

Preface

1/ Usual problem with vocabulary

Although grammar is not easy, one of the main problems that you face when you read a text in a foreign language is not grammar itself but an ever-increasing worrying lack of vocabulary. When reading a text written in a foreign language, there will always be the odd word that you will not know and maybe you can deduce an approximate meaning (for instance, some students of the English language, when reading the sentence “They were there, in the garden, sitting under an oak”, could perhaps not know what “oak” means, but it would not be too difficult to deduce that it’s a kind of tree), but the wider your vocabulary knowledge is, the more easily you will be able to understand the message of the text.

2/ A Latin example

The same happens in Latin. Observe this sentence from Cicero:

Dissuadentibus autem aut utilitas labefactanda est aut efficiendi difficultates efferendae.

You have studied the gerundive, you know how it works, and you immediately recognize it twice in this sentence in a structure that you know is called “passive periphrastic”. But... what do the verbs *labefacio* and *effero* mean? No matter how excellent your grammar is, either you know the meaning of these two words or you will not understand what Cicero is saying.

3/ How to learn vocabulary

Learning it from a list of words to be memorised does not bring very good results, as words learnt out of context tend to be easily forgotten, but learning them in context is much more useful for embedding them in your memory. With this in mind, we offer here a series of texts, glosses and exercises that may help you to consolidate and enhance your knowledge of it.

4/ But take into account...

It must be mentioned that one of the difficulties of Latin language is the large amount of meanings that some words may have. Think for instance of the verb *adhibeo*: “to use, to invite, to offer, to show...” The purpose of this book is not to present all the meanings for each word, therefore the word you learn here with a concrete meaning in this text may appear in another text with another meaning. Allow not some flexibility to the language but much flexibility, just remember what a surprise it is for a student of English language to find out that “well” means both a pleasant state of health and a hole in the ground from which you take water (or oil, if you are lucky).

For each word, the meaning that is given is the meaning that it has in *that* text. For instance, you will find in *Pensum* 14 the word *opes* defined as *copiae* because this is the meaning it has in that text, but in another text it may have the meaning “wealth” in a financial sense. So, if you ever come across the sentence *Magnas opes in parvo cubiculo habebat*, do not translate it as “He had many troops in a small room” just because you remember *opes* as meaning “troops”.

5/ What will you find in this book?

a) A preliminary part on core vocabulary.

The main 997 words that form the 70% of any standard Latin prose text. More details about it at the beginning of that section.

b) A main part of exercises (*Pensa*) for more advanced vocabulary.

More advanced vocabulary in groups of ten new words per exercise (with an additional part on very basic vocabulary again). More details about it at the beginning of that section.

6/ Appendixes

At the end of the book there is a key for the exercises related to the ten glossed words in each *Pensum* (there is no key either for the preliminary part, as the result is sentences that you create on your own, or for the additional exercises on very basic vocabulary after each *Pensum*).

There is also an index of authors from whom the texts have been taken. A quick glance will allow you to select the authors you prefer to deal with.

Finally, you will find an alphabetical vocabulary for the glossed terms, with an indication of the *Pensum* in which each term appears. You will see that some appear in more than one.

7/ Final purpose

As important as learning the 997 core words and the ten glossed words for each *Pensum*, or maybe even more important, is making sure that you know the meaning of all the words of each text, not only the ten selected ones, as the probability that you come across any of the other words of the text is much higher. It would not make much sense to learn the meaning of *adipiscor* but to let pass the meaning of such an important word like *castra* in the same text (if you see that you have forgotten its meaning or that for some reason you have never known it) just because it is not one of the chosen ten.

There is no magic book in the style of “Study this book and you will have solved the problem of a lack of vocabulary for the rest of your life,” unless you memorise a whole Latin dictionary. So, this book is not intended to solve this problem once and for all, but only to give a little help.

8/ Acknowledgements

It must be mentioned that most of this book was written during one of my periods of stay at the Fondation Hardt, in Geneva. I would like to express my gratitude to the Fondation Hardt for providing me with some wonderful stays and an excellent working environment.