Introduction: What Latin Is

Latin is an ancient Indo-European language; that is, it is one of the oldest known members of a large family of languages. It is related, with varying degrees of closeness, to all the other members of that family, including ancient languages such as Greek, Sanskrit, Gothic, Old Irish, and Hittite, as well as modern languages including English, German, Welsh, Russian, Hindi, Persian, and Armenian. The languages to which it is most closely related are the 'Romance' (i.e. Roman) languages that descend directly from Latin; these include Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian. English is a 'Germanic' language and not descended from Latin, but rather related to it as a niece to an aunt; the structure of English is very different from that of Latin. English vocabulary, however, has been heavily influenced by Latin (often via French), so that many Latin words have English derivatives.

Latin was originally the language of a small area of Italy called Latium, in which the city of Rome (traditionally believed to have been founded in 753 BC) was located. But as
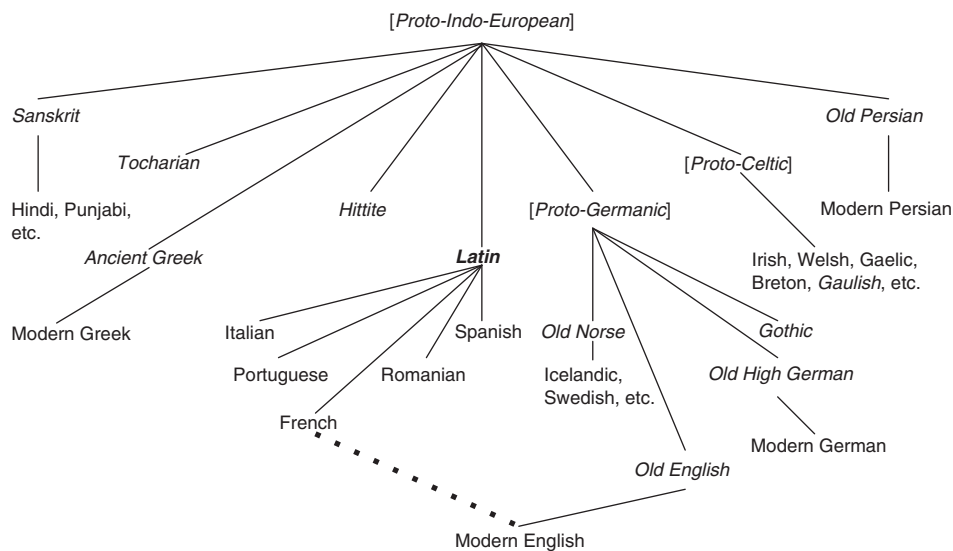

FIGURE 1 Latin and a few of the other Indo-European languages (ancient languages are in italics; brackets indicate ancient languages that do not survive in written form but can be reconstructed from surviving languages)

Rome's power grew the range of the language expanded, not only because Romans travelled all over the Mediterranean but also because many of the peoples conquered by the Romans gradually abandoned their own languages and went over to using Latin. Thus for example in most of what is now France and Spain the pre-Roman people were Celts who spoke languages related to Welsh and Irish, but they gave up those languages for Latin. In other parts of the empire, however, the pre-Roman languages survived the Roman conquest and sometimes even persist to this day; one obvious example of such survival is Greek, but there are numerous others including Welsh.

When the Roman empire collapsed in the fifth century AD, Latin rapidly disappeared from those parts of the world where it had not become people's native language; it also largely disappeared from places like England where the end of the empire was accompanied by a major influx of invaders speaking a different language. (Modern English does, however, still contain a few words that entered the language due to the Roman occupation of Britain, such as 'wall' from Latin *vallum*.) In other regions Latin survived, but it was transformed into a variety of forms sufficiently different from the original that they are now considered distinct languages: Italian, French, Spanish, etc. The original Latin language, or at least something closer to the original language, was also maintained after the fall of the empire, as a medium for international communication and for literature, by the more educated members of society (a group which for much of the middle ages was largely synonymous with priests, monks, and nuns). During this period much ancient Latin literature disappeared; virtually the only works to survive were those copied by hand in monasteries.

During the Renaissance and for several centuries afterwards Latin continued to be widely used as an international scholarly and scientific language; important thinkers who published their ideas in Latin included not only scholars like Erasmus but also scientists such as Isaac Newton. But the rise of first French and later English as international languages made Latin less useful for this purpose, and nowadays most people who learn Latin expect to use it for reading, not for expressing their own ideas. Nevertheless there are some neo-Latin enthusiasts who publish books and periodicals in Latin, converse in Latin, and even produce radio broadcasts in Latin; some but by no means all these people are connected with the Vatican, which still translates all its official documents into Latin. Because of this continuous usage the vocabulary of Latin has been constantly updated to include modern inventions, so that just as a medieval priest could use Latin to discuss points of feudal law that had not existed in ancient times, today's neo-Latin enthusiasts can easily discuss computers and aeroplanes in Latin.[1]

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[1] Those who would like to learn to speak Latin may want to look at the resources available via e.g. www.maierphil.de/SeptLat/, www.fundatiomelissa.org/, mcl.as.uky.edu/conventiculum-latinum/, www.latin.org/, and yle.fi/radio/yleradio1/ohjelmat/nuntiilatini/.

