

An Investigation into Teachers' and Pupils' Perceptions of the Value of Teaching and Learning Latin Derivations at GCSE

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Introduction

This case study looks at teachers' and pupils' attitudes concerning the teaching and learning of Latin derivations in preparation for the OCR Latin GCSE examination. The setting for the research was an independent, selective, co-educational day school. The study recognizes that its findings may be dependent on the particular conditions inherent in this particular school's environment. The study gathered opinions from 13 students in one Year 10 and 16 students each in two Year 11 classes over a period of two academic terms and from the school's five Classics teachers, as well as a member of the OCR board responsible for examinations. All names have been anonymized.

The central focus of the study was to determine how much pupils and teachers at the school thought derivation teaching, learning and assessing are useful activities for GCSE students of Latin and how much they thought Latin derivations merited being a part of assessment in the Latin GCSE examination.

Sources of Data

I used my observations of students in lessons (both when they were being taught by their regular teacher and when they were being taught by me), and informal interviews, questionnaires, and exercises completed by the participants

themselves, using the list of Latin derivations in Table 1. I also spoke

Table 1: Derivation list for GCSE students: For each of the Latin word below, give one English word which has been derived from the Latin word and give the meaning of the English word.

Latin Word	English Word	Meaning of the English word
audivit	Investigate	To look into
morte		
nomen		
quaerebat		
traxit		
terra		
matrem		
habitabat		
voces		
deorum		
multos		
annos		
tria		
descendebat		
respondet		
flos		
urbem		
spectabat		

informally with teachers about their use of derivations in the classroom and how they used them for testing purposes and I asked them to fill in a questionnaire. A questionnaire was also submitted to a member of the OCR board electronically.

At the school, Latin is compulsory in Years 7 - 8 and most pupils have not studied Latin beforehand. From Year 9 Latin is a popular option in a department with a longstanding classical tradition. At the time of the most recent Independent School Inspection, the GCSE results from 2007-2010 exceeded those in the state maintained sector.

Do derivations help Latin GCSE pupils to improve their vocabulary and spelling in English?

The literature is largely inconclusive with regard to whether or not English vocabulary is improved through the study of Latin. This is despite the fact that the discussion surrounding the validity of Graeco-Latin (henceforth G-L) derivational and morphological instruction is an old one. Carroll (1940) refers to the works of Thorndike and Ruger in the 1920s, which showed that after a year of Latin, pupils gained about two and one-half times as much in English vocabulary of Latin origin as did pupils who had not studied Latin of the same initial vocabulary ability but that the two groups gained about the same in words of non-Latin origin. On the basis

of a morpheme recognition test, Carroll found that the study of Latin derivations helped students particularly with unknown words (Carroll, 1940, p.102). Similarly, Pond (1938), in a study conducted with 79 pupils who studied Latin and 129 pupils who did not study Latin in an American school (henceforth, Latin and non-Latin pupils), showed that the English vocabulary scores of the Latin pupils were higher than those of the non-Latin pupils and that the positive correlation between the teaching of Latin and a larger English vocabulary was significant. However, Pond also pointed out that the average IQ of the Latin group was 109, whereas it was only 102 for the non-Latin group, which led him to the suspicion that there was a selection process going on, resulting in a higher proportion of higher-achieving students enrolling in Latin classes in the first place. This supposition Pond did not address in his own research but other researchers such as La Fleur (1981) have. La Fleur compared the vocabulary of Latin students to that of other “intellectually challenging” languages such as German and Russian and found that the Latin students still showed a greater range of vocabulary.

The situation which Pond noted – that Latin seems to be attractive to the more highly-achieving pupil – often seems to be true in many schools today, where the study of Latin is used as an extension activity for abler pupils. However, educational developments in the last few years have meant that Latin teachers have made a concerted effort to popularise a subject regarded as excessively difficult and elitist by many.

Several studies have suggested that the morphemic knowledge that ensues from the study of Latin derivations could be beneficial for both English and Latin language skills. Baumann et al. (2003) cite studies by Nagy (1988), Nagy and Anderson (1984) and Nagy and Scott (2000) which suggest that morphological awareness is an important means of helping students to independently determine the meaning of unfamiliar words via the analysis of prefixes, roots and suffixes. Nagy and Anderson (1984, cited in Baumann et al. 2003: pp.447-494) report that for every word known by a child who has the capacity to implement morphological and contextual strategies, ‘an additional one to three words should be understandable.’ Nation and Chung

(2009) also hold that morphemic analysis can aid in the acquisition of a larger vocabulary.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that much of this research is in English as an Additional Language (EAL) papers; therefore, although many of the key concepts can be transferred to the study of Latin (such as morpheme knowledge improving vocabulary and spelling skills in both English and Latin), the transferability may not always be seamless since in many cases the English words derived from Latin have changed over the centuries and the relationship to their source becomes clear only after some etymological work has been done.

