

Latin Education

Angus MACINDOE

Faculty of International Communication, Aichi University

E-mail: angus@vega.aichi-u.ac.jp

要 旨

ラテン語学習について、なぜラテン語を学ぶ必要性があるのか？ 言語は人とのコミュニケーションがある故に必要とされるので、ラテン語の様な現在使われていない言語を学ぶことは時間の無駄だと考える人もいる。本紀要は、以下5つの理由のためラテン語学習の重要性を論じたい。1) 顕著たる文学作品を読むため 2) ドイツ語、ゲルマン語の文法を理解するため 3) フランス語とイタリア語が容易に学べるため 4) 道徳を学ぶため 5) ラテン語を学ぶことで英語学習に役立つため。

ラテン語が英語学習をより早く簡単にかつ詳しく理解するよう助長するため、ラテン語教育が重要だと云える。

I. Introduction

Why study Latin? Why should anyone bother studying a dead language such as Latin, Ancient Greek or Old Church Slavonic, when they could invest the same time in learning a living language such as Chinese and then visit the country concerned and actually talk to real live people. Language exists for communication, and for most of human history that has meant using the mouth and vocal organs to grunt, shout, speak or otherwise utter words that other humans can understand and respond to. Surely a living language is more important than a dead one? Years ago at the Dragon School, Oxford, small boys passed down and recited this doggerel verse to express their feelings:

“Latin is a language, as dead as dead can be,
It killed the Ancient Romans, and now it’s killing me!” (Opie 1959)

They meant they disliked studying a dead language that seemed irrelevant and obsolete in the present age.

Another negative point is that people who show knowledge of Latin risk being seen as overeducated and out of touch, and also feel frustrated when they hear other people misusing Latin phrases. All this suggests that Latin has no place in education in the 21st Century.

This article will try to suggest that there is another point of view and that Latin is still worth studying, even in the age of Facebook, space exploration and the Internet. We will try to show that learning French or Spanish is greatly helped by knowing some Latin, and it is also helpful in understanding medical terms and names of species of birds, insects and so on according to the Linnaean system. Latin grammar is rigid and inflexible, with three genders and six cases, so it is good preparation for learning German. Vergil, Tacitus and Horace are examples of great writers who can be read in the original, and the analytic skills acquired doing Latin exercises are good training for many future careers. Latin enables us to read tombstones and inscriptions in different countries, and understand mottoes of family crests, regiments and schools.

These are all reasons to study Latin, but the greatest reason is to help us in learning English. Latin is one of the roots of English, with words having entered the language directly and also via Norman French, so learning Latin helps us with 30% or 40% of English. If we only learn a few Latin prefixes and suffixes, even this will help us understand a large number of English words and in cases where meaning has changed over the years we can be aware of the original meaning. Let us hope that some readers of this article may be persuaded that Latin is still a worthwhile field of study.

Chapter II will first look at memories of studying in my early years. Chapter III will examine the features of Latin that make it seem easy or hard, and show how concise and pithy the language can be. Chapter IV will look at the disadvantages and Chapter V will list the advantages of learning Latin, as well as demonstrating that even a dead language can be a powerful tool of communication. Chapter VI will briefly mention its importance in science and medicine before concluding.

II. My Early Years

The present author began to study Latin at the age of 7. My mother Jane was a *kyoiku mama* and wanted me to excel. I had a place at The Dragon School, Oxford from the

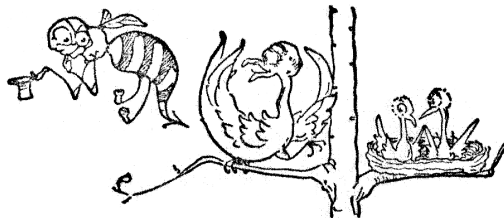
age of 8, a school where all pupils study Latin from their first week, and so she planned to coach me privately beforehand and give me a head start over the others, like many a Japanese mother.

