Translating: Facts, Illusions, Alternatives

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Why *do* we translate Latin into English in our Latin courses? The answer might seem incontestable: to enable students to practise their grasp of Latin grammar, and teachers to have a ready check on their progress. Another question is perhaps more pertinent: *why* does translating from Latin (and, in some courses, into Latin) persist right through secondary school study and then university study too? And most pertinent of all, why do we in effect kiss goodbye—from the very beginning—to all hope that our students will understand what Romans wrote without making it into English?

These hardy perennials of teaching-lore returned to bother the author when scrutinising a recent translation-and-grammar reader, P. Ruth Taylor-Briggs' *Via Plana: Graduated Readings in Advanced Latin* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001). Now within the translating-to-learn format *Via Plana* deserves credit. It not only provides a wide selection of practise-sentences and passages from literature in prose and verse, but arranges them in five graded levels of difficulty, replacing sentences with passages at the higher levels. Each of its chapters discusses a specific grammar topic, then follows this with the graded levels of sentences and passages for translation. The book devotes effort to explaining its selected topics clearly (more clearly than some grammars), and its range of passages is venturesomely broad, with Tacitus, Lucan, Valerius Maximus and even A. Hirtius represented.

The practise called 'prose composition'—turning English *into* Latin—*Via Plana* sensibly passes over as being little used in current teaching. Like all such compilations, or readers, the book's aim is to practise and guide students in translating. Its achievement is imperfect: it suffers from some surprising omissions (for example, notably silent on ablatives absolute—the ultimate bane of the hardest-working student—or concessive clauses); bestows an unnecessary two-chapter favoritism on relative clauses; and gives a chapter to *quominus* and *quin* which are a good deal less frequent in Latin than ablative absolute phrases. Still, *Via Plana* is reportedly more agreeable to students than many other readers, and within its own frame of reference it is a commendable venture.

That frame of reference, all the same, strictly stresses translating as the way to proceed. Advice regularly turns up in terms like this: 'if *quin* occurs in a context different from those defined above, translate either "without doing" or "but that…" […]; if the use of these phrases results in a stilted translation, … adjust your translation to create fluent English.' The implicit parallel assumption is ominous: that assiduously learning grammar plus vocabulary is, virtually by itself, the *via plana* indeed to mastery of Latin——reading skills, proficiency in comprehension, and literary perception included. Plainly *Via Plana's* entirely well-meaning author does not envisage that students might be taught to read, understand

and appreciate Latin without resort to Englishing it (or whatever their language may be), any more than the immense majority of Latinists over recent centuries has.[1]

This prompts a revised form of the question which began this paper: is translating—out of Latin or into it—the right way, the most preferable way, or even a good way, to develop real reading skills?

II.

Translating of course has a hallowed paedagogic ancestry. When Latin ceased to be taught in Latin, translating into and out of it—previously a tool for making diplomatic and ecclesiastical writings known to non-Latinate bureaucrats and the general public, and vice versa—became the dominant method for testing students' grasp of the language, especially at advanced levels. Memorising word-forms and vocabulary lists was of course essential in any case, and so it was natural for applied study of Latin to take the form of verbal transference. The approach seems logical and, since a minority—however small—of learners does emerge from it able to construe and comprehend Latin texts satisfactorily (though as a rule slowly), this is taken as justifying translating as the essential, nay inevitable route for understanding texts.

 It does have its uses. We cannot teach elementary Latin without it, to clarify points of grammar and meaning. Even at more advanced levels it can be useful for explaining some points to students. Translating well is also intellectually satisfying in itself. Even so, as an element of Latin study it is like using a teaspoon to eat a meal: at best, useful but not ideal; at worst, a misdirection of effort.

