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Research Article

Predicting Latin stories: an investigation of contextual clues

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Abstract

This article offers small-scale research findings on the impact of narrative contextual clues as a form of scaffolding in Year 9 Latin lessons. The students of this research learned Latin via the *Cambridge Latin Course* (*CLC*) (CSCP, 1998), which provides teachers and students with meaningful Latin in the form of interconnected stories (Hunt, 2016, 88). As Nuttall has argued, teaching students to read interconnected sentences and appreciate a text's meaning and overall message is what separates the act of reading from parsing vocabulary and grammatical structures (Nuttall, 1996, 2–3). Therefore, while the stories of the *CLC* can be read as isolated entities, the act of reading requires students to consider the overarching narratives of the stories. Furthermore, as students become confident in their Latin proficiency, it is possible to predict what is going to happen in a story just by thinking about what occurred in the previous line. For example, the first *CLC* story famously opens with the line *Caecilius est in tablino* (Caecilius is in the study). We can therefore predict that the story could take place in a Roman house and feature different rooms. Of course, this is exactly what happens in the story. This article focuses on the value of contextual clues in guiding students' predictions and promoting them to read rather than merely parse sentences. Ultimately, I argue that contextual clues, which can easily be overlooked as a form of scaffolding, serve as an invaluable aid for students when reading whole pages of Latin.

Keywords: Latin, schools, pedagogy, reading, context

Reading Latin

Before moving on to the research project and its findings, it is worth considering the value which reading has in aiding students' language abilities. Some may argue that parsing is the fundamental aim of Latin teaching, especially since the Latin GCSE examination focuses so literally and strictly on vocabulary and grammar. British Latin teachers have often urged students to search for the verb and decode Latin into English word order. For example, the Latin coursebook *de Romanis* advises students that 'when you meet an accusative noun in Latin, you may need to read on and translate the verb first' (Radice *et al.*, 2020, 27). Likewise, Cullen and Taylor's *Latin to GCSE Book 1* advises students to decode Latin sentences into English subject, verb, object order (Cullen and Taylor, 2016, 13). However, a counter movement in the twentieth century contended that Latin should not be treated like a puzzle but should instead be sight-read from left to right like any other language. For example, W.H.D. Rouse, headmaster of the Perse school, was a highly influential teacher who advocated for the 'direct method' in Latin teaching (1925). Likewise, Hansen (1999–2000) and Hamilton (1991) both argue that students should be taught to juggle the different possible denotations of words as they are first approached and prioritise the most likely meanings as the line progresses (with discussion in Russell, 2018, 19). Hoyos similarly argues for sight

reading from left to right and has two particularly convincing arguments: he states that reading by decoding is very slow and difficult for students to unlearn and that decoding damages students' abilities to analyse Latin literary style (Hoyos, 1993, 126–127). In sum, while parsing is undeniably an essential skill for Latin students, sight-reading is just as, if not more, important for training students to read genuine Latin texts and analyse their literary style confidently. Reading genuine Latin texts comfortably is not only important for prose examination papers but should be the primary objective of Latin teaching.

This phenomenon of encouraging sight-reading in Latin is significant for our purposes because of the integral role which the act of prediction has in reading from left to right. For example, Hansen argues that students should be taught to predict which kind of words could come after a fragmented Latin line (Hansen, 1999–2000, 179). Hansen (1999–2000) argues that this kind of prediction is essential for students to read Latin in its original word order, as Roman writers also would have predicted what kind of words would have followed the opening words of a sentence. Markus and Ross argue that all languages involve this kind of 'articulating expectations' (predicting which words will come next) when reading from left to right (Markus and Ross, 2004, 82–3). For example, an English speaker will expect a noun to act as a subject agent whereas a Latin speaker would expect *utitur* to take an ablative noun and a subject to take a verb (Markus and Ross, 2004, 83–85). A list of various grammatical elements of a sentence which Latin readers would expect to encounter as the line progress is provided in the appendix of their article (Markus and Ross, 2004,

93). Finally, Harrison argues that Romans would often predict that certain verbs would come after specific prepositional phrases, such as a verb of motion after an *in* phrase. She contends that we should teach students to anticipate Latin constructions in a similar way as the Romans themselves did (Harrison, 2010, 2–5).

