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Research Article

Vocabulary acquisition in the language classroom: what it is, how it works, which strategies and approaches are suitable for Latin instruction

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Abstract

This paper aims to guide the training of all Latin instructors and learners who want to optimise the process of acquiring the language by applying the results of research carried out in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), specifically here those related to the acquisition of vocabulary. Consequently, some theoretical considerations on the psycholinguistic operations that govern vocabulary learning are first offered, in order to build a better understanding of language acquisition and to make instructors and learners more knowledgeable about the vocabulary learning process, from the noticing of an unknown word and its integration into the subject's competence to the expansion and development of knowledge about the acquired words. The theoretical aspects of vocabulary learning will be illustrated at all times with practical examples taken from methods and books for learning Latin, as well as, in the fourth section, with a wide catalogue of practical advice – *must-do* items for the class – that can be easily implemented by Latin instructors.

Keywords: second language acquisition, vocabulary learning, Latin pedagogy, teaching applications and strategies

Introduction

Recent experience teaches us that, when it comes to the teaching of Latin, for many scholars and professors the debate remains focused on convincing legislators and public opinion about the usefulness and benefits of studying the language. And this even occurs with professionals who belong to institutions in which Latin, despite the difficulties, has still secured its place in the curriculum in the past years. For some others, however, the point is to demonstrate that success in the acquisition of Latin depends to a greater extent on the choice of the most adequate methodology and its correct implementation.[1]

Indeed, in a paper published in the spring of 2013 in the journal *Teaching Classical Languages*, Professor Jacqueline Carlon, one of the most active contributors to the modernisation of Latin pedagogy, considers in brief the main lines of thought in current research on language acquisition and their pedagogical implications for the language classroom. Taking as a theoretical foundation that such notions and principles were largely amenable to the acquisition of classical languages, Carlon points out 'some of the research areas specific to Latin that would be immensely useful to instructors', including the dominant role of vocabulary in a language in which word order can be so variable, and highlighting

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the importance of contextualising vocabulary to facilitate its acquisition (Carlon, 2013, 112).

Mastering the vocabulary of a language is the starting point for the fluent and effective performance of its skills; this is beyond any doubt for most researchers on SLA. The numbers speak for themselves: Schmitt (2008, 329) talks about the need to control 8,000 to 9,000-word families for adequate reading comprehension (that means 95% to 99% of word coverage or a rate of one unknown word every 50) and 5,000 to 7,000-word families for oral discourse. One must, of course, take into account the factor of interpersonal variety – these figures may not be universally valid – but specific attention to words turns out to be unavoidable, and this applies for Latin learners as well. What is more, the role of vocabulary is shown to be critical when analysed within the framework of the recent theories about *input processing* and *processing instruction* that have been developed mainly by Van Patten (2004). Through a series of basic principles, these theories try to explain the procedural operations of the brain when it receives a linguistic message. These principles include the so-called *Primacy of Content Words*, which claims that 'L2[2] learners come to the task of acquisition knowing that words exist and seek these as the key elements to the meaning of an utterance', or the *Lexical Preference Principle*, a natural consequence of the former, which defends the idea that 'learners will process lexical items for meaning before grammatical forms when both encode the same meaning' (Benatti and Van Patten, 2015).[3] Thus, in a phrase like *Antonius heri discessit*, the notion of 'past tense' will be processed by the learner from the adverb *heri*, rather than from the perfect form of the verb *discedere*, that is *discessit*.

On top of this, we must also consider that mastering the vocabulary of a language means knowing not only the form of the words, i.e. their pronunciation and spelling, but also their frequency, register and possible collocations or lexical chunks, not to mention the existence and use of idioms. As a consequence, the latest research usually distinguishes between the size of a speaker's mental lexicon and its depth, and experts have moved on from insights that highlight the incidental path for vocabulary acquisition, i.e. that vocabulary is acquired incidentally through reading and interaction, as a by-product of comprehension (Boyd Zimmerman, 1997, 15),[4] to opinions such as Schmitt's, who claims that 'it can't be assumed that an adequate lexis will be simply picked up from exposure to language tasks focusing on linguistic aspects or communication' (Schmitt, 2008, 329).

