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VARIA DIDACTICA

LATIN FOR STUDENTS WITH AN AFRICAN HOME LANGUAGE[1]

J-M Claassen (University of Stellenbosch)

One of my favourite quotations has always been Tennyson's "The old order changeth, yielding place to new / and God fulfils himself in many ways, / lest one good custom should corrupt the world." That means, essentially, "Change is good, and we should not fear it".

In the schools where Latin is taught, the greatest change nowadays is often annihilation - and we all do what we can to counter that. Where Latin still survives, the change is often in the mother tongue of the students. The isolating effects of apartheid are slowly being eroded and the demography of schools is changing. This change is more rapid than many others affecting our transitional society. Some schools offering Latin now have large numbers of students whose home language is one of the African languages, in others more and more will be appearing, and teachers must be prepared. Of course the best plan is for each of us to take Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho lessons (or lessons in whichever of our national languages is locally dominant), but before teachers get round to it, this paper is by way of a crash course in thinking about the way language works (which is something else than thoughts about grammar) and about methodology.[2]

For years I thought that the medium of instruction, rather than Latin itself, offers the greatest problem to Black students. When I started researching the subject, I discovered that this is only part of the truth: multilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon, and students who are young enough when they are exposed to a second language as educational medium can handle it perfectly well (Bliss 1989; Claassen 1992 and 1994a).

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1 Adaptation of talk given at CASA workshop for Western Cape Latin teachers, U.C.T., January 1996. An earlier version of this paper was read at the "Vakindaba vir Latyn", RAU, September 1992. I have retained the conversational tone of the first drafts, but have adapted the contents to apply equally to teaching at the secondary or tertiary level, and have added some reference material.

2 For the sake of brevity, in what follows I shall refer to "Xhosa" and "Xhosa-speakers", the target language in the Western and Eastern Cape, but what I have to say applies equally to the various African languages, who share a single system. The same principles apply *mutatis mutandis* to any of these languages. I cannot speak Xhosa, but derived my theoretical information on how the languages work from books, mainly A E Kotzé, G M M Grobler, R H Meketsi, J C le Roux, N Saule and P C Taljaard *South African Multi-language Dictionary* (Cape Town: Readers' Digest, 1991); J A Louw and J B Jubase *Handboek van Xhosa* (Johannesburg: Bonapers, 1963) and L E Jennings *The Concise Trilingual Dictionary: English, Xhosa, Afrikaans* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1974). I wish to express my gratitude to my colleague Miss Nomsa Satyo from the Department of African Languages, University of Stellenbosch, for checking the manuscript, and for her helpful suggestions.

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There is a large body of literature on multilingualism embodying theories of various kinds (e.g. Todd 1991; Hamers and Blanc 1989; Hakuta 1986; Barton and Walker 1983; Di Bona and Singh 1987; Pattanayk 1981). Key terms to remember are "additive" and "subtractive" bi- or multilingualism. "Hoeveel tale dat jy kan, soveel male is jy man - of vrou" is an attitude that approves of multilingualism, and it fosters additive multilingualism. Subtractive multilingualism is the phenomenon where students are made ashamed of their home language, if it is not the language that predominates in their cultural milieu. I can remember, as a student in an Afrikaans medium high school, of feeling extremely shamefaced when people discovered that I speak to my mother in English.

Mother-tongue education in SA is still a contentious and problematic issue, that admits of no easy solutions (cf. Thembala 1989). The problem is ancient and stems from long before 1948. The "Bantu Education" scene set in 1954 was built on a system established much earlier under E T Loram, an influential educationist who was much impressed by the Black school system of the American South, with its emphasis on "rural skills" and "education for subservience" (Davis 1984). Mother-tongue education was propagated by him and supported with the best of intentions by Afrikaners who had themselves experienced conscious linguistic oppression by the British after the Anglo-Boer war. This awareness moved them to propagate mother-tongue education for all SA students: for Black students, however, for only the first five years. Unfortunately something potentially good became bad because of the political system.

After 1954 the problem was exacerbated by the hermetic sealing-off of black students from native speakers of Afrikaans and English. Within 15 years a young generation of teachers arose as product of such circumscribed contact who themselves had had virtually no contact with native speakers of the languages they had to use as teaching medium from Standard 4 (now Grade 6) onwards. It is this shaky foundation, which is amazingly overcome by many talented young Black students, that is one of the factors leading to disastrous matric results, and it will take longer than a single peaceful matric year to shore up the sagging dyke properly (cf. Chrisholm 1984).

