

VARIA DIDACTICA

Workshop on the use of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae

University of Cape Town, 28-30 January 1991

Immediately after the CASA Conference at the University of Cape Town in January, a series of workshops on the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae was conducted by one of the two overseas guests at the conference, Dr Gabriele Thome, who holds a joint appointment in Munich at the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae and the university's Institut für Klassische Philologie. The workshop attracted 29 lecturers, teachers, and students from all over southern Africa who were united in their desire to learn how to make more efficient use of a major tool of Latin scholarship which most universities possess, the multi-volumed encyclopaedia of the Latin language *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (TLL)*. Three consecutive mornings were devoted to the workshop, each covering a different topic:

1. Dr Thome traced the history of the Thesaurus as an institution from its foundation in 1894 under the joint aegis of the German-speaking learned academies. Today it is controlled by an international commission comprising delegates from learned societies round the world that send scholars for one to three years to work on compiling entries for the encyclopaedic dictionary; for example, every year an American graduate student is chosen and funded by the American Philological Association. The total staff of about twenty includes some permanent positions, five of which are occupied by editors who train new recruits and edit the articles once they have been drafted. Dr Thome made this session come alive by showing slides of the Bavarian Academy in Munich, which is an extension of the Residenz (palace) and houses the library and archive of the Thesaurus. In the archive are stored 10 million handwritten slips recording every surviving occurrence of each Latin word down to AD 200, and a further selection down to AD 600. To complete this session, Dr Thome described how the raw material on the slips is interpreted and classified to create the articles. So far volumes covering entries for words beginning with A to M, and O, have appeared; P is currently in progress (N having been omitted for the present because of the enormous labour involved in compiling entries for the entire family of Latin negatives - *non, nemo, numquam, nescioquis* etc.). Entries for proper names were suspended after D, to be resumed once the basic encyclopaedia is complete.
2. In the second session Dr Thome circulated copies of the entries for two verbs, *praelegere* (select) and *praeire* (precede), to illustrate how to make optimal use of the information contained in the articles. She then handed out photocopies of the slips for the noun *praelectio*, and the participants had first to group them according to meaning and usage and then sketch out a lexicographical entry for this word; afterwards Dr Thome distributed copies of the actual *TLL* entry, so that the participants could compare their classification with the published version.
3. The third session demonstrated more sophisticated ways to use the *TLL*, with reference to a concrete noun, *pagina* (a column of writing), and an abstract noun, *iustitia* (justice). Dr Thome compared entries for *pagina* in other encyclopaedias, and showed how the

TLL entry can be used to correct misconceptions about the ancient book. Her examination of the entry for *iustitia* demonstrated that, far from being a mere catalogue of occurrences of the word, it traces the history of an idea.

The participants agreed unanimously that the workshop had been extremely valuable and stimulating, thanks to Dr Thome's combination of scholarly expertise, teaching skill, and personal charm. Dr Thome emphasised that visitors are welcome to use the library and archive, where they are given access to all the material that has not yet been classified and published (i.e. an invaluable resource for someone who is interested in the meanings and usage of a word for which an entry has not yet been compiled). Anyone who would like to visit the Thesaurus should write to Dr Thome or to the Director, Dr Dietfried Krömer, at:

Thesaurus Linguae Latinae
Marstallplatz 8
D-8000 München 22
Federal Republic of Germany.

Already several South Africans have made plans to spend time in Munich during research trips, and a member of the Department of Classics at Wits and former student of UCT, Grant Parker, has been awarded a bursary to spend a year there training as a lexicographer.

An undreamt of possibility seems now capable of realisation: that South Africa, under the aegis of CASA, should join the international Thesaurus Commission and send a post-graduate student to Munich annually or biennially to be trained in lexicography and compile articles for the *TLL*. For a Latin student of outstanding promise this would offer an opportunity comparable to some of the choice scholarships available to students in engineering, science, and medicine. As a first step, the CASA executive has invested the R1,000 surplus from the 1991 Biennial Conference to launch a Thesaurus Fund. The awesome task ahead is to raise enough capital to generate annual interest that would pay a return airfare to Germany and a year's living-expenses in Munich, i.e. the target is R400,000. To help Latin studies in South Africa to realise this dream, all readers of *Akroterion* are invited to send suggestions of possible donors or fund-raising schemes to the Chairman of CASA:

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