Concern over what techniques work best for developing reading skills is growing. For instance Kenneth Kitchell has made an important contribution from a controversial perspective, in an article provocatively entitled 'Latin III's dirty little secret—Why Johnny can't read'. His solution is for students to be given much more background context before they tackle a text: an introduction to its cultural context, for one thing, and much fuller use of ancillary strategies like pre-reading, studying surrounding sections of text in English translation, and gisting (working out the gist of some passages without performing a detailed translation). In more traditional mode, the *Cambridge Latin Grammar* makes a modest stab at outlining basic word-order conventions and sentence-structures to accompany its array of rules and constructions.[2]

Approaches like these and like *Via Plana*'s are seeking to resolve the universal and crucial problem besetting Latin learners. The move from elementary and post-elementary levels (Kitchell's Latin I and II) to actual texts is a kind of quantum leap which brings all too many learners crashing down. Not just the lovingly complex fashioning of a Ciceronian or Caesarian periodic sentence, but the intricacies of poets' diction and word-order too—not to

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[1] *Via Plana* is reviewed by T. Sienkewicz, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2000), at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2001/2001-06-15.html>; rather more critically by D. Hoyos, *Classicum* 31 (2005), 35-9. Translating as essential goal: expressly stated at *Via Plana,* viii n. 2 (not the most obvious place for it); quotation from p. 113.

[2] K. Kitchell, *New England Classical Newsletter* 27 (2000), 206-26; R.M. Griffin, *Cambridge Latin Grammar* (Cambridge, England, 1991), 84-90.

mention the highly charged compressions in Tacitus and the artfully contrived simplicities of Pliny—can baffle students. Worse, these stay baffled: year after year.

III.

What is the standard 'solution'? To practise and re-practise grammar, memorise and re-memorise vocabulary, and translate. *Via Plana*'s entire goal, to which even the detailed grammar-study is tributary, is to improve translating. Kitchell's ultimate goal is the same. There seems no coursebook or text-reader which privileges any other approach. University programs, even in graduate school, test Latin-language proficiency by setting grammar questions and translations. It is taken for granted that, outside (perhaps!) the highest levels of scholarship, the route to understanding what a Latin writer is communicating is to translate it first.

There are two critical drawbacks to this. The first is obvious: if to understand one has to translate, how much of one's life is needed for 'reading' the twelve books of the *Aeneid* or twenty-nine of Cicero's extant speeches (not to mention all fifty-eight)? What of the tens of thousands of inscriptions which form an indispensable part of historical and cultural study, are added to by new finds every year, and for most of which there are no Loebs or Penguins or Roman-history readers? Even supposing that constant practice improves translation-speed, as is certainly true for some devotees, it remains a time-consuming technique and, worse, one much too prone to accidents.[3]

The second drawback is still more damaging. Translating-to-understand encourages learners to assume—and encourages them, to the point of making it a fixed reflex—that the proper medium for understanding and absorbing Roman literature is *English*. Mature and responsible minds may slowly grow out of this, but when it is the implicit message from the beginning, and then is reinforced at every further level, it is a reflex that most find themselves indoctrinated in forever. This is killing to any in-depth comprehension of a text. Words and, still more important, word-groups are scanned to work out how they can be restated in English (or whatever the translator's language is), rather than for their interrelationships, implications and allusions. For seeing Latin texts *sub specie Anglicitatis* automatically means rearranging words and word-groups—mentally at least, often explicitly—to conform to English usages.

The 'hunt-the-verb' approach is embedded in this practise. One extreme aspect of it is the technique sometimes urged on students, of locating and translating the main clause first—wherever it may be—and *then* going back to figure out the subordinate parts of the sentence, and slot them in as seems appropriate. An even more desperate technique (and not confined to beginners) is to treat each Latin word as having its own English equivalent, and to suppose that, by peeling away the Latin to expose the English, a modest rearrangement of the results will in turn expose the sense of the sentence. This is the extreme end of the Latin-as-hidden-English approach.

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[3] For instance, few who have to use translating-to-understand will venture to take on the recently discovered *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* of AD 20: 2,101 words almost entirely in *oratio obliqua* of the most varied kind, the most momentous Latin find of perhaps the last hundred years, with huge implications for Roman history, culture and our judgement of Tacitus—unless their life (or job) depended on it. Depressingly but not surprisingly, the internet is full of translations of it.

The standard defenses of translating as a study-tool are that it reinforces learning grammatical forms, and that it is the only precise way to test how well or ill a student understands a given passage: a precision which can then be expressed in grades or marks, with the extra advantage of visibly differentiating students' performances on result sheets. Yet even if some students' translating of passages improves over time, what is being measured is simply the narrow procedure of uncovering English out of Latin, and occasionally Latin out of English. Then, as noted earlier, the better a student handles this transference-task, the more deeply ingrained grow her or his habits of hunting for verbs and main clauses, applying limited and uncritical assumptions for ferreting out subordinate constructions (any sequence of two or three words in the ablative being judged an ablative absolute, for instance; or any *ut*-and-subjunctive clause a purpose clause), and—above all— of viewing a text as a sea of chaotic harassments requiring careful decipherment, the sole consolation being that underneath huddles a more-or-less intelligible English equivalent.

