

Latin & French:

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Good Evening. Like many people, I have been interested in learning foreign languages. There has been two languages which have called to me more than the others. In my earlier days, one language called to me. In more recent times, another language has called to me.

I went to junior high in West Des Moines, Iowa, for most of it. Seventh grade was pretty cut and dried. More or less, everyone took the same basic schedule. Eighth grade year, you got to choose some electives. I was thinking about taking a class like Tech Ed. We had a sample of it in seventh grade and I thought it was neat. My dad and stepmom were not fond of this idea. They were thinking college prep and thus encouraged me to take a foreign language. I expressed my dislike of that, but I did end up following their advice. I found that I really enjoyed French class. One night, I even told my dad and stepmom that I was glad I took a foreign language.

Unfortunately, my study of French would be disrupted, because I would be going to live with my mom in Garrison, South Dakota. The school system in West Des Moines, Iowa was a good school system. It was pretty decent. However, the one in Garrison, South Dakota sucked. Garrison, South Dakota is a very small town. There is less than 1,000 people there. The school system is bare bones. At that school, eighth graders did not take foreign language. At the high school level, there was two years of foreign language, but that was German. I believe this was probably done because the high schools [must] have some foreign language. It was pretty pathetic.

I desired to keep learning French, so I studied it on my own. I got a French grammar and started practicing French. Later, I would find out I learned some of the matter wrongly, but at least I was passionate about it and gave it a try when I did not have an opportunity to learn it formally.

Soon again, I would be moving with my mom to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where I would attend Lincoln High School. That school was also pretty decent. It was much better than Garrison. The school had a nice foreign language offering:

- Latin
- French
- Spanish
- German

French was a language that appealed to me the most, partially, because I had already taken it. So that's what I took. I attended that school for just over a quarter of the year. Then I moved again to live with my dad and stepmom in Rockford, Illinois. I went to high school at Jefferson High. This school was much better than Garrison, but probably not as good as West Des Moines or Sioux Falls.

This school had some foreign language. I remember there was French and Spanish. There may have been German too, but besides those three, I think that was it. I enrolled in French. I took two years of it. I liked it. I contemplated taking a third year of French during my fourth year, but schedule-wise it did not work out.

When I went to college, in order to get a BA degree, you were required to take two semesters of a foreign language. The good news was you could exempt it if you scored well enough on the placement test. I took the placement test and just barely missed exempting the requirement. It was about four years since I had taken French. So because I just barely missed, I would have been placed in the second class. Afraid I would be over my head, I decided to take the first class. I took the first and second class.

Like many other college students during my early time at the university, I debated what I was going to major in. I considered French. A big barrier to majoring in French was the fact the French major had a requirement that only 304 level classes could count toward the major. Thus, 200 level classes did not count. You would have to take four classes or 16 credits before anything would start counting unless you were so fortunate to be able to exempt something due to a high score on the placement test.

For that and other reasons, I was drawn to other majors. I had a friend in college whose brother majored in the classics at his university. I do not recall the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point having a major in the

classics. If it did, I surely did not hear about it and I even read the undergraduate catalog. I decided to major in French. I thought majoring in the classics was a pretty cool way to go. Many people would think something like that would be very impractical. But I can relate to that because I majored in philosophy, which is supposed to be the epitome of impractical majors.

After my two years of, my two semesters of French in college, my foreign language study was set aside for a number of years. After graduate school, another foreign language started calling to me, Latin. People talked about it in graduate school here or there. For example, we learned that back in the day, you had to complete a thesis in your own tongue and then translate it into Latin. It's hard enough writing a thesis in your own language. It's hard enough learning a foreign language. I would imagine it would be extremely difficult to translate something as highly technical and sophisticated as a thesis into Latin.

When I moved to the Twin Cities, I visited some libraries. On and off, I would search for Latin books. Usually I found next to nothing. My desire to learn happened to coincide with an opportunity. Part of the problem getting started earlier was not having quite enough initiative. I visited the Ramsey County Public Library in Roseville. There I found the book *Latin Made Simple*. I checked it out and I began my study of Latin. The book was very user friendly. Some of the material was presented incorrectly, which is ever so frustrating. But overall the book has a nice style.

Latin has become a part of my daily routine. In fact, it is one of the top items on my daily agenda. Interestingly enough, agenda is a Latin word. I started studying Latin in late last June. So it's been ten and a half, almost eleven months. It has been very awesome. I feel I've learned a lot. At first it hurt my head to read Latin passages. Now it doesn't hurt my head. Some passages are indeed very difficult. Sometimes if I want to understand it well, I have to look up lots of words. But it's alot better than it was. I feel I've learned a lot of vocabulary. I feel my translation is getting better, though that's still very difficult. It seems inevitably there are mistakes. Usually the best I can hope for is translating a sentence with only one or two mistakes. Sometimes I can get a sentence translated exactly right from English to Latin. At first I found translating from English to Latin to be so hard and even frustrating, but then it soon became enjoyable and satisfying.