Alas! She knew no Latin herself, but of course I didn't know that. She bought a book called *Latin with Laughter* (1931) by Charis Ursula Frankenburg and taught me a page or two every Saturday morning, having studied those pages herself during the week. It was like a low-level graded reader, with amusing illustrations and stories based on minimal vocabulary. I remember one little story in which every sentence comprised two words, subject and verb, which were perfectly good Latin. E.g. *Poeta cantat. Musca volat. Poeta ululat.* (=Poet sings. Fly flies. Poet howls)

LATIN WITH LAUGHTER 27

WHY THE GIRL LOVED THE POET

3. Poëta püellam amat. Puella columbam amat. Vespa columbam vulnerat. Columba ululat. Puella ululat. Poëta vespam necat. Puella poëtam amat. Poëta cantat.



Vespa columbam vulnerat.

püella - girl
columba - dove

vulnerat - wounds
necat - kills

At The Dragon School everyone studied Latin at least three times a week, and the essential book was a slim brown volume by Kennedy entitled *The Shortbread Eating Primer*. That was not Kennedy's selected title of course; he named it *The Shorter Latin Primer*, but generations of inky-fingered schoolboys had passed their time at the back of the class adding extra letters on the cover of their book, in imitation of those of their friends. Other textbooks we used were by Hillard & Botting and L. A. Wilding: I thought it a weird coincidence that the top form teacher had the same name as the book's author, but it was of course the very same man. Learning grammar by rote is not now my favorite way of language learning, but in those days when our brains

were young and plastic it seemed easy and rather fun. The English word “this” doesn’t inflect, except in the plural “these”, but the Latin equivalent declines in a whole table of forms, once learnt never forgotten:

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nom	<i>hic</i>	<i>haec</i>	<i>hoc</i>
Voc	<i>hic</i>	<i>haec</i>	<i>hoc</i>
Acc	<i>hunc</i>	<i>hanc</i>	<i>hoc</i>
Gen	<i>huius</i>	<i>huius</i>	<i>huius</i>
Dat	<i>huic</i>	<i>huic</i>	<i>huic</i>
Abl	<i>hoc</i>	<i>hac</i>	<i>hoc</i>

Years later in New Zealand I was invited out by a sporting club whose objectives were drinking beer, walking long distances and shooting wild pigs. They were hard men, but some of them had learnt Latin at school so they called themselves the “Hic! Hike Hog Club” in memory of “*hic haec hoc.*” More schoolboy humour is shown in the tale of a forgetful diner in a restaurant trying to order a bottle of German white wine, or hock. “Waiter, bring me a bottle of ... er... hic? ... haec? ... hoc! that’s it, a bottle of hock!” The bottle is never brought. When the diner finally complains, the waiter says innocently, “Well, Sir, you declined it.”

At my next school Latin “construe” was taught twice a week, intensive study and translation of great writers from the Golden Age of Latin literature, such as Vergil, Cicero and Horace, together with the parallel challenge of translating English prose into Latin in the style of M. Tullius Cicero and English verse in the style of M. Vergilius Maro. Naturally we also learned to read faster, so we could handle poems of 500 lines or many of the books of Vergil’s epic the Aeneid.

Next came University College, Oxford and getting used to the tutorial system. Apart from lectures, which were all optional, we met with our classical tutor once a week, either one-to-one or two undergraduates together with one tutor, and read aloud that week’s essay to him/her and defended it. This was somewhat similar to being a member of Prof Ivan Cosby’s seminar class today at Aichi University.

After two years undergraduates faced exams called Honour Moderations (or “Mods”) which were reputed to be the longest exam outside the Imperial Chinese civil service: I think we had 13 three-hour papers in the course of a week, after which there was a feeling of achievement, relief and release that I can remember to this day. My final two years at university were devoted to philosophy and Greek history, so I had no more Latin, but a subject studied for 14 years tends to stick in the memory.

III. Features of Latin

1. Inflection and complex grammar

Some easy features to delight the learner are a) no articles, like the fiendish “a” and “the” in English b) no distinction between past simple and past perfect tenses (e.g. *amavi* =I loved/I have loved) and c) a smaller alphabet than English, “w” and “z” are limited to foreign names, while the pairs “j” and “i” and “u” and “v” are interchangeable. That may be the limit of the easy part.

