

Latin Language and new educational technologies. A possible contribution to the revival of European cultural unity

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Abstract: - This paper presents a project on revival of the Latin language study in Europe. The complete methodological and didactical renewal of a basic Course of Latin is addressed, through new e-learning technologies and methods promoted by the Interfaculty Centre “Rete Puglia” in the University of Bari. The obtained results in terms of experimentation benefits are presented.

Key-Words: - New European Humanism, Latin Language Teaching, E-learning, Learning Method, Course Maker, Internet.

1 Introduction

The present European cultural context displays two main demands: on one side, a deep care to find out and to assert one’s own cultural identity and roots; at the same time there is a strong request of global communication, of getting over barriers in order to meet and to integrate other people.

The study of the past is necessary in order to know one’s own cultural identity; on the other side, communication is possible only through the acquirement of a universalistic spirit. The study of the Latin language could answer both demands and give a considerable contribution to make a new civilization.

No future can be built, if we do not know where we come from and which are the roots of our identity. Europe did exist a long time before EU was constituted. In the last century, after two world wars, far-sighted men, real pioneers, boldly dreamed of united Europe. They founded their vision on a sound humanistic education; they were well conscious of the common philosophical, linguistic, juridical, religious features of the various Western Europe Nations. In the foundation ground of these nations there is a common Hellenistic-Roman and Christian culture that was established in the Late-Ancient Age. And Latin was the vehicle of this common culture [9,4,7,8,10, 20].

Today, in the current linguistic communication, there is the proposal to choose Latin as the second language in EU beside English [12, 13, 19]. During

its presidential semester (June – December 2006) Finland experimented this possibility making available “*Conspectus rerum latinus*” news in Latin, on site www.eu2006.fi [17, 21, 22].

Otherwise, we have not to forget that a worldwide event such as the Oecumenical Vatican Second Council, could occur, in the 20th century, owing to Latin, the Church traditional universal language. According to this universalistic spirit, the Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum caritatis*”, at number 62, suggests the celebrations which occur during international meetings are acted in the Latin language (22 February 2007). It is asserted therefore that Latin is able to be, even today, the language of unity and universality.

The features of this language, its structure, its logical expressive effectiveness make it quite suitable to become the universal communication tongue. Otherwise in every country of EU there is a long tradition in the study of Latin. For many ages up to the French Revolution, Latin was the language of scientific research and texts as well as of cultural intercourse among European Universities. Until 1974 a good knowledge of Latin was needed to matriculate in Oxford and Cambridge University.

2 Latin in Europe: an educational suggestion

According to these preliminary remarks, a **project of teaching-learning Latin** at European, and perhaps worldwide level, is not an anachronistic proposal. This project, realized throughout Europe in a wide formative vision, can

- A. Train young people to unity through the recovering of
 - a. the roots of European culture and identity,
 - b. the common cultural humus of the EU countries,
 - c. the relations of the various national languages (also not Neo-Latin) and cultures with the Latin language and civilization;
- B. Promote the integration and the cultural inter-exchange among the EU countries on the ground of common Roman-Christian roots;
- C. Balance the prevalence trend of scientific and technological courses on historical-artistic-literary subjects.

3 Renewing the methodologies

Obviously today the study of the Latin language at generalized levels involves a complete revision of its teaching objectives and methods [1,2,3,6,11].

In Italian and European Universities the Literature and Cultural Heritage studies are specialistic courses: necessarily they require the knowledge of Latin and Greek too.

Unfortunately a considerable number of the students matriculated to Literature and Cultural Heritage courses lack of notions, also basic, of Latin language and civilization (sometimes of their own mother tongue too). Therefore it is difficult to keep traditional teaching methods [5].

Instead it is necessary to design a flexible didactical process, according to the different needs of users, and to benefit by new more suitable equipments.

Today, to satisfy the needs of students, more and more unprepared on linguistic subjects, a Latin basic course has to be focused on the following **objectives**:

1. development of observation;
2. sharpening of logical analysis and synthesis (against a mere storage of notions perhaps involved by present technologies);
3. recovering of the linguistic consciousness, also of one's own mother-tongue;
4. lexical enrichment;
5. development of expressive abilities.

Usually the weak consciousness of general linguistic phenomena hampers a rapid learning of Latin language. A proper knowledge of one's own mother-tongue sensibly reduces learning times and difficulties. By means of the **method** here proposed, it is possible, however, to detect and recuperate missing linguistic notions and, at the same time, to advance in learning of Latin.