Bilingualism is potentially positive and dynamic, but a sealed off, inbred system results in inadequate preparation of students, some of whom never catch up: education through English in the higher standards remains a stumbling block. In theory, under our new dispensation, all parents may claim mother tongue education for their children in all subjects right up to Matric (Grade 12), but in practice the constraints of budgeting as well as the lack of adequately trained mother tongue speakers, and also lack in some cases of scientific terminology in our new official languages, makes this unrealistic (Langhan 1989). South Africa is apparently the only country in Africa where mother tongue education was applied exclusively in the first years of schooling. In the rest of Africa students started their school careers in the language of the local *Herrnvolk.* Only since the early 1980s has there been a movement in the rest of Africa towards introduction of the mother tongue along with the official school language. There is one UNESCO publication spelling out

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techniques, but it still propagates simultaneous training in the European (or "high school") language (Poth 1980). In the rest of Africa, therefore, educationists remained aware of the potential for "ghettoisation" inherent in exclusive attention to the local language. It was such "ghettoisation" which turned potentially additive bilingualism into subtractive monolingualism under the "Bantu Education" system.

Attention to a potential *lingua franca* like English (and also Afrikaans—in rural areas in the northern provinces, as well as in Namibia it is still the chief *lingua franca*) does not obviate all teaching medium problems: full bilingualism is seldom the rule. Yet our problem is greater in South Africa. At tertiary level students from the "Bantu Education" system have in the past had great problems with the medium of instruction or better, the medium of learning.

At the same time no Classicist can communicate adequately in all 9 of our new official languages, not to mention sub-groups and dialects. Most of us cannot even speak the predominant African language in the area where we operate (e.g. Xhosa is the language of the Western and Eastern Cape, whereas Sotho is predominant in Bloemfontein, Zulu in Natal, whereas virtually all the official languages occur in Gauteng Province). Even if we could, we should be cutting off our students' contact with the outside world even more, if we tried to teach Latin solely through medium of African languages, trying as it were to communicate *unicuique lingua sua*.

We must, however, remember that at all times we are actually teaching two "foreign languages"—i.e. Latin and "grammar". Many students, also English and Afrikaans speakers, find "grammar" the more difficult. In the degree to which English and Afrikaans share common Indo-European elements with Latin, sentence structure can be explained to English and Afrikaans speaking students in terms of their mother tongue, but sometimes circumlocution is needed. Grasping a sentence structure like the accusative-and-infinitive in reported speech is difficult even for Afrikaans and English speakers, as it works so very differently from their native tongue.

The theory of second- and third language teaching involves two principles: finding points of similarity between the home language and the target language (the well-known principle of "starting with the known"), and so-called "contrast teaching", where areas of greatest discrepancy are emphasised (a contentious issue at the best of times, so James 1980:v and 141ff.). For both, we need to be abundantly clear on what it is that we want our students to learn—and in the case of Latin, we do not simply want to instruct them in "grammar", but both we and our students must understand *what grammar does*, that is, the *nature* of the languages that we are comparing.

Working with the familiar didactic principle of movement from the known to the unknown, one should start with points of similarity. A large number of such points were listed by Dr M Wakerley of UNITRA at a CASA *Colloquium Didacticum* in 1982 (Wakerley 1982).

I do not wish here to repeat Prof Wakerley's extensive parallels, which relate to matters such as word derivation, formation of the imperative from verbal roots, morphological modification by means of prefixes, suffixes and infixes, tense

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formation (purely by chance, by the way, the imperfect in Xhosa is formed by means of *-be-* as infix, where Latin has *-ba-* as infix). She discusses similarities in use of the subjunctive, use of two different verbs for quotation, rather like *inquit* and *dixit*, demonstratives parallel in meaning to *hic*, *iste* and *ille*, and frequent use of diminutives.

All we really need is to equip ourselves with a few tricks, to be able to show Xhosa speakers (in the Western and Eastern Cape, other languages elsewhere) how Latin sentence structures compare with usages in their mother tongue. Ideally, problem areas could be illustrated by means of an example or two in the students' mother tongue, but we need not even go as far as that. Mercifully, most Latin students, particulalry those in Grade 10 upwards, also those from a non-Indo-European background, are intelligently curious about language in the abstract, and how it works. One trick is to ask a student how a particular English or Afrikaans expression could be rendered in Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana or whatever other language he or she speaks, and to think of the issues involved.