IV.

Prof. Kitchell's call for wider and more consistent cultural knowledge is sensible but can be only a limited part of the solution. Knowledge of the cultural context and of relevant technical items may certainly help at times, but cannot deal with essential issues of grammatical and structural recognition. In confronting the opening sentences of the *Third Catilinarian*, for instance, it is useful to know that Catiline was an alleged conspirator against the state, and Cicero his accuser, judge, jury and would-be executioner. But there remains the challenge of understanding what the orator is actually stating and how he states it.

> Rem publicam, Quirites, vitamque omnium vestrum bona, fortunas, coniuges liberosque vestros atque hoc domicilium clarissimi imperii, fortunatissimam pulcherrimamque urbem, hodierno die deorum immortalium summo erga vos amore, laboribus, consiliis, periculis meis e flamma atque ferro ac paene ex faucibus fati ereptam et vobis conservatam ac restitutam videtis.

> Et si non minus nobis iucundi atque illustres sunt ii dies, quibus conservamur, quam illi, quibus nascimur, quod salutis certa laetitia est, nascendi incerta condicio, et quod sine sensu nascimur, cum voluptate servamur, profecto, quoniam illum, qui hanc urbem condidit, ad deos immortales benevolentia famaque sustulimus, esse apud vos posterosque vestros in honore debebit is, qui eandem hanc urbem conditam amplificatamque servavit.

Or, for a shorter example, it is only a modest help to know that the following report comes after the telling of a major battle:

> Imperatori victori cum ceteri circumfusi gratularentur suaderentque ut tanto perfunctus bello diei quod reliquum esset noctisque insequentis quietem et ipse sibi sumeret et fessis daret militibus, praefectus equitum, minime cessandum ratus, 'Immo ut quid hac pugna sit actum scias, die quinto' inquit 'victor in arce hostium epulaberis. Sequere: cum equite, ut prius venisse quam venturum sciant, praecedam.' Imperatori nimis laeta res est visa maiorque quam ut eam statim capere animo posset.

The original passage is well-known but, to emphasise that a good deal of excellent Latin does not contain many explicit cultural pointers, the anonymous terms *imperatori* and *in arce hostium* have replaced actual names and that of the *praefectus equitum* is omitted. (Nor, indeed, would it help more than notionally to return *Hannibali, in Capitolio* and *Maharbal* to the text.)[4]

Another distinctive example, of timeless import:

> Scilicet illo igne vocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum occurreret. Dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.

> Nunc demum redit animus; natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala; et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam revocaveris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et invisa primo desidia postremo amatur. Quid, si per quindecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium, multi fortuitis casibus, promptissimus quisque saevitia principis interciderunt, pauci et, ut ita dixerim, non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus, exemptis e media vita tot annis, quibus iuvenes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae aetatis terminos per silentium venimus?

The subject-matter here could not be more important, today as much as in Roman times—the efforts of tyranny to annihilate freedom of expression and even of thought (*illo igne* refers to the burning of dissident books, an item which could be given in the heading to the extract or as a note), the horrors of servitude, its corrosion of free will, and the painful recovery afterwards. It is only tangentially helpful to learn that the tyrant was Domitian, the books told of the eminent dissidents Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, and we are reading part of the introduction to Tacitus' *Agricola*. All the problems, paradoxes and unprofitability of translating remain.[5]

It may be argued that normally such passages confront students only within a broader study like an AP prescribed-text program, or a college literature text; and therefore in translating students benefit by having the notes, introduction and other aids of the accompanying published editions. This is surely a mistaken objection. There is no ground for supposing that quality passages of Latin are engaged with only in intensive literary studies. Moreover if they were thus limited, the value of studying Latin would be seriously lowered.

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[4] Cic. *In Cat.* 3.1-2; Livy 22.51.1-2.

