The Cambridge Latin Course Online – The Learner's Perspective
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This paper draws on research I conducted during the 2004-2005 academic school year on learners' perspectives about the effects of electronic resources, particularly the 'click and look up tool', on their study of Latin via Book 1 of the Cambridge Latin Course (CLC) as part of the Cambridge Online Latin Project (COLP).

In 2000, the Cambridge School Classics Project (CSCP) together with Granada Media and the Cambridge University Press, received Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) funding to develop interactive CD-Rom materials based on Book 1 of the CLC for introduction into secondary school classrooms with or without a Latin specialist. The one-year COLP pilot commenced in twenty one schools (sixteen non-specialist, five specialist) with its print resources, the CLC textbook and Independent Learning Manual, in September 2000; its electronic resources, which were still in development in September, were introduced in January 2001. Today the twin aims of the COLP continue to be to 'produce and test a wide range of digital resources to accompany Book 1 of the CLC' and to 'set up and support Latin in secondary schools with no classics teacher' (Cambridge School Classics Project, 2005). This year there are thirty two non-specialist schools registered with the COLP using the pilot CD-Rom materials.[1]

Before arriving in Cambridge in September 2004, I taught Latin for two years at a New York City independent school where it was a compulsory course. I relished witnessing and contributing to the myriad of ways in which Latin can capture students' interest and inspire them to learn, even those who enter with preconceived notions that Latin is dead, difficult or (worst of all to a thirteen year old) boring. In most New York City schools, however, students do not have the opportunity to study Latin as it is no longer a part of the academic curriculum. I came to Cambridge interested in learning about how Information and Communications Technology (ICT) could make the study of Latin available to more students. What made me particularly interested in working with the CSCP on their online Latin course was precisely the fact that they focus on collaborating with schools that do not have Latin teachers.

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[1] The number of non-specialist schools may be higher as there are at least a dozen schools that have used the pilot materials in the past but do not have current COLP partnership status. Although schools are supposed to obtain a new site licence each year, they may well be continuing to use the materials.

My research took the form of a case study and centered on the COLP programmes at three state schools, which are government run schools that accept children of all ability levels from age eleven to eighteen years. Between Schools A and B, located on the outskirts of London, and School C, in rural Essex, there is a range of socio-economic, ethnic and geographic diversity. School A is a mid-sized urban comprehensive school and a designated technology college with a student population of about 900, 23% of which is non-white. School B is also a large urban comprehensive and a specialist sports college, recently selected by the government to be an ICT test-bed school. Of the approximately 1,650 students enrolled at school B, 44% are non-white. By contrast, School C is a large rural comprehensive school with a predominately (96%) white population.

At each of the three schools Latin is not part of the timetabled academic curriculum. Indeed, no Latin programme existed until introduced by the COLP four or five years ago. The students who choose to study Latin with the COLP do so in addition to their regular academic classes. They meet once a week, after school, in a computer room for 45-60 minutes under the supervision of a facilitator, who is usually a teacher but not a Latin specialist.

Because the electronic resources used by students participating in the COLP were designed to accompany and enhance Book 1 of the CLC, it is worth examining briefly the educational principles behind the Course itself. In 1970 members of the CSCP created a story-based course, the CLC, with two objectives in mind: first, 'to teach comprehension of the Latin language for reading purposes,' and second, 'to develop from the outset an understanding of the content, style and values of Roman civilisation' (Story, 2003:85). Set in Pompeii in the 1st century AD, the stories in Book 1 centre on the *familia* of Lucius Caecilius Iucundus. The Course is based on the theory that 'it is possible for a skilfully designed course to enable pupils to develop an *intuitive* grasp of Latin grammar' (Sharwood Smith, 1975). The CLC designers were heavily influenced by Noam Chomsky's theories of transformational grammar and language acquisition. The Course emphasizes the development of a literary reading skill in Latin by focusing on word groups and sense units rather than on parsing each individual word. As the Book 1 Teacher's Guide (1999) states,

Many students who appear to understand linguistic information presented in isolation find it hard to apply that information in their reading. In the Course, reading experience precedes discussion and analysis… (It is) important that they develop the habit of grouping words

together and treating the phrase or sentence as a single unit. Language learning consists of forming habits as well as solving problems (Cambridge Latin Course, 1999: 8).