That prediction is fundamental to Latin reading can also be uncovered by looking at original Latin texts and their ancient receptions. A famous example is the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which begins with the words *arma virumque cano* [I sing of arms and of the man] to indicate to the reader that the epic will be about an epic war and a heroic man – immediately signalling the influence of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* respectively. Before the reader has progressed past the first three words, Virgil is guiding them to predict the Homeric ventures which will occur in his epic poem. For a less well-known example, original manuscripts of Pliny the Younger's *Epistles* were accompanied with an index which contained the first few words of each letter of its respective book (Gibson, 2014, 42–44). The index served the purpose of introducing each letter and its addressee to the reader and inviting them to predict what would happen in the letter based upon its first few words. For example, *Ep*. 1.5 opens with *vidistine quemquam M. Regulo* [have you seen anyone more … than Regulus…] which signals to the reader that the letter will be about the famous orator Regulus and encourages them to predict what Pliny will write about his rival.

When reading languages from left to right it is essential to consider the context of the narrative and what is happening in the sentences. To use the *CLC* as an example, teachers could ask students to guess what will happen next in the narrative based upon the previous stories. Teachers often do use the title of the story and the pictures to guide students to anticipate what will happen in the passage. This kind of contextual prediction is just as valuable as anticipating which words will follow others. In fact, Halliday and Hasan argue that readers can only become confident in a language once they can predict upcoming text from context, because otherwise their reading will remain very slow and laborious (Halliday and Hasan, 1985, 45–46). Nuttall (1996) similarly argues that contextual prediction plays a fundamental role in reading a language because a reader can tap into any relevant information in their schemata (a cognitive framework of information) to assist them in reading a text. She claims, for example, that if we saw a text with the title 'the scope of ecology', we might predict an educational article rather than a newspaper story (Nuttall, 1996, 13).

The importance of contextual prediction has been evidenced in Latin teaching. For example, Letchford (2021) contends that when he shifted to teaching *Lingua Latina: Familia Romana* that his students became stronger at learning vocabulary because of the contextual clues which are embedded in the course. Short (2011) has also argued that making predictions based upon context can empower Latin students to think in a Roman mind-set and tackle difficult concepts such as idioms. Particularly useful in relation to contextual prediction in Latin teaching is the recent monograph by Hunt: *Teaching Latin: Context, Theories, Practices* (2022). In Chapter 3 'Reading', Hunt argues that students should 'look for particular structural features of a story' rather than read Latin with no expectations for what will happen next in the story (Hunt, 2022, 67). In this light, he outlines schemata which are essential for predicting what will happen in a text when reading. Two examples are 'external schemata' (existing knowledge of the story and complementary external material such as illustrations) and 'content schemata' (information from the story itself such as words,

character, or events) (Hunt, 2022, 67–68). I noticed that teachers at my placement schools during my teacher training tapped into students' 'external schemata' and 'content schemata'. For example, they often started lessons by recapping what happened in the previous story and guided students to predict what will happen in the current story by looking at the accompanying picture. However, Hunt also identifies a third set of schemata: the 'narrative and expectations/predictions schemata', which is an understanding of the form of the stories (Hunt, 2022, 67). I did not see any of the teachers during my placements call attention to the form and structure of the story to aid students in making predictions about what will happen next in the narrative. Moreover, while I tended to teach Latin by getting students to understand the sense of the story rather than fixate on endings, I also did not refer to common structural and content features of the story to guide understanding during my placements. I was fascinated by this concept and therefore decided to base my research project during the teacher training upon the impact of contextual clues in scaffolding translation.

