

EDITORIAL

Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis - "Times change, and we adapt ourselves to / are changed along with them." Whether classicists interpret the first person plural as *medial* or *passive* depends on the degree to which, in every age, they rise to the occasion. South African multilingualism is now statutorily acknowledged. It is further to be protected by the institution of a Pan South African Language Board. The recognition of eleven official languages is welcomed by all who value *Language* in the abstract as the most important cultural product of any society. By giving official status to the home languages of the greater part of South African society, the powers that be have not introduced a new Babel. They have given value to and affirmed the importance of each citizen's "language of the heart". Multilingualism is a fact of life in a large part of the world. This has been so since the days of Ennius, whose *tria corda* gave recognition to Latin, Greek and his native Oscan. In India today, in any given area, citizens are used to filling in official forms in one language, perhaps going to school in another, using a third language in the shops, and perhaps praying in a fourth. With the passing of colonialism the days have also passed in which members of a particular *Herrnvolk* could hector subservient underlings in the conqueror's own particular monolanguage, in the fond hope that loudness of tone would ensure understanding. Now it is more a case of "*unusquisque lingua sua*" - each in his own tongue.

So we are in a state of transition, and changes on the language front are felt nowhere more keenly than in the schools and in the universities. Quintilian, the great Roman educator, was so aware of the importance of bilingualism, that he advised Roman parents to keep on a Greek speaking nursery slave to teach their children Greek before they started picking up Latin from their parents. Such "early immersion" in a second language is also the underlying principle of a system whereby English speaking Canadian primary school pupils undergo two years of solely French-medium schooling, to ensure bilingualism.

We need always to distinguish between "language of learning" (teaching medium) and "language as subject of study" (either as mother tongue or as second or third language). The South African interim constitution guarantees parents' right to have their children educated in the language of their choice, whether their home language, or another. Provision is still proposed in a Languages-in-education document for the introduction of a second language as subject during the primary years, and, if a pupil so wishes, study of a third language is optional at high school level. This is where Latin usually slots in. The major difference between the pre-1994 system and the new proposal is that, apparently, only one language will be *compulsory* as subject in the matriculation examination.

At university level, in the area which in the past affected most Classics departments, there have been two major changes. Since December 1994 Latin is no longer compulsory for law students, and since July 1995 the statutory prescription of English and Afrikaans for these same students has been relaxed. It is now up to the Universities to set their own standards. This is in the spirit of free choice. Greek and Hebrew, the languages of the Bible, and Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, have never been prescribed by the state, but have always been required or recommended by the individual religious Boards that guide theological education. Such profound changes in the way language education is controlled by the state should not alarm us as educators. The removal of statutory prescription (and protection) of a few of the many languages featuring in education, and the fostering by statute of the "heart's tongue" of so many citizens should be seen as a "levelling of the

playing field", not as the institution of a slippery slope leading to annihilation, muteness or aphasia. Where there is an open choice, parents can, from a position of strength, choose a language of learning most suitable for their child. Perhaps the most difficult challenge at school level is not related to which languages are to be compulsory, but rather that a change in prescribed teacher-pupil ratios challenges teachers of Latin to find more pupils per class. This would mean a much more aggressive "marketing strategy" than has been followed in the past.

Where there is open choice, university teachers must, in an open market, offer their students the best to equip them for their chosen careers. The challenge is ours to offer a Classics curriculum that is vibrant, relevant, exciting and educating. The position of Latin at school and at university is still as strong as the enthusiasm of its proponents can make it.

Prophets of doom for Latin as school and university subject find that, like King Charles, Latin as subject "takes an unconscionable time a-dying". Witness the new impetus given to the subject at primary and secondary level by the peripatetic and epistolary courses in school Latin instituted by the University of Pretoria. Witness, too, the enthusiasm and calibre of performance of participants in CASA's third biennial Latin Olympiad, where the highest mark (92.5%) was scored by a Std 9 pupil who could translate an unseen passage of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* faultlessly. Witness, too the spectrum of surnames represented by top achievers, indicating successful participants from many different home language backgrounds, including Tswana, Pedi and Shona.

The working group on languages in education of Gauteng Province recently published a Draft Commentary on the Government's Languages-in-Education document, in which a strong plea is made for the recognition of *multilingualism* as the major factor in South African school life, and recommending conscious employment of code-switching (move from one language of learning to another) within a single class. Whoever has taught Latin in a large class is an adept at just such code-switching. It is up to all teachers of Latin to learn the basics of the linguistic system underlying those nine of the eleven official languages with which they probably are unfamiliar. In the classroom we need to be able to draw attention not only to difference between word-order in Afrikaans and English and inflection in Latin, but we need to be aware of certain similarities of inflection in Latin and the African languages system. We need not study all nine. In a classroom situation at Stellenbosch a Tswana-speaker could be helped to understand the use of the accusative case by showing her its parallel, an object-prefix, in Xhosa.

"Soveel tale as wat jy kan, soveel male is jy man" needs in this day and age to be made politically correct by the addition of " - óf vrou". It is gratifying to note that the trend set by our Constitution, of non-differentiation between South Africa's many languages, is being followed by a new journal, "*Alternation*" published by the Centre for the study of Southern African literature and languages at the University of Durban-Westville. It devotes as much attention to Afrikaans literature as it does to, for instance, the Khoi oral tradition. One of the most interesting articles in Volume 2.1 of *Alternation*, by Leon de Kock of the English Department of UNISA, relates to Latin studies by Xhosa speakers in the nineteenth century. Apparently the mouthpiece of Lovedale College (later Fort Hare University) had, in 1885, tried to justify the recent cessation of Latin teaching at the college on the grounds that the classics had "produced positive evils" in Xhosa youth. This was hotly debated and finally rebutted by two ex-students, an anonymous correspondent from Kimberley, and the famous educator and independent editor, John Tengo Jabavu. They provided a list of Latin-educated and exemplary Xhosa speaking citizens who were a credit to the earlier system of Classics education at Lovedale. Mr Jabavu himself was of course one of these, and he continued as Latin teacher. He was ultimately to see his son, the equally famous Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, combine the chair of classics with African

studies and Anthropology at Fort Hare. It is clear that the polemic had a salutary affect on the college curriculum.

So the new freedom of linguistic choice should be a source of joy to us as classicists - students who are confidently aware that their home language has value in the eyes of the state, will be more prepared, not less so, to venture into linguistic *terra incognita* - it is up to us to point the way.

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