

*Loci et Imagines: A Rhetorical Approach to Teaching Latin Syntax*

Latin rhetoric texts offer an approach to memory that aids the comprehension of Latin syntax, especially unfamiliar to students whose first language is analytic, that is, it largely depends on word order, rather than inflections. For example, as explained in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*:

*Constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus. Locos appellamus eos qui breviter, perfecte, insignite aut natura aut manu sunt absoluti, ut eos facile naturali memoria comprehendere et amplecti queamus: ut aedes, intercolumnium, angulum, fornicem, et alia quae his similia sunt. (III.29)*

The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory—for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like. (Trans. Caplan)

This system invites the speaker or writer to use *loci et imagines* (backgrounds and images), to prepare a speech. The orator envisions a space, divides it up into smaller spaces corresponding to sections of the oration, and places meaning-related images in these sections. The same system can be applied to the reading of Latin sentences. The student approaches the sentence as if it were a house, city, or region, with awareness of its boundaries and subdivisions, like city walls and neighborhoods, exterior walls and rooms, or geographical boundaries. For example, as in Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Book I, the student can view the sentence like a future province: he or she first maps the natural boundaries, then the structures within it, and finally the qualities and actions of the inhabitants. This presentation illustrates how to introduce students to Latin syntax following this kind of process, from its natural boundaries, starting with the first and last words and mapping inward. In this way, students are invoking memory in reading Latin, useful for comprehension, translation, and retention of the language.

*Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Trans. Harry Caplan. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954.