A vital study in the application of Latin in improving pupils’ verbal skills is that of Masciantonio (1977). He collected data from eight educational projects in the United States. An experimental group of Latin students and a control group of non-Latin students in different elementary schools were pre-tested, post-tested and then compared with regard to their English verbal skills. Masciantonio found that Latin greatly improved the verbal skills of pupils of all abilities. These findings need a caveat, however, as Masciantonio himself pointed out (1977, pp. 375–382). The Latin classes adopted for the US study used a method of Latin instruction which was innovative for the time (the early 70s), with ‘multisensory media, structural linguistics, the direct method, programmed and computer-assisted instruction, and attention to the affective domain. They likewise [made] extension of English verbal functioning a specific goal.’ (1977, pp. 375–382). Therefore, it may have been not so much the study of derivations specifically, but the methods utilized and the focus on verbal skills for the improvement of the students’ English fluency that may have influenced the positive results. A further problem is the fact that the study did not single out derivations; therefore, it is hard to know whether other areas of Latin, such as grammar or reading comprehension, might have accounted for the pupils’ apparent progress. Thus, although studies like Masciantonio’s establish the promising possibility that Latin learning might help English language skills, it must, for the moment remain only a possibility – no definitive

evidence has yet been presented.

Zimmermann and Schmitt (2002) also have important reservations regarding the usefulness of derivations. Even though they note that the nature of G-L derivatives (multisyllabic words which tend to have prefix, root and suffix) seems to invite morphemic analysis, they suggest that the knowledge of words within a word family does not entail comprehension of all other members of the family and that, in fact, pupils tend to know only some members of any given family. Evidence for this was a small longitudinal study of three EAL postgraduates studying at a university in the United Kingdom. The study found that even these advanced students showed major gaps in their derivational knowledge, especially with regard to adverbs and adjectives. This is surprising because although they were in the highly academic environment of PhD study and were being taught derivations and word families, two of the three students did not appear to advance much in their knowledge of the target words with regard to derivation in the space of one academic year.

Another reservation that Zimmermann and Schmitt have about the explicit teaching of derivations is the fact that reading appears to facilitate derivational knowledge the most, pointing out that derivations tend to occur more in the written than in the oral mode (p. 149). Therefore, it seems that people learn derivations by reading extensively – that is, by increasing their exposure to written vocabulary, which tends to be more specialised. This does not necessarily mean that more direct derivational learning would be rendered useless, but it does suggest that such an approach is not the only avenue open for vocabulary expansion.

The study of Graeco-Latin derivations as a means of bridging social class divides.

Widely debated in literature has been the notion that students from higher social classes have an advantage over students from lower social classes in acquiring more specialised vocabulary, due to their home and educational environments.

In response to such concerns,

Corson (1983; 1994) has suggested that the study of G-L derivations of English words could help bridge a specific educational gap between students from more- and less-privileged backgrounds. Using an original test called the *Measure of Passive Vocabulary Test* Corson (1983) measured the access of students aged between 12 and 15 to specific semantic fields. He found that users of middle-class social dialects possessed a passive vocabulary with items more widely ranging over a number of semantic fields, including academic English, than did users of working-class social dialects. In another study with the same objective, Corson measured students' active G-L vocabulary in a question. In the first experiment, students were asked to describe their former school in their own words. In the second experiment, they were asked to discuss moral issues. The latter experiment required the use of more complex and abstract vocabulary. Corson found that, for the more complex vocabulary, replete with G-L words (which comprise 65% to 100% of the total specialist vocabularies of the seven semantic fields investigated by the *Measure of Passive Vocabulary*), there were substantial differences in terms of G-L vocabulary, especially as students progressed in their studies. When the participant was 12 years of age, there were minor differences between different social groups (perhaps because younger children are less capable of absorbing more complex vocabulary items, or because of the lesser demands on primary school children's vocabulary). However, at age 15, the gap widened and seemed to contribute to lower achievement for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Corson, after mentioning evidence that students from lower social status backgrounds are capable of acquiring the complex vocabulary of their peers later on in secondary school (p.119), suggests that derivational practice, as a metacognitive activity, could make G-L words (which represent a very high-proportion of academic words more semantically transparent for users of all abilities and backgrounds (see Table 2 with a list of the 150 most frequent academic words).

Such explicit teaching of G-L words would presumably be aimed at preventing the exclusion of lower-social class students from academic dialects. In this, Corson was influenced by Bourdieu's

**Table 2 - A University Word List:
The Most Frequently and
Widely Used 150 Words
(D. Corson, 2002, p.678):
(Please note the words in *italics*
are not Graeco-Latin derivatives)**

Latin Word	English Word	Meaning of the English word
Accelerate	Entity	Precede
Achieve	<i>Environment</i>	Precise
Adjacent	Equate	Presume
Affect	Equivalent	Prime
Alternative	Establish	Principle
Analyse	Evaluate	Proceed
Approach	Evident	Publish
Approximate	Expand	Pursue
Arbitrary	Expose	<i>Random</i>
Assert	External	Range
Assess	Feasible	React
Assign	Fluctuate	Region
Assume	Focus	Require
Authorize	Formulate	Respective
Automatic	Function	Restrict
Chapter	Generate	Reverse
Compensate	Guarantee	<i>Role</i>
Complex	Hypothesis	Section
Complicate	Identify	Segment
Comply	Ignore	Select
Component	Illustrate	Sequence
Comprehend	Impact	Series
Conceive	Implicit	<i>Shift</i>
Concentrate	Imply	Signify
Concept	Indicate	Similar
Conclude	Individual	Simultaneous
Consequent	Inhibit	Sophisticated
Consist	Initial	Species
Constant	Innovation	Specify
Construct	Intense	Stable
Consult	Interpret	Statistic
Context	Intuitive	Status
Contrast	Involve	Structure
Contribute	Isolate	Subsequent
Convert	Magnetic	Suffice
Create	Magnitude	Sum
Criterion	Major	Summary
Crucial	manipulate	Technique
Data	Mathematics	Technology
Define	Method	Tense
Definite	Minimum	Theory
Demonstrate	Modify	Trace
Denote	Negative	Tradition
Derive	Notion	Transmit
Design	Obtain	Ultimate
Devise	Obvious	<i>Undergo</i>
Devote	Occur	Usage
Dimension	Passive	Valid
Distinct	Period	Vary
Distort	Perspective	Verbal
Element	Pertinent	Verify
Emphasise	Phase	Vertical
Empirical	Phenomena	
Ensure	Portion	
	Potential	