[5] Tac. *Agr.* 2.2–3.2, with a more-than-usually complex part of 3.1 omitted after *redit animus* ('et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabilis miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerva Traianus, nec spem modo ac votum securitas publica, sed ipsius voti fiduciam ac robur adsumpserit, …').

Second: to assume that such Latin can only be coped with via help from commentaries is, in effect, to sell the pass before a shot is fired. (How did the learned commentators in their turn find out the meaning of the text, in order to compose their commentaries?)

Another argument might be that these are just the types of passages for which Prof. Kitchell and others recommend 'gisting'. This too is unsafe; it really is only a milder way of giving up the pass. Even if these passages, of robust, subtle and complex prose were not offered to students until senior level Latin, what Johnny in Year III and his confrères and consœurs do find in their schoolbooks are passages which pose *to them* just as much complexity—unless watered down, which simply delays the pain till later.

V.

Great Latin literature was composed in coherent forms, with no idea of making some parts of a work easier or harder to read than others. The need is to find methods of reading which will release the greatness while reducing the agony. We should no longer take pains to ignore the elephant in the room: translating does not, cannot and will never achieve either.

Translating the above passages out of Latin can indeed be done, slowly and painfully, or fast if still often painfully, by hard-working students. But with the stress being on making English of the Latin, most will barely if at all notice the texts' multiple colorings: their rhetorical patternings, choice of words, types of *variatio,* and themes overt or subtle of drama, self-congratulation and paradox. Such features will be noticed—if at all—just as irritants impeding straightforward translation. Many, or most, will remain unable to identify them even after the translating is done. It would need a separate session (or sessions), under their teachers' guidance if not dictation, to tease out even some of these. What, then, has their translating achieved beyond the narrow bounds mentioned earlier?

The allied, and common, assumption was noted earlier too: that constantly practising (i.e., grinding away for years at) grammar and vocabulary must be *the* highroad to mastery not only of translating but likewise of advanced reading skills, proficient comprehension, and literary perceptiveness. This is wishful hoping for the overwhelming mass of students, both secondary and tertiary. However adept at recognising and differentiating (say) *ut*-clauses of purpose and of result, constructions of fearing and negative indirect commands, and ablative absolute phrases versus ablative phrases of time or manner or description, students will still too often stumble and guess their way through the passages quoted above, passages which are perfectly normal literary Latin. Unless abnormal amounts of time are available for further study, completing the translating of them will still leave a class largely unaware of their literary and artistic features. Of course, their teacher may instruct them in these, as just noted; but that cannot count as a benefit from translating.

Translating is really a separate category of mental work. It has needs and expectations of its own. Serious translations do turn out very different from one another, but all have to differ from the layout, and often the precise terminology, of the original. Often they are free paraphrases. (Michael Grant's genteel—or desperate—expedient for *O tempora! O mores!* comes irresistibly to mind, 'What a scandalous commentary on our age and its

standards!') In effect, the translator should know what the text is stating and be empathetic to how it is stating it, *before* any attempt at rendering it into another tongue.[6]

But as a tool in Latin learning, translating commonly serves as the method by which learners *first find out* what is going on. Of necessity, many or most cleave to unadorned literalism even when this produces grotesqueness and at times errors. The following is not too unfair a re-creation of an average translation-at-sight of the Livy quoted above, as the author has personally observed:

> To the victorious general when the rest, poured round, were congratulating and persuading that with so great a war having been completed [mistaking the participial phrase for an abl. abs.] of the day what there was remaining and of the following night, he might take quiet and himself for himself and give it to his weary soldiers, the prefect of the horsemen, least of all ceasing thought, [&c.].

These severe drawbacks would have to be borne nevertheless, if translating *were* the only way to understand a Latin text. After all we have no 'Berlitz' alternative of immersing ourselves periodically in an ancient Roman city; and few Latin students have access to yearly *conventicula*, like Prof. Terence Tunberg's in Tennessee where Latin is the only tongue allowed. But translating is not the only approach, or the best, to developing reading skills.

VI.

The feature most glaringly missing from Latin courses is focus on sentence structure. The *Cambridge Latin Course* does make an effort, as mentioned earlier. Using lists of examples, it shows for instance how subordinate clauses can follow a main clause, come before it or appear in the middle of it; how a pair of subordinate clauses may follow the main clause in sequence, or how one may occur inside the other; how a verb governing an indirect statement may be placed in front of this, in its midst, or following it. Listed too are examples of nouns and their adjectives separated by one or more words, and of how two such pairs may be 'intertwined', especially in verse (*cantatur tota nomen in urbe meum*); and then examples of words being omitted when the sense is clear (*sacerdos templum, poeta tabernam quaerebat*).