Action research project and methodology

I undertook my action research at my teacher training placement school, which is a highly academically-selective independent school. The school has extremely high examination results: the school's website indicates that in the academic year of 2019, 94% of students received a grade 7–9 at GCSE and 94% of students received an A-A* grade at A Level. The school is therefore not representative of typical state-maintained secondary schools nationwide, where the average examination results of 2019 in GCSE Maths and English, for example, was 43.2% at grade 5 or above (DfE, 2019, 4). This context has been laid out from the outset so to be transparent about the school's status. Since the student body of the school is extremely atypical, the results could differ from someone who employs a similar pedagogical approach in another school setting. Nevertheless, I contend that the findings of my project are still relevant to secondary Latin teaching on a general level. As Krashen (1981) has convincingly argued, students learn languages most effectively by 'comprehensible input'; that is, when the target language is taught in a meaningful way in which students are genuinely interested. Contextual clues support students in engaging with meaningful Latin and so can aid a wide range of students in their learning.

I undertook two lessons to gather research data. In the first lesson, I taught eight Year 9 students (Group A) and in the second I taught 23 Year 9 students (Group A). While the two groups were different in terms of numbers, they were comparable in attainment levels. The two classes were also similar in the ways in which they worked. Both groups of students were enthusiastic learners and enjoyed the stories of the *CLC*. I also chose this year group for more mundane logistical reasons. The Year 9 Latin lessons were an hour long, which was longer than the standard 40-minute Latin lessons which I was usually offered. This gave me sufficient time for the students to complete a substantial reading task and ensured that the questionnaire was not rushed at the end of the lesson.

Group A and Group B both read the story *contentio* in Book 3 of the *Cambridge Latin Course* (CSCP, 1998).[1] In this story, the famous Roman general Agricola gets into an argument with the Roman senator Salvius over his mistreatment of the honourable British client-king Cogidubnus. I organised the lessons in such a way so that I could teach two different groups the same story and do one without any contextual clues and one with contextual clues. While

the two groups were different, the students were of equivalent attainment levels. I could therefore use the common errors in the first lesson to help me design the contextual clues for the second lesson. Finally, I chose the two Year 9 groups because they often read Latin by predicting what would happen in the story by looking at the title, glossed words on the side, or skim-reading the story. They were therefore familiar with the basic concept of prediction, and I felt confident that they could handle a more sophisticated activity centred around predicting what would happen from the structural form of the story.

I used three types of data in the research: classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews with students after the lesson was finished. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to record the lessons and so the classroom observation data was largely recorded as notes by myself and my teaching mentor. The questionnaire template, which is included in the supplementary appendix, used the Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree', and chose not to use a neutral option so that the students would have to give a clear response about what they thought about the lesson. There was also a comment space to allow for elaboration. The questions were written to be non-leading, and the template avoided phraseology such as 'the contextual clues were helpful or unhelpful'. Finally, I interviewed seven students from Group B, who all agreed for their answers to be used in this study. These students were interviewed in one group rather than individually.

The primary research goal was to consider the impact of contextual clues in scaffolding student translations of Latin stories. I focused on translation because I observed in other teachers' lessons at both my placement schools during my teacher training that translation activities can sometimes be treated as dry and very technical exercises. Teachers often fixate on whether students have translated certain grammatical forms correctly and do not always discuss what is happening in the story itself. Yet it is the content and meaning of the story which is essential for the act of reading. The study also considers the unique strengths of contextual clues as a form of scaffolding and how they could be used more effectively in future Latin lessons.

