translate part of the text into Italian. This is not traditionally part of a communicative method, but I do this to accommodate the expectations for high-school Latin in Italy (crucially, the state examinations at the end of high school still require Latin-to-Italian translation). Oral exams typically start from an image like the one shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3 Example of an image used during an oral Latin exam.
Image by Ali Salah Photographie from Pexels licensed under CC0.
https://www.pexels.com/photo/newlywed-couple-smiling-16903588/;
link accessed April 27, 2025.

For beginners, I typically ask students a simple question about what they see (e.g., *Quid facit vir?* Expected answer(s): *Vir fēminam amat*; *Vir fēminae rosam dōnat*). When students have more vocabulary and structures they can use, I give them a few minutes to look at the image, and then have them describe it to me. I might ask a few additional questions in order to help them, or to force them to use specific words or structures they did not include on their own. I have also experimented with having students write a short text starting from one or more images, or with having them work in groups to prepare a role-playing scene: for the latter option, I would give them the scenario, the characters, and some grammatical structures they need to include in the dialogue, and let them be creative with it.

When grading written work, I tend to focus more on accuracy; when I evaluate speaking skills, I focus mainly on vocabulary and syntax, and I worry less about minor grammatical blunders (i.e., using the wrong inflectional ending and the like).

CB: What types of supplementary materials have you found useful for your students?

DN: My Gen-Z students, perhaps unsurprisingly, love video content. I mostly use materials on YouTube by US-based communicative teachers (see fn. 27). My students especially enjoy watching videos about Roman society, customs, and places. Usually, we read a list of questions first, and then we watch a video two or three times in order to find all the answers.

It can also be useful to provide extra reading materials: some good (though somewhat dated) options are: *Iulia* (Reed 1962), a reader that follows at first the adventures of a little girl, and then moves to narrating Greek and Roman myths, with increasing grammatical and lexical complexity; and *Ritchie's Fabulae faciles* (Kirkland 1903), a selection of short mythical stories.

Additionally, I like to use dedicated software to create self-correcting versions of exercises from the *Familia Romana* workbook, which saves a considerable amount of class time, as students can receive instant feedback on their performance.

CB: Would you say these methods work better with large or small groups of students?

DN: Over the last few years, I was able to experiment with all sorts of class sizes, from two people all the way to thirty. I would say that a small-to-medium group (something between five and fifteen people) tends to work best. With fewer people, the class quickly becomes boring and tiring, because there is no variety in interactions, and the students constantly need to be fully focused. Moreover, class sizes that are too small preclude group work—and we all know that cooperative learning and peer tutoring can be very valuable additions to our teaching. With more than twenty people, on the other hand, it is tricky to make sure that each student is talking and interacting as much as the method requires.

CB: When it comes to the time and effort that you have to invest in preparing each class, how do you feel that the communicative method compares with more traditional methods?

DN: I must admit that preparing a communicative class takes significantly more work than preparing a traditional one. I saw this very clearly during the current academic year, since I am teaching a traditional introductory Greek class (I was given no choice as to the method) alongside my usual communicative Latin classes. The Greek class virtually prepares itself: I take a quick glance at the next topic in the textbook, select some exercises from the workbook, and I head to the classroom. If I am in a real rush, I can teach without any preparation at all—after all, I remember the first declension pretty well, and I can easily write it out on the board, have my students copy it, and then decline a few nouns that are listed in the workbook.

Communicative classes on the other hand, always require some advance planning (and this is especially true for teachers who are new to this approach). When I introduce my students to a new chapter in *Familia Romana*, I do what I call a *praelēctiō*, i.e., a quick preview of significant new vocabulary and grammatical structures in context. This means that I first have to compile a list of all the main lexical and grammatical points in the text (not everything new must be introduced in advance, some new words can, for instance, be understood in context as we read the chapter). I typically prepare images and examples in order to clarify each point, and sometimes I even design some quick exercises to check for student comprehension.[54] After the reading portion comes the practice portion, and as few communicative Latin workbooks are available, I sometimes have to develop the materials myself. Alternatively, I take the time to turn the exercises in the workbook into the types of self-correcting activities I mentioned earlier. Even preparing an in-class quiz or exam is easier under the traditional approach: it only takes a few minutes to select a Greek or Latin

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[54] DN: While it is better in general to first read the text and then talk about it, and only later have the students practice and memorize a given vocabulary item or grammatical pattern, sometimes it can be a good idea to check whether the class has a general grasp of a new structure. Let's take the Latin passive periphrastic construction as an example: if students do not understand that the expressions *Marcus laudandus est mihī* and *Dēbeō Marcum laudare* are equivalent in meaning, going ahead and reading the corresponding chapter in the text might not be helpful. The students might not, at this point, be able to use the structure actively, but they need at the very least to be able to understand what it means.

text for the students to translate from one of the many available textbooks and workbooks, lifting it from a chapter dedicated to the same linguistic topics.