The main problem for the learner is that Latin is a strongly inflected language. According to Klyve (2002):

“...inflected language (sometimes also called a **radical** language) which means that the endings of words change according to their usage. We have something like this in English. We usually change the end of a noun if we want it to refer to more than one thing; e.g. one cat: several cats. We change some nouns depending on whether they are masculine or feminine; e.g. emperor and empress. We sometimes alter the endings of our verbs depending on who is performing the action; e.g. I run, he runs. We also change our pronouns (I, he, she, it, we, they and who) depending on how they are being used in a sentence; e.g. **I** chase **him** then **he** chases **me**. In this sentence both I and me refer to the same person (myself) but the words are different because they are used differently. In ‘I chase him’ I am performing the action but in ‘then he chases me’ I am having the action performed upon me. Normally, however, we do not change the forms of words in English but rely upon word order to make our meaning clear.

In Latin things are different. It is a language in which the start of a word, usually called the **stem** (sometimes also called the **root**), does not usually change but the **endings** of almost all words (sometimes also called **inflections**) do change according to how those words are being used. Word order is, therefore, not as important in Latin as it is in English and the verb usually comes at the end of a sentence.”

This means that the learner has to handle tenses and moods, persons, declensions and genders, and to learn a number of patterns starting from the words *mensa* (= table) and *amare* (=to love):

Nom	mensa	1 st person	amo
Voc	mensa	2 nd	amas

Acc	mensam	3 rd	amat
Gen	mensae	1 st pl.	amamus
Dat	mensae	2 nd pl.	amatis
Abl	mensa	3 rd pl.	amant

As mentioned before, learning these patterns by heart may be fun for younger learners and can give a sense of achievement, but fun or no fun, they tend to stick in the memory.

2. Latin's brevity and pith

In Latin, as in Japanese, the subject can be 'understood' and so omitted, and since a great deal of meaning can be packed into a few words it is an ideal language for pithy sayings and mottoes. When Tiberius, Roman emperor in the 1st Century, was told that his people hated him, he reportedly replied, "*Oderint dum metuant*" (=let them hate me, as long as they fear me) (Suetonius Tib. lix.) As another example, when Cicero was consul in 63 B.C. he visited the prison where several arrested supporters of Catiline were being held. Afterwards Cicero was asked about the condition of the prisoners, and simply replied, "*Vixerunt*" (=they have lived). He had ordered them strangled a short time before.

In more elegant words than mine, Jasper Griffin (1994) explains:

"It is a cliché among connoisseurs of Latin that the language has a 'lapidary' quality. It is certainly true that Latin goes very well on stone. The language is capable of extraordinary effects of compression: the absence of words for 'a' and 'the'; the fondness for omitting 'and' and 'but'; the ability to achieve unambiguous sense with very little use of prepositions like 'of' and 'to' and 'with'; the variety of possible forms for verbs, nouns and adjectives, each with its own precise and transparent grammatical function: such things conspire to create in Latin a weighty and pregnant manner, uncluttered with little auxiliary words, and juxtaposing substantial ones with a minimum of connecting mortar between the massy stones." (foreword to *Latin in Oxford* 1994)

Pithy Latin sayings that are favorites in my idiolect include "*Festina lente*" (lit=Hurry slowly) which is equivalent to our wordier saying: More haste, less speed. The motto of the kings of Scotland is "*Nemo me impune lacessit*" (=Nobody provokes me with impunity) and that of the Royal Regiment of Artillery is "*Ubique*" (=Everywhere). The motto of the SAS, Britain's vaunted special forces, "*Qui audet vincit*" (=Who dares

wins) always reminds me of Prof. Ivan Cosby's family motto, "*Fortuna audaces iuvat*" (=Fortune favours the bold), but the main ingredient all these mottoes have in common is their brevity and power.

3. Roman numerals

Roman numerals below 100 are written in straight lines, making it easy to inscribe them in stone or wood. I, II and III are easy, but from IV and V onwards need to be learnt. Early man seems to have counted on his fingers, and the Roman V is said to be based on the shape of an open hand with spread thumb opposing four fingers, similar to the current Chinese hand gesture representing "8". Twice V is naturally X.

