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TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH VIRGIL IN LATE ANTIQUITY

LEARNING LANGUAGES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Roman *magistri* and *grammatici* taught their students a wide range of subjects, primarily through the medium of Latin and Greek literary texts. A well-educated Roman in the Imperial era was expected to have a good knowledge of the literary language of Cicero and Virgil, as well as a competent command of Greek. By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, this knowledge had to be taught actively, as everyday Latin usage had changed during the intervening four centuries. After the reign of Theodosius the division between the Eastern and the Western Empires meant that knowledge of Greek was no longer as common as it had once been in the West.[1] At the same time, by Late Antiquity, migration increased and foreigners as well as provincials moved within the empire, for example, in search of military promotion. There is evidence that recruitment to official or public careers was based less on birth than on education.[2] These ambitious newcomers sent their children to Roman schools, which would facilitate their access to public office. Receipt of this education provided a means by which men from less privileged backgrounds could achieve promotion to such office and become prominent and influential individuals.[3] At the same time a late Roman education also produced a high level of cultural homogeneity among those who had experienced it.[4] So what might we learn about how language was taught—and what kinds of language were valued—in a late-antique Roman school? How might this contribute to our understanding of late-antique Roman elite society?

A complete commentary survives by the late-antique *grammaticus*, Servius, which can tell us about the way he taught his students, and what types of information he considered they needed to know. In this paper I focus on the insight, which his commentaries can provide into what might have happened in his classroom. Through an analysis of his *Commentary*, I ask what we could learn about his students' levels of competence in different registers of Latin, their understanding of archaic and literary Latin, and their fluency in Latin. In addition, I ask what linguistic information Servius felt was important and valuable for his students to know. I contextualize this analysis by considering other evidence about his students' backgrounds, particularly in terms of their linguistic competence, and I examine Servius' language-teaching in the light of that evidence to establish what it might tell us about the social and cultural mix of those students. In each case, I consider how Servius might be addressing the difficulties

[1] G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (Chichester, 2010), 196.
[2] Averil Cameron, 'Education and literary culture', in Averil Cameron and P. Garnsey (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XIII: The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge, 1998), 665–707, at 675.
[3] T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 1998), 190.
[4] P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Wisconsin, 1992), 39.

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he notices his students experiencing, and how the information he provides might have functioned in his classroom.

A good knowledge of Greek and Latin literature was a crucial mark of distinction among the wealthier classes, along with—in the early Principate—fluency in both Latin and Greek, because they could only be achieved through an expensive literary education.[5] This idea continued during Late Antiquity, as demonstrated for example by the cases of individuals such as Ausonius and Claudian, who came from Bordeaux and Alexandria respectively. These authors earned their important positions within Roman society and social advancement on the basis of their education and literary prowess.[6] In Claudian's case this was in a non-native language, namely Latin. It is certain, given the diversity of these two writers' backgrounds, that even children from upper-class families often would have been exposed to a range of non-standard linguistic features of accent and dialect in Latin, not only from household slaves but moreover from interaction beyond the home. Therefore, the varieties of Latin language and literature on the school-curriculum were not representative of the varieties of language in everyday use in different regions of the empire; rather, children were taught what was regarded as standard speech as well as historical linguistic forms. This was perhaps even more extreme with regard to Greek. While the Roman elite in the Imperial period may have needed to learn everyday *koinē* for practical reasons if they were to engage with Greek speakers, it was important that they gained at least a reading knowledge of literary Attic.[7] Social prestige was bestowed on those who had received an education derived from their knowledge of literary Greek and Latin.

Given that reasonably wealthy Romans in the Imperial era were expected to have gained a good knowledge of the literary language of both Latin and Greek authors at school, there has been considerable scholarly debate about how this was achieved, and for what purpose. Robert Kaster has explored the possible structures of the various stages of Roman schooling, and has argued that a *grammaticus* might potentially have taught a wider range of abilities and levels than historians such as Henri Marrou[8] imagined previously.[9] Therefore, a teacher might well have been required to provide instruction in more basic literacy alongside more advanced work on literary verse.

In Late Antiquity, not only were children exposed to non-standard linguistic features in Latin at home and in their local region, but also Latin itself was showing signs of linguistic changes since the Augustan era. Extant written texts reflect not the way in which people spoke, but the way in which they were taught to write.[10] The syntax of spoken Latin changed over the centuries in many ways, although these can be difficult to chart. Some of the most evident changes in Late Antiquity are word order and the relative positions of the verb and the object in a sentence. Adams examines the complications of both of these phenomena.[11] The gradually changing word order of spoken Latin would have made understanding literary Latin of the Republican and

[5] E. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (Oxford, 1999), 19.
[6] Cameron (n. 2), 673.
[7] Horrocks (n. 1), 126.
[8] H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Wisconsin, 1956).
[9] R. Kaster, 'Notes on 'primary' and 'secondary' education in Late Antiquity', *TAPhA* 113 (1983), 323–46, at 346.
[10] J. Clackson and G. Horrocks (edd.), *The Blackwell History of the Latin Language* (Oxford, 2007), 265.
[11] J.N. Adams, *Social Variation and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2013), 821 and 374.

