# Communicative Approaches for Ancient Languages

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Montaigne in his *Essais* (1.26) tells us that his father engaged a German tutor to teach him to speak Latin before he spoke French. The German spoke no French and he was given two assistants who also only spoke to the small child in Latin; even members of family were required to do the same. Montaigne’s *Essais* are full of references to his reading in the classical authors and so he retained his fluency in reading throughout his life, although he says he lost his ability to speak fluently when eventually he attended a school and was taught by more traditional methods. He is full of praise for some of his teachers, including George Buchanan, the Scottish poet. Even in 1533 when Montaigne was born learning Latin in this way was unusual and he recounts this as an exceptional tale. His account shows us that there will always be difficulties for using Latin as a living language. Latin no longer has native speakers and so any spontaneous use of the language between interlocutors will remain to a certain extent artificial. If it was a living language it would change and develop, and young people would change their speech habits in order to irritate and baffle their parents and the older generation. The new spoken Latin would then move away from the classical form of the language found in Cicero and Virgil, and modern speakers of it would find the ancient texts difficult, and so would have to study it in class with teachers who would instruct them in ancient grammar and syntax, and the whole thing would start all over again.

There has been a clear recent trend towards speaking Latin and using communicative approaches in teaching in differing circumstances and with many methods. This volume pulls together a number of current examples from practitioners in schools and universities and gives a valuable up-to-date snapshot of this contemporary *Latinitas*. *Fortasse mihi oportet hanc recensionem in Latina lingua scribere, sed omnia capita huius voluminis in illa lingua franca nostrorum temporum scripta sunt. Itaque revertor ad linguam anglicam*.

One of the most successful approaches to second language learning is CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning. This involves a subject such as History or Geography being taught in the pupil’s second language, alongside regular language lessons. This allows the target language to be used for the transmission of content which in turn requires production of the language in oral settings in class and written work for assignments and tests. It also gives the learners a different view on the content, unfiltered by the cultural and linguistic expectations of the learner’s first language and culture. Strict language requirements may be relaxed in favour of content understanding but the actual use of the second language enables linguistic competence to advance. With Latin this would be more difficult to carry out, but it could be possible to use some Latin in an ancient history course, and perhaps even a bit of Greek in a Classical Studies course. There are also accounts of university teachers (mainly in the USA and UK) using Latin as a medium to teach literature in small advanced groups of Latin students. The emphasis today on learning Latin and Greek is rapidity because of the pressure on the timetables of those wishing to learn. Learning by immersion and repetitive practice is effective in the long term but requires many hours of exposure in some form to the target language. This is usually not available for the ancient languages, and so the question of which method offers the quickest route to the reading and understanding of the classical texts must be posed and instructors of all levels should have a position on it.

Hunt and Lloyd have gathered an impressive list of contributors who face up to these questions and provide much evidence on which to base our decisions about our approach in the classroom. Both schools and universities are examined, schools in the first six chapters and universities in the next five, with sections on immersive teaching and other approaches and finally an extraordinary coda which reminds us of Montaigne. The accounts tend to be of individual initiatives in teachers’ own classes. Several speak of a visit to a summer school (such as the Accademia Vivarium Novum, which is often mentioned but which does not have its own chapter) that opened the practitioners’ eyes to the possibilities of using living Latin in the classroom. This leaves the impression that the world of Classical education is open to experimentation but that the students being taught by this method would eventually have to fit in with the usual round of language attainment measured by traditional examinations, without receiving much credit (in terms of certificates and diplomas) for their oral proficiency. The use of a living Latin approach appears to be very much up to individual initiative and depends upon a charismatic teacher able to carry off the performance required consistently. Current practice in learning modern languages is acknowledged with frequent references to Krashen’s research on second language acquisition in many chapters. There are contributions from the Polis Institute in Israel and the Paideia Institute project from the USA which both aim to provide a systematic range of courses, including online learning, using communicative approaches for other ancient languages as well as Latin (Greek, Hebrew).

None of the courses mentioned in the contributions aim for full fluency, although they do note the importance at summer schools or immersive courses of the convention of only using Latin as a means of communication for the duration of the course. This builds confidence and concentrates the mind on the target language. Most practitioners seem to opt for a judicious mix of techniques in class of Latin learners, using retranslation and explanation of a text in Latin as an extension of the language use. They tend not to dwell on the level of grammatical accuracy which is required in class, though this can be a problem if the teacher insists on a particular form of “correct” Latin and does not allow for the usual mistakes, hesitations, and incoherences of everyday spoken language in Latin. In conferences I have noticed that it is always much easier to follow a speaker using living Latin if they speak without notes in a conversational style rather reading a prepared text aloud in correct Ciceronian Latin.

The contributors all write in English and come mainly from the USA and UK. There are interesting chapters on Latin and Greek in a theology department, and on Classics in Poland and Brazil, using communicative approaches. There seems to be a wide variety in attitude to the use of living Latin in other European countries, some of which practise very little in the way of oral skills, even reading Latin or Greek aloud in class. Then of course there is the question of pronunciation which can become a heated issue, even though there is general agreement about the *pronuntiatio restituta*.

The book ends with an anonymised account of two children who were brought up as Latin/English bilinguals. The experiment provides evidence that Latin can be learnt as a first language (L1) even with the morphological challenges of noun cases and verb endings. Finally, however, the case study shows that while equal progress to the other first language can be made at the level of infancy it is very difficult to keep it up in later stages of development owing to the lack of native speakers, and the dependence on one source of language in the parent which will lead to a limited range of language output. A teacher using a living Latin approach would encounter the same limitation of input to their students, and even if they acquired correct usage the students would only experience one source of expression, until of course they start reading authentic texts with all their usual challenges. Montaigne seems to have had the same experience and says that the experiment in learning Latin as a first language did not continue.

Mair Lloyd and Steven Hunt have done an excellent job in bringing together these fascinating contributions to show that living Latin and communicative approaches to learning ancient languages have a part to play in Classics teaching in the 21st century. Training and opportunities to acquire the skills necessary in this area are clearly there to be used and all those in the field of the acquisition of Latin and Greek languages by beginners of any age should consider what part these approaches should have in their classrooms. All practitioners should read this book and think carefully about its contents.

John Bulwer