It is true that in Van Patten's (2010) division of what he calls 'the two broad domains of language' (on the one hand, learner's mental representation and, on the other, linguistic skills, both receptive and productive) the lexicon is said to be located in the former, with some of its features being that it is implicit, underlying and abstract, and consequently, the acquisition of vocabulary will inevitably occur in an incidental way. But according to these theories, there's still a place for instruction in this domain of language, in this case, on how to interfere with and optimise the processing strategies that our brain activates by default while exposed to input – the aforementioned *Processing Instruction*.[5] As Laufer (2005) remarks, vocabulary requires a different approach which incorporates explicit attention to learning the lexical items themselves, since 'learners who understand the overall message often do not pay attention to the precise meanings of individual words' (Laufer, 2005, 226). In addition, guessing from context is often unreliable, especially if the learner does not know at least 98% of the words in the discourse; besides, words which are easily understood (guessed) from context may not generate enough engagement to be learned and remembered, and new words which learners have come across in discourse need to be encountered again relatively quickly to avoid being forgotten. The uninstructed position, as pointed out by Laufer (2005), assumes that learners acquire vocabulary merely from input and especially through reading: when learners encounter a new word, they notice it as unknown and infer its meaning using linguistic and non-linguistic clues that may lead to making a correct guess, and consequently, to retaining a partial or precise meaning of the word; after learners' first exposure to the word which might be remembered only partially or not at all, new encounters will facilitate this process of reinitiating or expanding lexical knowledge, and remarkable cumulative gains in vocabulary knowledge will occur over time if the learner reads regularly.[6] But it is doubtful whether we can take these assumptions for granted and universally applicable, and consequently, it seems highly advisable to develop particular, proactive and principled techniques for the correct treatment of vocabulary in the language classroom.

With the intention of contributing to the work of those who believe that pedagogical research on language acquisition is crucial in the field of Classics, and the firm conviction that the an overhaul of the practices and techniques used to teach classical languages can favourably make their acquisition more rapid and inclusive, we present below the results of a brief investigation into the acquisition of vocabulary in language learning, the pedagogical implications that arise from these theoretical principles, and the ways in which they can be applied to real practices in a classical-languages classroom.

What is vocabulary acquisition?

In a very easy, very simple definition we could say that to acquire words is to integrate them into one's mental lexicon – which belongs, following Van Patten's model, to the abstract, implicit and underlying domain of the language that is called mental representation. However, to evaluate or determine the knowledge of the L2 vocabulary acquired by the learner, second language researchers normally establish two main stages in relation to the actual use of the words that L2 learners exhibit. We are now entering the field of skills, the other broad domain of language: *receptive knowledge*, when learners are able to comprehend the words they receive (that is, the words they read or listen to); and *productive knowledge* (that is, the capability to produce words in a L2 while writing or speaking) (Melka, 1997). Receptive knowledge of words is meant to be initial, declarative, conscious, passive or explicit; while the productive is procedural, subconscious, active and implicit. The former results into a sort of *offline* ability to understand or translate from the L2; while the latter refers to an *online* ability to actively and fluently use L2 words needed during communication.

It may be worthwhile for L2 instructors to understand this double distinction in order to adjust their expectations in the classroom and to assess learners objectively, with the awareness that receptive knowledge can be considered an early or not-so-mature phase in the acquisition of the L2, while productive knowledge is obviously the advanced, mature stage, closest to proficiency in word knowledge. Applied, however, to the knowledge of classical languages (or at least, to the acquisition of Latin) this distinction turns out to be crucial. This is because Latin instructors and learners, in general, will be more interested in the receptive skills of the language (that is, in correctly understanding the message they are encountering) than in the productive ones (that is, in creating their own messages and communicating). In fact, despite the uninformed opinions of some professors who mistakenly conclude that communication or creative exercises in Latin are an end in-and-of-themselves, or rather a type of entertainment with which to make our subject more popular among students and society (Alcalde-Diosdado, 2000), in the immersive, reading or inductive-contextual methods, the weight of productive activities is noticeably less prominent, and attempts to use Latin in a communicative or active way are in most cases a means to provide a greater amount of input in the class (Bailey, 2016).[7]