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the Augustan periods harder for children. These circumstances would have meant that the task of ensuring children's command of correct—but, to them, archaic—literary Latin was even more important for the *grammaticus* of Late Antiquity.

For knowledge of Greek in the West, the problems were probably rather different again. The diffusion of Greek in the Western Empire changed following Theodosius' final partition of the empire in 395, resulting in knowledge of Greek in the West becoming rarer after this point.[12] As a result, Latin-speaking *grammatici* would have needed to adjust their teaching to suit their students' varying abilities in Greek and probably taught more basic aspects of the language at greater depth than had their predecessors.

Roman classrooms were very different from our experience of classrooms. There is greater archaeological evidence of ancient schooling from Graeco-Roman Egypt than from Rome. It is likely that students from a range of levels were all taught within the same physical space.[13] Evidence for the physical conditions of schools in Graeco-Roman Egypt indicates that, at the most elementary level, some schools were even set up informally outside, amid the noise and the distraction of the urban (or even rural) environment, although such outdoor teaching would have only been feasible in areas of the empire that were fortunate enough to have experienced dry weather regularly.[14] Neither progression nor achievement was formalized,[15] and students could stay in a school for as long as their parents and teachers felt it was useful. This further increased the range of ages and educational stages within the same classroom. Thus, teachers would have required considerable skill (and human resources) in order to engage and instruct all the students in their tutelage, despite the potential obstacles.

We have limited evidence of what actually occurred in classrooms in antiquity, but we can gain some idea of the types of activities from the surviving late-antique bilingual dialogues, known as the *Colloquia*. These were probably used as language-teaching materials, to teach Greek to Latin speakers, and vice versa.[16] They contain some scenes set in school, narrated from a child's point of view, and show a wide range of student interaction and learning (*Colloquium Stephani*, 20a-21a):

ἄλλοι οὖν ὀνόματα, ἄλλοι στίχους ἀνηγόρευσαν, καθὼς εἰώθασιν γράφειν. ἠγέρθησαν καὶ ἐστάθησαν πρὸς τὸν πίνακα. ἤδη ἐμπείῳ οἱ λοιποὶ ὁμοῦ ἀπεκρίνοντο.

alii ergo nomina, alii uersus recitauerunt, quomodo soliti sunt scribere. surrexerunt et steterunt ad titulum. iam perito reliqui pariter respondebant.

Some recited nouns, others verses, at the level they are accustomed to write them. They rose and stood at the board. The remainder were in the same way answering one who was already experienced.

Here, we can see groups of children engaged in different tasks: reciting noun declensions, or reciting whole verses of texts, presumably in separate groups. Students are also giving presentations and answering questions. In the *Colloquia*

[12] J. Leonhardt, *Latin: Story of a World Language* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 94.
[13] R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, 2001), 42.
[14] R. Cribiore (n. 13), 27.
[15] A.C. Dionisotti, 'From Ausonius' schooldays? A schoolbook and its relatives', *JRS* 72 (1982), 83–125, at 120.
[16] E. Dickey, *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana: Volume 1* (Cambridge, 2012), 3.

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Monacensia-Einsidlensia we are presented with a scene (*Colloquia Monacensia-Einsidlensia*, 2n), whereby

ἄλλοι πρὸς τὸν ὑποδιδακτὴν τάξει ἀποδιδοῦσιν

alii ad subdoctorem ordine reddunt

others do their work under the supervision of the teaching-assistant.

The late-antique sophist Libanius appears to have employed others in his school, either as teachers or as teaching assistants.[17] Such a range of supervising adults would have provided students with the support they would need in order to carry out these various tasks and receive feedback and guidance on their performance. This is a much more varied picture than the standard views of late-antique schooling, as offered, for example, by Robert Browning[18] and Robert Kaster,[19] where the focus tends to concentrate on the teacher, rather than on the students. Thus, they imagine that a teacher might hold a lesson structured similarly to a commentary such as Servius', in which only the teacher's 'voice' is heard, beginning with a dictation and then proceeding to lecture students on that short passage in minute detail. Kaster and Browning follow Marrou's perception of the ancient classroom, in which he suggests that, following the structure of the ancient commentary, after a rapid and very short introduction, a lesson would involve a long and meticulous explanation, proceeding line by line and word by word,[20] without considering what and how the students might be engaging with while the teacher was speaking. The *Colloquia* demonstrate that, when teachers employed lecturing or dictation, these activities were not necessarily directed at all students simultaneously and—perhaps most crucially—that these were not the only activities employed to engage students during the course of the school day. As I have argued elsewhere,[21] the *Colloquia* show us that students in a late-antique Roman classroom were not merely a passive audience, but were employed in various learning activities, in which they practised their skills and demonstrated their progress to their superiors. I suggested how it is possible to read some of Servius' longer, technical comments in the light of the activities described in the *Colloquia*, and thus to see how the information in Servius' comments might have been constructed into a range of learning activities for students at different stages and abilities. Such a range of practical activities would have significantly aided children's learning, and helped them to practise skills and knowledge, which would have otherwise remained distant and theoretical. In the present article, I offer this as a perspective to help us understand how children might have learnt the correct usage of a form of language that was effectively artificial by this period. This is a task that is quite demanding in its own right, but needs active practice for a learner to become competent in using such language.