These numerals are found on old milestones and are still used as alternatives to Arabic numerals for volumes of books and for chapter numbers in "Civilization 21" articles. Perhaps their most common use today is in names of people, such as King James VI and I of Scotland and England, Charles IX of Sweden, Pope John Paul XXIII and, in that strange American usage, Harlow J. Carpenter III.

Roman Numerals work best with low numbers and have a kind of Roman logic that is satisfying to those who have cracked the code, but they are not designed for calculating: addition takes skill, multiplication is complex and long division is a nightmare.

IV. Disadvantages of Learning Latin

1. *Vita brevis, ars longa* (=life is short and an art takes long to learn)

Latin is a dead language, and one must question why it is worth spending so long on studying such an obsolete subject. The same study time could be more usefully spent on a modern language such as Chinese or Arabic, or indeed on a practical subject such as Engineering, Management or Computer Studies. The future will need graduates who have accumulated futuristic skills, and there is only a limited time to cram in these skills, so let's not waste that time on Latin. This may be the strongest argument against it.

2. Overeducated and out of touch

Politicians like David Cameron often have to play down their privileged background in order to woo voters, since human beings tend to like others who resemble themselves. Their speeches need to be clear, easy to understand, and repeat the same message as many times as necessary. Even if they know Latin, and use Latin phrases in conversation with their friends, they must avoid them in public speeches for fear of seeming overeducated and out of touch with ordinary people.

There is a story of U.S. vice-president Dan Quayle being asked to visit several countries in Latin America, and replying, “I don’t know any Latin; how can I talk to them?” To his opponents, this story showed Dan Quayle’s ignorance about the outside world beyond the borders of the U.S.A. However, it could have been a clever populist remark appealing to voters, showing both that he had had an ordinary education just like them, and that he had a sense of humour.

In contrast to Mr Quayle, Winston Churchill, the great wartime prime minister of Britain, did not pretend to be ignorant of Latin or the outside world, but did show his priorities by writing:

“Naturally I am biased in favour of boys learning English; and then I would let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour and Greek as a treat” (*My Early Life* 1930). As a popular politician he would not use Latin himself or recommend it as a normal subject of education.

3. The “Princess and the Pea” syndrome

In the well-known fairytale, a young poorly-dressed girl comes from nowhere to the castle gates and claims to be a princess who has suffered misfortune. She receives a warm welcome, but at the same time they want to confirm that she really is a princess, so they devise a test for her. They make up a comfortable bed in the guest-chamber with nine mattresses on it, but under the bottom mattress they hide a dried pea. The next morning, when asked how she had slept, she says she had a miserable night, tossing and turning all night long, because of something lumpy under her mattress. This convinces everyone that she really is a princess, since she is used to sleeping in luxurious beds, and the story ends happily.

In the same way, people who know too much Latin may be irritated and overly critical at tiny features in other people’s use of English. One example is the use of the phrase “under the circumstances,” which is often used by English native speakers. The Latinist knows that “circumstances” from its roots means things standing around you, so will prefer “in the circumstances” and complain about the other phrase.

Another example is the misuse of “decimate” as equivalent to “destroy,” when originally it meant the picking of one man out of ten for execution. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word:

“1 (obsolete) To extract a tenth or a tithe from -1845 2 *milit* To select by lot and put to death one in every ten of 1600 3 *loosely* To destroy a large proportion of 1663”
So the highest authority allows the meaning of “destroy” and yet, like the tiny pea

under the mattress, it still irritates or indeed rankles.

Yet another example of this syndrome is the misuse of 12 a.m. and 12 p.m. for midnight and noon respectively. If one is aware that p.m. is short for *post meridiem* (=after noon) then it is clear that 12:15 p.m. makes sense while 12 p.m. does not. However, usage is usage and when we reach the stage that a majority of people find a phrase acceptable, it may be time for pedants to cease cavilling and accept that things change.

