

The Oral Method

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The Oral Method was the name given to the Direct Method of teaching Latin after rules had been formulated for that method so that the uninitiated (mainly those who had not been taught in that way) could use it successfully. The new name was invented by Arthur Munday after he and I had worked together with Dr Loehry at the Priory School, Shrewsbury to formulate those rules. It follows that, if I am to describe the Oral Method, I must first explain the Direct Method, since the two have many practices in common.

As far as I know the Direct Method of teaching French was invented by M. Chouville and M. de Glehn when they were teaching at the Perse School, Cambridge in the early 1900s. The Headmaster, Dr W. H. D. Rouse, found their work so successful that he decided to adapt their method to the teaching of Latin. This adaptation was equally successful, and in 1911 the ARLT was founded to support the work of Dr Rouse, and the word Reform was deliberately included in the title to show that the main aim of the Association was to serve this purpose.

The basic principle of the Direct Method is that a pupil can best learn a foreign language in the same way as he learned his own, i.e. by imitating the words spoken by his parents and others around him, and by using them frequently and speaking them long before he could write them.

So it was that in my first year at the Perse, and in my first lesson with M. Chouville, I found myself imitating his actions and speaking a little French. He sat in a desk among us, got up from it and, while pointing at himself said slowly and clearly: '*Je me lève.*' Then he walked to the platform under the wall blackboard and, still pointing at himself said; '*Je vais à l'estrade.*' He came back to his seat, pointed at himself and said; '*Je retourne.*' Then he sat down, and still pointing at himself said: '*Je m'assieds.*' He went through this drill three times.

Then he sat beside me, got up and said; '*Je me lève.*', and motioned to me to do the same. He put his hand up to his ear to indicate that he wanted to hear me say something. But I got up and said nothing. So he repeated what he had

done before, but this time, as well as putting one hand up to his ear, he pointed at my mouth with the other. I realised what he wanted and said: '*Je me lève.*'; and he patted me on the back. When he walked to the platform and said '*Je vais à l'estrade.*', I managed to say '*Je vais . . .*', and pointed at myself, but couldn't remember the rest. So he pointed at the platform and said: '*. . . l'estrade*', and I got the whole sentence right. '*Je retourne.*' and '*Je m'assieds*' were then easy.

Chouville encouraged about half a dozen other pupils to go through the same drill, making quite sure that when they said the French they pointed at themselves. Then, when the next boy said '*Je me lève.*', he pointed at him and said '*Tu te lèves.*', and persuaded the rest of the class to do the same. After the whole drill had been performed several times in this way, and another boy had pointed at himself and said: '*Je me lève.*' and the class had pointed at him and said: '*Tu te lèves.*', Chouville turned his back on him, and, pointing at him with his thumb over his shoulder, said: '*Il se lève.*'

So the drill went on, and by the end of the first lesson we had learned the three persons, singular and plural, of all four verbs. This drill was the nucleus around which all our basic knowledge of French grew.

Next year, in our first Latin lesson with R. B. Appleton, the beginnings were all too easy. He went through the same drill saying '*Surgo*', '*Ambulo*', '*Revenio*' and '*Sedeo*'. Most of us saw at once what he was aiming at, and we soon learned the three persons, singular and plural, of these four verbs. This drill, with the addition of questions like '*Quid facio?*', '*Quid feci?*' '*Quid faciam?*' etc., was used to teach us all the tenses of these four verbs, and thus of other verbs too, for by good luck, or perhaps through the designs of the goddess Minerva, they were examples of the four conjugations.

After learning the Present Tense we were introduced to First and Second Declension Nouns, in both the Nominative and Accusative at once. This, I suppose, was because it was easy to demonstrate:

Hic est discipulus.

Video discipulum.

Haec est ianua.

Video ianuam.

(When, at the Priory School later, we used the same process, we found that *video* did not carry a sufficient idea of action to explain why the ending of the noun changed; so we used *pulso* instead.)

So we proceeded, gradually learning more grammatical forms and their use from the examples given us.

We learned to use the Relative Pronoun surprisingly easily, by the simple process of *aliter latine*:

Hic est discipulus et discipulus est callidus.

aliter latine: Hic est discipulus qui est callidus.