This is promising. But the sentences offered are all short and of strictly limited complexity; there is no example of a Ciceronian-sized period, perhaps because it would have taken too much space and complexity to analyse; and the stress is largely on the varied positions that subordinate clauses and phrases can have in sentences. The ultimate goal of such helpful indicators is discernible: as usual, to improve translating.

The structural logic and formatting of Latin sentences are as important as the grammar of individual words and constructions. Structure and formatting are rarely given proper attention, because of the assumption that grammar-plus-vocabulary, worked on long enough and intensely enough, will furnish all the skill you need to make sense of Latin texts. That is the standard decode-technique: handling Latin as a complicated bundle which, once picked apart to identify all its detailed components, can then be reassembled with the components given their English forms. It takes ages, it can lead to catastrophes not to

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[6] M. Grant, *Selected Political Speeches of Cicero* (Penguin Classics, 1969), 76. *O tempora! O mores!* is, perhaps, truly untranslatable and only paraphrasable.

mention catachreses, and it is quite unnatural. Unnatural too to think that this amounts to *reading* the language.

What is essential is to train the learner in *both* a sound knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, *and* at the same time in the skills to recognise how the individual grammar-vocab elements of a sentence develop into the phrases and clauses which convey its message. It is not simply a task of identifying those elements—here a purpose clause, there an ablative absolute phrase, further along the main clause, somewhere else a lengthy prepositional phrase—but of recognising how they link together, illuminate one another, set up expectations about one another and fulfil them.

Each word in a sentence is a *forecaster* or a *fulfiller,* or both: early in the sentence, forecasting (or 'signposting') some of the content to come, towards the end fulfilling expectations created by earlier words, and in the middle doing both. So equally do the component phrases and clauses.

Here is the second paragraph of the *Third Catilinarian* passage again, showing its structural format:

	TEXT	**BRIEF GRAMMAR**	
1a	Et si non minus nobis iucundi atque illustres sunt ii dies,	*si* signposts a Conditional Clause; *non minus* forecasts a matching comparison to come	**1a**
2	quibus conservamur,	*quibus* signposts a Relative Cl., embraced by the preceding	**2**
1b	quam illi,	fulfils expectation set up by *non minus;* continuation of *si*-clause after embraced Relative Cl.	**1b**
3	quibus nascimur,	another embraced Rel. Cl., antecedent now *illi* (sc. *dies*)	**3**
4	quod salutis certa laetitia est, nascendi incerta condicio,	*quod* must be causal ('because'), introduces Causal Cl. which explains the point made in the *si*-clause	**4**
5	et quod sine sensu nascimur, cum voluptate servamur,	a second Causal Cl. signposted by second *quod,* in two coordinated parts (verbs *nascimur, servamur*)	**5**
6a	profecto,	adverb, signposts start of Main Clause	**6a**

TEXT	BRIEF GRAMMAR
7a quoniam illum,	**7a** Causal Cl. signposted by *quoniam; illum* forecasts that this cl. contains a transitive verb
8 qui hanc urbem condidit,	**8** embraced Relative Cl. within the new Causal Cl.
7b ad deos immortales benevolentia famaque sustulimus,	**7b** completion of *quoniam*-cl.; this completion was expected because *quoniam illum* could be only the opening
6b esse apud vos posterosque vestros in honore debebit is,	**6b** the Main Clause of the periodic sentence; *esse* forecasts a main verb which can govern an infinitive, and this is fulfilled with *debebit; is* in emphatic closing position signposts Relative Cl. which follows
9 qui eandem hanc urbem conditam amplificatamque servavit.	**9** *qui*-clause explains *is*

NOTE   The numerals merely keep track of how the sentence develops, with *a* and *b* added to clarify the word-groups which pause to embrace others and then continue.

