Ad Cor et Mentem Per Aures: Benefits of Aural Learning of Classical Languages

We are faced today with two problems regarding acquisition of the classical languages: First, many students who are required to take classes in Latin and/or Ancient Greek do not enjoy studying them and, thus, readily abandon these studies after a couple years; second, even among those who do enjoy studying the classical languages and who have studied them intensely for several years, such as undergraduate and graduate students in Classics, many find themselves still unable to both quickly and accurately read ancient texts. The last half-century has seen a surge of scholarship about language acquisition (see Krashen, Garnham, and Sanz and Leow) and, at the same time, a rise in new methods of teaching Latin and Ancient Greek (see McCarthy and Patrick). The language acquisition scholarship suggests that languages are learned more accurately and effectively when they are approached as means of communication than when they are approached as primarily sets of grammatical forms (Sanz and Leow, *Implicit and Explicit Language Learning* 31). Certain methods of teaching Latin and Ancient Greek in the last 50 years have, likewise, put more emphasis than previous methods did on aural learning and communication rather than on grammar rules. In this paper, I argue that communicative methods, and in particular aural methods, of learning the classical languages hold a solution to the two problems (namely, love of learning and mastery of the languages) by removing the often-disliked grammar studies and at the same time increasing comprehension of vocabulary and syntax through repeated listening to good compositions.

I survey both the recent scholarship in language acquisition and the recent developments in Latin and Ancient Greek teaching methods, finding where the two overlap and how the former has been and continues to be successfully applied to the latter. I mainly survey the research of Stephen Krashen on Comprehensible Input Theory (CI) and the application of CI to Latin

teaching methods by Robert Patrick. I also note the rise in aural resources such as songs, books on tape, lessons read aloud, and other audio files or live audio demonstrations in Latin and Ancient Greek which are meant to aid language acquisition.

The knowledge of which methods are most effective for allowing a love of the languages to develop and for building fluency in the languages will be important for any teacher of the classical languages and for any Classics student who sees that either his amount of love or his level of fluency or both are not carrying him through his studies, in order to preserve the treasure of Latin and Ancient Greek and to raise up competent readers of classical texts.

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