What is more, if the implementations of strategies aimed at increasing or developing productive knowledge of vocabulary in the Latin classroom were abandoned or neglected, this would also be endorsed by the revision of what is known as the *combination hypothesis*, proposed by Mondria and Wiersma (2004). This hypothesis claims that 'the combination of a receptive and productive vocabulary learning approach would lead to a higher and more stable level of receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge' (Mondria and Wiersma, 2004, 80). In clearer terms, strategies and techniques focused on the acquisition of receptive knowledge of words can also result in the acquisition of productive knowledge and vice versa. However, a study carried out by the aforementioned experts showed that, despite the general expectation and the common opinion in the profession, learning techniques and class strategies applied for the expansion of productive knowledge had a positive effect primarily on the increase of productive knowledge itself, while they barely had an impact on the development of receptive knowledge. Likewise, the reverse is true: focusing on receptive learning of words increases the receptive knowledge of them.

What, then, is the objective of acquiring a productive vocabulary knowledge, when our subject's main object of study resides in understanding a textual legacy, for which the learner basically needs receptive knowledge? Would it be justified to put aside all activities or strategies related to the domain of productive knowledge, which are precisely the ones that take the longest and require extra effort for L2 learners? There is, however, still room for doubt: even if the so-called *combination hypothesis* lacks validity or the results of combined work on both types of word learning, receptive and productive, cannot be precisely measured in terms of mutual impact and the increase in both types, there are other theories that must be taken into account. It is worth mentioning here the so-called *levels of processing theory*, proposed in the early 1970s by Craik and Lockhart (1972). According to their *Levels of Processing model*, the recall and retention of stimuli is in direct proportion to the depth of mental processing. In other words, deeper levels of analysis produce more elaborate, longer-lasting and stronger memory traces.

The pedagogical application of this theory seems logical: if we want to facilitate greater vocabulary retention among our students, we need to promote greater cognitive effort in the classroom. In other words, an extended (in terms of time spent and exposure) and varied (in terms of manipulation and use through different activities, techniques, approaches) vocabulary processing is needed. In short, if the goal is to achieve greater engagement with the words, the application of an exclusively receptive approach will be insufficient for Latin learners as well, and only the promotion of activities, tasks and exercises that include both approaches, receptive and productive, will ensure the kind of elaborate processing required for the acquisition of a language.

Again, it is not about what we primarily need to do with Latin (that is, understanding what we read), but about the cognitive processes that lead to the mastery of a language, whether this is Latin, Greek or any modern language. So, the answer is yes: the use of productive activities in the classical-languages classroom is fully justified as a subsidiary means to achieve the primary objective pursued, that is, a degree of linguistic knowledge sufficient to understand the written message. In other words, 'the concomitant active use of the language in writing and even more so in speaking (which is much more difficult if one aims at consistently maintaining correct construction) is an incomparable aid to acquiring a more instinctive knowledge and control of all these elements' (Minkova and Tunberg, 2005, 9).

How does vocabulary acquisition work?

As mentioned above, different stages are considered in the acquisition of an L2 word from when an L2 learner encounters it for the first time to when it becomes a part of their linguistic competence and can be automatically retrieved when needed. We are going to follow here Jiang's model (2004), which consists of two clearly differentiated main dimensions. The first one covers relevant subprocesses for vocabulary acquisition that include the initial registration of a new word and its retention; its consolidation in learners' mental lexicon (for which the strategies used in class and the frequency of use and practice will make the difference, assuring consolidation and avoiding loss); the conversion of passive or receptive knowledge into productive and active skills; and the final integration into learners' competence.