ideas about cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984 pp. 80-81). An individual who has cultural capital is familiar with the dominant culture of society and is able to comprehend and use 'educated language'. Cultural capital varies with class but educational institutions, under the assumption that pupils already possess the same cultural capital, might disadvantage pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Bourdieu calls these students 'pupils with lower educational capital').

The idea of 'cultural capital' was tested by De Graaf (1988). She interviewed the parents and teachers of 1,031 Western German pupils who had entered secondary school in 1967. De Graaf wanted to see how a pupil's family situation affected their academic success. De Graaf measured parents' cultural capital (interest in politics, philosophy, and other cultures), 'reading behaviour' (interest in books, number of books in the home, time dedicated to reading, purchasing or borrowing books from libraries) and their children's school grades obtained from elementary school teachers. De Graaf wished to discover which of these factors had most influence on whether or not pupils gained a place at the *gymnasium* (the most prestigious form of secondary schooling in Germany). She found that 'reading behaviour' had a much more significant effect than other cultural activities, such as going to the theatre, which had more impact on perceptions of status.

It must be kept in mind, nevertheless, that the acquisition of cultural capital is not restricted to those with the 'right' background, such as a middle class home or parents who are enthusiastic readers. The talent and hard work of many pupils from less affluent backgrounds may still gain many of them entrance to top institutions. As Sullivan (2002, p.161) writes, cultural capital can be acquired by any individual and can function as a mechanism of social mobility.

The study of Latin derivations may be particularly helpful in increasing such cultural capital. Holmes and Keffer (1995) note that Latin makes up between 60% and 80% of all English words, while G-L derivatives make up 75% of English words (Booth, 1980). This makes little difference in everyday life, since the vast majority of G-L words in English are not often used in daily conversation. Instead words of Anglo-Saxon origin tend to

dominate. For example, in a sentence like 'I talked to my friend yesterday about her Latin classes,' eight out of ten of the words are Anglo-Saxon in origin. However, in the more formal registers of English, the number of Greek and Latin words begins to make their presence felt much more. Holmes and Keffer (ibid.) thus believe that knowledge of the roots of these parent languages would help students improve their vocabulary and consequently their test results.

Holmes and Keffer (ibid, p. 47) note that in the studies of La Fleur (1981) of the 1980 SAT test (Holmes and Keffer are concerned particularly with the American *Scholastic Aptitude Tests* or *SATs*, which test the verbal score of students applying for American universities), the verbal average of Latin students was 144 points higher than the national average. This would probably not have impressed Bowker (1975, cited in Mavrogenes 1979), who wrote that the main effect of Latin on vocabulary might not be the easier recognition of Latin derivatives in particular, but rather the greater awareness of words brought about by the intensive study of language. Importantly, however, La Fleur (1981) found that students of German and Russian were considerably outscored by the Latin students. He went on to say that he felt that this should not be attributed to the fact that Latin students might have been of a higher ability, since students of Russian and German were (in his opinion) just as much selected to study these languages, due to the perception that they had superior linguistic skills.

Further studies were carried out by Mavrogenes (1977) and Sussman (1978) (both cited in De Vane, 2011). They carried out a study in American inner-city schools with pupils of low reading ability and from deprived social backgrounds. Their findings reveal that reading scores in English were significantly better for Latin students than for students who did not study any foreign language or those who studied another foreign language. The students chosen for the Latin lessons were low level readers and from deprived backgrounds. This suggests that the teaching of Latin, through providing an understating of how language works, including the study of G-L derivations, may improve the vocabulary and reading skills of disadvantaged pupils.

In terms of the timing of such teaching, two studies by Devonshire and Fluck (2010) suggest that secondary school (when the teaching of Latin typically begins in the UK) may be the right time. In their first study, they investigated the spelling strategies used by 215 children in two UK primary schools, as well as the connections the children made between words. In particular, they looked at the impact of the explicit teaching of morphology on spelling development. They concluded that although children employ morphological strategies, they do not necessarily apply this to their spelling without being taught to do so.

The second study was a nine-week intervention comparing traditional phonic teaching with a conceptual approach to teaching focussing on morphology, etymology and phonology. The researchers found that, although phonological and retrieval strategies produced better results for lower (elementary) school years, morphology became more effective in more advanced (secondary) years. They posited that this was perhaps because of the need for students to use more complex polysyllabic words to describe increasingly more abstract concepts - the need to employ more academic words. This is significant, as secondary school could be seen as the most appropriate point in time for students to assimilate more intricate vocabulary, just as Peel (1971, 1975 and 1978, cited in Corson, 2002) reports, when he says that the optimal mental age for learning more complex vocabulary is around 15 years of age.