Research findings: story titles

It is useful to consider first the titles and pictures which accompany the stories, as they are most obvious contextual clues which can aid students in translation. In my classroom observations, I noted that even the light support of a title gives enough contextual clues for some students to understand the sense of the story. For example, as I did not point out the title to Group A, the students were confused about the phrase *di immortales* [immortal gods] and laughed, asking why the gods randomly turned up and disappeared. They did not detect that the phrase was an expression of bewilderment like the English 'good heavens' because they were not reading the lines in the context of Agricola's argument. Since the title was pointed out as a contextual clue to Group B, they figured out from context that the expression was some kind of insult, even if they thought it was an odd phrase, because they knew that Agricola and Salvius were having an argument. More specifically, several students in the class told me that they knew the expression must be some kind of indirect insult because the title *contentio* means argument. The students, then, were making a link between the title and the expressions used in the story.

Another example from classroom observations demonstrates that the title of the story aided students in Group B. Students in

both Group A and B were puzzled by the line *cur tam insanus eram ut tibi crederem?* [Why was I so insane as to believe you?] and thought it could mean 'why am I so insane to be believed'. However, since the students in Group B knew from the title that

> Agricola was arguing with Salvius, they knew that their mistranslation could not have been correct and asked me for advice.

The questionnaires confirmed the impression that the title of the story can be a useful way of guiding students to form predictions on what will happen next. For example, ten students said that they used the title when reading the story because 'it gave me a general idea of what is happening in the story, e.g. argument' and '*contentio* means argument, so I knew that the main theme of the story before reading it'. Since the questionnaires are anonymous, I cannot identify the student, but one pupil did say that the contextual clues were most useful when reading 'the argument between Agricola and Salvius'. The questionnaires here aligned to my own classroom observations, where I noticed that Group B were more confident in translating the story compared to Group A simply because they had focused on the story as an argument. In sum, my classroom observations and the questionnaires indicated that the titles were an especially strong form of contextual scaffolding for students.

Yet complicating this impression is another student questionnaire response which commented that they did not find the title particularly useful, claiming that 'the title argument is very vague'. However, while this student did not look at the title when reading the story, they did claim that they found the verbal discussion around the context of the story and characters to be useful. This student shows us that verbal explanations of stories are more important than can sometimes be assumed and we should not think that students can determine the context of the story simply from reading the title. I think that the title is one of the more useful and self-explanatory ones in the *CLC*: the title 'argument' presented with a picture of Agricola and Salvius looking sternly at each other makes it clear in my eyes that the story is going to involve an argument between Salvius and Agricola. However, the student's answer demonstrates that the implications of the title are not apparent for all students and verbal contextual clues are essential in guiding student understanding of stories.

While the classroom observations and student questionnaires indicated that the title was largely useful, the interviews painted a different picture because all seven students agreed that they did not use the title during translation. On one level, I think there may have been an initial problem in how I conducted the interview. Two students said that they did not use the title, and this may have influenced others to nod their heads and agree. I especially suspect that this might have been the case because it was the first question which I asked, and the students did not fully ease into the interview until the second question.

Yet on the other hand, the interview confirmed that the title's function is not clearly apparent to all students. S2 (student two) said that 'I sometimes look at it, but it never sticks in my head'. The same student also admitted that 'I'm not always sure what the point of the tile is'. This response was similar to one of the students on the questionnaire, who said that the title was 'very vague' and so at least some of the students in the interview agreed with this sentiment. The students' interview further demonstrates that titles are more effectively used as scaffolding when the teacher draws attention to how it is linked to the story.

Research findings: pictures

A surprising outcome of the questionnaires is that some students did not use the pictures when reading the story. I received responses such as 'the picture wasn't helpful, the drawings aren't that great' and 'the picture only shows two figures'. Yet it is important to note that for the question 'I used the story's title and accompanying picture when reading the Latin of the story *contentio*' there were two strongly disagrees, five disagrees, six agrees, and two strongly agrees. While not all students used the pictures as scaffolding, it is therefore not the case that they were completely unhelpful for all students. The answers of the questionnaires, then, do not completely contradict what I observed when teaching, where some students were explicitly referring to the picture when discussing why they had translated lines in certain ways.