One might think, not surprisingly, that vocabulary acquisition is completed when learners achieve the last stage of this first dimension, as they have increased the breadth and depth of their mental lexicon and are capable of using the lexical units actively and automatically. However, experts warn about the need to move on to the second dimension, which has to do with the content of the words that have been integrated in competence: this includes processes like enrichment, expansion and refinement of the lexical information represented in a lexical entry. It is in this phase that learners go from fluent to knowledgeable, as semantic depth, richness and organisation are involved here. The transition from one stage to another is called *semantic development* and successful acquisition seems to be directly affected by it.

We can use a clear illustration of this process with an example involving the verb *petere* and how semantic development is promoted in the book *Via Latina: de vita et moribus Romanorum* (Aguilar and Tárrega, 2022).[8] When learners encounter this verb for the first time – in Chapter number II – it is used with the meaning of movement and the intention of Remus' robbers' intention to reach Alba Longa. Thus, in this chapter's *lectio tertia*[9] learners encounter sentences such as *latrones oppidum Albam Longam petunt* [the robbers walk to the town of Alba Longa], followed by similar expressions like *Romulus et socii eius oppidum petunt* [Romulus and his allies head to the town] and *gemini oppidum petunt* [the twins make for the town]. With the help of the glosses and images included in the book's margins and their teacher's help and guidance (gestures, instantiation or communication of meaning in another form, including L1 translations) they come to the conclusion that Latin *petere* is similar or equivalent to English 'to walk to, go to or for, reach or head to'. Next, if retrieval and practice are frequent enough and learners are required to use the lexical item, it will be satisfyingly stored and, as we said above, integrated into competence – to this end, chapter II contains some exercises that require the use of the verb *petere* with this initial meaning, and it appears with the same meaning and value in chapter number III.

It is not without intention that we have mentioned references to L1 here, since for most researchers they are considered unavoidable during the first stage of semantic development, the so-called comprehension stage. According to Jiang (2004), during this initial dimension, an L2 unit will be linked to semantic or conceptual representations that already exist in learners' mental representation. The mapping of a first-encountered L2 word onto a pre-existing L1 translation or meaning is called *semantic transfer* and 'it is likely to occur as far as there is an existing word or concept that is similar in meaning to the target word, no matter what strategies are used by the teacher to convey the meaning of the new word' (Jiang, 2004, 104). Many L2 instructors are reluctant to use L1 references in their classes as they want to avoid interference while the L2 mental representation is developing. However, psycholinguist studies demonstrate that the L1 is active during L2 lexical processing; so, as Schmitt (2008) remarks, 'it seems perfectly sensible to exploit it when it is to our advantage' (Schmitt, 2008, 337).

Relying on the L1 word in the initial, comprehension, stage of vocabulary learning will make more cognitive resources available for learners to comprehend and store the lexical unit, not to mention the time saved in the class and free to use for other exercises or activities that may be more effective for lexical processing. Nation (2001) points out that translating from L1 can be criticised for taking time away from L2 and for encouraging the idea that there are exact equivalences between L1 and L2. But different stages of learning require different approaches, and using L1 references in an initial stage can result in quick, simple, direct and easy understanding of words. The problem is that the link between the L1 concept or meaning and the L2 word would not always be sufficient because

they do not share identical semantic properties. Semantic transfer will allow the use of the L2 word to some extent – normally, covering core meanings of the lexical unit – but restructuring of the semantic content transferred from L1 will soon be required for specific, accurate and idiomatic – peripherical, figurative or connotational – semantic structures for new L2 words to develop.

Returning to the example of *petere* and its use in *Via Latina*, after the first encounter with the content of 'to walk to, go for or to, reach or head to' that is presented in Chapter II, an encounter with a second meaning is provided in Chapter IV through examples like *Horatius primum Curiatium petit* [Horatius attacks the first of the Curiatii] and *Romanus secundum Curiatium petit eumque necat!* [The Roman attacks the second of the Curiatii and kills him!]. Learners will check the original semantic content they already learnt and predictably perceive some conflict, mismatch or breakdown in understanding that will require restructuring: the development stage of vocabulary acquisition is starting and will come to the end with the emergence of an L2 word in learners' mental lexicon endowed with modified and fine-tuned semantic content. From this point onward, new encounters will be facilitated with new morphosyntactic properties or syntactic contexts that will once again call for checking and restructuring of the learned units, as in Chapter VI with the collocation *auxilium petit*, meaning 'to ask for' [he asks for help], or in Chapter XI with the phrase *tribunatum petit* with the meaning 'to apply for' [he applies for the tribuniship].

