

Latin (lingua Latina, Latin: [ˈlɪŋɡʷa ˈtʰaːtʰiːna], or Latinum, Latin: [ˈtʰaːtʰiːnʊ]) is a classical language belonging to the Italic branch of the Indo-European languages. Considered a dead language, Latin was originally spoken in Latium (now known as Lazio), the lower Tiber area around Rome.[1] Through the expansion of the Roman Republic it became the dominant language in the Italian Peninsula and subsequently throughout the Roman Empire. Even after the fall of Western Rome, Latin remained the common language of international communication, science, scholarship and academia in Europe until well into the 18th century, when regional vernaculars (including its own descendants, the Romance languages) supplanted it in common academic and political usage. For most of the time it was used, it would be considered a dead language in the modern linguistic definition; that is, it lacked native speakers, despite being used extensively and actively.

Latin is a highly inflected language, with three distinct genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter), seven noun cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, vocative, and vestigial locative), five declensions, four verb conjugations, six tenses (present, imperfect, future, perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect), three persons, three moods, two voices (passive and active), two or three aspects, and two numbers (singular and plural). The Latin alphabet is directly derived from the Etruscan and Greek alphabets.

By the late Roman Republic (75 BC), Old Latin had evolved into standardized Classical Latin. Vulgar Latin was the colloquial register with less prestigious variations attested in inscriptions and some literary works such as those of the comic playwrights Plautus and Terence[2] and author Petronius. Late Latin is the literary language from the 3rd century AD onwards, and Vulgar Latin's various regional dialects had developed by the 6th to 9th centuries into the ancestors of the modern Romance languages.

In Latin's usage beyond the early medieval period, it lacked native speakers. Medieval Latin was used across Western and Catholic Europe during the Middle Ages as a working and literary language from the 9th century to the Renaissance, which then developed a classicizing form, called Renaissance Latin. This was the basis for Neo-Latin which evolved during the early modern period. In these periods Latin was used productively and generally taught to be written and spoken, at least until the late seventeenth century, when spoken skills began to erode. It then became increasingly taught only to be read.

Latin remains the official language of the Holy See and the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church at the Vatican City. The church continues to adapt concepts from modern languages, contributing to the continued development of the Latin language. Latin today, however, is more often studied to be read rather than spoken or actively used.

Latin has greatly influenced the English language, Along with a large amount of others, and historically contributed many words to the English lexicon, particularly after the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons and the Norman Conquest. Latin (and Ancient Greek) roots are especially used in

English descriptions of theology, science disciplines (especially anatomy and taxonomy), medicine, and law.

A number of phases of the language have been recognized, each distinguished by subtle differences in vocabulary, usage, spelling, and syntax. There are no hard and fast rules of classification; different scholars emphasize different features. As a result, the list has variants, as well as alternative names.

In addition to the historical phases, Ecclesiastical Latin refers to the styles used by the writers of the Roman Catholic Church from late antiquity onward, as well as by Protestant scholars.

After the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 and Germanic kingdoms took its place, the Germanic people adopted Latin as a language more suitable for legal and other, more formal uses.[3]

Old Latin

Main article: Old Latin

The Lapis Niger, probably the oldest extant Latin inscription, from Rome, c. 600 BC during the semi-legendary Roman Kingdom

The earliest known form of Latin is Old Latin, also called Archaic or Early Latin, which was spoken from the Roman Kingdom, traditionally founded in 753 BC, through the later part of the Roman Republic, up to 75 BC, i.e. before the age of Classical Latin.[4] It is attested both in inscriptions and in some of the earliest extant Latin literary works, such as the comedies of Plautus and Terence. The Latin alphabet was devised from the Etruscan alphabet. The writing later changed from what was initially either a right-to-left or a boustrophedon[5][6] script to what ultimately became a strictly left-to-right script.[7]

Classical Latin

Main article: Classical Latin

During the late republic and into the first years of the empire, from about 75 BC to 200 AD, a new Classical Latin arose, a conscious creation of the orators, poets, historians and other literate men, who wrote the great works of classical literature, which were taught in grammar and rhetoric schools. Today's instructional grammars trace their roots to such schools, which served as a sort of informal language academy dedicated to maintaining and perpetuating educated speech.[8][9]

Vulgar Latin

Main article: Vulgar Latin

Philological analysis of Archaic Latin works, such as those of Plautus, which contain fragments of everyday speech, gives evidence of an informal register of the language, Vulgar Latin (termed *sermo*

vulgi, "the speech of the masses", by Cicero). Some linguists, particularly in the nineteenth century, believed this to be a separate language, existing more or less in parallel with the literary or educated Latin, but this is now widely dismissed.[10]

The term 'Vulgar Latin' remains difficult to define, referring both to informal speech at any time within the history of Latin, and the kind of informal Latin that had begun to move away from the written language significantly in the post-Imperial period, that led ultimately to the Romance languages.