V. Advantages of Learning Latin

1. Ability to read great literature

Some of the greatest literature in prose and verse has been handed down to us from Roman writers like Pliny and Horace, who of course wrote in Latin, so it is wonderful to be able to read this in the original.

Some will deny this, saying that we can enjoy foreign literature, whether Japanese, Arabic or Icelandic, in translation, and so we have no need to learn any other language. This is a huge debate, and many words have already been written on both sides. A translation may be accurate in meaning but not in rhythm and sound, or vice versa. A translation may be brilliantly successful or not depending on the translator, but we can never be sure what percentage of what we read is from the original author and what percentage from the translator. That may be the biggest doubt.

It must be better to read Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy in translation rather than not to read them at all, and yet in the words of James Howell (1594?–1666).

“Some hold translations not unlike to be
The wrong side of a Turkey tapestry”
(Familiar Letters, bk I, let.6)

This suggests you can make out the design intended by the craftsman, and the colours he chose, but the wrong side is not as good as the right side.

Which authors are recommended? The great historians Livy, Caesar and Tacitus spring to mind, but poets such as Ovid, Vergil, Horace, Propertius and Catullus often write more memorable and more quotable lines. It is notable that G. Julius Caesar has only seven entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1941), while Q. Horatius Flaccus has nearly seven pages! Of course Caesar’s lines include some of the heaviest, strongest and best known words in Latin:

- (1) *Veni vidi vici* (=I came, I saw, I conquered), spoken after his victory over Pharnaces at Zela in 47 BC (Plutarch I.2)
- (2) *Iacta alea est* (=the die is cast), said after he crossed the River Rubicon in 49 BC (Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* xxxii)
- (3) *Et tu, Brute?* (You also, Brutus?) gasped at the moment of his assassination in 44 BC.

By contrast, Horace (as Q. Horatius Flaccus is affectionately known in English) does not write about war and political strife, but more about ordinary life, Falernian wine, love and a peaceful existence in the countryside. He observes the rise and fall of great men, and comments on the fickleness of fortune and the brevity of men's lives. We have selected just three of his thoughts to represent him:

- (1) *Dum loquimur, fugerit invida*
Aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero. (Odes I ii 1.7)
 (=While we speak envious Time is flying: seize the day! Put no trust in the future)
 The two words *carpe diem!* have been plucked out like plums from Jack Horner's Christmas pie and quoted in books and movies, taught by teachers in class, recommended by parents who know no other Latin and have acquired a life of their own quite independent of Horace. Did he invent the phrase himself, or did he simply include in his poem words that were in common use among the people of Rome? We can only speculate, but since he was the first to write it down, to him belongs the credit.
- (2) *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (Odes III ii 1.13)
 (=lovely and honourable it is to die for one's country) These words have been so frequently used on war memorials with names of people killed that they are like a cliché. Wilfred Owen and Ezra Pound quoted them in poems written in English, assuming their meaning would be understood, and of course they remind Japanese readers of the spirit of *bushido*.
- (3) *Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.* (=mountains will go into labour and a silly little mouse will be born) (*Ars Poetica* l.139)

He uses this line to pour scorn on his rivals, contemporary writers producing poetry to please powerful men, but how apt they are for any writer! How often has the present writer struggled to write something like a majestic carnivore or a mighty pachyderm, and delivered something more like a puny rodent?

P. Vergilius Maro's forte was epic poetry, so to do him justice we should really quote

a passage long enough to hear the music of his language. Instead let us introduce him with two small samples of his work:

- (1) *quadrupetante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum* (=with four-footed beat hooves shake the dusty plain) (*Aeneid* viii 1.596)

This hexameter line is unusual in that the first five feet are all dactyls, which gives it a triple beat when read aloud, resembling the hoofbeats of a galloping horse.

- (2) *varium et mutabile semper Femina* (=a fickle thing and changeful is woman always) (*Aeneid* iv 1.509)

This is unjust and untrue, and today it would be politically incorrect to write it or even think it, but it is nevertheless interesting to compare this statement with concepts in later European and Japanese literature. We should never forget that surviving poetry from 2000 years ago was written by men, so we do not know the opinion of the fairer sex: it is like seeing only one side of a coin and speculating about what lies beneath.