Clearly what we need to illustrate depends on what the student needs to know about Latin. We begin with levels of language awareness. For Latin there are four levels involved:

1. Lexis and semantics, that is vocabulary and equivalent "meanings";
2. Morphology in the abstract ("paradigms"), leading to
3. Recognition of morphology in context (the relationship between noun and verb endings), leading to
4. Recognition of structure, that is, the interpretion of the way a Latin sentence hangs together.

First, the obvious level of similarity of *vocabulary*. There are of course no common roots between the two different language systems, as there is between members of the Indo-European family. To give meanings of Latin words in an African language is not so much "teaching in an African language" as creating an area of familiarity, what is called a "linguistic beachhead for the landing of more advanced troops", that is, for the acquisition of other linguistic input. This is not the place to discuss the minutiae of the debate on the elusiveness of out-of-context "meaning" of any one component of any one semantic set (cf. Louw 1989). I take for granted that there is some method whereby the verbal equivalence of a similar concept may be established in different linguistic systems, to which I attach the term "meaning", in deliberate quotation marks.

I have tried to meet the challenge of equivalence with some simple Xhosa input in our computer programs that are distributed by the National Media Library. Xhosa "meanings" have been provided for the first four vocabulary exercises. If the randomiser leaves out the "meaning", typing in a Xhosa meaning will trigger feedback of the Afrikaans and English meanings as well. Multi-lingualism is fostered in this way (cf. Claassen 1989). My schools' edition of Nepos' story of Hannibal is more ambitious (Claassen 1994b). It is set for Grade 11 in Gauteng Province, and would do equally well for practice in unseens at the beginning of Grade 11 in other provinces. The story carries the grammar, and the vocabulary provided (all those

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words that do not occur in Smuts et al. 1985 *Lexis Latina*) have meanings in Sotho, Pedi, Twsana, Zulu and Xhosa as well as Afrikaans and English.

The fact that *morphology* is important in Latin and that meaning is indicated by inflection (i.e. both paradigms and recognition of Latin "shapes") does not need excessive explanation for speakers of the African languages (Wakerley 1982). It needs only to be pointed out that, whereas in the African language system, to indicate singular or plural, words change the "front parts" (i.e. prefixes) of their nouns, adjectives and verbs, Latin changes the endings (suffixes). What does need careful elucidation for all students, however, is case usage, and we need a slightly different approach for speakers of an African language than for the others. More of this later.

Sentence structure is the level where most careful preparation of students from an African home language background needs to be done, because of great basic differences between the Indo-European and African systems. Wakerley's article give important inputs, but does not raise the most basic point of similarity: *neither Latin nor the African languages use an article with nouns*. What can be a major hurdle to English and Afrikaans speakers when they learn to translate, is no problem at all to many Black students. (This is, by the way, a point we need to bear in mind when marking such students' essays in English).

Equally, what we express in English by means of auxiliary verbs and other forms of periphrasis, is frequently expressed by mere inflection, in both Latin and the African languages. Tense and mood are indicated in Xhosa, as in Latin, in inflection of verb stem and endings, by means of infixes and suffixes. Jenny Krumm, formerly of Wits, collected an interesting list of instances (forwarded to me by Prof David Scourfield), where Black students have problems, not with Latin, but with those forms (mostly periphrastic tenses) of English verbs which require as equivalent a single word in Latin and also in the African languages. This is a point of similarity which needs intensive study. It is with this kind of problem that we must try to cope by offering students direct access to understanding Latin via their home languages, without their needing to be confused with English periphrasis.

What Dr Wakerley has to say about the noun in the African language system is equally important (1982:102-103). The prefixes of nouns are inflected, and there is agreement (or concord) between nouns, adjectives and verbs by means of these prefixes. Here too, English-speaking teachers must remember that, as in Latin, a Xhosa verb often has its subject already implied or imbedded in its own inflection, and so, if students leave out the subject, e.g. if they write a sentence like: "are playing", just like Latin "ludunt", in stead of "*the boys* are playing", this is an inappropriate application, to English, of a common Xhosa usage, but something that is familiar to us from Latin (which works in a similar way). Teachers are quick to criticise such aberrant English. Neither the Romans nor Xhosa speakers are "stupid"—their language systems merely differ from ours, and what occurs as contamination when English is the language of learning could be processed directly and with insight by a speaker familiar with the African language system.