The timing is also ideal because the complexity of the mental operations involved is good preparation for university (Hennings, 2000). Indeed, Wilson (1992) suggests that tests should give more importance to the 'relationship between words' rather than 'merely knowing the words by themselves.' Such tests would favour the type of mental exercise that the study of derivations engenders. The intellectual leaps that an individual has to make seeing a given word in Latin, say *flos*, then trying to remember that it means flower in English and then associate it with an English word such as *florist* (but perhaps not *flown*) could be a useful means of training for the type of reasoning that will be required of students as they head into tertiary education.

Problems with the teaching of derivations

Studies like the ones mentioned highlight what they claim as the high transferability of Latin to other subjects (Livingstone, 2001; De Vane, 2011) and it is possible that derivation testing was originally seen by the OCR board as a way of showing the cross-curricular relevance of Latin.

However, the teaching of derivations presents a few challenges which are worth bearing in mind. Most importantly, I have heard a few times in staffrooms that derivation testing is too easy for abler students. There is some evidence with which to debate this. Panov (2011) and Cardinaletti (2011), for example, note in their discussion of comparative grammar that Latin, as it stems from Proto-Indo-European, possesses a rich number of prefixes which are initially used to express ideas of space and / or motion. Nevertheless, over time prefixes gain in complexity, and become attached to verbs that no longer denote motion but denote more abstract concepts instead. In this manner, prefixes distance themselves from their original meaning. This can make the morphology of the word more opaque, forcing students to acquire considerable morphological proficiency in order to reliably deduce the relationship between an English word and a Latin one.

Another potential problem with the current GCSE approach to testing derivations is that it is based on a vocabulary list which students are expected to know well beforehand and on words that are placed in the set text passage for translation. Carroll (1940) holds derivations only enrich one's English vocabulary if one does NOT know the derived word itself. Therefore, for derived words with which a person is already familiar, as in the OCR Latin examination, derivation testing might appear to be pointless.

Summary

The literature review addresses only tangentially the first research question which is whether derivation teaching and testing help to improve students' spelling and vocabulary at GCSE since no specific research was ever conducted in this area. Although the studies analysed were

conducted at different times and contexts of primary and secondary Latin teaching, they show that the teaching of derivations helps to make the ‘workings’ of Latinate words more explicit to students (in the shape of a better understanding of prefixes, roots and affixes) and that this focus might aid vocabulary acquisition and retention.

With regards to Research Question 2, many studies seem to suggest that the teaching of derivations may be useful for students in particular with regards to the acquisition and expansion of English vocabulary; but the sum total of the evidence does not seem to prove it one way or the other.

The research questions concerning whether teachers and pupils find derivation testing useful at GCSE and whether or not the derivation question should stay or be replaced by some other type of exercise will be further addressed by the questionnaires.

Methodology and Research Focus:

The methodology employed was dictated by the research questions, as summarised in Table 3, below:

explanation of what the term derivation means and what was being asked of them in the exercise. They pointed out that failure to understand what a derivation is was a common examination pitfall for students. In this, teachers followed the recommendation given by the OCR examiners’ report for 2012:

‘Question 15 (on derivations) caused a few problems, as candidates often gave the meanings of the Latin word, rather than an English derivative. However, most candidates scored 3 or 4 marks on this question. It would be helpful to explain, however, that candidates must give an English meaning of the derivative which is the same part of speech as the derivative, e.g. ‘donation – a gift’, not ‘to give something’ (OCR GCSE Latin Examiner Report January 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/66331-examiners-reports-january.pdf>)

Thus, I began each 35-minute lesson on derivations (I taught the lesson to four groups of students in total) with a brief explanation of the term. After the explanation, I handed the students the derivation list to do on their own or in pairs. When the majority had finished,

The derivation list contained a selection of fifteen derivatives taken from the OCR GCSE Latin examinations for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The Derivation List was purposely made to resemble the examination, instructing students to look at the Latin word, find an English derivative and explain the meaning of that English derivative. For example, Latin word: *respondit* – English word: response – Meaning of the English word: a reply.

The idea behind the Derivations List was to promote an informal discussion with students about this type of exercise and to see what the students would produce in a non-exam situation. It works as a “diagnostic tool” (Taber, 2004 pp143-5). Students seemed to like the activity and to enjoy discussing their choices and finding out more about Latin derivations. It was an activity which the majority could do successfully. Along with their regular teachers, there was also some discussion of what the examiners’ expectations might be. One teacher, for instance, said that pupils could on that occasion be experimental with words but that in the exam situation it would be better to “play it safe”. Another teacher, however, expressed the idea that the board would not include vocabulary derived from the Greek (such as *tria*). In fact *tria* did figure in the 2011 examination.

From the total sample of students who were closer to taking the examination, I only had regular teaching contact with one Year 10 group, with which I revised grammar points for GCSE about once every fortnight. With three other groups, I observed a few lessons before teaching them one lesson on derivations. Aside from serving to revise the idea of derivations with the Year 11 students and to introduce the notion to the Year 10 ones, the lesson would allow me to gauge their reactions to derivations.