Thus, it is not unreasonable for Ghanbari and Marzban (2014) to claim that 'learning vocabulary (…) can't ever be seen as fully mastered. Expansion and elaboration of vocabularies extends across a lifetime' (Ghanbari and Marzban, 2014, 3854). Powerful, quality context and repeated exposure will facilitate a process that is highly unpredictable due to personal and lexical factors. In addition, native conceptual patterns are difficult to overcome once they have been created and strengthened through retrieval and practice, so that natural exposure will often show up as an insufficient stimulus for semantic restructuring and development to happen. As Jiang (2004) sees it, instructional intervention will be needed at this point, either explicit, with direct correction or explanation of the cross-language differences and similarities, or less direct, through the indication of unsuccessful communication. As regards the given example, the verb *petere* and its use in *Via Latina*, rich exposure to it and retrieval with varied meanings in readings and exercises will facilitate semantic development.

Approaches and strategies

What has been said so far strongly suggests that vocabulary acquisition is 'multifaceted' (Schmitt, 2008, 343) and that consolidation and refinement of vocabulary can only be achieved by adopting an approach that covers all aspects of word knowledge – not solely meaning. To encourage this in the language class, Nation (2001) proposes a four-strand approach in which each component has equal attention and emphasis and provides for the different dimensions of vocabulary learning mentioned before, that is, from learning of new information about lexical items up to consolidation and enhancement of that knowledge. These four strands are: (1) meaning-focused input, (2) meaning-focused output, (3) language-focused learning, and (4) fluency development.

The first one, meaning-focused input, consists of providing opportunities for our students to learn vocabulary through exposure to language, for which meaningful and interesting contexts will be needed. As learners will be focused on message, a high rate of known words will be required here (at least 95% of the words used), but unknown and unfamiliar units can be also conveyed at this point; learners will notice and understand these through different strategies, such as guessing from context, reciprocal teaching, negotiating or an instructor's intervention communicating meaning.[10] Activities such as extensive reading or listening to stories are indicated for this approach. The combination of reading and listening, as proposed in *Via Latina* with the recorded voices of different speakers (*auditiones*)[11] has also proved to be effective, as well as instructors' instructions in L2, an invaluable source of stimuli for learners.

The second strand of this model concerns meaning-focused output, that is, opportunities to learn words through communication tasks or activities. Conditions here will prove very similar to the meaning-focused input approach, including the need for a focus on information, having at least 95% word-coverage and being encouraged to use unfamiliar units. Also, a supportive input will make the difference, giving the learners the necessary stimulus for noticing, understanding and actively using the units. Communication activities or tasks can consist of guided and prepared writing exercises,[12] but it is important to mention here Carbonell's (2010) concerns about the shortage of communicative methodologies applied to classical languages, since even those methods which claim the use of Ancient Greek or Latin as a 'living language' and provide opportunities for an oral use of the language, do not offer real, spontaneous communicative situations.[13]

However, experts also call for caution on this point: as research has shown and Carlon (2013) opportunely warns, 'in the process of learning any language, native or foreign, accurate understanding comes long before correct production', which will emerge fluent and accurate to the extent that the mental representation of the target language becomes solid and deep (Carlon, 2013, 108). Thus, adjusting our expectations in the classroom is key, in addition to focusing 'our requirements on production that will build skills rather than frustrate the learner' (Carlon, 2013, 108). Last but not least, it is worth remembering that output is not only important as the culmination of the process of mastering a language, but also an essential part of the process itself, as the *levels of processing theory* noted above makes clear, not to mention the positive affective stimuli that learners can receive through the actual use of the language to communicate.

