

Grammar & CLC: Keeping it in Contextt

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The Cambridge Latin Course, like *Ecce Romani* and the Oxford Latin Course, is a reading-based textbook series. Reading-based textbooks have many positive features, and in CLC these include:

- more words met in context than traditional texts
- it is a whole language approach (versus treating Latin as a decipherable code)
- culture is incorporated into the Latin text
- there is a continuous storyline to keep the students interested
- usage is learned by repetition in context (inductive as opposed to preceptive)
- there are no drill and kill exercises

According to Gareth Morgan, “a ‘preceptive’ book will present rules first, and then use reading matter to illustrate and practise the rules that are given. An ‘inductive’ book will present the reading-matter first, and use examples from it to formulate (and, if possible, lead the student to formulate) the rules.” CLC is clearly an inductive text, as is stated in the teacher’s guide: “Because the course presents grammar in a controlled context, students learn the grammar and vocabulary through reading passages and remembering particular instances rather than from memorizing charts and applying grammatical rules or vocabulary to readings.”

Gone, indeed, are the drills on just morphological forms, those of singular to plural, nominative to accusative. Gone too is our old friend the noun chart, that organizational tool, our decoder key for that secret code of a language—Latin. But is that actually bad? Or is it about time that Latin was viewed as a true, vibrant language that can be read and understood by just going from left to right (not hunting the verb), that can be acquired by usage (in this case, reading) like modern languages?

I personally like CLC; the more I use it, the more clever I think it is. However, the authors never had my students and perhaps could not understand the difficulties students have, especially young students, in organizing information, forming rules, and developing their own strategies for learning the language. These concepts include, after all, higher level thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis.

Of course it is our job as teachers to form the bridge between textbook and student, and sometimes it is difficult to see exactly what is needed to make a strong bridge or indeed how big that bridge needs to be. Many teachers find that their students do not learn the noun endings well enough and want to blame the textbook for lack of structure. Others will provide structure in the only way they know how—having students learn the traditional noun ending chart—but this goes against the philosophy of CLC.

I personally am not satisfied with either of these options. Structure is needed, yes, but structure in context, structure that will bridge the gap between student and textbook, structure which will not undermine the underlying philosophy of CLC. My biggest problem with the noun ending

chart is that it totally lacks meaning in isolation. It is coldly artificial and devoid of the life of the language.

The Model Sentences

By Stage 8 in CLC, students have now been introduced to the 1st 3 declensions, nominative and accusative, singular and plural. It is time to organize. I provide the students with the following sentences of my own design:

decl.	#	Nom.	Acc.	Verb	tense
1st	S	<i>ancilla</i>	<i>statuam</i>	<i>laudat.</i>	present
decl.					tense
	Pl	<i>ancillae</i>	<i>statuas</i>	<i>laudant.</i>	
2nd	S	<i>dominus</i>	<i>anulum</i>	<i>laudabat.</i>	imperfect
decl.					tense
	Pl	<i>domini</i>	<i>anulos</i>	<i>laudabant.</i>	
3rd	S	<i>mater*</i>	<i>infantem</i>	<i>laudavit.</i>	perfect
decl.					tense
	Pl	<i>matres</i>	<i>infantes</i>	<i>laudaverunt.</i>	

On the day these are introduced we discuss what they mean, copy them down (including the labels) and then chant each line 6 times—three times with all the words visible and then erasing a word but chanting the whole line until no words remain. Our warm-up for the rest of the week is chanting them 3 times each, then using flashcards to drill new vocabulary followed by “declining” some of these words through the sentences. I ask the students which set of sentences to use (1st declension, 2nd declension, or 3rd declension). Once determined, we do a global substitution which results in sentences like these:

1st	S	<i>tuba</i>	<i>tubam</i>	<i>laudat.</i>	present
decl.	Pl	<i>tubae</i>	<i>tubas</i>	<i>laudant.</i>	tense

Inevitably the students will ask, “What does that mean?” “Why,” I reply, “ ‘The trumpet praises the trumpet. The trumpets praise the trumpets.’ ” We laugh at it being nonsensical but then discuss how we still understand the structure—subject/verb/direct object—while “drilling” the endings. The beauty of these sentences is that the endings are arranged in a chart while retaining meaning from the context of the sentences; there is structure with meaning.