[17] R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late-Antique Antioch* (Princeton, 2007), 35–6.

[18] R. Browning, 'Education in the Roman empire', in Averil Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XIV: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600* (Cambridge, 2000), 859.

[19] R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (California, 1988), 177.

[20] Marrou (n. 8), 279.

[21] F. Foster, 'Reconstructing Virgil in the classroom in Late Antiquity', *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society* 43 (2014), 285–303.

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Classrooms in the ancient world would seem to us to be very austere and sparse,[22] and probably contained remarkably few actual texts, by today's standards. Teachers could (and did) open their schools using whatever accommodation was available to them, and, when the teacher needed to move, the school moved as well.[23] Thus, the equipment and furnishing of the school would be limited to availability, and potentially to portability. Many students may have proceeded no further than learning basic reading, writing and arithmetic, in order to enable them to participate in straightforward business transactions.[24] Even learning to write your name was a significant level of literacy for some. Extant school-texts from Greco-Roman Egypt contain fragments of a range of materials, from alphabet practice to long passages of written texts and compositions.[25] These texts are, however, largely short and often incomplete. Yet, an extended text written by a practising *grammaticus* does survive: the detailed commentary on Virgil by the late-antique commentator, Maurus Servius Honoratus.

Servius lived in Rome sometime during (at the very broadest) 354–430 C.E.[26] He was probably engaged in writing his *Commentary* sometime between 390 and 420, and the work may well have been completed by 410.[27] This means that Servius was writing around and shortly after Theodosius' final partition of the empire, before knowledge of Greek had faded, but at a point at which Greek was already removed from everyday life. It is important to note here that Servius' *Commentary* has reached us in two forms: the text considered to be Servius' own (often known as the S-text) and an expanded form (often referred to as the D-text), which is thought to have been created in the eighth century by interweaving Servius' *Commentary* with another late-antique commentary.[28] As my focus here is on Servius as a late-antique teacher and writer, in this article I will refer only to the text so far identified as Servius' own, according to the nineteenth-century editions by Thilo and Hagen,[29] the twentieth-century so-called 'Harvard Servius'[30] and the more recent Budé edition.[31] However, until a full critical edition of the whole text becomes available (rather than editions which focus on the enlarged version of the text), it is hard to be certain that all the layers of texts have been fully identified; Charles Murgia has warned that neither Thilo and Hagen's edition nor the

[22] B. Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford, 2003), 165.

[23] R. Cribiore, 'Spaces for teaching in Late Antiquity', in T. Derda, T. Markiewicz and E. Wipszycka (edd.), *Alexandria: Auditoria of Kom el-Dikka and Late-Antique Education* (*The Journal of Juristic Papyrology*, Supplement 8) (Warsaw, 2007), 143–50, at 144.

[24] S. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Routledge, 1977), 34.

[25] R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Greco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, 1996), 173.

[26] P. Bruggisser, 'City of the outcast and city of the elect: the Romulean asylum in Augustine's *City of God* and Servius' *Commentaries* on Virgil', in M. Vessey, K. Pollmann and A.D. Fitzgerald (edd.), *History, Apocalypse and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on St Augustine's* City of God (Bowling Green State, 1999), 90 and Alan Cameron, 'The date and identity of Macrobius', *JRS* 56 (1966), 25–38, at 37.

[27] C. Murgia, 'The dating of Servius revisited', *CPh* 98 (2003), 45–69.

[28] P.K. Marshall, 'Servius', in L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), 385–8.

[29] G. Thilo and H. Hagen (edd.), *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii* (Leipzig, 1881).

[30] E.K. Rand et al. (edd.), *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum editionis Harvardianae volumen: In Aeneidos libros 1 et 2 explanationes* (Cambridge, MA, 1946), and A.F. Stocker and A.H. Travis (edd.), *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum editionis Harvardianae volumen: quod in Aeneidos libros 3–5 explanationes continet* (Cambridge, MA, 1965).

[31] E. Jeunet-Mancy, *Servius: Commentaire sur l'Enéide de Virgile, Livre VI* (Paris, 2012).

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'Harvard Servius' may be considered fully reliable in their separation of the layers of texts.[32]

The *Commentaries* provide many helpful explanations of Virgil's more complicated constructions, and consequently provide evidence for how late-antique readers interpreted, and struggled with, the language of the *Aeneid*. It is unlikely, given the paucity of written material available in the ancient classroom, that the text would have been readily available to the majority of students in its entirety. Although we do not know precisely who comprised the audience of Servius' *Commentaries*, it may have included other *grammatici*,[33] and so the commentary perhaps functioned as a teacher's guide. This would have allowed the material contained in the commentary to be passed on to a wider range of students, through those teachers. Therefore, Servius' text, which was no doubt created at least in part as a result of his own teaching experience in the classroom, may have also served as a guide to others as to how to teach aspects of language, which had become trickier for students in Late Antiquity.