Nevertheless, I did consider after the lesson why some students did not use the pictures, especially because I have found them a useful form of scaffolding in the past. In fact, Hunt has noted that pictures in the *CLC* can be used to teach students new vocabulary and immerse themselves in the Roman world (Hunt, 2016, 110). I became doubly suspicious that I may not have taught the pictures as effectively as I could have done when I read a student's answer: 'in other *CLC* stories I do use the pictures, but for this story in particular not so much'. Upon reflection, I think I could have been clearer at the start of the lesson who Agricola and Salvius were, as there was some confusion about the two characters, and I initially struggled with low-level classroom disruption when starting the lesson. In fact, when I was circulating and assessing student translations, I noticed that one student was confused who Agricola was because the word *agricola* means 'farmer' in English. The lesson has taught me that when you use pictures as scaffolding, you must be very clear when explaining who the characters are, and not simply assume that the students can figure it out for themselves or remember previous stories.

The interviews gave some insight into why some students found the pictures a useful form of scaffolding, but others did not. Some students, such as S1, S5, and S7, used the picture to get a general idea of what is happening in the story. This is an effective way of supporting learning. However, S4 told me that he used pictures solely to identify individual words. For example, he told me that he used the picture of the cat attacking Eutychus in *pro taberna Clementis* [in front of Clemens' shop][2] to help him identify that the word *felis* translates to 'cat' in English. Using pictures in this way is an effective support for learning vocabulary but the student did not typically use pictures as a way of guiding understanding of what is happening in the narrative.

Research findings: narrative contextual clues

In addition to the titles and pictures, I also provided verbal and written contextual clues for Group B about the narrative of the story. I talked with the class about the fact arguments frequently happen in stories when one character attacks another. We then discussed the kind of insults Salvius would be likely to make against Agricola which provided a framework for understanding his speech. These questions were then displayed on the projector and were visible for students to look at as they were translating.

- 'Think about what happened in the first half of the story. Agricola has just confronted Salvius. What typically happens in *CLC* stories when someone confronts another?'
- 'Agricola has told Salvius that he has supreme power in the province. This is a threat to Salvius. Think about which person in the Roman Empire has more power than Agricola. How might Salvius use this person's status to threaten Agricola?'
- 'We have seen in previous stories that Agricola is popular for his military successes in Britain. Think about how Salvius might try to undermine these successes to criticise Agricola.'

I also wrote out more simplified versions of these contextual clues on the whiteboard in case students wanted a more concise clue. I wrote 'Salvius and Agricola's argument' and 'What will Salvius use as insults?' 'The emperor's power and Agricola's military campaigns'. These clues were accompanied with line numbers to assist the students in predicting what would happen in the story.

I noticed in my classroom observations that the contextual clues gave a general framework which supported student understanding of the story and consequently their translations. For example, some of the students in Group A did not pick up on the fact Salvius was defending himself and attacking Agricola in his speech. One of the students initially translated *quam caecus es!* [How are you so blind!] as 'How blind am I!' before correcting himself when he noticed the *es*. This was despite the *CLC* stating that Salvius was *iratus* [angry] when he responded to Agricola. Group B did not make this same mistake since we had discussed in class that Salvius was defending himself and criticising Agricola.

Furthermore, some students in Group A were also confused by the line *tu ipse Imperatori id quod in Britannia facis explicare debes* [You yourself ought to explain to the emperor what you are doing in Britain] and misread it as 'You are the emperor who ought to explain what has happened in Britain'. This may seem like a strange error because Salvius is addressing Agricola, who is clearly not an emperor. However, it is very common for some of the students in this class to translate rashly and excitedly, not thinking about the actual sense of the story. In the case of Group B, since we had discussed and I then wrote on the board that Salvius was probably going to invoke the emperor Domitian's name opportunistically in his attack on Agricola, they generally did not mistake Salvius addressing Agricola as an emperor.