The third strand consists of direct teaching and explicit learning activities about words, that is, language-focused learning that will draw specific attention to target vocabulary. The underlying thought here is that even when rich and repeated exposure can cover the first stage of the vocabulary acquisition process, that is, the comprehension stage, it will not provide enough impetus for the second to initiate, that is, for semantic restructuring and development to happen. Jiang (2004) remarks that 'instructional intervention is needed to overcome plateaus in semantic development' (Jiang, 2004, 121). Thus, instructors and learners will maintain focus on language items, working out strategies for vocabulary learning that will be implemented through a wide range of activities from intensive reading to more traditional vocabulary activities.[14]

With the conviction that is necessary to combine incidental and implicit vocabulary instruction with explicit instruction activities, Sökmen (1997, 237) lists a set of seven guidelines for this approach that may be worth recalling for instructors:

(1) 'Build a large sight vocabulary', based either on frequency or difficulty of words, or both; priming glosses – lists with words before reading – will help to avoid confusion, ambiguity or false cognates, while prompting glosses – those given with the text

– can be useful for less ambiguous lexical items. Encouraging students to have vocabulary notebooks or to make their own collections of words can be motivating and lead to better retention of lexical units. Words can be reviewed with a periodicity previously established or agreed upon with the students, such as spending ten minutes at the end of each class or a weekly class dedicated to them;

(2) 'Integrate new words with old words': since human lexicon is meant to be a network of associations, a web-like structure with interconnected links, it is incumbent upon instructors to help learners stablish and organise connections. A large assortment of activities can be implemented here for promoting the integration of new material into existing units, from building semantic maps that graphically show word connections, to semantic scales and activities focused on grouping by strong bonds of synonymy and antonymy or association with the same semantic field or lexical category;[15]

(3) 'Provide a number of encounters' that allow learners to note frequency, the company that words keep, their register and syntactic behaviour, and their possible forms and derivations: this will assure that accurate knowledge of the units develops. Sökmen (1997)[16] remarks here that 'recalling' words leads to better retention than presenting them as new, so that regular intervals for calling up words and subsequent retrieval experiences have to be established by learners. Traditional vocabulary activities such as *cloze exercises*, paraphrasing, associations will guarantee these encounters, but informal practice through games can offer other useful stimuli for vocabulary retention;[17]

(4) 'Promote a deep level of processing', since words encoded with elaboration and those that are manipulated by learners and related to their personal experiences are remembered more consistently, along with those that are presented by instructors;

(5) 'Facilitate imaging and concreteness', since the human brain contains a network of verbal and non-verbal information for words;[18] when words are presented with images or the learning process triggers the emergence and association of a word with memories, later recall will be easier for information that is not only verbally stored. Random material is difficult to memorise, but once learners make it concrete – by linking words to personal experiences, current events or real-life comparisons – retention and consolidation of vocabulary will be easier;

(6) Engagement with words can also happen 'using a variety of techniques' that include instructional strategies – such as routines that focus on words and their definitions by searching in dictionaries, highlighting and glossing, copying, paraphrasing and matching – word unit analyses – recognition of affixes and roots, or having a list of 'master words' can be also effective for acquisition of a language like Latin, an inflectional one with high levels of lexical formation through composition and derivation procedures – mnemonic devices – acoustic and verbal, such as poetry, rhymes or songs, or visual, like flash cards – oral production – as in role playing, dialogues, pair work, group discussion – , and last but not least;

(7) 'Encourage independent learners' strategies', as most vocabulary learning will take place outside the classroom[19] (Sökmen, 1997, 237)

The fourth strand is concerned with fluency development for already learnt and frequently used words, so even if the focus is still on the message, it will not be suitable to use marginally familiar words and certainly not for unknown vocabulary. The objective of the class time that will be dedicated to fluency is to pressure learners to perform faster, that is, to recognise or produce words in a timely manner that enables real-time language use. Fluency therefore affects not solely oral skills, but also reading comprehension, the ultimate goal to which most Latin students aspire. As rightly noted by Schmitt (2008), 'if the vocabulary recognition speed is too slow, then reading turns into a slow decoding process and it becomes impossible to understand the flow of the text' (Schmitt, 2008, 346).[20] Strategies for developing fluency in the classroom range from traditional instructional proposals – such as appropriacy judgements or sentence completion exercises[21] – to oral practices through pair or group work challenging classmates in short, simple, games,[22] but also incidental approaches like intensive and extensive reading – such as working with a class text or readers.[23]