But not all forms of Latin have acquired the same status. Already during the Roman empire the Latin prose of the end of the Republic (especially that of Cicero) and the poetry of the beginning of the Empire (especially that of Virgil) had assumed a special position, because the works of these writers seemed to native speakers of Latin better than anything else produced in their language. For prose in particular Cicero has usually set the standard that subsequent users of Latin aimed at. Extensive criticism of this practice (Erasmus, for example, ridiculed it on the grounds that using only words known to Cicero made it impossible to use any of the updated vocabulary that rendered Latin useful as a medium of communication in his own day) has by and large failed to change it, because when dealing with a language as internally diverse as Latin, and in the complete absence of native speakers whose judgements of comprehensibility would be reliable, it is generally felt that *some* objective standard must be used to decide what is and is not right. To most people, therefore, 'Latin' means ancient Latin, and to most of those who distinguish among different types of ancient Latin it means Ciceronian Latin.

The Pronunciation of Latin

1 Background

There are many different pronunciations of Latin. Currently the most common in English-speaking countries is the restored ancient pronunciation described below, which is a fairly close approximation of the way educated Romans of the late Republic pronounced Latin.[1] Even in antiquity, however, there was some variation in pronunciation, and this variation greatly increased in the middle ages, when Latin was commonly pronounced like the pronouncer's native language. Remnants of the diverse pronunciations produced by this system can be found in what is now known as ecclesiastical or church Latin (which is effectively pronounced like Italian) and in Latin names that have become part of the English language (which are effectively pronounced like English). For example the name *Cicerō* is pronounced *Kikero* in the restored pronunciation, *Cheechero* in the ecclesiastical pronunciation, and *Sisero* in the English pronunciation. This diversity can lead to serious misunderstanding, because the various pronunciations are not easily mutually comprehensible, so when learning Latin it is important to master the pronunciation used by those who will be teaching you (normally the one described below), so that what you say will be understood correctly.

2 Consonants

In the restored pronunciation most consonants are pronounced in Latin like one of their pronunciations in English, but Latin consonants normally have only one sound regardless of what other letters appear nearby, whereas in English the same letter may have very different sounds in different words. The differences, therefore, can be considerable in practice. The most important of them are:

c **is pronounced hard, like the *c* in 'cold'**, never soft like the *c* in 'city' (i.e. always like *k*, never like *s*).

g **is pronounced hard, like the *g* in 'get'**, never soft like the *g* in 'gem' (i.e. never like *j*).

i **is pronounced like the *y* in 'yet' when it is a consonant** (*i* is usually a consonant when a word begins with *i* + vowel, and when *i* appears between two vowels).

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[1] For more information on how the Romans pronounced their language and how we know, see W. S. Allen, *Vox Latina* (2nd edition, Cambridge 1978).

qu **is pronounced like the** *qu* **in 'quick'**, never like the *qu* in 'unique' (i.e. always like *kw*, never like *k*).

r **is always fully pronounced**, regardless of where it occurs in a word. The Romans pronounced their *r* more like a modern Italian *r* than like a modern British or American *r*, but many English speakers use their own type of *r* when pronouncing Latin.

s **is pronounced voiceless like the** *s* **in 'sink'**, never voiced like the *s* in 'ease' (i.e. never like *z*).

t **is pronounced like the** *t* **in 'type'**, never like the *t* in 'ration' (i.e. never like *sh*).

v **is pronounced like** *w*, never like *v*.

double consonants are pronounced double: *nn* lasts longer than *n*, and the *dd* in *reddō* is pronounced as in 'red dough'.

3 Vowels

Latin has no silent vowels: every letter is pronounced, even the final *e* in a word like *sine* (pronounced *si-ne*). English vowel letters usually have two very different pronunciations according to what other letters follow them: compare the vowels in 'rat' and 'rate', 'bit' and 'bite', and 'not' and 'note'. But in Latin the spelling of the rest of the word makes no difference to the pronunciation of vowels: every vowel has its own sound. That sound can be long or short, a difference that is always important in a few specific forms and more generally important in poetry, but that is not normally indicated in writing; in order to know which vowels are long and which short, one has to learn that information individually for each word and form. In the forms where vowel quantity (i.e. which vowels are long and which short) is an important distinguishing marker, it is vital to learn it, but in other forms teachers often leave it up to students whether to master the quantities. As a result not all Latin students learn the quantities, and some of those who do not later regret that decision. Once you have learned all your Latin vocabulary without quantities it is considerably more difficult to re-learn it so as to know the quantities, with the result that for the rest of your life you face certain handicaps.