LITERARY AND ARCHAIC LANGUAGE

Servius frequently draws distinctions for his students between Virgil's expressions and those in current usage. These effectively fall into two related areas: the peculiarities of the language of literary Latin verse on the one hand, and on the other the distinction between archaic and contemporary Latin usage. These distinctions are not always clear-cut: Clackson and Horrocks note the difficulties in tracing linguistic changes, since an apparently unusual form may be a false impression, resulting from the fact that there are no other surviving examples of a given use, or because the writer concerned is adopting a consciously classicizing style.[34] Likewise, literary language is not always easily distinguishable from colloquial language;[35] this is a particular problem in Late Antiquity, a period of considerable generic change and recombination.[36] This problem occurs particularly when *grammatici* try to distinguish for their students between the way in which Virgil writes and contemporary spoken Latin, in order to teach their students how they should phrase the same ideas in their own writing or formal speaking.

Servius, for example, clarifies Virgil's language in Book 1 of the *Aeneid* at the point when Neptune calms the storm, which Juno asked Aeolus to create. Neptune is described as *perlabitur undas* ('gliding along the surface of the waves') (*Aen*. 1.147). Servius explains Virgil's use of the word *perlabor* ('I glide through') in this context (*Aen.* 1.147):

PERLABITVR VNDAS figura est. quod enim nos modo dicimus per praepositionem nomini copulatam sequente uerbo, antiqui uerso ordine praepositionem detractam nomini iungebant uerbo, ita tamen ut esset una pars orationis, et faciebant honestam elocutionem. nos dicimus 'per undas labitur', illi dicebant 'perlabitur undas'. item 'per forum curro' et 'percurro forum'.

[32] C. Murgia, 'Why is the APA/Harvard Servius?: Editing Servius', *Whither the APA/Harvard Servius?* Panel at the Annual Meeting of the APA, 5 January 2004. Online: http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/89p134jb, p. 2.

[33] P.K. Marshall, *Servius and Commentary on Virgil* (*Occasional Papers* 5, CMRS) (Asheville, NC, 1997), 20, following P. Lockhart, *The Literary Criticism of Servius* (New Haven, CT, 1959).

[34] Clackson and Horrocks (n. 10), 92.

[35] E. Dickey and A. Chahoud (edd.), *Colloquial and Literary Latin* (Cambridge, 2010).

[36] D. Shanzer, 'The tale of Frodebert's tail', in Dickey and Chahoud (n. 35), 377.

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GLIDES ALONG THE WAVES, it is a figure of speech. For what we now say using a preposition connected to a noun with the verb after, the ancients turned the order around and used to join a preposition (which was removed from its noun) to a verb, but in such a way that it was one part of speech, and they used to make it a respectable expression. We say 'per undas labitur', they used to say 'perlabitur undas'. Likewise, 'I go across the forum' and 'I cross the forum'.

Servius explains why Virgil's use of a verb with a preposition attached to it is different from what would be regarded as current usage in Late Antiquity. He seems to indicate that the natural late-antique idiom (which resembles the English construction) requires the preposition to govern the noun, which is therefore placed next to it in the sentence, rather than attached to the verb. Servius draws his students' attention to the difference between how *antiqui* ('the ancients') used to say something and what *modo dicimus* ('we say now'). What Servius has picked out is part of a more general linguistic change taking place in later Latin, that of relying more heavily on prepositions and less on cases for meaning. In this instance, however, Servius is not implying that his students should or should not imitate Virgil's way of phrasing at this point. Rather, his point seems to be that they should understand Virgil's meaning, but at the same time that they must be aware that this idiom is an archaic form of language. Servius provides his students with a second pair of examples to illustrate his point further: *per forum curro* ('I go across the forum') and *percurro forum* ('I cross the forum'). These examples are not drawn from Virgil, but are the sorts of expressions that his students might need to use in formal conversation, or even in composing a formal speech. Servius even supplies the comparative examples in the first person, as an example for his students to see how they might use similar phrases. This could have been the start of an exercise whereby students formed further such expressions using verbs and prepositions, which would enable them to understand not just how to recognize the archaic idiom but also how to form it themselves.

There are a number of occasions when Servius draws his students' attention to Virgil's use of prepositions, which is unsurprising, since this point was a common difference between Virgil's Latin and the Latin of Servius' own day. However, Servius focusses on how to use prepositions effectively in different registers, and he shows his students that Virgil's use of prepositions is therefore reflective of a more formal way of speaking in certain contexts, such as in legal formulas. For example, when Latinus swears an oath to Aeneas towards the end of the epic, he begins with one that mirrors Aeneas' earlier oath (*Aen*. 12.176). Latinus starts: *terram mare sidera iuro*, 'I swear by land and sea and stars' (*Aen*. 12.197). Servius has already given his readers (and perhaps his students) many examples of Virgil's linguistic uses relating to prepositions by this stage in his *Commentary*, if they were reading through the text or extracts of it in chronological order. In this instance, the verb *iuro* ('I swear') is followed by a simple accusative direct object, rather than by a preposition that would also govern the case of what is being sworn by. Servius (*Aen.* 12.197) explains that

TERRAM MARE SIDERA IVRO ornatior elocutio, et crebra apud maiores, quam si uelis addere praepositionem, ut dicas 'iuro per maria, per terras'.