The same educational principles played a role in the creation of the 'click and look up' tool that accompanies the electronic version of the CLC stories.
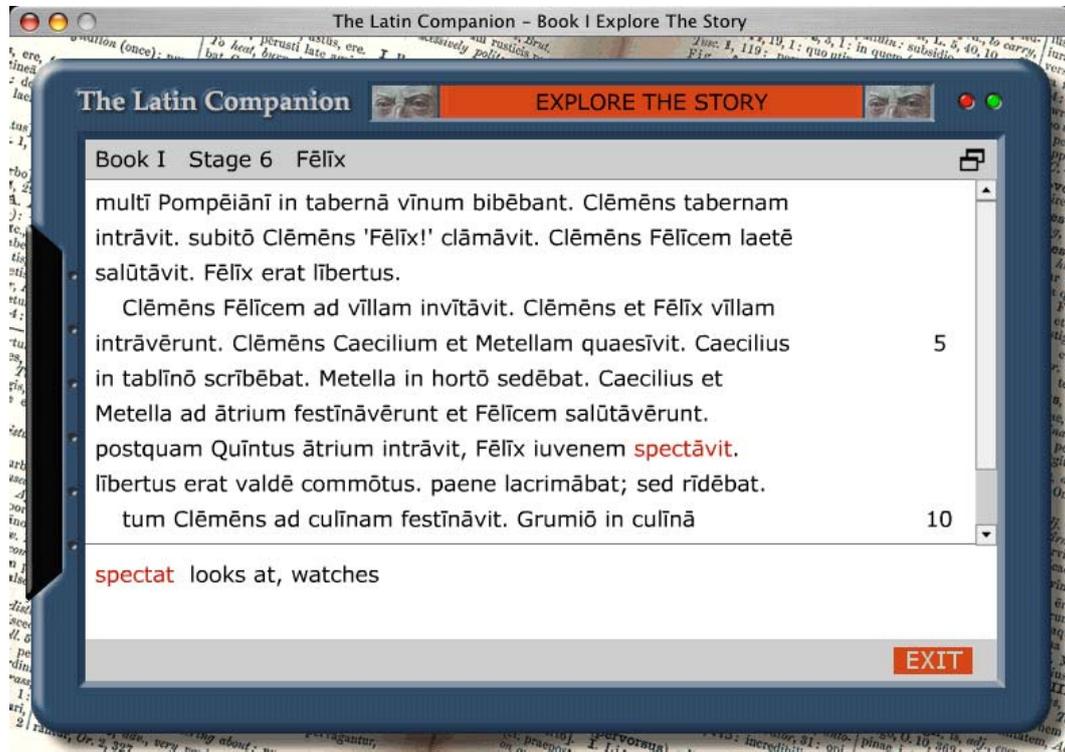
It is important to note several key features of the online version of the text. The screen is designed to look as similar as possible to textbook layout. Both the lineation and the line numbers (e.g. 5, 10) are identical. Moreover, the 'click and look up' definition provided at the bottom of the screen when students click on a word (e.g. *spectavit* in line 8) is exactly the same definition that students would find if they were to look up the vocabulary word in the dictionary at the back of the textbook.

My research focuses on the value of this 'click and look up' tool. According to the education theory behind the Course itself, if reading word groups as a whole (rather than parsing individual words) is a critical part of learning Latin, then the increased speed generated by using the 'click and look up' tool (rather than the dictionary) enhances language acquisition because it makes it easier for students to do precisely that. COLP designers would argue that the add-on value of this electronic resource is not simply that it is quicker. Rather, because it is quicker, the 'click and look up tool' both makes it easier for students to read units (word groups, sentences) smoothly and also increases the frequency of meeting a word in context, thus facilitating language

acquisition. Whether students actually think that this is the case is a key question in my research.