The questionnaires confirmed my impression that the contextual clues functioned as a general framework for reading the story. Yet the responses were even stronger than I expected, and I believe I underestimated how far the clues would help students understand the general gist and overview of the story. When I was teaching during my teacher training period, I often focused on specific lesson objectives regarding grammar, and I am still occasionally guilty of not giving due consideration to what is happening in the story itself. One of the students said that they used the contextual clues when reading 'complicated sentences as I had no idea how it would go'. Another student similarly attested that the clues helped them understand the 'gist of the story'. On one hand, the contextual clues have a vital function as scaffolding by guiding student understanding of the story. Yet my research findings also suggest that some students find it difficult to remember what is happening in the overarching narrative of the *CLC*, which is often more complex than it is given credit.

This sentiment was shared among all seven students in the interview. S7 told me that he used the contextual clues for understanding 'the general story' and that they are useful in this light because of how some passages 'can feel separate from the other stories'. S4 conferred, saying 'Yeah, I also used them most for the story. I found the context of Agricola helpful in reading the story'. Regarding the story *contentio*, S2 claimed that the general framework was particularly useful because he forgot who Salvius was: 'I wasn't sure who Salvius was. Sometimes the *CLC* jumps

about in the story and you forget who the characters are'. In fact, S1 said that he would find these contextual clues helpful in other stories: 'If there was a reference to a story that had happened a while ago then that would be more helpful'. The outcome of the interviews is clear: students value having a general framework of the story to aid them in translation. In fact, the students felt so strongly that they decided to go back to discussing the value of a general narrative contextual framework after I had finished the question and had planned to move on.

The questionnaires indicated that the contextual clues also aided students in understanding the characters. Specifically, the contextual clues guided the students to think about the tone of Agricola and Salvius' language and predict the kind of things they would say. To begin with, the clues got students to think about Agricola and Salvius' personalities, with one student commenting that they 'helped me understand the characters a bit more'. The students were able to determine that the different natures of each character would influence the words they were likely to use. One student answered that they found the contextual clues helpful in understanding 'Agricola's dialogue and mood'. Other students predicted that Salvius was going to get into an argument with Agricola and throw insults at him. For example: 'I knew that there may be some insults to come'. When I was preparing the lesson, I had specific lines in mind for each characters' speech which I thought the clues would assist in reading because they were especially tricky. Yet the clues also acted as a valuable scaffolding for helping students to get inside the heads of the characters and predict the general kind of comments that they would say.

The contextual clues proved more popular than I had anticipated and a key piece of feedback which I received in my questionnaires was a demand for more clues. One student said that 'A few more clues would have helped' and another expressed a similar desire: 'They were good, maybe a few more clues would be good'. Moreover, some students wanted more elaborate clues about the story. For example, I received feedback such as 'I wanted bigger clues' and 'Some of the clues could be expanded on a little'. Yet it is also important to note that this was not an opinion which was shared unanimously in the class. One student claimed that they did not want more contextual clues because 'I think that is all the context needed'. The data suggested that it could be beneficial to give students an option of using simpler or more elaborate contextual clues depending on their needs. Or, as Hunt has argued in favour of differentiation by input more generally, providing more support materials for students who struggle to read the Latin stories (Hunt, 2016, 61).

In the interviews, students were more diplomatic and did not say that they wanted more contextual clues in the lesson. Instead, they expressed a desire to have similar clues in other Latin reading activities. Perhaps the views of the seven students who attended the interview did not align with the students who answered the questionnaires. Yet it is also possible that the questionnaires have an advantage over interviews regarding feedback because students feel more at ease expressing their thoughts anonymously compared to when talking to a teacher face to face. On the one hand, if the questionnaires were not anonymous then I could have invited some of those students to interview and asked them to elaborate on their comments. However, if the questionnaires were not anonymous, it is also very likely that the students would have been more reticent in giving their honest thoughts on the lesson.