The questionnaires

Since I had heard mostly negative comments from teachers before I taught the lesson, the overwhelming positive reaction that the students had in relation to the Derivation List caused further queries. Did students enjoy it because it is a less demanding lesson than they are used to in their GCSE preparation? Was it the novelty of being taught by a new teacher? Most importantly, how much did the students gain from it?

These questions led me to devise a questionnaire for teachers and for the

Table 3 - Research questions and data collection methods:

Research question:	Most appropriate means of answering the question:
RQ1: Does derivation testing at GCSE promote the improvement of secondary students’ vocabulary and spelling in English?	a) First-hand experience of introducing/ revising derivations for GCSE with students in Years 10 and 11 in 35-minute lesson slots each - specifically, using a derivations list to gauge students’ understanding and opinions. b) Informal discussions with teachers and students. c) Classroom observations.
RQ2: Do pupils and teachers believe derivations serve any “useful” purpose?	a) Teachers’ questionnaire comprised of 8 multiple choice questions. b) Students’ questionnaire comprised of 7 multiple choice questions. c) Class observations.
RQ3: Do teachers and students think that derivations should be replaced by something “more useful”?	a) Informal discussions with teachers and students. b) Questionnaires for teachers and students. c) Questionnaire for OCR board member responsible for GCSE examinations. d) Classroom observations.

The lesson taught

Before delivering the first lesson, the students’ usual teachers had told me that students tended to need some

we went through it together and had an informal discussion regarding their views on derivation testing. In most cases, their teachers, who were observing the lesson, also provided feedback based on their previous experiences with the examination.

pupils. I also sent a different questionnaire regarding the introduction of derivations in the examination to the OCR subject co-ordinator. I hoped to discover if there were any contrasts between the views of teachers and students and the intended objectives of the examination board.

I gave the teacher's questionnaire (see Figure A) to five teachers. One teacher had not taught Latin GCSE before, but I decided to hand him the questionnaire since derivations feature regularly in other levels and he has had experience of the Ancient Greek GCSE, which also contains a derivation question. All the other teachers had taught Latin GCSE. I gave the students' questionnaire (see Figure B) to the 44 Latin GCSE students. The limitations of the questionnaire format are the issues of reliability and, in the case of the closed questionnaires for students and pupils, the added problem of the questions not presenting enough options which I tried to supplement with informal discussions as much as possible.

Classroom observations

A final way in which I gathered information was through classroom observations. As I was interested in how derivation teaching and learning occurred in this school's classroom context, I observed and made notes on any occurrences of derivations in Year 10 and Year 11 classes in particular. (See Figure A) (See Figure B)

Limitations of the research

A major drawback in this type of research is that the sample collected is very limited. Indeed, the school in question has relatively small classes and a selective admissions process, allowing for a much more limited range of findings than a larger, non-selective school might have allowed. The homogeneous profile is alluded to in the ISC 2010 report. Students' ability profile is far above the national average. For ten pupils, English is an additional language but they were considered to be fluent in English and able to access the curriculum without restriction. The background of the parents of the pupils is predominantly professional.

Thus, it was difficult to investigate issues related to students of lower socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, the fact that students seemed to have no major issues with derivations could be

Figure A: Derivations questionnaire for teachers

- 1.) How often do you include derivations in your everyday teaching?
 - ☐ Often.
 - ☐ Regularly.
 - ☐ Infrequently.
 - ☐ Never.
- 2.) Do you think derivations help your students with their Latin vocabulary?
 - ☐ Yes, quite a lot.
 - ☐ Yes, to some degree.
 - ☐ Very little.
 - ☐ Not at all.
- 3.) How much do you think derivations help your students with their English vocabulary?
 - ☐ A lot.
 - ☐ To a certain extent.
 - ☐ A little.
 - ☐ Not at all.
- 4.) Do you think the GCSE derivative question is a useful means of testing pupils?
 - ☐ Yes.
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Not sure.
- 5.) Do you think derivations should remain on the OCR GCSE?
 - ☐ Yes, it should remain as it is.
 - ☐ Yes, but with changes.
 - ☐ No, it should be removed from the exam.
- 6.) Do you find it hard for students to decide whether a word would be considered as an acceptable Latin derivative by the OCR board?
 - ☐ Yes, quite often.
 - ☐ Sometimes.
 - ☐ Rarely.
 - ☐ Never.
- 7.) Do you think the majority of your students regard derivation testing at GCSE as "too easy"?
 - ☐ Yes.
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Not sure.

influenced by their school and family environment, their own abilities, and a plethora of other factors over which I have no control.