This may look formidable; but the comments-column simply explains the sentence's structure which, of course, is there whether the sentence is analysed or not. Note how each subordinate clause is signposted by its introductory term (*qui, quod, quoniam*), and how one group of words—main clause, subordinate clause or (in other sentences) a phrase—can readily 'embrace', or wrap around, another. Note also the double embrace with which group 6 (the Main Clause) enfolds group 7 which in turn enfolds group 8, and how each in turn has to be completed before its embracer can be completed (7b completing 7a, then 6b completing 6a). Such embraces are notoriously, and to many learners maddeningly, common in quality Latin: yet they invariably follow logically developing patterns of thought. Note in turn, therefore, the logical development of the sentence—all the more effective through this structuring—from general proposition (which days in life deserve most rejoicing) to the specific climax (Cicero according himself, in the third person, *honos* all but equal to Romulus'). This logical progression, too, is standard in sentences, not to mention paragraphs.

In narrative the logical progression is easier to grasp: the order of the events mentioned, often combined with buildup to an emphatic ending. The passage from Livy illustrates it:

(1) 'The others' [evidently the other officers] surround Hannibal,

(2) congratulate him [on his victory, as the context shows]

(3) and urge him to rest and let the men rest;

(4) but Maharbal speaks in opposition.

The impact of this opposition is dramatised both by giving Maharbal the main clause and, just as important, by using indirect statement for what 'the others' say while framing his words in direct speech and giving him more space. Such event-progression explains, and *makes possible*, the long narrative sentences which so many students find such torment. In turn, as the extract from Cicero shows, in non-narrative texts the logic of event-order is replaced by the logical progression of topics.

VII.

Analytical tabulations like these would be laborious—at least as laborious as translating—if applied to every text, but that is not recommended. What the analyses illustrate is the fundamental fact that pattern and logic pervade every single quality Latin sentence (even in verse). With guidance, the reader's eye can learn to recognise these patterns as it follows the sentence along the page. With practise, any reader can learn to recognise the signposts which bind and make sense of any Latin sentence. As this skill develops, translating in order to find out the content, even translating to find its literary and intellectual aspects, becomes less and less appropriate—or necessary.

Guided practising, combined with basic rules for reading, makes it possible to read and comprehend texts directly. Initially these methods can, in fact, be used to improve students' skills in translating. For the more he or she first comprehends the sentence—not just its grammatical items and vocabulary, but also its developing message—the more accurately will the translating be done. And with comprehension coming directly from the Latin text, the underlying qualities of the text can be recognised far more fully and independently.

Grammar-plus-vocab may be compared to two wheels of an auto: indispensable, but not adequate. The other pair of wheels is message and context. No passage of discourse consists of disconnected statements, any more than a sentence does of disconnected clauses and phrases. Not only are the words within a sentence signposts and pointers to other words and to constructions, but the phrases and clauses that they build are signposts to a developing mental picture; and so are the sentences forming a paragraph.

In the Hannibal-passage, even without help from outside, the reader at once realises that the context is that of a victory, thanks to the second word and then the description of a crowd of congratulators. But as we read along, the structure of the opening sentence makes another thing increasingly plain: the congratulators are being subordinated—via the grammar and sentence-structure themselves—to some further development, indeed to a looming contrast. Once the sentence reaches the start of its Main Clause, therefore ('praefectus equitum'), the *message* already forecasts that his rôle will be different and will form the contrast: and this is at once confirmed by the participial phrase 'minime cessandum ratus'.

In other words, the *message* in the sentence is created by the *grammar,* but conveys more than the grammar alone can. Even before we read what Maharbal says, we know that

he will reject the notion of enjoying *quies.* The elaboration which follows—in words vividly set out as *oratio recta*—in turn develops this message, to tell us its detailed form and to play extensively, in Livian Latin, with skilful rhetoric. The rest of the anecdote (not quoted in full above, but famous enough) continues to exploit the interweaving of grammar and message: Hannibal's *oratio obliqua* hesitation, Maharbal's brilliantly antithetical putdown with its grammatical balance plus variety ('vincere scis, Hannibal; victoria uti nescis')—culminating in Livy's grave assertion that through that day's delay, Rome was saved.[7]

Successfully translating the quoted passage, or the full story, depends on recognising and appreciating these varied aspects of the Latin. As the reader reads along, the grammar, vocabulary and structural placement of words and word-groups co-operate in building a context, picture or *message* of the developing report. And this message in its turn helps to illuminate and make correct sense of each further stage of the text. We saw the same with the quotation from the *Third Catilinarian,* and just the same happens with the passage from *Agricola.*

One necessary inference is that, to translate any Latin text properly, first the translator must read it through and comprehend its message. Understanding has to come first, the translating next. This in turn puts translating into its correct relationship with understanding. It can be an extra activity—refinement, confirmation, luxury or marks-earning exercise—but it must not the *route* to understanding, as it so dominantly is at present.

