Is Latin really dead?

Language is an instrument for human to communicate and transmit information. Latin has played a noticeable role in human society. It is an ancient language which is both cognate and origin of many contemporary languages (Garger, 2012). However, with the development of other languages, Latin seems to go on a downfall. This essay mainly focuses on the issue of the existence of Latin. The writer contradicts the common view of the extinction of Latin, and tries to substantiate the idea that Latin is still alive from several perspectives.

Based on the essay written by Frank Morris (2006), we agreed that Latin is still alive for several reasons (pp. 218-222).

First, Latin is still used traditionally in the modern world just as its usages in Vatican. For example, many announcements and speeches delivered in the new pope’s election are in Latin. Moreover, some lexicographers are trying to update Latin vocabulary to make it keep pace with social changes.

Second, Latin also can be seen in popular culture. There are many Latin phrases in popular fictions like Harry Potter or popular films like Life of Brian.  Some Finland broadcasting stations prefer to broadcast news in Latin. Additionally, there are an increasing number of people communicating in Latin through the Internet.

Third, Latin has affected other languages and regarded them as carriers to keep itself alive. For instance, 80% of Roman, 60% of English and 90% of multisyllabic words are borrowed from Latin. Besides, almost all medical and scientific phrases are derived from Latin or ancient Greek, which are called the cousin of Latin.

Fourth, Latin also exists in schools. Enrollment in Latin is quickly increasing. Colleges, middle schools and even elementary schools have Latin courses. Studying Latin has many benefits. It is useful to learn western civilization and values easily and offering a basis for other language studies such as enrichment of vocabulary.

Two general ideas in the essay have been known for a long time. According to Rickerson (2006), one is that Latin is taught in some universities and it has been adopted in pop culture， the other is that it has great influences on other languages.

However, there is also some new information to us, especially the very detailed information. For instance, Latin is still used in Vatican. Secondly, some Finnish radio broadcasts deliver news in Latin. Thirdly, many Latin enthusiasts are communicating online in Latin. Fourth, the author points out a specific high percentage, to some extent, of how many words are derived from Latin in other languages. Fifth, according to the essay, Latin is considered as a kind of basic education in many schools. This new cognition seems to enhance our confidence in the renaissance of Latin. Another interesting new thing is that the courses offered by schools show the function of Latin in developing intelligence and providing the origin of English culture and values, which in turn promote English learning.

From the above paragraphs, it seems that even though Latin is still alive, it is fading away. We would like to introduce some possible solutions to revive Latin.

The first solution is simplifying Latin. Simplifying could be an optimal choice. There are many difficulties in learning basic courses of Latin such as memorizing numerous rules at the beginning. Simplifying makes the learning of Latin more convenient and may increase students’ confidence.

Second, enhancing the educational popularization. Latin courses can be offered by enthusiasts, scholars and language institutes. Effective spread of videos and voice software on the internet provides more ways for students to access. Additionally, the learning of Latin can proceeded in the form of salon where interested people can read Latin pieces and write Latin poems. Apart from that, it’s a good idea to set up institutes to teach Latin with a background of European culture like the model Confucius Institution. But it needs more considerations about organizers and funding before starting this project. Spreaders could create an image that Latin is originally noble and they are the bridge between ordinary learners and this linguistic altar.

Third, it is feasible to explore the value of culture and business such as publishing bilingual books of medieval culture, selling Roman clothes with Latin introductions, combining Latin music (Mass and Gregorian chant) with metal rock. This method can bring vigor and power to Latin, but it can also decrease the seriousness of Latin.

Fourth, using Latin as the official language of the European Union may revive it. Many modern European languages have close relations with Latin in ancient times. Because of the expansion of the Ancient Roman Empire, Europe was the main district using Latin. Even after the fall of the Ancient Roman Empire, Latin was still used by those Christian missionaries. Sermo Vulgaris, also known as the Latin used by civilians, gradually disappeared along with the fall of the empire. Nevertheless, Latina Classica, known as the Classical Latin, had been used as the common written language of Europe for more than 1000 years instead of disappearing as the Sermo Vulgaris. Apart from this point, using the same language can increase the sense of identity of being a European, which could be a great impetus to reinforce European integration. However, this method also has a lot of disadvantages. Latin is a very old language without many changes for hundreds of years. Many modern meanings may be unable to express. It is also a fact that much governmental personnel may not understand Latin. Apart from that, using Latin in large-scale must need a great number of teachers, which is kind of hard to accomplish.

Fifth, increasing the usage of Latin in many subjects. Latin had been used as the common written language of Europe for more than 1000 years, therefore, almost all the compositions in this period were written in Latin. Classical Studies, Philosophy and Western Literature and many other subjects that related to classic study can take a great help from these old compositions, which makes it important to revive Latin in these subjects.

In a word, we think Latin is still an alive language. We can find its traces in our life. There are also many scholars and enthusiasts devote themselves to popularize this ‘dead language’. Languages which have few users should be protected, for the purpose of preserving history, culture and diversity of language.

References:

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