I SWEAR BY LAND, SEA AND STARS This expression, also frequent among the ancients, is more ornate than if you wished to add a preposition, in order to say 'I swear by the seas, by the lands'.

Here Servius indicates that, although this expression was 'frequent' among earlier authors, it was still appropriate in Late Antiquity on those occasions that call for

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more ornate (*ornatior*) expressions. Thus, Servius expects his students to recognize the difference between a form that is archaic and another that, while archaic, is still used in certain formal situations.

Sometimes Servius' comments seem designed to help his students to understand Virgil's language and avoid making mistakes about the meaning of the text. It is important to remember that for Roman children in Late Antiquity Virgil's Latin was hard going—and probably about as difficult for them as Shakespeare's English is for British secondary-school children today. Literary language was so very different from daily conversational language that reading ancient epics must have been a very alienating experience for most Roman children.[37] Virgil's language would have been doubly difficult: not only was he writing in the Latin of four hundred years earlier, but his register was very unlike the spoken Latin even of his own day. Mistakes of comprehension were probably common (as they are in today's classrooms, where British children study texts by Shakespeare, or even by Virgil), and we can see Servius dealing with this problem. Virgil's often-complex word order, which is highly effective once understood, seems to have been as tricky for younger and less experienced readers of the poems centuries ago as it is today. Servius often uses the phrase *ordo est* ('the order is') when he reorders Virgil's words for his students, so that they can overcome the linguistic difficulties inherent in reading the unusual word order of verse. There are forty-nine instances in which Servius reorders the words for his students to understand the meaning more easily.[38] On the famous line in which Laocöon warned the Trojans not to trust the horse, Servius pauses for such a comment (*Aen.* 2.44):

DONA CARERE DOLIS DANAVM? ordo est 'dona Danaum', non 'dolis Danaum'.

THE GIFTS OF THE GREEKS LACK GUILE? The order is 'the gifts of the Greeks', not 'the guile of the Greeks'.

Servius' warning implies that late-antique students were making the same mistake as today's students, of taking the words in the order in which they are written, without due attention to sense. In this case, the sense is rendered meaningless by 'the gifts lack the guile of the Greeks', when it is precisely those gifts that are full of guile. The problem which Servius draws the reader's attention to is that of which noun is qualified by the genitive *Danaum* ('Greeks'). Presumably this is what his students were struggling with, because *dona* is separated from *Danaum*, while the verb is in a prominent position following the subject. Servius does not often feel that it is necessary to place the verb before the object when reordering the words. Levy counted only two instances of verb-object reordering in the corpus.[39] This is perhaps particularly interesting when considering the general principle that, although classical literary Latin often tends to prefer object-verb, the spoken language more consistently seems to have favoured a verb-object order.[40] This implies that, although word order may have helped to clarify meaning in spoken language, late-antique students generally still could cope with the principle of the final position of a verb in a sentence when reading literary Latin.

[37] C. Laes and J.H.M. Strubbe, *Kleine Romeinen: Jonge Kinderen in het Antieke Rome* (Amsterdam, 2006), 91.

[38] H.L. Levy, 'Servius in his classroom', *CJ* 67 (1971), 167–74, at 169.

[39] Levy (n. 38), 170.

[40] J.N. Adams, 'A typological approach to Latin word order', *Indogermanische Forschungen* 81 (1976), 70–99.

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INFLECTION OF NOUNS

Nouns, for Servius, often seem to require particular attention, especially when gender, case and declension are involved. Servius' students needed to know how to use nouns accurately, and this is complicated in an inflected language with grammatical gender. Adult native speakers of languages with grammatical gender tend to know the genders of words which occur regularly in their spoken language, while grammatical gender tends to be particularly difficult for non-native speakers to master. Servius, however, perhaps surprisingly, devotes a number of comments to explaining how particular nouns decline, and how their gender is assigned. In some cases, this is because he is commenting on archaic and literary forms, which are often as difficult for native speakers to master as they are for non-native speakers. But other instances might indicate that not all his students were in fact native Latin speakers, even among the wealthy classes in Rome. If a number of his students were acquiring Latin as an additional language, this type of note on the current conversational use of a word would address their problems. By the end of the fourth century, there were considerable numbers of people whose native language was not Latin living within the empire. A significant number of Roman officers in the army were non-native speakers,[41] and such men increasingly held high positions.[42] These foreign elites, who perhaps spoke their native language at home, most likely would have desired that their children gain a traditional Roman education, in order to secure their futures. Therefore, if there were children from such backgrounds in Servius' classroom, we can expect that they brought with them the usual problems of accuracy displayed by non-native speakers.