The method is articulated into consequential steps:

- Matching between the Latin language and the mother-tongue through simple sentences;
- Detection and recovery of missing basic linguistic notions in order to achieve prerequisites;
- Careful observation of Latin variables with consequential discovery of grammatical relations;
- Rule codification and storage;
- Experimentation on various texts.

The **contents** of the Course are properly divided into didactical units:

1. Latin prosody;
2. Language structure: period, sentence, word;
3. Articulation of a Latin sentence, starting from the predicate:
 - a. Morpho-syntactical relations in a sentence,
 - b. Nominal and verbal inflexions;
4. Hierarchical structure of the Latin period:
 - a. principal and secondary sentences,
 - b. absolute and relative time: *consecutio temporum*;
5. Start to translate.

Every unit can be enlarged and enriched into various subregions. The arguments are dealt through the analysis of simple literary documentary texts about the Roman civilization [14, 15, 16, 18].

4 The didactical formative results

The exposed method presents features of evidence, rapidity and effectiveness which have allowed the achievement of appreciable results on various level users.

The method has been tested on:

- the students enrolled in the first year of traditional Literature Courses, coming from high schools without Latin language subject;

- the students matriculated to the University Certificate of Cultural Heritage, mostly coming from Vocational and Technical Schools;
- since the academic year 2001-02, the students enrolled in Literature and Cultural Heritage triennial Courses.

90% students matriculated to the courses above mentioned have passed the Latin Literature exam during the academic year, as required. Furthermore it has been possible to observe:

- a. a progressive **interest** in the Latin language;
- b. a better **comprehension** of basic linguistic phenomena (f.e. the use of the verbal tenses, of logical relations in the structure of a sentence, etc.);
- c. a considerable development of **logical** abilities of analysis and synthesis;
- d. a deeper **consciousness** of one's own mother tongue;
- e. an **enriched** and **more articulated** speech.

The results allow to suppose reasonably that a more extended teaching of Latin can oppose the contemporary cultural models. In fact, the study of the Latin language recovers the lexical and syntactical progressive impoverishment the generalized use of communication media (e-mail, mobile, chat, forum, etc) brings about. Therefore a generalized Latin teaching could build a new civilization, providing a balance factor and different trends.

5 Taking benefits by new technologies: a radical renewal

By means of PROTEO Project, some pilot courses on e-learning have been attended by an engaged group of very interested Professors of the various Faculties of the University of Bari. The aim of such courses was to put the attention to the functionalities of the new equipment provided by the project in different Faculties and to produce, in an e-learning mode, their University courses with traditional arguments in different knowledge areas.

I attended these courses and I was given the chance, and also the challenge, to reengineer the contents and the methodology of a basic Course of

Latin, according to the parameters and features of Lectora Publisher course maker, as well as to verify its effectiveness in a wider e-learning project. The translation of the contents of a Latin course into Lectora Publisher Course Maker can result very difficult. In fact, in Lectora Publisher there is a number of significant factors to be analyzed in the evolving e-learning applications and activities, including the selection of:

1. a properly basic “unit of learning” or “unit of information”, that moves away from the traditional course model (courseware) to become smaller and more detailed module (learningware);
2. properly units of learning, interconnected each other by an internal consequentality;
3. properly pages or slides having a monothematic scheme;
4. a technical language with the possibility to produce a study in a glossary, etc.

Although these modifications have produced a radical adaptation of the methodological and didactical procedures, the results in terms of communication clarity and training facilities are evident. Furthermore, the Lectora's content organization provides a visual, efficient way of organizing the Latin language course as well as an easy access to all didactical units. In addition, the course has an easily and custom-made designed animation, with colored images and parts of texts into the pages. Also multimedia objects, including audio and animations, in different multimedia formats, are inserted into the pages.

6 Advantages

Once the *Latin Language* course is completed by using Lectora Publisher Authoring Tool, it consists of several Learning Objects (LO), that are the smallest units the student can pursue. A LO is made up by many different pages. The granularity chosen during the planning phase of the course structure is very important first of all for pedagogical reasons, but also because a LO is a reusable object. A modification on a single learning object, for its stand-alone facility, doesn't cause the adjustment of the entire course.

On the other hand, when the course has been published on a LMS Platform according to the AICC (Aviation Industry CBT Committee)/Web Based standard the didactical features of learning objects sensibly increase. Now the course is usable from students as well as Professors, whose eventual

suggestions can be considered to update the course itself. Some didactical units can be extracted and subsequently easily re-used for different knowledge level students.

Tests on the course can be inserted on the platform more than a time into several sub-regions with different difficulty levels.