VIII.

In developing learners' reading and comprehension skills through adding structural recognition to grammar and vocabulary, the ultimate goal is to foster their ability to cope directly with Latin texts, including faster and more informative (and satisfying) reading. It is not only rewarding for the reader but much more effective. Confronted with a new Latin work—another Ciceronian speech, say, or a book of the *Georgics*—she or he need not have the sinking feeling that defeat already looms even before the first page is studied. Once careful practice in structural recognition takes hold, dawn breaks; nor will night ever return.[8]

These goals are worth striving for even if some readers still find it hard to read quality Latin without needing to translate at all. The skills of pattern-recognition can be taught as part of a normal Latin program, using some of the time that otherwise would go into more translating. It is true that the later the level at which reading-and-recognition skills are introduced, the harder it is for learners to develop them. Earlier introduction, matching

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[7] Livian rhetoric: *die quinto … epulaberis; sequere* matched (chiastically) with *praecedam, venisse* contrasted by *venturum.* The original version, by Cato the Elder in his *Origines,* is shorter, punchy and minimally adorned, chiefly with alliteration: 'Mitte mecum Romam equitatum; diequinti in Capitolio tibi cena cocta erit' (Cato, fragment 86 Peter = Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 10.24.7). Livy provides Maharbal with an opening comment lecturing Hannibal (*Immo* &c.), puts *sequere* before *praecedam* (avoiding the event-order convention*),* supplies the antithesis *prius venisse quam venturum* with the stylistic omission of *me* and *esse,* and transforms the homely *tibi cena cocta erit* to the grandly single *epulaberis.* For further literary and historical analysis of the passages see D. Hoyos, 'Maharbal's *bon mot:* authenticity and survival', *Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000), 610-14.

[8] For guidelines and discussion of how to read Latin without needing to translate it, see D. Hoyos, *Latin: How to Read it Fluently* (CANE Educational Materials: Amherst, 1997). This manual needs to be updated and expanded.

the time spent on translating and in time outweighing that, promises superior results (if only because students have less to *un*learn in the hunt-the-verb area).

IX.

What about the other claimed 'benefit' of translation, that it alone allows students' grasp of Latin to be measured precisely? It is an unimpressive claim.

Adventurous courses already include assignments not only of translation, but also some of grammar-explication and of comprehension. Assignments like these can be searching and can be insightfully devised. Although, by their nature, they do not require students to handle every single word in a passage, this is not a drawback. Students who do handle every word, in translating, still make mistakes and can emerge with little idea of what the passage was really about (the *message* missed because of fixation on forms) or what were its salient literary features.

Close non-translative assignments on a passage can take many forms. Here are some examples. (1) A short speech in *oratio recta* can be set for transforming into *obliqua;* and vice versa. (2) Remove all punctuation from a paragraph; (3) or introduce a number of carefully devised one-word grammatical errors (e.g. *urbe condito*); and require the passage to be rewritten correctly, succinctly explaining each correction. (4) At any level except beginners', give a passage of modest or advanced complexity to be written out in the structural-analysis form illustrated above, with each construction within it again succinctly explained (*not* each word, which would be parsing grammar again). (5) Devise a number of carefully devised questions on meaning, implications and grammatical feature. (6) In an exam, combine some of the above to create a challenging paper.

The variety and versatility of assignments and tests like these are a sharp contrast to the unoriginal grind of regular translation. In turn, assessing such work is no less precise and differentiative than assessing translations. Certainly, students are going to make mistakes—just as they make mistakes in translating. But unlike it, such assignments and others like them develop learners' skills in both comprehension *and* grammar-plus-vocabulary. They will also be more stimulating; and stimulation assists learning.

For these many reasons, it is time to push the elephant—lumbering, academically-limiting translation as a learning method—out of the room, in favour of reading and comprehension skills-building: an approach far more suited to the ideals and practical goals of why we study Latin in the first place.

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