During the Classical period, informal language was rarely written, so philologists have been left with only individual words and phrases cited by classical authors, inscriptions such as Curse tablets and those found as graffiti. In the Late Latin period, language changes reflecting spoken (non-classical) norms tend to be found in greater quantities in texts.[11] As it was free to develop on its own, there is no reason to suppose that the speech was uniform either diachronically or geographically. On the contrary, Romanised European populations developed their own dialects of the language, which eventually led to the differentiation of Romance languages.[12]

Late Latin

Main article: Late Latin

Late Latin is a kind of written Latin used in the 3rd to 6th centuries. This began to diverge from Classical forms at a faster pace. It is characterised by greater use of prepositions, and word order that is closer to modern Romance languages, for example, while grammatically retaining more or less the same formal rules as Classical Latin.

Ultimately, Latin diverged into a distinct written form, where the commonly spoken form was perceived as a separate language, for instance early French or Italian dialects, that could be transcribed differently. It took some time for these to be viewed as wholly different from Latin however.

Romance languages

Main article: Romance languages

See also: Lexical changes from Classical Latin to Proto-Romance

While the written form of Latin was increasingly standardized into a fixed form, the spoken forms began to diverge more greatly. Currently, the five most widely spoken Romance languages by number of native speakers are Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Romanian. Despite dialectal variation, which is found in any widespread language, the languages of Spain, France, Portugal, and Italy have retained a remarkable unity in phonological forms and developments, bolstered by the stabilising influence of their common Christian (Roman Catholic) culture.

It was not until the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711, cutting off communications between the major Romance regions, that the languages began to diverge seriously.[13] The spoken Latin that would later become Romanian diverged somewhat more from the other varieties, as it was largely separated from the unifying influences in the western part of the Empire.

Spoken Latin began to diverge into distinct languages by the 9th century at the latest, when the earliest extant Romance writings begin to appear. They were, throughout the period, confined to everyday speech, as Medieval Latin was used for writing.[14][15]

It should also be noted, however, that for many Italians using Latin, there was no complete separation between Italian and Latin, even into the beginning of the Renaissance. Petrarch for example saw Latin as a literary version of the spoken language.[16]

Medieval Latin

Main article: Medieval Latin

The Latin Malmesbury Bible from 1407

Medieval Latin is the written Latin in use during that portion of the postclassical period when no corresponding Latin vernacular existed, that is from around 700 to 1500 AD. The spoken language had developed into the various Romance languages; however, in the educated and official world, Latin continued without its natural spoken base. Moreover, this Latin spread into lands that had never spoken Latin, such as the Germanic and Slavic nations. It became useful for international communication between the member states of the Holy Roman Empire and its allies.

Without the institutions of the Roman Empire that had supported its uniformity, Medieval Latin was much freer in its linguistic cohesion: for example, in classical Latin *sum* and *eram* are used as auxiliary verbs in the perfect and pluperfect passive, which are compound tenses. Medieval Latin might use *fui* and *fuera* instead.[17] Furthermore, the meanings of many words were changed and new words were introduced, often under influence from the vernacular. Identifiable individual styles of classically incorrect Latin prevail.[17]

Renaissance and Neo-Latin

Main articles: Renaissance Latin and Neo-Latin

Most 15th-century printed books (incunabula) were in Latin, with the vernacular languages playing only a secondary role.[18]

Renaissance Latin, 1300 to 1500, and the classicised Latin that followed through to the present are often grouped together as Neo-Latin, or New Latin, which have in recent decades become a focus of renewed study, given their importance for the development of European culture, religion and science.[19][20] The vast majority of written Latin belongs to this period, but its full extent is unknown.[21]

The Renaissance reinforced the position of Latin as a spoken and written language by the scholarship by the Renaissance humanists. Petrarch and others began to change their usage of Latin as they explored the texts of the Classical Latin world. Skills of textual criticism evolved to create much more accurate versions of extant texts through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and some important texts were rediscovered. Comprehensive versions of author's works were published by Isaac Casaubon, Joseph Scaliger and others.[22] Nevertheless, despite the careful work of Petrarch, Politian and others, first the demand for manuscripts, and then the rush to bring works into print, led to the circulation of inaccurate copies for several centuries following.[23]

Neo-Latin literature was extensive and prolific, but less well known or understood today. Works covered poetry, prose stories and early novels, occasional pieces and collections of letters, to name a few. Famous and well regarded writers included Petrarch, Erasmus, Salutati, Celtis, George Buchanan and Thomas More.[24] Non fiction works were long produced in many subjects, including the sciences, law, philosophy, historiography and theology. Famous examples include Isaac Newton's Principia. Latin was also used as a convenient medium for translations of important works first written in a vernacular, such as those of Descartes.