In Latin nouns and adjectives agree and are inflected to express a relation to the verb; in Africa south of the Sahara a form of the noun-prefix, called a *concord*, is

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repeated as prefix before any other word in the sentence to which it is related (to the verb, as subject or object-concord, to adjectives and their sub-forms, relatives, and to other nouns as possessives and copula). Such concords are *not* separate words, but are *morphemes*, that is, an integral part of the words to which they are attached. In Xhosa and Zulu they are written as an attached part of the word, that is, like an inflectional beginning attached to a stem (where Latin words have inflectional endings), but in the Sotho languages they are somehwat confusingly written as detached, separate units. This has to do with the particular orthography devised by particular lexicographers in particular areas. Some of these concords also occur where in Afrikaans or English we would expect a separate preposition—that is, just like the Latin ablative or locative, a single inflected word can work as a nominal adverb.

But when we start looking at sentence structure more closely, a word of caution: pretty soon we have to reach a point of "contrast teaching", rather than going from known to unknown in a one-to-one application. Any teacher who has to teach Latin to African students needs to be aware of the fact that apparent similarity of inflection is not of great use, for in Latin, as in other Indo-European languages, the verb is the "point of growth" in a sentence—whereas in the African language system, focus is on the noun as "growth point". We must be very clear on what we ourselves are doing in language before we can attempt contrast teaching.

What is meant by "growth point"? In the Indo-European system a sentence expands *adverbially* in the sense that the *cases of nouns* which appear with verbs in a sentence are dictated by the *nature of these verbs*. This is particularly true of Latin (and Greek), but also applies to English, in the degree to which inflection (such as who/whom) occurs in English (e.g. *I see him*; *he sees me*), but with the addition of another factor: word order. In English "Dog bites man" has a particular sense that is the direct opposite of "Man bites dog". Such illustrations are our staple when teaching students the irrelevance of word order in Latin.

In the African language system word order is also important, but a sentence expands *adnominally*: that is, the *shape and nature of the noun as subject* dictates the shape and function that the other words in the sentence assume. Just as in Latin (and Greek), grammarians have divided words into convenient *classes*, in this case assigned according to the form and plural inflection of the noun-prefixes. A glance at any appropriate dictionary will give teachers the forms pertaining to the dominant local African language.

When traditionally grounded Classics teachers say to a student "look for the verb, then look for the subject", they are tacitly working with an over-familiar, almost intuitive, system that not all have explicitly formulated for themselves. Latin sentences have one of six basic structures, depending on the *nature of the verb*. By "nature" I mean *the syntactic implication involved in its semantics* - that is, *the verb's meaning dictates which other words will comfortably occur with it within a sentence.* So, for instance, we are aware of semantic groups like *sit*, *stand, lie*, *walk*, which all have to do with body movement, and cannot normally apply to inanimate objects, but, grammatically more importantly, *none of these can take an object*: they are what we

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term *intransitive*, and when we loosely say "I can't stand him", or "I'm going to walk the dog", we are actually using secondary meanings, either metaphorical or causative.

Comparative teaching of sentence structure in Latin

The six basic structures therefore develop from verbs that fall into six different kinds of semantic groupings.[3] It is most important that students be taught that the nature of the verb depends on its *meaning*. Therefore vocabulary learning is an absolute *sine qua non*, from Grade 8 (or the beginning of the first weeks of Latin Intensive at university level) onwards. They must be encouraged to consider the appropriate allocation to a particular semantic set and therefore the structural implications of the meaning of each Latin verb they encounter. Students need to be made aware of the six different types possible in simple sentences. These structures need to be understood fully for students to be able to read any sentence correctly. Complex and compound sentences are still made up from these six types, and no others.[4]

Below follows in schematic form the basic groupings of Latin verbs which determine the structure of Latin sentences:

Six types of Latin sentences developing from six types of verbs

1. Intransitive verb
2. Transitive verb
3. The verb "to be"
   (a) as copulative (with nouns or noun + adjective)
   (b) used absolutely + prepositional phrase denoting place
4. Impersonal verb
5. Passive verb
6. Verb expecting prolative infinitive

Interpretation of these structures should be facilitated for students from an African home language with reference to comparable phenomena in the African language system. This in many cases will mean conscious awakening of students' awareness of their own linguistic mannerisms. It is a commonplace of contrastive didactics that native speakers of a language work on the intuitive level. In this case it would probaly be best to ask students how a particular sentence or phrase in English or Afrikaans (reflecting the appropriate Latin construction) would be put in their home language, and then to require them to analyse what is involved in this particular utterance. The "triangle" will be complete only when the Latin construction is presented to them and they are required to make a direct association with the equivalent expression in their home language. These structures work as follows in the African language system:

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3 That is why it is important to train students to *state and explain* case *functions in relation to verbs from which they develop.*

4 The computer program *PISCINA* (listed below, which the National Media Library of the Education Department has made available to schools), was designed to teach exactly that.

