

The History of Oral Methods in Latin Pedagogy

This paper examines the role of audio-lingual techniques in Latin pedagogy from Antiquity to the present day. The relevance of this component has changed dramatically, as the focus within the field has deviated from practical, everyday use to reading comprehension, as the language itself shifted from one widely spoken to one almost exclusively literary. Historically, this method is inextricably linked with memorization and recitation: Roman pupils learned by rote historical facts, mythological details, and popular adages; modern students memorize paradigms and grammatical rules. For centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, classical study relied most upon translation and performance, especially of the epics of Homer and Vergil. One Elizabethan scholar goes so far as to attribute the Empire's ruin to the disappearance of Latin from tongues. . . of common talk (Ascham 118). For students today, the oral component is a unique one. While Roman children studied basic grammatical rules with a *grammatikes* or *litterator* after having learned to understand and speak Latin at home, modern students clearly lack that advantage. Since Latin has long been branded a *dead* language, emphasis on its spoken element is one only recently resurrected. Linguistic structuralists support its continued employment, however, as hearing and speaking are the primary means of language acquisition, and reading and writing are secondary. Since its inception, this technique has, of course, had its critics. Many, including Stoic philosopher Epictetus, dismiss it as mechanical recitation demanding no independent judgement or critical thinking. Certain modern textbook authors have sought to rectify such shortcomings by introducing a more inductive approach which enables students to absorb rules and forms in small increments, rather than immediately facing numerous tables and charts to commit to memory. Minkova and Tunberg's *Latin for the New Millennium*, for example, uses fictional dialogues in a modern-day setting to ease new concepts into the reader's observation.

Works Cited

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