In this book, all long vowels are marked with macrons (a macron is a line over the vowel, e.g. *ā*) in paradigms, vocabulary lists, discussions, and grammatical exercises (i.e. everywhere except in translation exercises); in sections where long vowels are marked, any vowel not marked is short.[2] The purpose of marking the long vowels is to give readers who wish to learn the quantities a chance to know what they are; the reason that no such marking is provided in translation exercises is that because Latin texts are

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[2] A complication is that some vowels can be either long or short. Generally speaking these are not marked as long, but readers may want to be aware of them. The most important words involved are *mihi, tibi, sibi, ego, ibi, ubi, nisi*, and *modo*, all of which sometimes have a long vowel in the final syllable. In endings, the third person plural perfect indicative active ending *-ērunt* can also be found as *-erunt* with short *e*.

normally printed without macrons, it is better to learn to read Latin without them from the beginning.

The pronunciations of the vowels are as follows:

Short:	Long:
a as in 'h<u>a</u>t'	*ā* as in 'f<u>a</u>ther' (never as in 'd<u>a</u>te')
e as in 'g<u>e</u>t'	*ē* as in '<u>ai</u>r' (never as in 'tr<u>ee</u>')
i as in 'b<u>i</u>n'	*ī* as in 'tr<u>ee</u>' (never as in 'tr<u>y</u>')
o as in '<u>o</u>ff'	*ō* as in 'l<u>aw</u>n'
u as in 'p<u>u</u>t'	*ū* as in 'sch<u>oo</u>l'

In many books, including this one, the letter *i* can stand for either a vowel or a consonant; it is usually a consonant when it occurs at the beginning of a word followed by a vowel or between two vowels, and in other positions it is usually a vowel. (In some older texts consonantal *i* is written *j* – but it is still pronounced like English *y*, not like *j*.) In many texts there is a similar situation with *u*, which can be either a consonant (in this book written *v*) or a vowel according to position. Latin writers make occasional use of the letter *y* to represent a Greek upsilon; originally this sound was like a French *u*, but later it came to be pronounced like Latin *i*, and English speakers often prefer to use this later pronunciation.

When two vowels come together they are usually pronounced separately as two distinct vowels, for example *ia* in *glōria* (pronounced as in English) and in *grātia* (pronounced 'grat-ee-a', not 'gray-sha'), *iu* in *Lūcius* (pronounced 'Luke-ee-us', not 'Loo-shus'), *iō* in *capiō* and in *faciō* (pronounced 'cap-ee-o' and 'fak-ee-o'). But some particular vowel combinations form diphthongs, that is, a single vowel sound made up of several parts. Diphthongs are always long. The most common Latin diphthongs are:

ae pronounced like the *i* in 'bike'
au pronounced like the *ou* in 'cloud'
oe pronounced like the *oi* in 'oil'

4 Accent

In Latin, as in English, one syllable of each word is stressed. In Latin the placement of the stress is predictable, as follows.

1)   If the word has only two syllables, the first syllable is stressed.
2)   If the word has more than two syllables, and the second syllable from the end contains a long vowel, or a short vowel followed by two or more consonants, the second syllable from the end is stressed.
3)   Otherwise the third syllable from the end is stressed.

Thus *docēre* is stressed on its second syllable, but *dūcere* is stressed on its first syllable. Regardless of whether one learns the quantities, it is important to stress Latin words correctly, as doing otherwise leads to miscommunication.

Practice

For each word in passages 1–5 below, work out which syllable should be stressed and mark it with an accent. Then read the passages aloud with correct pronunciation. Passages 6 and 7 are poetry and somewhat more complicated to pronounce (see chapter 66); you should listen to someone who has learned to read Latin poetry aloud and try to imitate his or her pronunciation of these passages.[3]

1 Quoniam videō multōs velle Latīnē loquī et Graecē, neque facile posse propter difficultātem et multitūdinem verbōrum, meō labōrī et industriae nōn pepercī, ut in tribus librīs interpretāmentōrum omnia verba scrīberem. multōs enim videō cōnātōs esse, nōn prō dignitāte sīcut ipsa rēs postulat, sed suae cupiditātis et exercitātiōnis causā. propter quam causam nōn audeō plūra verba facere, sed volō omnibus palam facere, nēminem melius neque exquīsītius interpretātum esse quam mē in tribus librīs quōs scrīpsī; quōrum hic liber prīmus erit. quoniam parvīs puerīs incipientibus docērī necessāriam vīdī esse audītiōnem interpretāmentōrum sermōnis cottīdiānī, ut facillimē Latīnē et Graecē loquī discant: idcircō paucīs verbīs dē sermōne cottīdiānō scrīpsī haec quae subiecta sunt.