2. Assistance in understanding German grammar

For many beginners modern German grammar is a fearsome thing, what with 3 genders, 4 cases, inflected endings, a number of verb moods and tenses and a long list of irregular verbs. Japanese speakers, in particular, who use no articles and do not differentiate between singular and plural in their mother tongue, may be shocked by German: they must quickly learn plurals and how to decline the articles *der-die-das* and *ein-eine-ein*. For students who have done Latin before, in the words of our Antipodean cousins, “No worries!” Cases, genders, inflections are already familiar, and even German grammatical terms like *Akkusativ* and *Plusquamperfekt* come straight from Latin. Such students still have to spend time learning grammatical tables, but the pattern is not foreign to them, and even the German habit of leaving the verb to the end of some sentences seems quite natural.

3. Romance languages made easy

It is a truism that languages change year by year, and pedants who try to deny that are like King Canute facing the flood tide, but we can sometimes see patterns in the changing. Latin used to be the common language of the western Roman Empire, and when that empire fragmented, different countries saw the language change in different ways. Now the Italic Group of Romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Catalan, Rumanian and Romansh) have many differences but also many similarities, as they all developed from the same Latin root.

It is probably easier for a Spaniard to learn Portuguese, or any speaker of a modern Romance language to learn another, but for any learner a grounding in Latin makes languages in this group easier to learn. As a small boy on a train journey in Italy, I understood the sign ACQUA NON POTABILE (=not drinking water) and could warn my younger sister not to drink it, saving her from who knows what consequences.

4. Acquiring mental discipline

There are many different subjects that are said to involve good mental discipline. Mathematics is sometimes said to contain order, truth and beauty. The Ancient Greeks thought rhetoric and logic were important things to learn. The Persians, according to Herodotus, taught their boys to ride, to shoot and to tell the truth, which my old classics teacher RCM (better known as “Mange”) said was more than some children learn at school today.

Despite these other claims, Latin has long been considered especially good mental training. Maybe this is because of the analytic skills needed for the grammar, deductive skills needed for interpreting Latin unseens, memorizing skills for mastering the tables in Kennedy (1962), or the critical thinking skills needed for evaluating poetry. There are also more dubious arguments, such as “Centuries of tradition can’t be wrong”, and the tendency of teachers and parents educated in a certain way to believe that theirs is the best way, but the sum total of the arguments suggests that mental discipline is acquired in the learning of Latin.

5. Latin for communication

“With Latin, a horse and money you may travel the world.” (*Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* 2004) This must refer to the Middle Ages and onward, when educated people in most European countries had studied Latin and so it could be used as a lingua franca. Esperanto had not been dreamed of then, and English was only spoken in a small island nation on the NW corner of Europe; Frenchmen spoke French while Spaniards spoke Spanish, and so Latin had a peculiar role as the unchallenged common language of the time. Books, prefaces, academic or scientific articles written in Latin could acquire a wide readership, letters could be written, understood and answered in Latin, and apparently it also served for oral communication.

“But that was all in the past. Those days are gone; who communicates in Latin today?” many would object. An easy answer is the world’s smallest state, the Vatican. Roman Catholics in many countries used a Latin prayer book until recently, and people in the Vatican are said to use Latin for some of their oral communication even now.

People sometimes challenge me, “Go on, say something in Latin!” and I usually

respond with “*Minime*” (=No) or “*Gratias tibi ago*” (=Thank you) or simply quote some poetry. Since Latin is a dead language, as already admitted, we don’t generally use it for communication, but there are exceptions to every rule, and a few examples are provided.

Pax! (=peace) was used as a truce term from elementary school onward to ward off attack by other children, often accompanied by holding up crossed fingers. Everyone respected the term and refrained from fighting.