All of this can sound demotivating, but there are two important "buts". First, and foremost: my experience this year has shown me once again that, the more communicative the class is, the more the students are interested and engaged, and the more they control the language. My Greek students tend to forget, after five months, the meaning of basic high-frequency words such as γράφω, 'I write,' or λέγω, 'I say,' (precisely as I did when I was their age). As long as our linguistic competence is passive, and our knowledge of vocabulary comes from a list, it is difficult to feel really in control of a language. This is not only true for students, but for teachers too. Teaching Latin in a communicative way has, without a doubt, greatly improved my own Latin competency. Until a few years ago, even after completing a Ph.D. in Classics, I always had the feeling that I could not understand a Latin text immediately upon approaching it (the way I understand, say, and English or French text): I needed to stop often, find the verb, then the subject, and so on. Now, I almost always read and understand what I see, and I only very rarely need to slow down and resort to grammatical analysis to untangle a particularly challenging passage.

My newly-found confidence in Latin also made me realize how differently I feel with regard to Greek. I have had few occasions to approach Greek in a communicative way, even less to teach it so, and as my class moves beyond the most basic topics, I always have the feeling that I am forgetting something, or that I am making a mistake. I sometimes feel like I am not actually in control of the language. And, for sure, I need to consult a dictionary more often, even when I am simply preparing lessons for an introductory class.

The second "but" is more practical in nature: after a few years of communicative teaching, I have put together a large archive of lesson plans, slides, exercises, and additional materials. Therefore, I can prepare at least beginner communicative lectures almost as quickly as I would more traditional ones.

CB: What is your recommendation for teachers who are interested in these more progressive methods, but are not sure where to start, and whether the change will be worthwhile?

DN: Surprisingly enough, I would not advise anyone to "dive right in". A change of method, much like any change, needs some amount of planning. Otherwise, we might end up thinking that the method is bad, when we simply were not applying it correctly. This of course does not mean that all change needs to wait until a complete re-training has taken place. If a teacher feels unhappy with their current method, I would advise them to apply the "+1 rule": what is one thing that I can change now in order to move towards a more communicative approach?

A good starting point could be to work more systematically on vocabulary (perhaps using one of the strategies mentioned above). Or maybe, start teaching grammar more inductively, by showing some examples first as opposed to just stating the rule (as discussed in Part III). If we (and our students) are happy with the results, we can think about more structural changes next—and here some additional teacher training will likely be necessary. One word of warning: if our students come from years of learning Latin with a more traditional approach, they will likely be puzzled by the changes at first. Just give them time: in a few weeks they will enjoy not having to thumb through their dictionary all the time, and working on their vocabulary by reading texts or watching videos instead.

V. Conclusion

As Classicists work to reimagine a new and more inclusive version of the field, rethinking the way the Classical languages are taught will be a crucial step in making the study of the ancient world more accessible and attractive to a wider and more diverse set of students. The Grammar and Translation method, with its roots in a classist conception of higher education and in a nineteenth-century version of linguistics, needs to gradually give way to more progressive approaches, more in line with what the study of second language acquisition has long established as best practices for teaching the modern languages.

More progressive methods will remove one artificial barrier to entry into the field, making it easier to recruit and retain students from a variety of backgrounds. More progressive methods will also alleviate challenges for students with specific learning disabilities,[55] and for students who do not speak the language of instruction natively. Finally, by bringing more students to a higher level of proficiency in the languages, these methods will benefit the field altogether by creating scholars who feel secure in their language skills and thus in their capacity to do original work on the texts.

These changes do not need to happen at the same speed, or in the same way, for each teacher and each classroom, but they do need to happen. Of course, the burden cannot fall on individual teachers alone: the training provided to teachers must shift, and graduate programs that choose to prepare their students for more progressive teaching methods will need to find room in the curriculum for some additional linguistic training, ideally including both coursework in linguistics in general (either an introductory linguistics course or, potentially, a course on the linguistics of Greek or Latin specifically) and coursework on contemporary language pedagogy (as well as the opportunity to practice said pedagogy).

Teaching communicatively requires a higher level of language proficiency on the part of instructors than traditional methods do: this might mean allowing for more time for graduate students to build their language skills before they are tasked to teach introductory Latin or Greek, or providing funding for them to attend a spoken language immersion program. While the internet abounds with useful materials (e.g., videos, books, and podcasts in the target languages), more Greek and Latin textbooks embracing the communicative methods need to be written (ideally featuring a more modern and sensitive treatment of cultural and social topics than, say *Familia Romana*), as the current selection of textbooks is heavily skewed towards Grammar and Translation.

This does not mean that individual teachers are powerless in experimenting, within the limitations they operate under, with more progressive practices and approaches. This paper is meant to provide some historical context, actionable advice, and personal anecdotes to get started along this journey.

The pedagogy of the Classical languages has always had a tendency to be more conservative than it claims to be. In part, I believe this is due to a kind of survivor bias: the field, after all, has spent close to two hundred years selecting precisely for those people who could do well within those traditional methods. This process, perhaps unwittingly, has helped keep the discipline for the few. It has fashioned learning the languages (a task for which human brains are generally very well suited, under the right conditions) into an elaborate and exclusive trial, which (moreover) does not always lead to proficiency. If we

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[55] On this topic, see Iovino (2019).

care about the future of our discipline, it is time to take a different path. It is time to stop climbing mountains in flip-flops.

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