Hic est discipulus et discipulum video.

aliter latine: Hic est discipulus quem video.

Finally we were introduced to the Passive by the same process:

Canis me mordet.

aliter latine: A cane mordeor.

Thus, by the end of the fourth term, we were introduced to, and most of us could use effectively all that was needed to compose or understand simple sentences and some easier complex ones.

The oral work was reinforced by reading Appleton's First Latin Course, *Initium*. This, to me at least, was not very helpful, since it did not practise intensively enough the grammar that we were learning.

During the next two terms we were taught how to understand and use the more difficult complex sentences. This meant, in the main, learning the use of the Subjunctive. At the beginning of each lesson we recited, as we had done in the previous terms, individually or in chorus, some of the Grammar Tables which we had got by heart as soon as we had learnt how to use them. We followed this by drilling the Verb Series. This was important because it provided a means of introducing the Subjunctive.

Appleton prepared the way by adding a little to this series:

Master: *Surge, vel iubeo te surgere. Quid facio?*

Pupil: *Iubes me surgere.*

(We had already been introduced to the Infinitive.)

A day or so later he added to the above in the impressive voice which he always used to introduce new material:

Master: *Iubeo te surgere, vel Impero tibi ut surgas.*

Pupil: *Surgo*

and so on with the second person singular and plural in all four verbs.

Next day this drill became:

Master: *O Marce, impera Sexto ut surgat.*

Marcus: *O Sexte, surge.*

Master: *Bene, imperas Sexto ut surgat.*

and so on with the other verbs.

This showed us that *impero* went like *ambulo*, and so next day we were able to do the drill properly:

Master: *Surge. Impero tibi ut surgas. Quid facio?*

Pupil: *Imperas mihi ut surgam.*

(Past experience showed the 'm' was more likely than 'o' to follow 'a' to mean 'I'. I have never known a pupil to say 'surgao'.)

Master (to the rest of the class): *Quid facio?*

Class: *Imperas ei ut surgat.* etc.

Later this drill was practised in answer to the question '*Quid feci?*'

The use of *cum* with the Subjunctive was introduced by *aliter Latine*:

Master: *Surge et ambula. Postquam surrexisti, ambulavisti. Quando ambulavisti?*

Pupil: *Postquam surrexi, ambulavi.*

Master (in a suitably impressive voice) *Vel, cum surrexisses, ambulavisti. Quando ambulavisti?*

Pupil: *Cum surrexissem, ambulavi.*

and so on.

Indirect Speech was also introduced by using the verb series:

Master: *Surge. Quid facis?*

Pupil: *Surgo.*

Master: *Bene. Dicis te surgere. Quid dicis?*

Pupil: *Dico me surgere.*

Master (to the class): *Quid dicit?*

Class: *Dicit se surgere.*

and so on.

These exercises were backed up by R. B. Appleton's and W. H. S. Jones' book called *Pons Tironum* – the bridge, as it were, between elementary spoken Latin and the literature. This book gave ample practice to the grammar as it was introduced orally, and it began to deal with things Roman. It also included a few simple passages from Roman poets, which we learned by heart.

It was during these two terms that we began Latin Composition. Once a week Mr Appleton told us in Latin a story about a loveable rogue called *Noctuinus Noster* (who was really *Til Eulenspiegel*). Each story contained examples of the new construction we were learning and of others that we had already learned. When we had fully understood the story we gave our own versions of it in class, and then wrote them out for homework.

It is noteworthy that *Pons Tironum* kept the basic rule of the Direct Method, that English must never be used in teaching a foreign language. The book had a vocabulary, but the explanations were given in Latin, reinforced sometimes by drawings. E.g. *porcus* was explained simply by a picture, and connected with it was *porculus* = *porcus parvus*.

Great attention was paid to vocabulary. Appleton would explain by *aliter Latine* or *contrarium Latine*, or by a drawing or some action, the words he knew we did not understand when we read a new sentence. He expected us also to ask *Quid significat?* about words whose meaning we had forgotten. We kept our own vocabulary notebooks, and once a week were given a vocabulary test.