Cave canem (=beware of the dog) is written under a marvelous mosaic of a dog on a house wall in Pompeii, beautifully preserved by the volcanic ash that buried most of the town after Vesuvius erupted in AD 79. This may have been a genuine warning, like the signs people have on their garden gate today. At school we use to call out “Cave!” (pronounced KV, =Look out!) to warn our fellow-pupils if we saw a teacher approaching. If a boy wanted to give something away to his fellow-pupils, he would hold it up and call out “*Quis?*” (=Who? Interestingly this is the origin of the English word “quiz”) and the first person to shout “*Ego!*” (=I) would receive the object.

Perhaps the Latin phrase with the narrowest usage of all was heard in about 1960 in Upper IIIa, a class taught by “Yatto”, alias Mr R. StJ. Yates. If a pupil was not paying attention, or made some basic grammatical error, Yatto would advance on him, hand raised to strike: only the words “*Actum est de me!*” (=It is all up with me/I’ve had it) could avert punishment.

“*Peccavi*” (=I have sinned) was the succinct message sent by Sir Charles Napier to his superior Lord Ellenborough, while campaigning in India in 1843. (*Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* p. 823) Presumably neither the messenger himself nor the hostile tribes among whom he had to pass would understand the message, though it was clear to Lord Ellenborough that “I have Sindh” meant that Sindh Province had been captured by Napier or brought under British control.

The movie *Sebastiane* directed by Derek Jarman depicted the life and death of St Sebastian. Since the movie is set in Roman times, the director made the brave and rare decision to have the dialogue in authentic Latin with English subtitles, often using vulgar Latin. When one foul-mouthed Roman soldier swears at another calling him “*Oedipus rex!*” the subtitle predictably translates it as “Mother f****r!” Students of spicy words in other languages, please take note.

6. Helping people to learn English

There are plenty of Latin words that have entered English, with little or no change of meaning. Whether to call them “loanwords” is a matter of individual judgement, based perhaps on how long ago they were adopted. Words adopted in the last hundred

years or so may be labeled loanwords, while ones that came before may not. This list includes:

memo (randum) =something that is to be remembered

agenda =things that are to be done

femur =thigh-bone

index = a) forefinger b) pointer c) section of a book that indicates where things where may be found.

Shared vocabulary is one of the main ways that Latin helps in learning English.

The study of common prefixes and suffixes is especially efficient, since Latin words are often compounds of several elements. This means that learning a small number of prefixes enables the learner to intuit or deduce the meaning of many English words. Let us now list some of the common prefixes and show how they are used in English:

Latin Prefix	English Meaning	English Example
(1) Prepositions		
<i>Ante</i>	before	antecedent
<i>Contra</i>	against	contradict
<i>Cum</i>	with/together	compose, collect
<i>Extra</i>	outside of	extraordinary
<i>Post</i>	after	postpone
<i>Sub</i>	under/in addition to	submarine, suppose
<i>Ultra</i>	beyond	ultrasonic
(2) Measurement words		
<i>Magnus</i>	large	magnify
<i>Multus</i>	much/many	multiply
<i>Omnis</i>	all	omnivore
(3) Words positive or negative		
<i>Bene</i>	well	benefactor
<i>Rectus</i>	straight	rectify
<i>In</i>	not	innocuous, illegal
<i>Malus</i>	bad	malevolent
<i>Retro</i>	backward	retrograde
(4) Numbers		
<i>Unus</i>	one	uniform
<i>Duo</i>	two	duet

<i>Tres</i>	three	triangle
<i>Quattuor</i>	four	quadruped
<i>Quinque</i>	five	quinquennial
<i>Sex</i>	six	sextet
<i>Septem</i>	seven	Septuagint
<i>Octo</i>	eight	octet
<i>Novem</i>	nine	November
<i>Decem</i>	ten	decade
<i>Centum</i>	one hundred	centigrade
<i>Mille</i>	one thousand	millennium

(Green, 1990)

These are only a sample of the range of Latin prefixes, but enough perhaps to show how useful it can be to master them.

A number of Latin phrases are used in English without translation or apology, partly because their meaning is clear and succinct. It is not necessary for the learner to acquire these, and indeed many native speakers are ignorant of them, but it may be worthwhile to understand a few.