In Stage 9 we modify the sentences slightly (and I have warned the students that I would do so):

decl.	#	Nom.	Dat.	Acc.	Verb	tense
1st	S	<i>ancilla</i>	<i>puellae</i>	<i>statuam</i>	<i>dat.</i>	present
decl.						tense
	Pl	<i>ancillae</i>	<i>puellis</i>	<i>statuas</i>	<i>dant.</i>	
2nd	S	<i>dominus</i>	<i>servo</i>	<i>anulum</i>	<i>dabat.</i>	imperfect
decl.						tense
	Pl	<i>domini</i>	<i>servis</i>	<i>anulos</i>	<i>dabant.</i>	

3rd decl.	S	<i>mater*</i>	<i>patri</i>	<i>infantem</i>	<i>dedit.</i>	perfect tense
	PI	<i>matres</i>	<i>patribus</i>	<i>infantes</i>	<i>dederunt.</i>	

To remember the order of the case names across the columns of nouns, we learn the mnemonic device “Never Date A Verb (or Virgin, according to some of my students).”

By the time we add in the Dative, students are beginning to understand that we are focusing on the endings. They are beginning to understand how to “decline” nouns through the sentences and even add adjectives, demonstrating what the book has already been showing: adjective/noun agreement. For instance, if the adjective *notus* is in our vocabulary words to master, we will then make:

<i>dominus notus</i>	<i>servo noto</i>	<i>anulum notum</i>	<i>dabat.</i>
<i>domini noti</i>	<i>servis notis</i>	<i>anulos notos</i>	<i>dabant.</i>

Yes, we have “The famous master was giving the famous ring to the famous slave.” Most assuredly at some point in their Latin education students will need to become familiar with the traditional noun chart and what is truly meant by declining a noun, and such exercises as these will familiarize them with concept of declining.

If I want to focus on just one case, say the dative case, I will do some substitution drills using our white boards. For instance, I will have the students copy down the sentences for a particular declension on their white boards, asking them to underline the datives. Then I will read out the sentence with a new word for the dative, which they will put into Latin. Thus, if I call out “The slavegirl gives a statue to the woman. The slavegirls give statues to the women,” the students will write *feminae* and *feminis* in large letters on their white boards and then hold them up for me to spot check. At the end I repeat the correct Latin sentences (not just the substituted words) and provide the English translations, thus reinforcing both the form and meaning. Whether we are “declining” a noun through the sentences or using them for a substitution drill, the best part is that these drills are always in the context of a sentence so they are never devoid of meaning.

After students have become familiar with these model sentences and have had an opportunity to memorize them, I introduce a worksheet (which is in your handout) that takes them through the various levels of questioning found in Bloom’s Taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Young students do not automatically use higher level thinking skills without guidance. The point of the worksheet is to give the students an opportunity to consider why we learn the model sentences, how to find the base/stem of a word and what the endings are, whether they are truly of value in their Latin education, and whether they can think of other ways to organize the information (in this case, noun endings) for internalization and mastery. Students are more willing to memorize the sentences once it is demonstrated how critical it is that they learn their noun endings.

However, as you may have noticed, we are still missing genitives and ablatives. In Stage 17 the genitive is introduced piggy-backing on prepositional phrases. It seems only natural to take advantage of this relationship to teach the last two cases. Thus I introduce:

<i>in villa</i>	<i>feminae</i>	in the house of the woman
<i>in villis</i>	<i>feminarum</i>	in the houses of the women
<i>in horto</i>	<i>amici</i>	in the garden of the friend
<i>in hortis</i>	<i>amicorum</i>	in the gardens of the friends
<i>in nave</i>	<i>senis</i>	in the ship of the old man
<i>in navibus</i>	<i>senum</i>	in the ships of the old men

By the time these are introduced in 8th grade, students have come to greatly appreciate the usefulness of the original model sentences.