Servius comments on the word *uulgus* ('multitude') towards the start of the *Aeneid*, when Neptune calming the storm is compared to a statesman calming the multitude (*Aen.* 1.149):

> VULGUS et masculini generis et neutri lectum est: generis neutri hoc loco, alibi masculini, ut 'in uulgum ambiguas'. et hoc est artis ut masculino utamur, quia omnia Latina nomina in 'us' exeuntia, si neutra fuerint, tertiae sunt declinationis, ut 'pecus pecoris': si autem secundae fuerint declinationis, masculina sunt; 'uulgi' autem facit, non 'uulgeris', ut 'docti', 'clari'. usurpatum tamen est neutrum genus propter unum Graecum nomen, id est 'pelagus'. cum enim 'pelagi' faciat, neutri tamen est generis.
>
> THE MULTITUDE. This is read in both the masculine and the neuter: in this place it is neuter, elsewhere it is masculine, as '[to sprinkle] unclear [words] on the crowd' (*Aen.* 2.99). And this word is of the type which we can use in the masculine, because all Latin nouns ending in 'us', if they are neuter, are third declension, like 'pecus, pecoris': but if they are second declension, they are masculine; however, its genitive is 'uulgi', not 'uulgeris', as 'docti' and 'clari'. But the neuter is employed on account of one Greek noun, that is, 'pelagus'. For, although its genitive is 'pelagi', its gender is neuter.

This extended comment on one word follows a comment on other parts of the verse. However, the level of detail provided by Servius for this one word is very noteworthy. He begins by observing that *uulgus* can be both masculine and neuter: the latter appears to be by far the most common usage in literary Latin. Lewis and Short[43] list seven

[41] J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford, 1990), 8.

[42] A.D. Lee, 'The army', in Averil Cameron and P. Garnsey (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XIII: The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge, 1998), 211–37, at 223.

[43] Lewis and Short s.v. (p. 2015).

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authors, including Virgil, who have used it in the masculine, although these are generally isolated instances, and largely in authors of the first and even second centuries B.C.E. Although a significant number of authors listed use the word in the neuter, none of them is later than Pliny. The word is not listed in the form *uulgus* in Niemayer's *Mediaeval Latin Dictionary*, although its related adjective *uulgaris* and noun *uulgares* are.[44] Nor does it appear to have any Romance descendants, as neither *uulgus* nor any related words appear in Meyer-Lübke.[45] It is therefore likely that the form *uulgus* was already archaic by the late fourth century in the neuter, and the rare masculine variant even less familiar. Servius is therefore drawing attention to an irregularity about the word, which is useful for native and non-native speakers alike. The rest of his explanation provides students with a rule with which to understand both the gender and the declension of nouns with a similar ending. The archaic nature of the word makes this level of detail necessary for native (as well as non-native) speakers, who may not know that this noun is a second-declension noun. Servius seems to be anticipating his students' likely error of taking *uulgus* as a third-declension noun, thus making its genitive *uulgeris*. The existence of the adjectival forms *uulgaris* and *uulgarius*, the latter of which Lewis and Short list as a particular ante-classical and post-classical variant, and Niemayer's plural noun *uulgares* suggest that some similar form was in use in spoken Latin in Late Antiquity. And if this were the case, it would be a natural error for his students to make, and Servius would be aware that this common error needs clarification. Servius concludes this comment with an observation about the declension of the Greek loanword *pelagus*, which he suggests has influenced the gender of *uulgus* on occasions. This information might have targeted more advanced students, or teaching assistants, who might need to be aware of wider irregularities within the language. Thus, the range of information Servius provides caters for students of different abilities and stages.

While Servius' students may not have known *uulgus* because it was already archaic, there are other words which Servius glosses, commenting on their meaning, gender and formation, which were not as obscure for his students. In *Aeneid* Book 7, when Latinus receives a prophecy from Faunus, he is told that foreigners would arrive and that *quorum a stirpe* ('from their stock') their descendants will rule the world. Servius glosses the word *stirps* (*Aen.* 7.99):

> A STIRPE stirpem cum de genere dicimus, tantum femininum est, cum de arbore, et masculini generis et feminini inuenitur, ut 'sed stirpem Teucri nullo discrimine sacrum', contra Horatius 'stirpesque raptas et pecus et domos'.
>
> FROM THE LINEAGE when we say 'stirps' about descent, it is only feminine, when it is about a tree it is found in both the masculine and the feminine genders, as in 'The Trojans, without making any distinction, [had removed] the sacred trunk' [*Aen.* 12.770], and alternatively in Horace, 'uprooted trees and flocks and homes' [*Carm.* 3.29.37].

Here, Servius illustrates two separate (though related) meanings of the word, and explains how gender is assigned according to the meaning. Once again, this is a word of ambiguous gender—it is a third-declension noun, which could be either masculine or feminine, and the only instances where it is possible to distinguish its gender are those where a first-declension or a second-declension adjective agrees with it. However, unlike the previous example, this word is more likely to have been familiar

[44] J.F. Niemeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden, 1976), 1118.
[45] W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1935[3]).