Findings and analysis

The Students' questionnaire

The findings from the students' questionnaire were as follows:

1. *How often are derivations a feature of your Latin lessons?*

The overwhelming majority of students declared that derivations are a very minor feature of their Latin lessons – 73% responded that derivations rarely appeared and 16% said that derivations

Figure B: Questionnaire on derivations for Year 10/11 Students

- 1.) How often are derivations a feature of your Latin lessons?
 - ☐ Very often.
 - ☐ Regularly.
 - ☐ Rarely.
 - ☐ Never.
- 2.) Do you think derivations help you with your Latin vocabulary?
 - ☐ Yes, quite a lot.
 - ☐ Yes, to some degree.
 - ☐ Very little.
 - ☐ Not at all.
- 3.) How much do you think derivations help you with your English vocabulary?
 - ☐ A lot.
 - ☐ To a certain extent.
 - ☐ A little.
 - ☐ Not at all.
- 4.) Do you think the GCSE derivative question is a useful means of testing pupils?
 - ☐ Yes.
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Not sure.
- 5.) Do you think derivations should remain on the OCR GCSE?
 - ☐ Yes, it should remain as it is.
 - ☐ Yes, but with changes.
 - ☐ No, it should be removed from the exam.
- 6.) Do you find it hard to decide whether a word would be considered as an acceptable Latin derivative?
 - ☐ Yes, quite often.
 - ☐ Sometimes.
 - ☐ Rarely.
 - ☐ Never.
- 7.) How easy do you find derivation exercises?
 - ☐ Very easy.
 - ☐ Easy.
 - ☐ Challenging.
 - ☐ Difficult.

never appeared in their lessons. Only 11% said that derivations were a regular feature of their lessons. Many factors may have come into play in this response. It is possible that students are not aware of derivations appearing in, for instance, a grammar-orientated lesson because their focus is elsewhere. It may also be that some students thought that the question meant having a vocabulary lesson of the sort that I taught them on the day, that is, a lesson exclusively on the topic of derivations. In any case, students' perceptions were that derivations did not play a large role in their lessons.

2. *Do you think derivations help you with your Latin vocabulary?*

If teachers needed any incentive from their pupils to use more derivations in their lessons, the answers to this question might prove valuable – 52% thought that derivations helped to increase their Latin vocabulary to a certain degree and 37% thought that derivations helped their Latin vocabulary quite a lot against 11% that saw no benefit to their Latin in studying derivations.

3. How much do you think derivations help you with your English vocabulary?

In contrast, students' opinions as to the advantage of G-L derivation study for their English were more cautious with 39% declaring that derivations helped their English vocabulary to a certain extent and 25% saying that derivations helped their English a lot. However, other students thought that G-L derivations brought no benefit (9%) or little benefit (27%) to their English vocabulary. Regardless of how advantageous some research indicates that the explicit teaching of derivations might be for English vocabulary acquisition, many students do not perceive it that way.

4. Do you think the GCSE derivatives question is a useful means of testing pupils?

A different question still is how valid the testing (as opposed to the teaching and learning) of derivations is felt to be by the students. The results were mixed – although 55% thought that derivation testing was worthwhile, a relatively large number of students (25%) were uncertain how to answer and a further 20% said that derivations were not useful at testing levels. The number of undecided respondents may be due to the phrasing of my question or it may be because students feel they lack the expertise and the information to make such choices.

5. Do you think derivations should remain on the OCR GCSE?

Question 5 contrasts with 4. Although there was a relatively large number of students who did not express an opinion about the validity of derivation testing in number 4, in question 5 a much larger number came to the defence of derivations in the GCSE exam (66% would leave the question unchanged and a further 14% would preserve it but with

changes).

6. Do you find it hard to decide whether a word would be considered an acceptable Latin derivative?

The answers to this question showed that students perceive the derivation question as posing some challenges. Half of the students declared that it is sometimes hard to tell whether or not a word would be considered acceptable by OCR and 39% quite often had trouble deciding on a suitable derivative. 11% of the students declared that they rarely had trouble finding an appropriate English derivative.

7. How easy do you find derivation exercises?

In their questionnaires, the students stated that they had had little trouble deciding on an appropriate derivative which diverges from pupils' previous answers in our informal classroom discussion in which they said that Latin derivations posed some challenges. Furthermore, students again declared Latin derivation was easy for them in their answers to question 7 – the overwhelming majority find derivations easy (50%) or very easy (39%). Although only 11% of students found derivations difficult, I would be curious to find out into what type of learners this minority of pupils fit into and what it is exactly that they find challenging. Unfortunately, such questions are outside the remit of this case study.

Teachers' questionnaire

There are five teachers in total at the Classics department and I assigned each teacher with one letter of the alphabet. Since the sample size was small, I summarise responses teacher-by-teacher in the next subsection.

It was clear from the informal conversations I had had with the teachers that they had mixed views on the subject of derivation teaching and, in particular, on the testing of derivations at GCSE. One teacher said that although she saw the relevance of teaching students derivations in terms of linking Latin to the modern world, she did not believe that the derivation question fitted in with the other questions on the examination and so thought that it should be removed from the GCSE. Another teacher was

more enthusiastic about derivations and claimed to use them regularly to reinforce language points. For example, when revising grammatical structures in a translation passage called "Helen" with his Year 11 group, this teacher used derivations to explain the different meanings of *incipio* / *capio* / *recipio*. This diversity of opinion is reflected in the teachers' responses.

Teacher A used derivations infrequently but to his surprise found them to be helpful to some degree for students' Latin vocabulary and very helpful for students' English vocabulary. Teacher A appeared not to be sure if there was really any use for derivations at GCSE examinations and abstained from answering whether or not they should remain in the examination. He also responded that it was quite often difficult for most of his pupils to decide on whether or not a word would be considered as an acceptable derivation by the OCR board and so it makes sense that he should think that the derivation question is not perceived by most pupils to be too easy.