During February and March 2005 I visited each of the three schools twice: the purpose of the first visit was to observe the class and to distribute questionnaires, the second was to conduct semi-structured interviews. I met with a total of forty seven students. When asked how they prefer to translate CLC Book 1 Latin stories:

- 67% prefer to use electronic resources

- 22% prefer either – doesn't matter

- 11% prefer to use the textbook

While it is important to note that there is a consistent minority of students who prefer to translate with the textbook, it is clear that the majority of students opt to use electronic resources for translating when given the choice. Not only do students prefer to use the 'click and look up' tool to translate when they translate (67%) but in so doing,

- 68% believe they translate <u>faster</u>

- 62% believe they translate <u>more accurately</u>

- 61% believe they understand the plot better

- 65% believe they understand Latin grammar better

These percentages suggest a pattern which indicates that approximately 60% of students believe that using the 'click and look up' tool helps them learn more Latin than the textbook. Therefore, it comes as quite a surprise that when I asked students specifically about 'learning Latin' with the 'click and look up' tool, only:

- 35% believe they learn <u>more Latin</u>

- 39% believe they learn the same

- 26% believe they learn <u>less Latin</u>

How can it be that 87% of students find the 'click and look up tool' helpful or very helpful, 67% prefer to use it, yet 26% (more than quarter of students) believe that they learn less Latin when using the tool instead of the textbook?

This discrepancy suggests a tension between the students' enjoyment of using electronic resources and their perceived language acquisition. At the same time, it provides fascinating insight into students' perceptions both of what the learning process demands and how they believe their brains acquire language. Consider the following quotations:

> It's an arduous process and we could do it in a minute on the computer. But I actually think you learn better if you do it from the book (School A boy, age 13).

> You use more of your mind when you translate from the book, the CSCP is too easy (School B girl, age 13).

For students, using the 'click and look up' tool on the computer is often perceived as taking the easy way out. The fact that both the 'click and look up' tool and the dictionary at the back of the book provide the same information is irrelevant. According to students at all three schools, the process of 'real' learning demands time and labour – looking words up at the back of the textbook, writing out translations and memorising vocabulary. The data suggest that students possess a model for language acquisition in which the process of acquiring information is as critical as the information itself. The 'in-a-minute' speed and the easiness of 'just clicking' that the 'click and look up' tool provides make it an illegitimate shortcut to 'real' learning. As one student puts it, 'You just click the button and it will give you the answer, so you're not really translating yourself' (School C girl, age 14).

Are students right? Is it true that the value of looking a word up at the back of the book is that it takes time, and therefore you are more likely to think before you look and to remember it when you do? Or it this simply a reflection of traditional cultural notions about what it means to learn? It is here that student perception of learning with the COLP tools clashes explicitly with the educational theory in which they are grounded. At the same time, while more than half of the students interviewed at each school believe that they achieve more 'real' learning when they use the textbook, there are also a significant number of students at each school who find either that there is 'no difference' or that it is easier to learn with the 'click and look up' than with the textbook.

> You learn better, like, you remember more, rather than, like, in the textbook you get bogged down, you can't be bothered (School B girl, age 13).

> On the computer, you can change what you put as you're trying to translate it …
> we don't have to keep struggling at it all the time (School C Boy, age 14).

Here the COLP theory is validated by students who find that they 'get the story better' when they use 'click and look up' tool to translate.

These incongruities between the students' model of learning and educational theory and variation amongst students themselves carries implications for future practice. If teachers believe that the 'click and look up' tool enhances students' ability to read Latin, then they have an obligation to discuss overtly with their students the value of using it, thereby helping students to comprehend better their own learning process. I would argue that because students' perceptions of the learning process influence their actual language acquisition, for effective Latin learning to take place with the 'click and look up' tool, students need to be able to understand not only 'how' to use the resource, but also 'why'.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that there is a clash between students' perceptions of 'real' learning and their enjoyment of learning Latin with electronic resources. The processes (writing out translations, looking up words in the back of the textbook) which they perceive as necessary to 'really learn' Latin are precisely those which they enjoy least.

