

## Authentic Texts in the Latin Classroom: Problems and Solutions

As Latin teachers increasingly explore principles of Secondary Language Acquisition (SLA), they must contend with the question of authentic texts in the language classroom. The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines authentic texts as “written by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group” and advocates for their use to “serve as a reminder to learners that there is an entire population who use the target language in their everyday lives...[and] provide information about the target culture and provide that culture’s perspective on an issue or event” (ACTFL-2015). While Latin pedagogy has centered on the translation of authentic texts for millennia, many now recognize that the extant authentic texts appropriate for novice and intermediate learners remain exceedingly rare (let alone the lack of authentic audio-visual materials like television commercials or podcasts available to modern languages).

Two questions arise: first, whether commonly recognized “authentic” texts in Latin can provide meaningful learning for novice and intermediate students; second, whether authentic texts demonstrably bestow stronger language acquisition than texts crafted for students in the classroom. I contend that even beginning students can benefit from authentic Latin texts if supplied with sufficient support, and that employing adapted versions of Latin authors has more to offer learners than even the best modern textbooks. To be sure, “the modern textbook commonly contains ‘authentic texts’” ( Simonsen-2019); the *Cambridge Latin Course* employs many tropes of Roman comedy and the *Oxford Latin Course* fictionalizes a life of Horace extrapolated from his poetry. Nevertheless I propose that, by employing more Late Antique and Medieval Latin in the classroom and by scaffolding Classical Latin through adapted and tiered

reading, educators can follow the spirit of ACTFL's recommendations while accommodating the realities of extant Latin literature.

Late Antique and Medieval Latin texts need not be used in place of classical authors but as introductory scaffolding, which ACTFL defines as "the support provided for learners to promote acquisition of skills and concepts" (ACTFL-2015). The teacher who wishes to introduce her students to Tacitus' criticism of Tiberius can begin with a later writer such as Eutropius or Aurelius Victor, proceed to Suetonius' life of the emperor, and then conclude with Tacitus himself. Such an approach has the advantage of proceeding from simpler to more complex Latin while also presenting multiple views of the same events across generations and centuries.

An alternative approach sees the teacher adapting Tacitus' work into several "tiers" of increasing complexity until students reach the unadapted text. While engaging with the same author's narration of the same episode in several iterations may wear on students' patience, "by the time [students] approach the unadapted Latin, they are able to read and comprehend it - not necessarily literally translate it - without the assistance of notes or a dictionary" (Sears-2019). As such, both methods provide a greater net benefit to students than if they began with the target text unassisted but for the usual dictionary and grammar/commentary.

The use of inscriptions and graffiti, which "offer authentic Roman voices that can be used on their own or as the basis of project-based learning" (Vergilian Society-2022), can be used to supplement these two core practices since most inscriptions are too short to provide extensive enough input for language acquisition. For the same Tacitus-favoring teacher, surviving graffiti detailing the Pompeii-Numeria rivalry (cf. *ILS* 6443c et al) may shed additional perspectives on the riots outlined in *Ann.* 14.17.

While supporters of Grammar-Translation pedagogy and critics of Comprehensible Input contend that the slower approach of SLA only puts more distance between students and the classical authors held at such a premium for so long, students will come more prepared to understand and value these writers after more deeply acquiring the language through empirically backed data on language learning. By exploring a wider selection of the authentic users of the Latin language across 2,000 years and by creating more accessible pathways to these authors for greater comprehension and retention, Latin teachers across the United States and beyond can promote greater inclusion in their student communities and thereby ensure a more vibrant future for the language and its surviving texts.

## Works Cited

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