(*Colloquia Monacensia–Einsidlensia* 1b–q, an ancient language teacher's preface to his textbook; you will read this passage in chapter 30)

2 Gallia est omnis dīvīsa in partēs trēs, quārum ūnam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquītānī, tertiam quī ipsōrum linguā Celtae, nostrā Gallī appellantur. hī

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[3] Recordings of these passages can be found for example at www.rhapsodes.fll.vt.edu/aeneid1.htm (Robert Sonkowsky), www.fas.harvard.edu/~classics/poetry_and_prose/Aeneid.1.intro.html (Wendell Clausen), www.youtube.com/watch?v=orzrnEzKbaE (Evan der Millner). These three differ considerably from one another in certain respects: it is the features they have in common that are useful to master.

8   *The Pronunciation of Latin*

omnēs linguā, īnstitūtīs, lēgibus inter sē differunt. Gallōs ab Aquītānīs
Garumna flūmen, ā Belgīs Mātrona et Sēquana dīvidit. hōrum omnium
fortissimī sunt Belgae.

(Caesar, *De bello Gallico* 1.1.1–2, the conqueror's explanation of the
geography of Gaul; you will read this passage in chapter 32)

3   Cum vocātus essem, ad praeceptōrem accessī et tabulam, in quā erat lēctiō
mea, eī dedī. et coepī reddere memoriā quae accēperam ut discerem:
versūs ad numerum et distīnctum et clausulam, cum aspīrātiōne ubi
oportēbat, et versuum metaphrasin dedī. dum reddō ēmendātus sum ā
praeceptōre, ut vōcem praeparem bonam.

(*Colloquium Stephani* 13a–15, the tale of a boy who can pronounce Latin
well; you will read this passage in chapter 47)

4   Cicerō Pūbliō Caesiō salūtem dīcit. Pūblium Messiēnum, equitem
Rōmānum, omnibus rēbus ōrnātum meumque perfamiliārem, tibi
commendō eā commendātiōne, quae potest esse dīligentissima. petō ā tē
et prō nostrā et prō paternā amīcitiā, ut eum in tuam fidem recipiās eiusque
rem fāmamque tueāris.

(Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 13.51; you will read this passage in chapter 44)

5   Cicerō Atticō salūtem dīcit. cum quod scrīberem plānē nihil habērem, haec
autem reliqua essent quae scīre cuperem: num Caesar profectus esset, quō in
statū urbem relīquisset, in ipsā Italiā quem cuique regiōnī aut negōtiō
praefēcisset, ecquī essent ad Pompeium et ad cōnsulēs ex senātūs cōnsultō dē
pāce lēgātī – cum igitur haec scīre cuperem dēditā operā hās ad tē litterās mīsī.

(Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 10.3; you will read this passage in chapter 56)

6   Arma virumque canō, Troiae quī prīmus ab ōrīs

     Ītaliam fātō profugus Lāvīniaque vēnit

     lītora, multum ille et terrīs iactātus et altō

     vī superum, saevae memorem Iūnōnis ob īram,

     multa quoque et bellō passus, dum conderet urbem

     īnferretque deōs Latiō; genus unde Latīnum

     Albānīque patrēs atque altae moenia Rōmae.

     mūsa, mihī causās memorā, quō nūmine laesō

     quidve dolēns rēgīna deum tot volvere cāsūs

     īnsignem pietāte virum, tot adīre labōrēs

     impulerit. tantaene animīs caelestibus īrae?

         (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.1–11; you will read this passage in chapter 31)

7   urbs antīqua fuit (Tyriī tenuēre colōnī)

     Carthāgō, Ītaliam contrā Tiberīnaque longē

     ōstia, dīves opum studiīsque asperrima bellī,

     quam Iūnō fertur terrīs magis omnibus ūnam

     posthabitā coluisse Samō. hīc illius arma,

     hīc currus fuit; hoc rēgnum dea gentibus esse,

     sī quā fāta sinant, iam tum tenditque fovetque.

     prōgeniem sed enim Troiānō ā sanguine dūcī

     audierat Tyriās ōlim quae verteret arcēs;

     hinc populum lātē rēgem bellōque superbum

     ventūrum excidiō Libyae; sīc volvere Parcās.

         (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.12–22; you will read this passage in chapter 31)