Advantages are immediately evident. The use of the Lectora Publisher course maker obliges to think and to re-propose all teaching contents in an easy, affective and also flexible way. The use of schematic synthesis, tables, visual effects, alternation of colours; the possibility of deepening on single words or characters by means of internal or external links makes the communication very attractive and winning.

Students think that the e-learning version of the course facilitates the study activity and the recovery of the lost lessons. Furthermore, the navigation of the course pages easily allows the collection of the whole didactic material prepared by the Professor.

The student can personalize his course, by running over again and enlarging, as he likes, those notions not yet totally absorbed or by rapidly following the acquired notions: he simply becomes the protagonist, since he can adapt his course understanding to his personal requirements and learning rhythms.

By **comparing** the final e-learning version with a classical lesson, like the traditional one provided in a book, the effectiveness and the immediacy achieved through the e-learning techniques are evident. Also when it is compared with a traditional frontal lesson, the realized e-course results superior since it has features that the direct teacher-student communication hasn't. Briefly, in the e-learning version the precision level and the economy of communicative language are increased [14,15,16,18].

In this way a very interesting revolution occurs in didactics. It is a chance and a spurring challenge for every teacher. The EU Council with far-sighted policy invests many financial resources on this radical revolution the new educational technologies give rise to, if used in a creative way. It is a vital question to be answered by our own knowledge and creative efforts.

7 Experimental results

In the current academic year 2006-07, the experimentation of the "Basic Course of Latin Language", realized with Lectora Publisher course maker has started, according to the method above described. The experimentation has involved about forty students enrolled in Literature Course, curriculum "Literary Culture of Antiquity".

In order to verify the functionality of the method, the didactical unit concerning the Latin prosody has been chosen by sample. Almost all students enrolled had a faint or wrong idea of this linguistic notion.

The argument "Latin Prosody" has been presented according to the method just explained.

The **intermediate verification test** has given the following results:

- ◇ number of students enrolled in the course: 42;
- ◇ number of students who have taken the test: 42;
- ◇ number of students who have passed the test: 31;
- ◇ number of students who have failed the test: 11.

Successively, the students enrolled in the course, distributed in groups, have attended a training session at Rete Puglia Centre, where they have visualized the Latin Prosody didactical unit in e-learning mode. Furthermore everyone has taken a password to enter into the **web-learning** portal realized by the Rete Puglia Centre, in order to run over the Latin Prosody didactical unit from their P.C. and to take self-validation tests.

The students have appreciated the experience and the clear didactic approach of the unit visualized.

About one month later (the access to the web-learning portal was already available), the **final verification test** of basic Latin Course has occurred with these results:

- ◇ number of students who have taken the test: 42;
- ◇ number of students who have passed the test: 40;
- ◇ number of students who have failed the test: 2.
- ◇ Summing up, the issues are:
- ◇ **intermediate verification**

- 31 out of 42 students have passed the test (**73,81%**);
- ◇ **final verification** (after web-learning access opening)
 - 40 out of 42 students have passed the test (**95,24%**).

The increase in positive issues is evident and particularly appreciable. We rightly believe that the increased positive issues from the intermediate verification test to the final one have to be ascribed to the higher didactic effectiveness of the basic Latin Course in e-learning mode.

Connecting web-learning by their P.C. the students have been able to run over the prosody didactical unit and the training activities of self-evaluation. Particularly the disadvantaged students have declared to be more interested in learning work and to avail themselves owing to the clear efficacious communication speech realized by Lectora.

8 Conclusion and perspectives

The positive results obtained, though partial, encourage in going on and enlarging the project experimentation area. Owing to the network realized by the "Rete Puglia" Centre, the access to the web-learning portal will be given also to the students enrolled in Literature and Cultural Heritage of the country-sites of Taranto and Brindisi, beside to the other University sites of the whole Region.

A further prospect is to extend the experimentation to secondary intermediate and high schools. A basic course of Latin language, easy rapid efficacious to be approached, thought and realized in e-learning mode, could favour, at national and also European level, the insertion of basic Latin notions in the educational plans of secondary intermediate and high schools.

Some basic Latin notions could help those students who choose to matriculate to humanistic faculties. At the same time, basic Latin notions would provide every other student the possibility to re-contact the historical roots of one's own language and culture.

We do not ignore the risk that the study of Latin is restricted within too specialized precincts or a more and more limited number of people. The literary-artistic heritage of huge value which founds

the European unity runs the risk to become completely unknown and obscure to most European citizens. Perhaps it is already occurred.

It is time, therefore, to find a remedy, taking advantage from all facilities offered by new technologies, in order to bring time, minds and energies back to a cause which involves the future of European civilization.

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