When I visit libraries in the Twin Cities, one of my searches is for Latin books. Since I've looked for Latin books a number of times, I have memorized where the Latin books are in the libraries. Thus I do not need to go to the computer catalog. In the Library of Congress system, Latin books are in the PA area. In the Dewey Decimal system, Latin books are in the 400 area.

My friend Blanca said about another topic, “every book you read gives you extra insight.” This applies to Latin as well. It seems every Latin book I get has something different and new to offer:

- It may be extra vocabulary words.
- It may be clear explanations of grammatical points explained in other places.
- It may be minor grammatical points that are not included everywhere. The major ones are generally included in every book.
- It may be extra exercises with answers. I love to get extra exercises with answers. These seem to be too few in number.

I have even gotten some Latin books on interlibrary loan. There are some major similarities between Latin and French, [like language experts say]. Some words are exactly the same in both languages, [like language experts say].. Otherwise, many words, although not exactly the same, are very similar, [like language experts say].. Sometimes these words differ in just the endings which are peculiar to each individual language , [like language experts say].

Take the verb to be. In Latin it is sum est, es est. In French it is je suis, tu es, il est, elle est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont. Two of the forms are spelled exactly the same. The second person and third person singular forms. They are pronounced differently since French employs silent letters and Latin pronounces every letter. The third person plural form is almost the same. It differs

The other forms of this verb to be at least start with the only by one letter. In Latin it is s-u-n-t. In French it is s-o-n-t. same letter. A reason for the similarity is because French is derived from Latin , [like language experts say].. Other Romance languages like Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian are also derived from Latin , [like language experts say].. Latin, as we know, originated in the Roman Empire. As the Roman Empire

conquered these different areas, Latin spread , [like language experts say].. Eventually, the Latin changed in each area and became these individual languages, [like language experts say]..

Some people say “if you learn one language, particularly those in the same family, it's easier to learn another language because there's a lot of similarities.” Indeed, this can be true. Vocabulary-wise, it helps a lot to be familiar with one language. Like I said earlier, Latin and French have a lot of similarities [like language experts say]. Sometimes it just involves learning different endings [like language experts say]. Even with English, which is heavily influenced by Latin , [like language experts say], one has a good head start. Even if a person does not know a word in Latin, one can often make a reasonable guess because much of the time the Latin word is comparable to some English word , [like language experts say].. You can almost just guess it and get it right. I've done this before.

Some would say “if you learn one foreign language, you learn the ability to learn a foreign language. Thus, you can take that and learn another foreign language.” I do think the very reason that knowing one language makes another easier can also make it more difficult. The similarities which make it easier can also make it more difficult. When there's lots of similarities, there's room for great confusion. On occasion, my mind has mixed up French with Latin. It doesn't happen super often, but it does happen on occasion. It has seemed as if the study of Latin has broke open the part of my mind which has stored the French I learned years ago. The memories of French have lied dormant, but Latin brings them back, it seems. Why is it hard to learn Latin or French? Many say Latin is a very difficult language. I'm not thinking it's as bad as people make out to be, but I do think it is harder than French. It seems harder than what I remember French being. A big reason for this is because Latin is highly inflected [like language experts say]. Inflection is a change of a word ending based on how the words are used in a sentence , [like language experts say]. Latin has six different cases, which is a lot to keep track of [like language experts say]. There are idiosyncrasies one must be aware of. Sometimes when it seems like one case would work, another would actually be the more correct one.

English is not inflected [like language experts say]. French is not considered an inflected language either [like language experts say]. But if there are shades of inflection, then French is a little more inflected than English [like

language experts say]. Because Latin is inflected, the word order does not have to be the same always, though there is a standard word order [like language experts say]. In English and in French, the subject comes first [like language experts say]. In Latin, although it usually does, you can technically put it at the end, in the middle, or wherever else you want it to be [like language experts say].

The word order in French is different than English [like language experts say]. In French, you may have:

- Subject, object, verb [like language experts say].

In English, it's typically:

- Subject, verb, object [like language experts say].

I remember French also having subject, verb, object. For example, if you said, "Je vais en France," I am going to France, the subject would be first and the object would be last with the verb in the middle. But in Latin, it is typically:

Subject, Indirect object, Direct object, Verbal clauses and phrases, Verb.
[like language experts say]

Since the verb is at the end in Latin, that makes it harder to read at first [like language experts say]. French has the verb closer to the subject, so it's not as hard to get used to [like language experts say]. Because of inflection, certain small words which may be expressed in English or French are merely implied in Latin [like language experts say]. For example, words such as "to" or "for" used with an indirect object are implied by the case ending in Latin, while such would be expressed in English and as I recall in French as well [like language experts say].