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to Servius' students. Lewis and Short (who list numerous instances of the word, particularly in Cicero) classify it as feminine, but also confirm its use in the masculine as 'poetic and post Augustan'.[46] They list six authors who use it with adjectives identifying its gender as masculine—Virgil once in the *Georgics*, and three times in *Aeneid* Book 12 referring to a tree. The *OLD* describes the attribution of masculine gender for *stirps* as archaic and occasionally used when *stirps* indicates a root or a trunk.[47] However, its presence both in Niemayer,[48] with a number of related words, and in Meyer-Lübke,[49] with descendants in Italian and Portuguese, makes it likely that the word *stirps* remained in use in the spoken Latin of Servius' day. This is also suggested by the way in which Servius instructs his students *cum ... dicimus* (when we say), implying that this is something that they might do, rather than the passive *inuenitur* ('it is found') regarding the archaic use of either masculine or feminine. Interestingly, the instance of the word in Virgil, which Servius is commenting on, is not a gendered example, since there is no qualifying adjective. The meaning is also straightforwardly, as he glosses, *de genere* ('about descent') rather than about a tree. If the word were still current for Servius' students, but also had an archaic usage, it would make sense for him to gloss it for students, who would be unfamiliar with that usage. However, the fact that he glosses the regular use of gender in current spoken Latin is perhaps indicative of his audience. It would be unnecessary for native Latin speakers, who would already know that the word has a feminine gender, but it could be helpful for those whose native or home language was not Latin. Thus here Servius may be catering for students of different backgrounds as well as abilities.

A further supporting example can be seen in Servius' observations on Virgil's use of the word *balteus* ('belt') when describing the infamous item worn by Pallas in *Aeneid* Book 10. Considering the importance ascribed to this garment in the poem, it is appropriate that Servius needs to clarify for his students how Virgil uses the word when it does occur (which is only four times within the poem). Servius (*Aen.* 10.496) explains:

> BALTEI potest et synaeresis esse 'baltei', potest et hypermetrus uersus; nam sequens a uocali inchoat. balteus autem a numero singulari masculini est tantum generis: Iuuenalis 'balteus et tunicae et cristae': in numero uero plurali et neutri: idem Iuuenalis 'quotiens rumoribus ulciscuntur baltea'.
>
> OF THE BELT 'baltei' can be both synaeresis (running 'ei' together), and a hypermetric verse (it is the last word in the line); for the next line starts with a vowel. But 'balteus' in the singular is only masculine in gender, for example, in Juvenal: 'swordbelt and tunics and crests' [6.256], in the plural, on the other hand, it is also neuter: likewise, Juvenal says: 'how often are beltings revenged by rumours' [9.111].

This comment begins as a note on scansion and pronunciation, as Servius explains how Virgil's verse might scan. He identifies two ways in which his students might pronounce the word *baltei* in reading it aloud correctly, either by treating the final 'ei' as a diphthong, and thus as one long syllable at the end of the hexameter, or by treating the 'e' as the final syllable, and letting the 'i' elide with the start of the next line, which begins with an 'i' on the word *impressumque*. If a student was performing a reading in class, paying due attention to quantities and accent, they might find the

[46] Lewis and Short s.v. (p. 1761).
[47] *OLD* s.v. (p. 1822).
[48] Niemeyer (n. 44), 994.
[49] Meyer-Lübke (n. 45), 683.

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end of this line difficult, on account of the possible extra final syllable. But Servius continues his note with the information that *balteus* in the singular is masculine, while in the plural it is also found in the neuter, as in the verse of Juvenal. This is interesting, since the word *balteus* is very likely to have been familiar to Servius' students. The *TLL* gives instances of the use of the word in Late Antiquity, in Jerome (*Ep*. 60.10), Ausonius (*Ecl*. 24.6) and other authors.[50] These instances indicate that the word *balteus* may have been current in the spoken Latin of Late Antiquity. Lewis and Short list the word *balteus* as masculine, and the neuter as 'more rare', generally ante-classical and poetic.[51] They give numerous examples of its use in surviving literature, including Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and the Christian author Tertullian, demonstrating instances of the neuter plural (in Livy and in Juvenal) as well as the masculine singular and the masculine plural (the latter in Tac. *Hist.* 1.57). In addition, they point to three occurrences of the word in Jerome's *Vulgate*, where it appears in the accusative singular. A more detailed search of Jerome's *Vulgate* also reveals the masculine accusative plural (*Exodus* 28.40), as well as multiple occurrences of the genitive, dative and ablative forms. Given the probable date of this (namely that Jerome did not finish his translation until 405, making it roughly contemporary with Servius' own composition), it is unlikely that any Christians among Servius' students would have been already reading Jerome's text. Furthermore, it is listed by Niemayer[52] as meaning a palisade between a castle's wall and a moat, and also by Meyer-Lübke, who gives descendants in several modern languages, including Romanian, Italian, Provençal, Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese.[53] Such a significant number of descendants in multiple Romance languages, in addition to the word's mediaeval Latin counterpart, strongly implies that the word *balteus* was still in use as a regular masculine noun in the spoken Latin of Servius' day. Once again, Servius' comment draws attention to a feature that he anticipates requires teaching. It is unlikely, given the word's regular formation as a second-declension noun, that native Latin speakers would have needed guidance on its usual gender of masculine. However, it would make good sense if this comment were directed at non-native speakers, who might mistake it for a neuter given the similarity of masculine and neuter endings in oblique cases in singular second-declension nouns. For native and non-native speakers alike of a more advanced level, Servius demonstrates the poetical and rarer use of *balteus* as a neuter plural noun. Thus, in one comment, Servius has taught pronunciation, regular gender assignment and poetic use of unusual gender assignment from one word in Virgil's text. He has addressed non-native speakers, and advanced students. And each point could relate directly to student learning activities, such as performing a reading, using language correctly in written or spoken composition, and observing a rare literary usage in the poets. Thus, Servius has differentiated his material and appealed to a range of students, working at different levels and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Interestingly, Servius' information about the use of the word *balteus* in the neuter plural in this comment is not at all relevant to the passage of Virgil's text he is discussing. Furthermore, as Virgil does not use the word in the plural at all (let alone in the neuter), the information has no value in the context of studying Virgil's poetry. This information must, therefore, have related to a wider pedagogical purpose, one that went beyond an understanding