Conclusions

In this paper we have examined the role of vocabulary as a determinant factor in language acquisition, an idea that needs to be reinforced in the pedagogy of classical languages, in which, traditionally, vocabulary learning has been given sporadic attention in the face of the overwhelming importance given to grammar learning. To this end, we have considered it relevant to describe, firstly, the psycholinguistic processes that lead to the acquisition of vocabulary, from the noticing of an unknown word to the expansion and enrichment of its knowledge. In this way, we intend to guide and optimise the work of the instructors in the Latin class, who, knowing the details of the mental operations that lead to the acquisition of vocabulary, will be better prepared to focus on effective strategies and activities in the classical-languages class. However, we have not neglected the practical part or the pedagogical applications of the theories and hypotheses on vocabulary acquisition for the classical-language classroom; in this sense, we have contributed a large number of ideas that, at an organisational and individual level, can help us to optimise the time invested in vocabulary acquisition.

From both approaches, theoretical and practical, we can draw some basic conclusions. First, that vocabulary acquisition requires a many-sided, multiform, and varied approach to be both appropriate – as different stages of vocabulary acquisition need different strategies and methods – and effective in the long term. Thus, even when the focus will be primarily on creating meaning through multifarious tasks involving meaningful input and output as well as fluency-development exercises and tasks – meaning focused instruction – there must also be room for form-focused instruction, that is, drawing learners' attention to tasks where deepening the knowledge of a word is a task in-and-of itself. Second, vocabulary acquisition is a cumulative process that extends over time through repeated encounters and specific attention to target words. As said before, even when an important part of learning words will happen outside the classroom, it is incumbent upon instructors to facilitate and renovate opportunities for target words to be met, retrieved, and expanded.

Notes

1 In this article I will present the results of the research on vocabulary acquisition of the last several years, which have been previously shared in two seminars on the application of new methodologies to the teaching of classical languages, namely, 'Classics and SLA', promoted and organised by Professors J. Tárrega and C. Cochram, from the Department of Classics at UMASS Boston, and 'Langues anciennes, nouvelle méthodes?', developed by T. Polichronis from the Université Aix-Marseille.

2 L2 = Second Language.

3 Another of the most important principles to keep in mind is the so-called *Sentence Location principle*, concerning the tendency of L2 learners to process words with greater salience first, and its corollary, the *First-noun Principle*.

4 Such insights are still indebted to the natural approaches that emerged in the 1980s with Krashen's and Terrel's (1983) studies as a fundamental reference.

5 It is also worth mentioning here Ellis (2002) and his theories on *consciousness raising*, which claim the importance of awareness of a linguistic feature for our brain to be able to process it.

6 All these are assumptions derived from the vocabulary-through-input hypothesis: the noticing assumption, the guessing ability assumption, the guessing-retention link assumption, or the cumulative gain assumption (Laufer, 2005).

7 This statement works for methods like *Lingua Latina per se illustrata. Familia Romana*, and the more recent *Via Latina: De lingua et vita Romanorum*, but not for specifically communicative approaches like the one implemented in *Forum: Speaking Latin as a Living Language*.

8 The book covers the history of Rome from its origins, beginning with the discovery and upbringing of the twins Romulus and Remus, founders, according to legend, of the first Roman settlement not far from Alba Longa, the city founded and ruled by kings descended from the mythical Aeneas.

9 Each chapter of the book – 12 in total – is divided into three sections that include a reading or *lectio*, and subsequent exercises for reading comprehension and meaning-based form-focused instruction on vocabulary and grammar.