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Equivalent sentence structures in Xhosa[5]

1. Latin sentences with intransitive verb

Personal subject-concords added to the stem indicate the person, but like Latin personal verb endings, have no other purpose:

1	ndi-hamba	si-hamba	I walk	we walk
2	ù- "	ni- "	you walk	you walk
3	ú- "	ba- "	he / she / it walks	they walk[6]

If the sentence has no other extension, a longer form of the verb occurs with infix of -ya-.

2. Latin sentence with transitive verb

Subject + Subject-concord + *-ya-* (or -object-concord-) + -verb stem + object.
So, this implies "word order", but emphasis may change word order. Order of concords before the verb stem indicates subject / object relationship..

3. Latin sentence with verb "to be"

(a) *As copulative*
In the African language system there is no verb "to be", but the subject-concord or the so-called indefinite copulative (in Xhosa *ng- / yi-*) works as a copulative before the word (either noun or adj) to be attached to the subject.
(b) *As absolute*
(1) "there is" *est / sunt*
subject-concord
or indefinite copulate before the subject
(2) "...is" + prepositional phrase denoting place:
ditto, with locative form of noun denoting place.

4. Latin sentence with impersonal verb

There are in fact two kinds of impersonal verbs in Latin:
(a) *Avalent*
having no noun, that is, with no case developing from the verb, as in *pluit* ("it is raining"):
Noun-concord + verb stem / Abstract noun

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5 It should again be stressed that local languages may differ in form or appearance, but that the system is consistent. To adapt the above schema to one of the other African languages, recourse to the preambles preceding a particular language in the *Multi-language Dictionary* of Grobler et al. (1991) may prove adequate. However, it is easier simply to require a particular student to apply his or her mind to a particular structure, as suggested above. The teacher needs only to be actively aware of the fact of difference between the Indo-European and African systems.

6 In the third person there may be a whole variety of concords, depending on the prefix of the original noun as subject (which may or may not be present in the sentence).

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(b) *Monovalent*
having a single noun in an oblique case developing from it, as is *decet mihi* / *oportet me* / *bonum est* ("I ought to", "I should", "it is good")
Noun-concord + adj. stem = "good" + word for "that" + noun clause

5. Latin sentence with passive verb + agent + instrument

Very much as in Latin, the verb-ending is altered by means of a suffix (in the case of Xhosa *-w-* / *-iwa-*) with the necessary sound changes, and the agent is expressed by means of the "indefinite copulative":
i.e. *ng-* / *yi-* / subject-concord repeated before a full noun
Instrument is expressed by a prefix *nga-* before a full noun.

6. Latin sentence with verb expecting prolative infinitive

In the African language system a different point of view obtains:
(a) *possum* = "I can":
(1) may be expressed by use of the potential mood (in Xhosa by the infix *-nga-* between subject-concord and rest of word), but
(2) it can also be expressed by subject-concord plus "with" / "and" *-na-* + infinitive of verb
(b) Other words such as *volo*, *cupio*, *incipio*, *debeo*, are expressed by a finite verb followed by an infinitive, as in Latin, but: although the infinitive works like the Latin verbal "growth point" and can have an object, future tense or negative forms, it is seen as a *verbal noun*, for it is qualified by an *adjective or relative*, not modified by an adverb.

The above has served to establish that the basic sentence structures in Latin and Xhosa (or any of its sister languages) are essentially different. In the end we remain aware that Latin is the target language, and that we are trying to show our students *how Latin works*, and where English (or Afrikaans) as medium fails us, we must be aware of possible points of confusion. The biggest source of early confusion for all students is the matter of *cases and case usage*. We know that, to induce Afrikaans and English speakers to understand the function of the Latin oblique cases, we often need to use prepositions: dative: "*to* the girl (or table)"; genitive: "*of* the girl"; ablative: "*by*, *with*, *from* the girl" etc. The African language system has few prepositions (Wakerley 1982:103). For Black students, for whom prepositions in Afrikaans and English sometimes cause problems, we should rather be able to illustrate case usage directly, by means of direct equivalence.

Further, for any students the phenomenon that inflection, and not word order, indicates meaning, holds some problems. We must keep firmly in mind that we are trying to get our students to understand the function of Latin inflectional endings within sentence structure. That means, we must think very carefully ourselves about *how* we recognise cases in Latin, what cases *do* in Latin, and *what we are doing in English* when we try to express their equivalents.

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