Metaphrasing & Reading

The importance of learning the noun endings is reinforced when we read, especially when we take the time to slow down and use a reading card. The reading cards I use were developed at the University of Michigan. These cards, with their clipped upper left-hand corners, train the reader to look only at the current word in the sentence and all that came before, and to never ever jump ahead or skip around. We ask ourselves these three questions as we read:

1. *Quid video?* What do I see? (part of speech/morphology)
2. *Ergo, quid habeo?* Therefore, what do I have? (syntactic function)
3. *Ergo, quid exspecto?* Therefore, what do I expect? (morpho-syntactic expectations)

So if we have a sentence like *Quintus servo . . .* when we get to *servo* we can identify that it is dative (“to” or “for”), and that we should expect a giving verb. An easier way to express this is by “metaphrasing.” For nominative plus dative plus accusative plus verb we could metaphrase it this way: “Someone verbed something to someone.” Therefore, for the phrase *Quintus servo* we would say “Quintus verbed something to the slave.” If the next word is *pecuniam*, we then say *Quintus verbed money to the slave*. When we finally meet *tradidit* we can complete the sentence: *Quintus handed over the money to the slave*. We are in essence retraining the brain to hold information until the end of the sentence (when we will have finished the complete thought) plus giving the brain a framework in which to retain the information. Metacognition—understanding the thinking patterns we use to process language—is something students are capable of, but not solely on their own. As teachers we can show them through metaphrasing how to retrain the brain in order to read Latin in word order.

Metaphrasing can be used to transform “drill and kill” morphology exercises into something meaningful. There is, unquestionably, a usefulness to drills which work forms; they do help students understand the nature of word stems and endings. When I do use such drills, I always make sure there is a metaphrasing component:

acc. s.	acc. pl.	metaphrasing
amicum >	<u>amicos</u> >	Someone verbed <u>the friends</u> .

The simple addition of the metaphrasing keeps the drill in the context of reading and comprehending, and complements nicely the work we do with the reading cards.

I have recently come up with a way to combine the model sentences and metaphrasing. I have students pick one 1st, 2nd, and 3rd declension noun. We decline each in the sentences on a transparency, spacing the sentences and words far enough apart to use the transparency as a “Flyswatter” grid. (*Flyswatter is a review game. Make a grid of vocabulary items on a transparency for an overhead projector, then divide the class into two teams. Have a student from each team approach the overhead screen and give each one a flyswatter. Call out the English of one of the Latin words on the screen and the first one to hit it with the flyswatter wins a point for his/her team.*) I then call out a metaphrased sentence and the students compete to hit the word in the appropriate case that I actually translate. For instance, if for 1st declension our word is nauta, the sentences would look like this:

1 st	S	nauta	nautae	nautam	dat.	present
decl.	Pl	nautae	nautis	nautas	dant.	tense

The metaphrased sentences to choose from would be:

The sentence I use:

The correct answer:

The sailor verbed something to someone. **nauta**: Nominative S

Someone verbed **the sailor** to someone. **nautam**: Accusative S

Someone verbed something **to the sailor**. **nautae**: Dative S

The sailors verbed something to someone. **nautae**: Nom. Pl

Someone verbed **the sailors** to someone. **nautas**: Acc. Pl

Someone verbed something **to the sailors**. **nautis**: Dative Pl

The students enjoy this exercise because it is a game, and it reinforces the connection between endings and the function of a word in a sentence.

Final Thoughts

I have struggled over the years with my own inability to read authentic Latin with fluency and ease. Part of this is because I was never trained to “read” Latin or to treat it as a real, vibrant language. The more we understand about the nature of reading Latin specifically and about the nature of teaching reading in foreign language classes in general, the better we will be able to train our students to connect with the ancient authors whom we value so highly.

If I can offer any advice at all, it is to dare to think outside of the box. Do not be afraid to go against tradition and try something new, something fresh of your own creation. Re-examine what

your goals are and how to meet those goals. If your goal is to teach students to become solid readers of Latin, then think of the best ways you can support teaching Latin in context. Consult reading teachers at your school, read books and articles on teaching reading to ESL and foreign language classes. Most of all, trust your instinct.