Teacher B regularly included derivations in his teaching. However, he believed that derivations helped students more with their Latin (to some degree) than with their English (a little), which was the opposite view of A. This teacher was also in favour of the derivation question being kept on the GCSE exam. Teacher B felt that his students sometimes have trouble deciding whether a derivation would be accepted by OCR. This teacher wrote in his questionnaire that the final question ("Do you think the majority of your students regard derivation testing at GCSE as "too easy?") was not applicable to his situation. This may be because this particular teacher was not teaching GCSE this term.

Teacher C was convinced of the importance of derivations, and he included derivations in his teaching even more than B. He also believed that derivations were more helpful with Latin than English vocabulary. However, despite his opinion that derivations were useful and his use of them in lessons, he thought that derivations should not be part of the examination.

Teacher D used derivations frequently in his lessons and he believed they helped pupils' Latin vocabulary quite a lot and their English to a certain

degree. It is perhaps not surprising that this teacher believed that the derivation question should stay. Teacher D stated that it was quite often hard for his students to decide on an appropriate English derivative.

Although teacher E used derivations infrequently in his lessons, he believed that derivations helped students with their Latin vocabulary to some degree and, most revealingly, he believed that derivations helped students a lot with their English vocabulary. However, he did not believe that derivations should be examined. He reported that his students sometimes had trouble deciding on an appropriate derivation for the GCSE paper but that in the end derivations were considered to be easy by most of his pupils.

The OCR questionnaire

The OCR answered a series of questions submitted by me by email. The respondent indicated that the derivations exercise:

‘...tests evaluative skills and [reflects] the continuing influence of the classical world on our modern world. It meets the assessment objective for the two language papers: ‘Latin Language: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of language’. Perhaps most importantly, it encourages teachers who do not already do so to make links between Latin words and English words derived from them. This improves their students’ knowledge and retention of Latin vocabulary and, of course, also increases their facility with English.’

One of the most interesting assertions made in this statement by OCR is the fact that the board seems to be willing to prescribe classroom practice for teachers by encouraging teachers (because teachers need to prepare their pupils for examinations) who do not use derivations in their lessons to do so. The statement is reminiscent of a document from another era in the teaching of Classics, and it may be that OCR is making an attempt to restore some objectives of previous times which may seem anachronistic in our times:

‘It is, of course, in the English language that one finds the closest everyday connexion between Latin and

Greek and modern times, and here there will be ample opportunities for enlivening and enriching things that would otherwise be of no particular interest or significance. It is often found that the less academically minded grammar school streams find derivations and all the picturesque odds and ends an even greater source of surprise and interest than do those who are better able to cope with the difficulties of language construction. That this enthusiasm is not, as the cynical might suspect, due to relief from the need for mental strife, is proved by the questions they will ask and their readiness to spend a great deal of time in research out of school hours. It is a genuine interest; and anything that will promote a spirit of inquiry in legitimate decisions is more than desirable...’ (The Teaching of Classics, by the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools 1954: p. 140).

As for the ambiguity in deciding what words might be accepted by the OCR in their examinations, the board declared that they would not make a distinction as to whether a word in Latin was a Latin ‘original’ or derived from the Greek and that they would use words from the GCSE list that would also occur in the Latin passage on the same examination. Furthermore, OCR said that they would opt for words that would have generated classroom discussion previously although they did not make it clear how they would know which words had indeed been discussed in the classroom (although I presume OCR thinks that all words in the GCSE vocabulary list would be discussed at some point). Perhaps a good guideline for teachers would be to tell their pupils to explicitly relate their English derivative to the Latin (for e.g. Latin word: *terra*; English word: terracotta; Meaning: earthenware) as specified in the OCR responses to my questionnaire (Appendix 1)

The examination board believes that the question is not too easy for those who understand what is being required; however, they also write that this does not always guarantee that students get it right. According to the examiners’ reports from previous examinations, students seemed not to be clear as to what was being requested of them. However, it seems that OCR has noticed that teachers have been instructing their pupils, since more pupils understand the instructions. I have personally witnessed the teachers

making sure that students are clear as to the instructions in the derivation exercise. OCR gave me no hint whether derivation testing was unpopular to the point of exclusion from future examinations. The answer was that any exam question could be reconsidered in the specifications review.

Conclusion

The usefulness of derivation testing in UK classrooms

As regards to the first research question, whether or not derivation testing promotes the improvement of pupils’ spelling and vocabulary apprehension, most of the literature seems to favour the idea. However, in the UK teachers do not have the habit of teaching the meanings of morphemes. Therefore, derivation instruction in Latin may be beneficial in making students more aware of morphemes and contribute to better spelling, particularly if morphology is combined with etymology. The teaching of these strategies may even empower students to independently learn the meaning of new words (Baumann et al. 2003).

Linking between past and present

Students’ perceptions tell us that they think that derivations are more helpful with their Latin vocabulary acquisition and retention than with their English vocabulary. In contrast, OCR believes that derivation testing promotes the teaching of derivations as a link between English and Latin (and other MFLs and Latin) and the past and present of common languages. In terms of recommendations for future practice, therefore, it may be helpful for teachers to tell their students more explicitly about the connections between the two languages.