> In normal classes we just learn from books but we use the computer in Latin which
> is good fun' (School C girl, age 13).

> It's much more fun on the computers, I mean, learning out of the book is kinda,
> like, we have to actually write in the books, I mean we don't write that much but,
> like, just reading out of the textbook is quite boring, 'cause on the computers you
> do it, like, interactively and you, like, it's easier (School C boy, age 13).

In the context of school life the COLP classes are located in a no man's land, somewhere between compulsory academic studies and voluntary recreational activities, which must be balanced carefully. It is clear that electronic resources enhance student enjoyment and motivation, which is critical to the success of a programme that depends on students volunteering to study Latin after-school. Without ICT, Latin loses its 'after-school' atmosphere, becoming too similar to a traditional class.

While it is hardly surprising that most COLP students reject the idea of a textbook-only Latin course because it is 'boring' and too much like 'normal school,' it is perhaps more unexpected that those interviewed also oppose an ICT-only course as

well. Indeed, every student was opposed to getting rid of the textbooks, for reasons related both to learning and to motivation. Without the textbook, students find that the COLP loses its intellectual rigour. In addition, there is no 'novelty factor' associated with using ICT for this generation of students. They report that being 'confined to a computer' is just as 'boring' as being confined to a textbook.

There is, in fact, no reason that students should have to choose between the two. The COLP is clear in stating that the electronic resources are designed to complement the book, not to replace it. The combination incorporates both reading Latin at speed for comprehension and analysing each word in depth, both of which are beneficial to the learner. Moreover, from the learner's perspective, it is advantageous to use both, not only for language acquisition, but also for motivation and enjoyment. Despite the fact that the environment is more relaxed, despite the fact that the adult is not a specialist, the COLP nonetheless operates in a classroom setting that students associate with traditional learning. In addition to the textbook, the presence of a teacher and peers forms an integral part of the 'familiar' learning template with which students are comfortable. It is the combination of ICT resources, e-tutors and facilitators that enables students to access Latin in a setting that they perceive as both conducive to learning and enjoyable as an after-school activity.

Overall students perceive that the electronic resources enhance the learning of Latin on three levels: language acquisition, motivation and access to a language that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to study. While the majority of students prefer to use the 'click and look up' tool when translating Latin stories, they possess simultaneously a strong loyalty to the CLC textbook and a wariness about how the ease and speed provided by 'click and look up' affects their learning of Latin.

These findings provide a platform for further research in several directions. In particular, the findings bring to light key questions about students' understanding of the value of a textbook as a medium for learning. What distinguishes it from the online text with the 'click and look up'? Is it a sense of physical permanence? Is it the linear 'barebones' organization? Is it a sense of 'no frills' academic authority? And at the same time, what does their loyalty to the textbook reveal about their perceptions of ICT in the academic setting? Is it that electronic resources are traditionally associated with games and entertainment, and thus represent short cuts or 'academic fluff'? Is it the notion that information gathered from the web is somehow less valid because it lacks an editorial screening process required for a book to be published?

And would a comparative study find that students in the USA share the same attitudes towards ICT and learning?

In conclusion, it is worth noting that we, as teachers and researchers, are at a particular point in the development of ICT learning and integration into classrooms, particularly with regard to Latin. For the first time, there is enough actual use of electronic resources to be able to examine the extent to which they affect the learning process. Until this point, we have developed theories about what it means to learn via ICT and generated materials based on these theories, like the 'click and look up' tool, but could conduct little actual research. Now that students are beginning to use these materials regularly in classrooms, we have the opportunity to analyse interface created by theory, practice and the perceptions of the learner.

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