Thus, having crossed this 'bridge', we were equipped to approach the main goal of the course, the reading and enjoyment of Latin Literature, and also to begin learning Greek. We were introduced to Latin Literature by means of another book by Appleton and Jones called *Puer Romanus*. This told the life of a Roman boy and included much information about Roman customs. It also ingeniously included passage of prose and verse from Latin Literature, the standard of some of these being equivalent to the present A-Level.

Appleton continued to make sure that we learned the vocabulary and understood the syntax. He did this as he had done in previous years, by asking questions about each sentence after it had been read aloud. For instance, after the following had been read:

Deinde cum advesperavisset, cum gemitu precibusque e congregata multitudine petiit ut Pompeius ad se veniret.

the vocabulary was explained and the questions and answers would be:

Master: *Quid fecit?*

Pupil: *Petiit.*

Master: *Quando petiit?*

Pupil: *Cum advesperavisset.*

Master: *Vel aliter Latine?*

Pupil: *Postquam advesperavit.*

Master: *Quo modo petiit?*

Pupil: *Cum gemitu precibusque petiit.*

Master: *Quid igitur fecit?*

Pupil: *Gemit et precatus est.*

Master: *E quibus petiit?*

Pupil: *E multitudine.*

Master: *Qualis erat multitudo?*

Pupil: *Congregata erat.*

Master: *Quid petiit?*

Pupil: *Ut Pompeius veniret petiit.*

Thus, in a way, we construed the sentence without knowing that we did so. What is more, we consolidated our knowledge of Latin by using it.

We also read some passages of Latin prose and poetry from an anthology, and learned them by heart together with the passages of verse quoted in *Puer Romanus*. Part of one lesson each week was given up to reciting these passages.

Each evening we had to write a Latin summary of what we had read in class, and from the beginning of the third year we were given passages of simple English prose to translate into Latin.

So at the beginning of the ninth term the great moment arrived. We really began to read Latin Literature for its own sake. The book we read was *Aeneid II*, and we did so with the same attention to vocabulary and grammar as before. We also learned passages by heart, and the recitation of these, together with those from *Puer Romanus* that we had already learned, now took up the whole of one period a week. This period began with a solemn ceremony. A lectern was put near the platform. On it was a beautiful copy of the *Aeneid* bound in vellum. From this one of us read, using all the expression he could command, the portion of Book II that we had read during the week. The boy who was to do this reading was chosen the day before, so that, if he wanted, he could prepare the passage beforehand. Some of the dullards were bored. I myself was thrilled by every line that Virgil wrote, and at one time knew the whole of the first two books of the *Aeneid* by heart.

During this third year we began to learn Greek, and we did so in a more formal way. It was assumed that since we were now well acquainted with Latin Grammar, we had merely to apply it to the as yet unfamiliar sounds of the kindred language.

Those who specialised in Classics, about six each year, usually spent three years in the Classical Sixth. We tackled *Unseens* and *Prose and Verse Composition* in both languages. But our main task was reading the literature. In the afternoons each year had a lesson apart from the rest, so that it could read works that suited its attainment. Thus in the First Year Sixth I read the whole of Caesar's *Gallic War* in one term, while in the Third Year I read Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The main reading was done during a double period at the beginning of each day by all three Years together. We never translated anything into English, and since we were not allowed to take outside examinations we never wasted our mental energy in learning to defeat examiners. Instead we read the literature to appreciate and enjoy it. The reader read a sentence aloud, and if he understood it began on the next. But he could be stopped either by someone who did not understand the sentence, or by someone who

wished to challenge his understanding and ask him questions about it. We discussed in English the literary and historical value of what we read, and if the grammar was very abstruse Dr Rouse explained it also in English. And each night we wrote in Greek or Latin a summary of what we had read during the day.