Finally, a point came up in the interviews which I did not observe in the classroom and was not written in the questionnaires: students valued discussing the contextual clues because it allowed them to talk about the *CLC* stories. On the one hand, these

discussions assisted the students in translation, as can be seen in S4's comments: 'The verbal conversation helps more. If there was no discussion I feel like, I'd be confused if they were just written on the board. I feel like that way generally'. Yet it is also important that these classroom discussions keep students engaged in lessons and, in the words of S1, makes the lessons 'less boring'. S5 similarly claimed that 'It makes the lesson more fun and engages you more. You don't really absorb anything if you just have to move from one line to the next'. Discussing contextual clues in class, then, also supports student engagement and passion for the subject. This point is not only important in keeping retention figures high, but a key responsibility for any teacher is to share their passion for the subject and inspire a similar enthusiasm in their students.

Conclusion

The upshot from these research findings is that students found the contextual clues a useful form of scaffolding in translating Latin stories. My classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews suggest that students can make predictions about what will happen in the passages by looking at the title and pictures. Students also used the narrative contextual clues as an aid in understanding the general framework of the *CLC* stories and the characters within them. These clues further helped students predict what would happen in the story and consequently guide them in their translations.

Of course, contextual clues are not a perfect form of scaffolding and have their flaws. For example, Markus and Ross (2004) caution that relying upon such scaffolding can damage students' Latin abilities in the long run, because it makes them too dependent upon context. In other words, Markus and Ross argue that teachers should not simply tell students what is happening in the story but encourage them to 'develop their own mental pictures/movies' and 'learn to read independently' (Markus and Ross, 2004, 84–85). I shared this concern, which is why I did not tell the students exactly what was going to happen in the story but asked them to consider what was likely to happen. Nevertheless, all forms of scaffolding must be eventually phased away, and contextual clues are most likely no different. Yet they have a clear use when used appropriately.

Finally, I want to conclude by answering a practical question which I imagine some will ask.

> Surely this kind of Latin teaching is best fit for a reading course like the *CLC* rather than other popular textbooks like those by John Taylor? Also, private schools have more room for this kind of experimentation rather than state schools, which must rely on tried and tested methods in their often severely underfunded and disadvantaged classroom sizes and time allocations.

I share these concerns. I currently work in a state-maintained school (albeit grammar)[3] which offers GCSE Latin as an A Level enrichment subject for any student so long as they received a grade 6 in English.[4] The course I offer is only two years long with classes at two hours a week and I use *Latin to GCSE* (Cullen and Taylor, 2016). I am perfectly happy with this programme and want Latin to be accessible to all students, but there is no doubt that Latin is self-evidently deeply unequal in how it is taught across the UK. Latin is also often under threat from being axed if student numbers are unsatisfactory and examination grades are not high, including at my own school. Changing 'conventional wisdom' is not an easy prospect. Nevertheless, I have continued to use these contextual clues in my own teaching and focus on the narratives of Cullen and Taylor's stories on Aeneas,

Roman heroes, Caesar, and the Roman emperors. I find that focusing on narratives and the forms of stories in my current lessons improves student engagement with Latin and aids their translation in much the same way as these research findings have suggested. Of course, more action research will need to be conducted to make more certain statements. But ultimately, reading is an essential skill in Latin, and it does not conflict with grammatical understanding. After all, the goal of Latin should be reading Latin texts.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631024000795.

Notes

1 'Contentio', Stage 26, p. 97, Cambridge Latin Course (UK 4th edition) (CSCP, 1998).

2 'pro taberna Clementis', Stage 18, p. 102, Cambridge Latin Course (UK 4th edition) (CSCP, 1998).

3 State-maintained is equivalent to a public school; a grammar school is a school which selects its students on academic ability at age 11.

4 GCSE is the standard English national examination at age 16; A level is at 18. GCSE examinations are graded 9-1, with 9 the highest. The average grade achieved in English Language in England in 2023 was 4.78 (a so-called 'pass' is 4).

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