- (1) *Deo volente* (=God willing) is often abbreviated to d.v., and is reminiscent of the more fatalistic *inshallah!* that Muslims use to show that the plans of men are subject to divine will. In the southern states of the USA, people may make a plan to meet “If God is willin’ and the creek don’t rise,” because when heavy rains come the water level can rise dramatically and flood the roads.
- (2) *ad infinitum/ad nauseam* (=to infinity/to the point of disgust) These two are used in similar situations, when something goes on and on and on.
- (3) *quid pro quo* (=something for something, reciprocation) Note how neat the phrase is compared with its clumsy English circumlocution! “Quid” is of course common slang for a pound in Britain, which explains the old Punch joke, in which one man complains to his friend, “Well, ’e ’ands me an envelope an’ says ’Ere’s a quid pro quo’. I opens it, an’ there’s only ten shillings inside!”

There are plenty more of these Latin phrases, which may add sophistication to one’s speech but are perhaps too much of a luxury for the learner. Life is short and time spent on studying prefixes will prove the most rewarding, since the aim of language study should be clear communication.

VI. Conclusion

This article has considered Latin education both from a personal viewpoint and a more objective one. It has included some reminiscences of the writer's own long flirtation with the language, which never quite reached a full-blown love affair, and has also included enough quotations from authors of the Golden Age of Roman literature to attract the casual reader to study them more deeply.

Huge areas of the world of Latin have been left unexplored in this article, and left for a future one. Medicine and science use many Latin words: *tibia* is the Latin word for shinbone, and nearly every bone and organ in the body has a Latin name as well as the equivalent vernacular name. Science is likewise dependent on a vocabulary of Greek and Latin terms that poured into English from the Renaissance onwards. Green (1990) explains that biology is the study of living matter in all its forms, and the system of classification of plants and animals was devised by Linnaeus (alias Carl von Linne), the 18th Century Swedish scientist, who gave every plant, tree, fish, bird, insect or animal a double Latin name, the first part denoting the genus, the second the species. One example is *Troglodytes troglodytes*, which denotes one of my favorite birds the Winter Wren (*misosazai* in Japanese), although the original meaning of "troglodyte" was an Ethiopian cave-dweller. International birders can all understand the common Latin name, whatever their mother-tongue, because of the Linnaean system.

This article has tried to recommend the study of Latin in order to enjoy great literature and also as an aid to learning Romance languages such as Spanish, or the grammatically challenging German. It has pointed out the mental discipline acquired by learning Latin, and the fact that even a dead language can sometimes serve to communicate important messages. Because of the number of Latin words and phrases used in English, in particular the mass of compound words beginning with one of those distinctive prefixes, we feel that learning some Latin, even to a basic level, is one of the foundation-stones for mastery of the English language.

References

Books

- Adams, Reginald H. 1994. *Inscriptiones Aliquot Oxonienses* (Foreword by Jasper Griffin). Oxford: Perpetua Press.
- Frankenburg, Charis Ursula. 1931. *Latin with Laughter*. London: William Heinemann.
- Graves, Robert (transl.) 1957. *The Twelve Caesars* (Suetonius). London: Penguin Books.
- Green, Tamara M. 1990. *Greek and Latin Roots of English*. New York: Ardsley House.
- Hillard & Botting. 1995. *Elementary Latin Exercises*. London: Duckworth.

Kennedy, Benjamin Hall. 1962. *The Shorter Latin Primer*. Harlow: Longman.

Klyve, Gregory. 2002. *Latin Grammar*. London: Hodder Headline.

Opie, Iona and Peter. 1959. *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Oxford: O.U.P.

Dictionaries

The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. 2004. Speake, Jennifer (Ed.). Oxford: O.U.P.

The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. (5th Edition) 1999. Knowles, Elizabeth (Ed.). Oxford: O.U.P.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. 1974. Onions, C. T. (Ed.) Oxford: O.U.P.

A Latin Dictionary. 1879. Lewis, Charlton T. and Short, Charles. Oxford: O.U.P.

Film

Sebastiane. 1976. Written and directed by Derek Jarman and Paul Humfress. Starring Leonardo Treviglio, Barney James and Richard Warwick.