In these lessons we had our fun too. I remember that there was in the First Year Sixth with me a boy called Evans, who was not really clever enough to have specialised in Classics. Sometimes he almost dozed off during a lesson, and once, to wake him up, Dr Rouse asked him to point out on the map that always hung on an easel the position of a town we were reading about. Evans seized the pointer and thrust it clean through the map. At once one of the seniors, who was to become a famous film director, burst out with a quotation from Virgil: "*Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*"

On another occasion one of us who used to ride a bicycle to school sustained a puncture and arrived very late at the morning's reading lesson. Dr Rouse asked him: "*Cur tam sero venisti?*", and he, somewhat at a loss to explain such a modern accident in an ancient language, replied: "*Machina mea aegrotat.*" "*Machina aegrotat*" said Dr Rouse. "*Quo modo machina aegrotare potest?*" And the reply was: "*Pneumonia, ut puto.*"

So by the Direct Method I had, by the time I went up to King's, Cambridge, read, appreciated and enjoyed a vast amount of Latin and Greek literature, including the whole of Virgil and the whole of Horace, the whole of the Iliad and thirteen Greek plays. The Classics tutors at King's were amazed at the amount I had read, and I was equally amazed to find that they could not hold a conversation in Greek or Latin. It was not until then that I realised I had been taught by an unusual method. But I was determined to become a teacher and to use this method in order to enable my pupils to enjoy as I had the literature which is one of the bases of our civilisation.

I began teaching in N. Ireland and so was somewhat cut off from ARLT; but in 1935 I moved to Beckenham and Penge County School, where I was given every encouragement by the headmaster. I joined forces with Frank Lockwood, who was teaching at Wilson's Grammar School. He was two years older than me, so that we were in the Classical Sixth at the Perse together for a year. We did our best to further the work of the ARLT, especially at its Summer Schools. We were greatly helped by Mr Kinchin-Smith, who was in charge of the Classics students at the London University Institute of Education. He sent all his students to observe our lessons, and asked both of us to lecture to them about the way we taught. Most of them joined the ARLT and began themselves to teach by the Direct Method. It looked as if all was going well when early in 1941 I was called up into the army.

When I was invalided out in 1944 I found that the Classics in my school was almost non-existent. My former headmaster had been killed by a bomb. The ARLT was inactive and Lockwood, now Headmaster at Gainsborough was out of touch. Soon, however, he came back to London as Headmaster of William Ellis School, and had the bright idea of starting the Weekend Courses in Lon-

don. He was helped by Mr Kinchin-Smith's old students who were teaching in or near London, and the Courses were a great success. Meanwhile I had been appointed Headmaster of the Priory School, Shrewsbury in 1946, and was soon able to get the ARLT Summer Schools started again. After I had appointed Arthur Munday, an old pupil of Lockwood's, to be head of my Classics Department in 1947 we were able to take our pupils to London to give demonstrations at the Weekend Courses. And yet, somehow, the Direct Method did not become as popular as we hoped.

The reason for this was made clear to Munday and myself by Dr Loehry, who joined my staff in September 1948. He had lectured in Law at Vienna University, and since he had no experience of teaching young people he spent almost the whole of the Summer Term before he took up his post observing Munday's and my lessons, making notes about what we did and how we taught, and asking why we did so.

All too often we found that we could not give him a clear answer. It seemed to us that we were merely imitating the way in which we had been taught, and so were teaching almost by instinct. And then I remembered how Dr Rouse and Mr Appleton also could not explain how they taught. When asked they could only answer: "Come and see some of our lessons, then you will know." Many people came to their lessons and thought them amazingly effective. Then they went away and tried the method in their own classrooms; and failed utterly. So they decided that Appleton and Rouse were either geniuses, who had some special gifts, or else they were charlatans. I began to wonder whether people were thinking the same about myself and Munday.

When we at last worked out satisfactory answers to Dr Loehry's questions, I realised that we were not completely imitating the method by which we had been taught. I had altered it in several ways in order to improve it in places where I myself had had difficulty in understanding fully what the masters thought they were teaching me. For instance, I made sure that my pupils, after they had begun to understand how to use a particular piece of grammar, were given plenty of practice in using it. How intense this was I did not realise until a Tutor from a University Department of Education recorded some of my lessons. He found in one of them that the boys used the particular piece of grammar that they were tackling no less than 127 times in 45 minutes.

Especially I had made a great change about the use of English in learning Latin. At the Perse no word of English was ever used in teaching French, and it was very sparingly used and only in the later stages of teaching Latin and Greek. M. Chouville never used a word of English, and ignored any boy who addressed him in that language, even out of class. Even when grown up, if I met him in the street, I would automatically drop into French to talk to him.