[50] *TLL* 2.1711.21.
[51] Lewis and Short s.v. (p. 221).
[52] Niemeyer (n. 44), 79.
[53] Meyer-Lübke (n. 45), 75.

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of Virgil's language for its own sake. The way in which Servius has framed the information about the neuter plural does not imply (and certainly does not prove) that he wanted his students to use the neuter plural variant of *balteus* actively. But the ability to recognize it and be aware of its existence—even though Virgil does not use it—was clearly valued and important to his aims.

LEARNING GREEK

As I stated at the start of this paper, knowledge of Greek was becoming less common in the West during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. For example, although many cultured elite Romans were still interested in aspects of Greek culture, such as Greek philosophy, by the fourth century most read such texts only in translation.[54] A wealthy and advanced Roman student who attended Servius' school might have had a grounding in basic aspects of Greek, but would have been unlikely to have been able to read (or even access) Greek literature in significant depth.[55] On the other hand, it is well known that Virgil's poetry borrowed directly from Greek literary traditions, in terms of material, genre and language. Servius considers these traditions important enough to comment on Virgil's use of Greek material and generic conventions relatively frequently in his comments, including references to Greek as a language. Servius regularly acknowledges how Virgil's use of Latin can be seen to arise from Greek usage. Whenever he refers directly to any Greek words or phrases, he always explains their meaning and translates them into Latin. He seems, therefore, to expect his readers (whether students or other teachers) to have some grasp of the language and its structure, such as familiarity with the alphabet, noun declensions and even basic pronunciation, but not to have extensive knowledge of vocabulary.

For example, when Jupiter calls Mercury to transmit instructions to Aeneas to leave Africa, Servius gives a broad explanation about Mercury and his caduceus, as part of which he explains the meaning of Mercury's Greek name Hermes (*Aen.* 4.242):

῾Ερμῆς autem Graece dicitur ἀπὸ τῆς ἑρμηνείας, Latine interpres.

But [Mercury] is called Hermes in Greek from *hermeneia*, in Latin an 'interpreter'.

Interestingly, Servius does not seem to expect all his readers to know Mercury's name in Greek, something that we might consider quite basic. Nor does he expect them to know the meaning of the Greek word ἑρμηνεία, which he provides to explain and gloss the name of Hermes. But he does expect his readers to recognize the meaning of the word ἀπὸ and the definite article to agree with the noun, which he always uses whenever glossing Greek. This seems to be a formulaic phrase, and perhaps one that his readers are so used to that it does not require glossing. Servius expects a basic knowledge of Greek from his readers: articles and prepositions, rather than a wider vocabulary. However, his decision to teach the Greek name of the god and its Greek etymology may demonstrate the cultural capital his students needed to acquire, in order to be able eventually to compose their own written pieces in a highly literary register of

[54] Cameron (n. 2), 666.

[55] F. Racine, 'Servius' Greek lessons', in E. Archibald, W. Brockliss, J. Gnoza (edd.), *Learning Latin and Greek from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, 2015), 63.

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Latin, whether prose or verse. This is the sort of training that Servius' literary contemporaries, such as Symmachus, Ausonius and Augustine, must have received.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of specific examples in Servius' commentary, I have attempted to shed some light into the nature of the backgrounds and the linguistic competencies of the students in Servius' classroom and the strategies by which he addressed this. Not all of them spoke Latin as their native language, and their abilities and familiarity with formal registers of standard Latin probably varied greatly. Therefore, Servius had to target his teaching on Virgil's language to enable those students to recognize both archaic and contemporary Latin, as well as to distinguish between different formal registers, including prose and verse. He seems also to have expected them to be familiar with the Greek and with Greek idioms necessary to enhance their understanding of Virgil's use of language. It is important to remember that these comments probably originally also formed part of lessons such as those shown in the *Colloquia*, and not just lectures, so that students were able to practise regularly how to use good standard spoken and written Latin themselves. The Latin that they were learning from Virgil was not only intended to be employed in basic communication, but was also to ensure that they had a competent grasp of a certain register of language. It was important for them to know the differences between the language of the Augustan age and their own language, and when to use particular types of registers. Such knowledge of literary Latin was not a practical necessity (you would be unlikely to use it at the market, for example), but rather it served as a status marker and thus a prerequisite for public office and acceptance into the Roman elite.

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