I believe Latin has a smaller vocabulary than English and French. I have heard that English has one of the biggest vocabularies. When I look in the Latin dictionaries, it seems as if one general Latin word is used for a variety of more specific English words. Part of the problem is French and English have been modernized and contemporized, thus there are very precise and specific words for a great number of ideas, topics, objects, actions, you name it. This would naturally make Latin more concise. Latin is also more concise because, as I said earlier, some of the small words are implied but

not expressed. English is considered a very wordy language [like language experts say].

Another feature of Latin, which is, in my book, very interesting, also makes it more concise. In Latin, subjects are optional [like language experts say]. In both English and French, you need the subject [like language experts say]. In Latin, you can say, ambulum, I walk. In English, you have to say, I speak to you. You would not say, speak to you to express the thought, I speak to you. In French, you would say, je parle français, I speak French. You would not say, parle français to express the idea, you are speaking French or you do speak French.

Recently, in the teacher's self Latin grammar book, one of the translation exercises was translating “cogito ergo sum”, which is Latin for, “I think, therefore I am.” In French, this is, je pense donc je suis. In both English and French, this fairly short thought takes five words to express. In Latin, it takes three. This is because subjects do not have to be expressed. You can tell the subjects by the verb endings [like language experts say]. Although French also has changes in verb endings, some of the endings are the same for different persons. So you need the subject there to distinguish between the two.

Another interesting feature of Latin, which makes it condensed more, is that it lacks what we know as articles [like language experts say]. Articles are the, a, and, in English. In French, articles are un, un, le, la, les. Articles enable you to be more precise and specific [like language experts say]. There is an important difference between saying the book and a book. When you say the book, you are referring to one book in particular. If you say a book, you are referring to any book. For example, if you say grab me the book, you want the person to get one book in particular. If you say grab me a book, the person could get you any book and you would be satisfied. Although articles enable us to be more precise, I have found them to not always be as necessary as English or French speakers would act as if they are. They're not included in Latin and they do not seem to be as important as we would make them out to be.

I came across the book *Winnie Ille Pooh*. I'm actually now reading it. *Winnie Ille Pooh*, as you may have guessed, is the Latin translation of the

book *Winnie the Pooh*. I just told you that Latin did not and does not have articles. So why is it *Winnie Ille Pooh*? Should it be Winnie Pooh? I wondered this at first. Then I discovered that the word *Ille*, “which is one form of the pronoun that, assumed some quasi-article functions in the later years of Latin usage” [like language experts say]. “It never evolved to a full-fledged article, but it did take some of the functions.” [like language experts say]

Today, as we know, Latin no longer is used widely, though it once was, at least as a whole language. The other Romance languages are still in great use:

- Italian is spoken primarily in Italy. I'm not aware of any other place where it's spoken in any great way.
- Romanian is about the same as Italian, though Romanian is not as popular as Italian. It would be much harder to find Romanian books than Italian books.
- Portuguese is spoken in Portugal and Brazil.
- French is spoken in France, in Quebec, as a second language in the rest of Canada. It's spoken in parts of Africa and spoken in some islands here and there.
- Spanish is spoken all over. It's spoken in Mexico and Latin America and Spain. It's becoming a very dominant second language in the United States, though it's not an official second language [like geography experts note].
- English is spoken all over, too. It's spoken in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and it is a major language all over the world. Where it's not the first language, it's the second language.

Since our nation is so dominant, and Great Britain was so dominant in the past, English has played a great role all over the world, and still does. Latin does still have some usage. A huge number of words in English are derived from Latin [like language experts say]. It's amazing when you get down to it. I have heard people talk about this and then as I study Latin more and more, it's so remarkable to see the similarities and the carryover from Latin to English. The only other language so influential in the forming of English was Greek [like language experts say].

Latin is used in the legal arena [like language experts say]. Many phrases such as pro se, someone defending him or herself, are Latin phrases [like language experts say]. The phrases typically are verbatim Latin, though they are pronounced in the English way [like language experts say].

Medicine uses Latin [like language experts say]. Anatomy is full of Latin words [like language experts say]. Parts of the body are based on Latin words [like language experts say]:

Cranium, brain is a Latin word, as are the rest of the body parts [like language experts say].

In science, the elements are often Latin words [like language experts say]. Also, the plant and animal classification system heavily uses Latin [like language experts say]. It's based entirely in Latin [like language experts say]. Whenever a new species is found, the Latin words for it become its official name [like language experts say].

The Catholic Church, more than any other organization, uses Latin today. The Catholic Church uses Latin as a whole language in its documents and publications. It uses the Latin language. Before Vatican II, all masses were conducted in Latin. Then it was ruled that masses could be conducted in the language of the people in the given areas. Kudos to the Roman Catholic Church for keeping the great language of Latin alive.

Latin is an awesome language. There are many people like me who keep Latin alive for academic interest. I have loved studying it. It has been so awesome. I have found the study of foreign language to be fascinating, enriching, fulfilling, and satisfying.