In the early stages of Latin at the Perse there were times when I wished some explanation could be given in English, if only to indicate what we were supposed to be learning. I was sometimes not quite sure what the purpose

of the lesson had been, and so I fell into the habit of asking myself each evening what I had learnt in the Latin lesson that day. The purpose of the Verb Drill was obvious, but when we first tackled the Noun in the Nominative and Accusative together, I was a little puzzled as to why 'm' was put at the end of the noun. After some thought I made a rule for myself that the word has an 'm' added to it when something is done to it. I was frustrated when we first came upon neuter nouns which had an 'm' at their end when they were doing something; but my confidence was restored when we came to the Third Declension. The teacher never insisted that we should go through this kind of mental process, and those pupils who did not do so tended to fail badly at Latin. And so I had introduced into a much changed Direct Method a session when, at the appropriate time, there was discussion in English about what had been learnt, and rules in English were made about it.

It was Arthur Munday's idea that because we had made changes to the Direct Method we should also change its name, and because the approach to each part of grammar was still made by word of mouth he invented the name 'Oral Method'. Here are the rules which, with the help of Dr Loehry, we managed to draw up. Some of them apply to the teaching of any subject.

1) Never tell. Instead always lead pupils into finding out for themselves.

2) Teach as a pupil, not as a teacher. Abandon your mature ways of thought and adopt those of your pupils, bearing in mind that all but the cleverest become about two years younger in the early stages of learning a foreign language.

3) Teach by example, not by rule. When you introduce a new piece of grammar give your pupils enough examples of it for them to be able to imitate you.

4) These examples must be in Latin, and must be simple and concrete, and deal with things within their own background and experience. The examples should be accompanied by some kind of demonstrative action or drawing.

5) Three examples will usually suffice. If they do not, it is your fault, not the pupils'. You must begin again with better examples.

6) When your pupils imitate you well enough to make you believe that it is the result not merely of imitation but of logical thought, the time has come to discuss with them in English this particular piece of grammar, and to encourage them to make up their own rule about its usage in their own words. If they cannot do this you must revert to Rule 3, and begin the whole process again with better examples.

7) The final test is for pupils to translate suitable English sentences into Latin. The object of this is not to catch them out, but to give them the joy of proving to themselves that they really know what they thought they did.

8) Once pupils have learnt how to use a particular piece of grammar they must practise this usage constantly.

9) Test regularly your pupils' knowledge of vocabulary, and make sure that they learn by heart examples of the grammatical forms that they have learnt to use.

10) Never confront pupils with more than one difficulty at a time. It is perhaps unwise, at any rate in the early stages, to teach Latin by means of stories set in Ancient Rome, since this would mean teaching both Grammar and History at the same time.

Once these rules had been formulated they could be discussed after demonstration classes, and especially at ARLT Summer Schools, which were being attended by more and more people. I could also explain these rules to students at University Departments of Education, where I was invited to lecture. And so the use of the Oral Method grew.

What spread the use of this Method more than anything was the publication of *Principia* and *Pseudolus Noster*. As pupils learned orally the various points of grammar Munday and I had written exercises and stories to fit them. (*Pseudolus* was a reincarnation of my old friend *Noctui-nus*, alias *Til Eulenspiegel*, in new clothes.) When these exercises and stories had been sufficiently revised, I persuaded a local bookseller, who was also a publisher in a small way, to publish them, warning him that he was unlikely to sell many copies. But in fact he sold thousands of them a year for over twenty years. This meant that hundreds of mainly young teachers were using the Oral Method, and thousands of pupils were perhaps enjoying learning Latin.

The Oral Method spread to its farthest point when Scott, Foresman, one of the largest educational publishers in America, asked permission to publish these books, together with a booklet explaining the Oral Method, in the U.S.A. and Canada, and I was invited to give demonstrations and lectures at Teachers' Courses organised by Universities in those countries.

But old customs die hard. Several years after Scott, Foresman began publishing the books I heard of an American teacher who used them enthusiastically, but introduced the grammar by means of the English-Latin sentences printed on purpose at the end of the books.

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Romano-British Chariot-Sticker

Aequa mente cede nunc;
Iram tuam linque.
Nihil exstat peius quam
M viginti quinque.

HERBERT H. HUXLEY