Latin education underwent a process of reform to classicise written and spoken Latin. Schooling remained largely Latin medium until approximately 1700. Until the end of the 17th century, the majority of books and almost all diplomatic documents were written in Latin.[25] Afterwards, most diplomatic documents were written in French (a Romance language) and later native or other languages.[26] Education methods gradually shifted towards written Latin, and eventually concentrating solely on reading skills. The decline of Latin education took several centuries and proceeded much more slowly than the decline in written Latin output.

Contemporary Latin

Main articles: Contemporary Latin and Ecclesiastical Latin

Despite having no native speakers, Latin is still used for a variety of purposes in the contemporary world.

Religious use

The signs at Wallsend Metro station are in English and Latin, as a tribute to Wallsend's role as one of the outposts of the Roman Empire, as the eastern end of Hadrian's Wall (hence the name) at Segedunum.

The largest organisation that retains Latin in official and quasi-official contexts is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church required that Mass be carried out in Latin until the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965, which permitted the use of the vernacular. Latin remains the language of the Roman Rite. The Tridentine Mass (also known as the Extraordinary Form or Traditional Latin Mass) is celebrated in Latin. Although the Mass of Paul VI (also known as the Ordinary Form or the Novus Ordo) is usually celebrated in the local vernacular language, it can be and often is said in Latin, in part or in whole, especially at multilingual gatherings. It is the official language of the Holy See, the primary language of its public journal, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, and the working language of the Roman Rota. Vatican City is also home to the world's only automatic teller machine that gives

instructions in Latin.[27] In the pontifical universities postgraduate courses of Canon law are taught in Latin, and papers are written in the same language.

There are a small number of Latin services held in the Anglican church. These include an annual service in Oxford, delivered with a Latin sermon; a relic from the period when Latin was the normal spoken language of the university

In the Western world, many organizations, governments and schools use Latin for their mottos due to its association with formality, tradition, and the roots of Western culture.[29]

Canada's motto *A mari usque ad mare* ("from sea to sea") and most provincial mottos are also in Latin. The Canadian Victoria Cross is modelled after the British Victoria Cross which has the inscription "For Valour". Because Canada is officially bilingual, the Canadian medal has replaced the English inscription with the Latin *Pro Valore*.

Spain's motto *Plus ultra*, meaning "even further", or figuratively "Further!", is also Latin in origin.[30] It is taken from the personal motto of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain (as Charles I), and is a reversal of the original phrase *Non terrae plus ultra* ("No land further beyond", "No further!"). According to legend, this phrase was inscribed as a warning on the Pillars of Hercules, the rocks on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar and the western end of the known, Mediterranean world. Charles adopted the motto following the discovery of the New World by Columbus, and it also has metaphorical suggestions of taking risks and striving for excellence.

In the United States the unofficial national motto until 1956 was *E pluribus unum* meaning "Out of many, one". The motto continues to be featured on the Great Seal, it also appears on the flags and seals of both houses of congress and the flags of the states of Michigan, North Dakota, New York, and Wisconsin. The motto's 13 letters symbolically represent the original Thirteen Colonies which revolted from the British Crown. The motto is featured on all presently minted coinage and has been featured in most coinage throughout the nation's history

In conclusion, Latin stands as a timeless testament to the enduring legacy of the ancient Romans and their contributions to language, literature, culture, and scholarship. Despite its ancient origins, Latin continues to exert a profound influence on modern society, permeating various aspects of our daily lives, from legal terminology and scientific nomenclature to religious rituals and educational curricula. Its rich vocabulary, elegant syntax, and logical structure have endowed it with a unique beauty and precision that transcends time and borders. Moreover, Latin serves as a gateway to the study of classical literature, philosophy, and history, providing valuable insights into the intellectual heritage of Western civilization. Whether through its resonance in the arts and humanities or its practical applications in academia and beyond, Latin remains a vibrant and relevant language that connects us to our shared cultural heritage and inspires a sense of continuity with the past. As we continue to explore the depths of human knowledge and creativity, Latin stands as a beacon of enlightenment, inviting us to delve into its treasures and discover the richness of our collective intellectual inheritance.