10 We've already talked about translation to L1 as a direct and time-saver resource in the class, but experts remark on a rich number of ways to communicate meaning. Nation (2001) brings together a wide catalogue of definitions, whose effectiveness will be all the greater the shorter, direct, specific and simple they are. Definitions can also adopt different forms, from formal definitions to informal such as synonyms and antonyms, analytic definitions, taxonomic definitions, exemplifications, definition by function, grammatical definition, definition by associations, definition by classification… Definitions can be also embedded in the reading, so that they help learners not to interrupt reading. Quotations or italics should be used to indicate that a definition is being given. There are some examples of this kind of definitions in *Via Latina*, as for *pomerium* et'*census* (p. 85), *obsidio* (p. 118) and others.

11 These are available, along with other resources, in *Via Latina*'s site (link here: https://blogs.umb.edu/classicsandreligiousstudies/via-latina-2/).

12 *Via Latina* has a wide sample of these exercises, especially in the section *Imaginem describe*, that has been carefully enhanced in the second edition of the book.

13 In relation to *Via Latina*, modest attempts at communicative activities are presented in the last chapter of the book (p. 222), with the aim of being meaningful and capable of engaging learners affectively and socially.

14 Noteworthy here is the work 'A comparison of four strategies for teaching a small foreign language vocabulary' (Ingeborg and Dögg, 2009), because of their concrete and easily implementable combined proposal of *tact-training*, in which a visual stimulus is showed and related to the L2 new word; *listener-training*, vocalisation of a new word when presented with its reference or indication of the referent when presented with its foreign name; and *intraverbal training*, using as reference learners' native language. Schmitt (2008) propose an elaborate classification containing three types of strategies implemented with different activities oriented to either the home learning or the class learning context: *metacognitive strategies*, those involving control of own learning and orient learners to search of additional exposure and schedules or organization for reviewing new material; *cognitive strategies*, which consist of manipulation of the information, memory and creation of mental links; and *social/affective strategies*, those related to self-motivation and interpersonal relationships such as cooperative group learning.

15 *Via Latina* offers abundant exercises oriented towards practising word associations in the fixed section *Vocabula disce* [Learn the vocabulary] inserted after each reading: these include *Vocabula idem et contrarium significantia* [Vocabulary with the same or opposite meaning] or *Quid non convenit?* [What doesn't match?].

16 She talks about a range from 5 to 16 retrievals for learners to acquire words.

17 Sökmen (1997) proposes *Scrabble* or *Bingo*. As for *Via Latina, Coniunge vocabula, Imple sententias, Vocabulum rectum elige* or *Quid significat?* [Join the words, Complete the sentences, Choose the right word, What does it mean?] are commonly proposed.

18 Experts talk about *the dual coding theory* as an important principle to take into account in language learning. See Boers *et al.* (2004).

19 This seems irrefutable in the case of learning modern languages, the input of which can be easily accessed on most occasions. But it is debatable for learning Latin, for which it will not be so simple to find exposure beyond reading, although oral resources that provide high-quality and varied Latin input have proliferated enormously in recent years.

20 It is worth mentioning here one of the most revealing articles that I have encountered during my self-training in the active methodologies applied to Latin teaching. 'Decoding or sight-reading? Problems with understanding Latin' (Hoyos, 1993) warned of the fact that 'most students, and not only students, cannot in practice *read* a Latin sentence unless they translate it. The "disentanglement" method is to use hunting for the "bones" and rearranging the parts as the means for *both* understanding and translating the text (….). The practice needs to be combated. The inefficiencies of reading by decoding and understanding via translating need to go. Instead of teaching how to read Latin, they retard or destroy the capacity. To learn afterwards how to read the language of the Romans, you have to unlearn how to decode'.

21 As frequently included in *Via Latina* under the generic title of *Quid magis convenit?* [What matches better?].

22 Some suggestions are provided on the *Via Latina* site, under the title *Instrumenta*.

23 In recent years, the selection of easy readers in Latin has greatly increased: a simple search on the internet with the criteria 'easy Latin readers' will yield multiple results nowadays.

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