Derivations and students’ background

It is difficult to precise, considering the limitations of my focus group, what exactly makes students do well at derivations and by extension, be more fluent in academic discourse – social class, reading habits, family background, a mixture of factors? It seems fair to say that teaching derivations to students of all abilities and backgrounds may be a

way of preparing pupils for academic life where Latinate words play such a major role. Derivation teaching may enable students to access a vocabulary that might elude them otherwise. On the other hand, the testing of derivations may be more helpful in terms of English vocabulary expansion but, curiously, English teachers (and indeed MFL teachers) do not deal with derivation testing at GCSE.

My school was overwhelmingly middle class and it would have been hard to test the idea of diverse amounts of cultural capital on such a socially and racially homogeneous group of pupils. Class is also a very thorny issue in the UK historically and not easily definable. However, in informal discussions it did seem that students who were motivated to work on derivations, and were good at it, were those who possessed superior reading habits—perhaps having come from a background that invested them with this form of cultural capital. It would be useful to carry out more systematic research on the issue in a comprehensive school where a wider range of pupils could be questioned. In particular, research that included topics concerning the reading habits of students and their families could provide more information (Sullivan, 2002).

The usefulness of derivations

The answer to research question 2, concerning students and teachers' perceptions as to the usefulness of derivation testing, remains somewhat inconclusive. In the case of teachers, for example, 2 found derivations useful, 2 not useful and one was not sure. It may be that those who find derivation testing not useful do regard Latin derivation useful if employed as and when necessary or appropriate, for instance, during a vocabulary task or while reading a Latin passage. Perhaps those who answered yes or no to this question were expressing personal preferences. For instance, a teacher with greater disposition for grammar may find derivation testing too easy or students who enjoy derivation and do well at it may be in favour of it remaining in the exam. Perhaps OCR examiners decided to include it because of Latin's unusual position in relation to other languages in that it is learned not so much for communicative purposes as for

reading comprehension.

However, derivations seemed, from my experience teaching the lesson described in section 3, to be a motivational activity. If enjoyment in this type of activity can engage both abler and weaker students, then the OCR objectives are being reached.

Derivation testing at GCSE

In answer to research question 3, concerning whether derivations should be replaced, 66% of students thought it should stay in the examination as it is and 14% believed it should stay but with a few changes. Perhaps some of the changes could be to promote extension for the students who find derivations too easy which would also please teachers who believe that derivations do not belong in the GCSE because it is too simple an exercise (teachers' opinions at the school being divided on this matter).

In order to better prepare students for the derivation question at examination, it is recommended that teachers not only mentioned that the words will be in their GCSE vocabulary list but that they will also appear in the passage for translation. This would give the students a context with which to work and it would show that derivations are not an alien exercise different from everything else in the GCSE, but part of its organic nature.

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Appendix 1: OCR Questionnaire Responses

1.) What academic purpose underlies the addition of a derivation question to the GCSE Latin examination? (e.g. Does it relate to the English curriculum? Is it to show the continuing relevance of Latin?)

It tests evaluative skills and the continuing influence of the classical world on our modern world. It meets the assessment objective for the two language papers: 'Latin Language: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of language'. Perhaps most importantly, it encourages teachers who do not already do so to make links between Latin words and English words derived from them. This improves their students' knowledge and retention of Latin vocabulary and, of course, also increases their facility with English.

2.) Do you distinguish between "original" Latin words and Latin words that derive from Greek, for example, words such as tria? Would Latin words that derive from Greek appear in the examination?

We would not distinguish between them.

3.) What kind of criteria do you apply in selecting a Latin word for the examination? Is it any word in the GCSE vocabulary list?

It has to be in the GCSE vocabulary list and it has to appear in the passages in the question paper. We would normally only choose the sort of words which a teacher might reasonably discuss in class.

4.) Some teachers feel ambiguous about what words would be accepted as derivations by the board. For instance, in one class a teacher told a student not to use terracotta but instead to use a "more English" word such as territory for terra. In another class, a teacher mentioned that tria would not appear in the examination because it is originally Greek. Are there any general guidelines for the inclusion of a word in the examination?

'Terracotta' is an acceptable derivation from terra (as long as the candidate could show how it relates to 'earth'). We would

expect teachers to discuss a full range of Latin derivations in class and would hope that the students would take part in that discussion. Teachers should be aware of the criteria for selecting a Latin derivation as detailed in question 3.

5.) Do you think that most students tend to find the derivation question in the examination "too easy"?

You would have to ask the students this! The evidence from their answers is that those who know what is required by the question tend to answer it quite well. But by no means does it appear to provide guaranteed marks.

6.) In past papers analyses, it was reported that some students simply translate the word instead of giving an English derivative. Do you think that is because some students have trouble in finding derivatives or they simply misread the instructions?

In the first sittings of these papers (i.e. 2010), it was clear that not all students understood what was required of them. Examiners' reports have since helped teachers and candidates to understand what is expected of them.

7.) Do you think derivations are an effective way of testing students?

See the answer to question 1 above as regards the assessment of derivations. Good teachers have always used derivation exercises to help students see the links between Latin words and English words (and, for that matter, between Latin and French / Italian / Spanish words). Such exercises help to widen students' vocabulary of Latin / English / French / Italian / Spanish words. By including a derivation question in our exam papers we are hoping to encourage all teachers to use this as a regular part of their teaching. This is an important feature of any examination specification / paper.

8.) Have you ever considered removing this question from future examinations?

We always keep question types under review and would consider all question styles at the time of specification re-development.